

A PERUSH ON BEREISHIT

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Genesis 1:1

בראשית ברא אלקים את השמים ואת הארץ.

God is a “given” at the beginning of the Torah. He is not described at all. Nor does his title receive the definite article, as if another God could be conceived of. Upon his first action God is already recognized and known, although except for his creative act we know nothing of him. We will know God only from His creation and his continuing activity in context of the created world.

Time seems to commence with God’s creating heavens and earth. God appears to be beyond time. Only the world he created is within it.

The heavens, whatever they may be, are not divine matter. They too are created, and are God’s handiwork. God does not reside in any place we could describe or know.

Genesis 1:2

והארץ היתה תהו ובהו וחשך על פני תהום ורוח אלקים מרחפת על פני המים.

Nachmanides on verse 9 and “Haktav Vehakabala” here both interpret that “the earth” both here and in verse 1 refers to our universe, while “the heavens” in verse 1 refers to a spiritual realm with which we are not familiar. The Torah mentions the creation of the spiritual realm, but does not describe it at all. The heavens are for God- only the universe did he give to man. It is only the universe’s creation that the Torah describes in detail.

That the wind of God hovers over the face of the water establishes that God the Creator is not withdrawn from His creation. On the contrary, He is represented in it by His wind, which hovers over and directs the to and fro of the created world. God is beyond the world, yet remains a presence in it. This message is one of the most important in the Torah. It is possible that this is what Rashi means by interpreting “the wind of God” as “God’s throne of honor.” “Wind” is the least corporeal term possible to describe this.

Genesis 1:3

ויאמר אלקים יהי אור ויהי אור.

God’s speech is equivalent to action. Hence God says “let there be light”, and there is.

In opposition to the darkness present in the universe (verse 2), God creates light. As of yet light is unnecessary. No life is around to benefit from it. Light is created right away to establish its presence in the face of darkness. Rabbi Saadya Gaon has explained that darkness is merely the absence of light. God fills this absence right away. In this world there is light. Darkness, too, but light as well.

Genesis 1:4

וירא אלקים את האור כי טוב ויבדל אלקים בין האור ובין החשך.

To perceive good is not a creative act, but rather a cognitive one. Recognition of “good,” which should be understood here in a utilitarian or esthetic sense, not in a moral sense, is in God’s realm alone during creation. During the six days of creation God recognizes everything he has created as good, with the exception of man.

Separation is a creative act. As distinct from “division”, “separation” puts apart two things that are essentially different from each other but are mixed nonetheless. Light and darkness are certainly different from each other. They required separation. It is not clear whether this separation is intrinsic, or whether it refers to setting time boundaries for them respectively. See the next verse.

Genesis 1:5

ויקרא אלקים לאור יום ולחשך קרא לילה ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום אחד.

Calling a name gives new identity to a known item. Light in its essence is a physical phenomenon. By calling light “day” it turns into the defining factor in that unit of time. By calling darkness “night” it becomes the defining factor of night.

Not all light is called day, and not all darkness night. Only the light and darkness that are related to time receive these appellations.

Calling is not a creative act. It is a defining act.

Perhaps this verse interprets the previous verse. The separation of light and darkness takes place through their division into different times of day.

The word “day” at the end of the verse means something different than the same word at its beginning. At the end “day” means a twenty four hour period including morning and eve, while at the beginning it refers to the daylight hours only. Apparently one word can have different meanings in the Torah even within one verse. A word’s context is no less crucial for its understanding than its root.

Genesis 1:6

ויאמר אלקים יהי רקיע בתוך המים ויהי מבדיל בין מים למים.

No new item is created on the second day. The firmament appears to be merely empty space between the upper and lower waters. Perhaps because of this God does not see the results of the day as “good”. Proper order resulting from separation is a necessary creative activity, but does not result in an item worthy of the title “good”.

We do not know the nature of the upper waters. We merely know the firmament separates them from the lower waters. While the firmament, in effect all of the universe excepting our own planet, appears to us to be infinite in size, the rabbis of the Talmud suggest the separation of the 2 waters to be no more than a hair’s breadth. It is clear that our rabbis saw in this day’s divine activity matter beyond our limited understanding. A propos, the Midrash teaches that the angels were created on this mysterious day.

Genesis 1:7

ויעש אלקים את הרקיע ויבדל בין המים אשר מתחת לרקיע ובין המים אשר מעל לרקיע
ויהי כן

If we will assume that “separation” is always between two items essentially different from each other, such as light and darkness (see verse 1:4), our verse shows that the upper waters are different from the lower waters in a very distinct way. But we do not know what that difference is.

Genesis 1:8

ויקרא אלקים לרקיע שמים ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום אחד.

Calling is a defining act (see verse 1:5). It establishes identity. The heavens of verse 1:1 are completely beyond man’s realm. The firmament, becoming the connotation of the word “heavens”, is called so because though not intrinsically beyond man’s reach, effectively it is also beyond man’s realm. Man could not reach most stars in a human lifetime even traveling at the speed of light. Even the nearby moon will be reached by few. Astronauts enter the realm of the heavens, considering their extent, much less than a Californian surfer enters the realm of the Pacific Ocean.

The “sky-heaven “ is part of the “earth” of verse 1:1, and therefore the physical laws apply throughout the universe the same as on earth. But the sky –heaven remains beyond human control. This identity is defined and established by calling the sky “heaven”.

Genesis 1:9

ויאמר אלקים יקוו המים מתחת השמים אל מקום אחד ותראה היבשה ויהי כן.

On the third day God spoke twice and saw both results as good. The first was the collecting of the waters to reveal the solid land beneath. The realms of land and water will be distinct, but not separate. The distinction begins with physical collection of the waters. God continues the process by distinguishing the identities of dry earth and water as “land” and “seas”. The “seas” is within the realm of man’s excursions and control, but not of his settlement.

The seas are considered in one place because they are connected, and because they collectively submit to, and yet escape, man’s dominion.

Genesis 1:10

ויקרא אלקים ליבשה ארץ ולמקוה המים קרא ימים וירא אלקים כי טוב.

In the calling of names to day and night, the sky-heaven, and land and sea, God finishes the three callings of creation. The two portions of the 24 hour day have been distinguished.. The sky-heaven has been declared a distinct realm beyond the globe, and the planet itself has been divided into the realms of land and sea. These are the essential borders of time and space in the world we live.

Genesis 1:11-12

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים תִּדְשָׂא הָאָרֶץ דֶּשֶׁא עֵשֶׂב מִזְרִיעַ זֶרַע עֵץ פְּרִי עֹשֶׂה פְּרִי לְמִינֹו אֲשֶׁר זָרְעוּ בּוֹ עַל הָאָרֶץ וַיְהִי כֵן. וַתּוּצֵא הָאָרֶץ דֶּשֶׁא עֵשֶׂב מִזְרִיעַ זֶרַע לְמִינֵהוּ וְעֵץ פְּרִי אֲשֶׁר זָרְעוּ בּוֹ לְמִינֵהוּ וַיִּרְא אֱלֹקִים כִּי טוֹב.

Greenery divides into grass and tree. Grass grows with seeds to reproduce, while trees grow fruit that contain seeds. This appears to be the difference between grass and trees. The source of plant life is the earth itself. Plant life evolves from inorganic earth. The seeds of grass and trees maintain not only their general type, but even their individual species.

God saw the distinguishing of dry land as good, as described in verse 1:10. The greening of that land was viewed separately and seen as good as well. The land and its greenery were created on the same day, but received separate compliments of goodness from God.

Genesis 1:13

וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם שְׁלִישִׁי.

With this verse the first half of creation is done. The development of the world and universe is a picture of organization through separation and growth. The universe is silent, peaceful, and inanimate. Time exists, but is irrelevant. Greenery grows by the light of creation, without luminaries.

Genesis 1:14

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים יְהִי מְאֹרֶת בְּרַקִּיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הַיּוֹם וּבֵין הַלַּיְלָה וְהָיוּ לְאֹתֹת וּלְמוֹעֲדִים וּלְיָמִים וּשְׁנָיִם.

The creation of the luminaries announces the coming of cognitive life. They are placed in the sky-heaven, but their relevance is in the realm of earth. Their first purpose is to establish exact measurements of time and direction for our world. Day and night are already separated by light and darkness, but from now this distinction will be exactly marked by the appearance of the sun and the stars. Years will be marked by the annual solar cycle. Holidays will be dated by the lunar month. The sun and the north star will be signs for the four directions, and for those who know the night sky well, the moon and the other stars as well. The bulk of the information available to the stars is relevant only if there is man to think and understand. Thousands of years after man's appearance he would not only mark time and direction by the luminaries, but would come to understand gravity and relativity through them as well.

Genesis 1:15

וְהָיוּ לְמְאֹרֶת בְּרַקִּיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהָאִיר עַל הָאָרֶץ וַיְהִי כֵן.

The second purpose the luminaries serve is to light the land. On the fourth day of creation the light that had been created on the first was encapsulated in the luminaries.

The light of the first day sufficed for lighting the land. The light was captured by the luminaries in order that they could serve as markers of time and direction. That being the case, they continue to serve the purpose of the original light also.

Genesis 1:16

ויעש אלקים את שני המארת הגדולים את המאור הגדול לממשלת היום ואת המאור הקטן לממשלת הלילה ואת הכוכבים.

The luminaries are intended to shine day and night, unlike the light of the first day which served only daytime. The day is lit by the sun, maintaining its “light” nature from the first day, while the night is lit by the pale moon, maintaining the evening’s dark character.

In the creation statement in verses 1:14-15 rule is not mentioned. The sun and moon rule day and night by their dominating position from on high, and in our dependency on them for natural light. But it is God who created the luminaries, and in the next verse He places them in the sky-heaven. “Rule” is not a task to be performed by the luminaries. “Rule” is a means by which they perform their task.

Genesis 1:17

ויתן אותם אלקים ברקיע השמים להאיר על הארץ.

In the creation statement of this day, shining on the land is mentioned

last in the list of the luminaries’ functions. Upon placing them in the sky-heaven in this verse, shining on the land is mentioned before the other functions. The shining function is fulfilled immediately upon the placement of the luminaries in the sky, and is therefore mentioned first. It is intrinsic to our world from creation that practical order does not reflect logical order

Genesis 1:18

ולמשל ביום ובלילה ולהבדיל בין האור ובין החשך וירא אלקים כי טוב.

Although “rule” is not an assigned purpose of the luminaries, they cannot fulfill their role of indicating direction and determining the calendar without “ruling” day and night, that is, without being the most prominent items of the day and night sky. Only as such do they command the attention that results in our marking time and direction by them.

Becoming sources of signs and times is mentioned only in the command, not in the fulfillment. They will actually serve this function only upon man’s cognition of their full relevance. This will not take place until man is created and develops his perception of the stars and luminaries.

This is also why in the command the function of the luminaries mentioned is to separate day and night, while in the fulfillment it is to separate light and darkness. The distinction of day and night is practical and relevant only to animal life, still missing.

Genesis 1:19

ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום רביעי.

With the fourth day God completed the creation of the inanimate. Two thirds of the creation days are over. Two days are left to create animal life. Since even the simplest form of animal life is created later than the luminaries, the quality of the luminaries’ being is less than that of animals. Hence, to worship the sun, moon, or stars, is equivalent to worshipping trees and rocks. That luminaries are created after plant life shows that

greenery can exist without them (see verse 1:13). But with their creation a major step is taken to prepare the world for man.

Genesis 1:20

עוף יעופף על הארץ על פני רקיע השמים. ויאמר אלקים ישרצו המים שרץ נפש חיהו

On the fifth day God begins to create animal life. On that day itself He creates animal life that develops from water. This life evolves into two forms; fish and bird. These two life forms live in the water, and fly through the sky, respectively, making them especially different from man, a creature of land. This difference reckons their creation a day sooner than he.

Genesis 1:21

ויברא אלקים את התנינם הגדלים ואת כל נפש החיה הרמשת אשר שרצו המים למינהם ואת כל עוף כנף למינהו וירא אלקים כי טוב.

Although the command that brought about fish did not specify great serpents, the verse of actual creation does. In fact, the word “vayivra”, he created, emphasizes the creation of the serpents. The verb “to create” has not been used since the first verse, and is used again in this chapter only regarding man. The emphasis tells anyone who might have thought these great sea monsters predated creation, and are not dependent on God for their existence that they are wrong. God created the great serpents.

Animal life is created with species. This is stated in the creation act, though not in the command. Animate life, as part of the continuum of plant life, continues the precedent of species already commanded to vegetation.

Genesis 1:22

ויברך אתם אלקים לאמר פרו ורבו ומלאו את המים בימים והעוף ירב בארץ.

The blessing to be fruitful and multiply for the creatures from water creates the sexual drive and attraction between male and female. The sexual dimension at its core functions between separate animals. Its complication and sophistication is beyond anything imaginable.

“Be fruitful and multiply” speaks to both water and bird life. “Fill the water of the seas” is directed to the fish. “And the birds shall multiply on the land” is to the birds. The fish have the sea as an exclusive domain, and are therefore blessed to fill it. The birds will share the land with animals and people. They are blessed merely to multiply upon it, not to fill.

Genesis 1:23

ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום חמישי.

The development of fish and bird from water shows they are not created on this day ex nihilo, but rather come from existing matter. The development of life from water is different from the greening of vegetation from the earth. Greenery remains attached organically to the ground. Animal life separates from it. Birds do not live in water at all. Fish need to live in water to survive, but are not organically attached to water with roots. Life created on the fifth day brings creation closer to man, though there is still distance.

Birds, always mentioned after sea life, are closer, since they fly and multiply on land. But even birds come from water and fly in the sky.

Genesis 1:24

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים תּוֹצֵא אֶרֶץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה לְמִינָהּ בַּהֵמָה וְרִמָּשׁ וְחַיִּתוּ אֶרֶץ לְמִינָהּ וַיְהִי כֵן.

Land animal life is created on the sixth day. God commands they be created by type, not merely wild, domestic, and crawler, but with many species of each of these. Man will share his territory with them, and their divisions are significant.

Like fish and bird, land life is not created ex nihilo on this day. They develop from the land itself, as bird and fish did from the sea.

Genesis 1:25

וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹקִים אֶת חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ לְמִינָהּ וְאֶת הַבְּהֵמָה לְמִינָהּ וְאֶת כָּל רִמַּשׁ הָאֲדָמָה לְמִינָהּ וַיִּרְא אֱלֹקִים כִּי טוֹב.

The making of land life is a distinct act of creation, and therefore merits God's viewing it as good. This is the last time God views a particular creation as objectively good.

The creation of man is a separate act of creation.

Genesis 1:26

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים נַעֲשֵׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדֹמוֹתֵנוּ וַיִּרְדּוּ בְּדַגַּת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל הַרְמֵשׁ הָרֹמֵשׁ עַל הָאָרֶץ.

Why was Adam's creation not deserving of a day unto its own?

Rabbi Nissim of Gerona explains that only creatures necessarily distinct from earlier creations are appointed a separate day. Man, however, is capable of ignoring his spirituality, leaving him no different from the animals. It is not for God to separate man from the animals by a day of creation. It is for man to arise and separate himself.

A different approach appears in the Midrash. There we find that the Sabbath was to be man's separate day of creation. However, the creation of man on the Sabbath would conflict with God's intent that Sabbath be a day free of creative activity. Therefore God created man on Sabbath eve rather than on Sabbath itself. Thus, instead of being created on Sabbath, man is created in preparation for Sabbath.

In this verse, no physical source is mentioned for man's creation. Unlike the fish and bird who swarm from water, unlike the animals that come from the earth, man's existence is simply commanded by God.

The name Adam in our verse seems to come from the term "dmut", form (Rabbi Naftali Berlin). Adam has a divine form, a majestic presence tainted with divine representation. This majesty is probably what empowers him to rule over all animal life. God has no physical presence, yet He is metaphorically described in human terms throughout the Torah. This is possible because of man's own participation in God's form.

Genesis 1:27

ויברא אלקים את האדם בצלמו בצלם אלקים ברא אותו וזכר ונקבה ברא אותם.

This poetic verse sings that man is created in God's image. The repetition in the first two phrases fits the rhythm of the verse, and clarifies the term "his". "And God created man in his image". Whose image? "In the image of God he created him."

Maimonides explains that the image of God refers to God's freedom of will. Only God and man share in this freedom. If not for His free will, even God, with his infinite and unlimited power and capacity, would be merely a robot. It is man's participation in this divine attribute that merits him the title "in God's image".

"Dmut", form, is not mentioned in this verse, perhaps because it is already implied in the Hebrew word for man, "Adam".

It is explicit in the verse that both male and female are included in the generic term for man, Adam, and are both created in the image of God. The verse implies they are created separately, without significant order, and without hierarchy.

Genesis 1:28

ויברך אתם אלקים ויאמר להם אלקים פרו ורבו ומלאו את הארץ וכבשהורדו בדגת הים ובעוף השמים ובכל חיה הרמשת על הארץ.

As opposed to the fish and bird of verse 1:22, man is informed of his blessing. On the one hand, this is natural, since man is capable of comprehending the blessing he receives. However, knowing is not a neutral factor in the blessing. It renders the blessing a bond in the hand of the blessed, who by knowing of it has the capacity to accept or reject. It thus places the fulfillment of God's will as expressed in the blessing in his hands. Man may choose not to multiply, not to fill the world, and not to conquer it. To do so would be a self imposed curse. It would also be a violation of God's expressed will, who wants man to be blessed. But he can do so nonetheless.

In light of this it is possible that God informing man of the blessing transforms it into a command. This is the position of Rabbi Aharon Halevi, who views the commandment to have children as stemming from this verse. By this approach, man is not merely blessed to reproduce, fill, and conquer the world. He is commanded to bring this blessing to realization.

The blessing to fill the land is similar to the blessing the fish receive to fill the water of the seas. Birds are blessed merely to multiply on land. The land is to be filled by man.

The blessing to conquer the land places a challenge before man. The blessing's implication is that man is not created the world's ruler. Man will have to make a colossal effort to rule the world. While man will have to make an effort to populate the world and to fill it, these blessings will result with much greater ease than the blessing of world control.

The ecological system including animal, bird, fish, land, water, insect, and plant, makes all these interdependent. Control over living beings is tantamount to control over the physical world.

Man is blessed here with sexual drive and attraction. The blessing is also to fill the land, not to limit man's area of settlement. This blessing has been fulfilled. Man has settled

land from the most northern points in Eurasia and North America to the southernmost points in South America, Africa, and Australia.

It is possible that the blessing of reproduction is intrinsically connected to the blessings to conquer and rule. The drive to the former spills over and converts into the lust to control.

Genesis 1:29-30

ויאמר אלקים הנה נתתי לכם את כל עשב זרע זרע אשר על פני כל הארץ ואת כל העץ אשר בו פרי עץ זרע זרע לכם יהיה לאכלה. ולכל חית הארץ ולכל עוף השמים ולכל רומש על הארץ אשר בו נפש חיה את כל ירק עשב לאכלה ויהי כן.

“I gave you all the grass that has seed” seems to mean I gave you the grass to eat its seeds. Similarly, “and all the trees that have fruit with seeds will be food for you” means the trees will be for you to eat its fruit and seeds. In these verses God divides the greenery between Adam and land animal life, including birds. Fish, who don’t live on land, are left out. Seeds and fruit are for Adam. The grass itself is for animals.

All life on land is vegetarian. But human food and animal fodder are distinct. What fills the trough is not what goes on the table. From verses later (9:3-4) it appears that our own verses do not define the natural order, but rather command the limitations of man’s food sources.

Genesis 1:31

וירא אלקים את כל אשר עשה והנה טוב מאד ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום הששי.

The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. God saw each creation individually to be good. When God sees everything He created together, He finds it very good. The word “behold” indicates that this view was suddenly apparent upon the completion of all God had done, and could not at all have been perceived without the actual composite picture.

Included in this “very good” is Adam, about whom it does not say “and God saw that he is good.” It is upon Adam himself to establish through his free will to what extent he is good or bad. This is not only a moral statement. It is an esthetic point as well. Because the essence of Adam is his godly form, that is, his free will, even an esthetic evaluation of Adam will be determined by his choices in this freedom. The freedom of Adam, crown of creation, is a crucial ingredient in the “very good” of creation.

The Hebrew definite article preceding the word sixth, “hashishi”, seems to mark it as the last day of creation.



Genesis 2:1

ויכלו השמים והארץ וכל צבאם.

The word “vayechulu” means “completed,” not “ended” (the Sabbath evening prayer, Unkelos, Sforno, Mesorah). At the close of the sixth day, the heavens, the earth, and their hosts were completed. This completion, this wholeness, was attained upon the arrival of the Sabbath.

The subject of the sentence is “the heavens and the earth and their hosts.” God is missing from the verse. The world is created by God and dependent on Him, but has a separate existence. The verse has us stare at the completed universe for a moment in its own right.

Genesis 2:2

ויכל אלקים ביום השביעי מלאכתו אשר עשה וישבת ביום השביעי מכל מלאכתו אשר עשה.

This lyrical verse divides neatly into two parts, each of seven Hebrew words. Both end with the words “His melachah that He did”. Both include the term “on the seventh day”. Each has a word rooted in the Hebrew root “kof lamed”, the word for “all”. Each begins with a verb.

Melachah is activity oriented to a valuable result. It is of no significance whether the activity is difficult or easy. Writing two letters, stitching two stitches, tying or untying a knot, planting a seed in the ground, or plucking a cherry from its tree are all melachot. God created the world with melachot. For God no melachah is difficult. All this distinguishes melachah from ‘work’, which is difficult activity, and not necessarily geared to result.

The two verbs ‘vaychulu’ and ‘vaychal’ are not merely different forms of the same root. They have different meanings. As explained in the previous verse, “vayechulu” means ‘was completed’. The verb “vaychal” means ‘to end’, in this case to end activity.

“Vayishbot”, the opening verb of the second phrase in our verse, means ‘to stop doing’. God both ended his melachah , vaychal, and stopped doing it, vayishbot. There is a tension here, for ending makes stopping superfluous. What is the significance of stopping if the activity has ended, and there is nothing left to do? The Scriptural insistence on emphasizing both the ending and the stopping indicates that both are significant.

Sabbath is both the day on which God already ended His melachah, and stopped himself from continuing His melachah. That is, He finished before Sabbath, and therefore ended on Sabbath. He nonetheless is considered as having stopped it as well, because He had melachah to do on the seventh day which He made sure to do on the sixth. The Midrash quoted above in verse 1:26 explains that it would have been appropriate to create Adam on the Sabbath. God stops from doing the melachah appropriate for the seventh day, the creation of Adam, and makes sure to get it in on the sixth. Thus does God stop doing melachah on the Sabbath.

Genesis 2:3

ויברך אלקים את יום השביעי ויקדש אתו כי בו שבת מכל מלאכתו אשר ברא אלקים לעשות.

In verse 2:2, we are told what happened on the seventh day. Our verse reveals that as a result of what happened God blessed and sanctified the seventh day forever.

'Blessing' has appeared in the Torah twice already. The creatures of the fifth day were blessed to multiply. Adam was blessed to multiply and rule. The Torah does not say how the seventh day is blessed. It appears the seventh day is not blessed in a specific way. Rather it is blessed at its very essence. In the words of Rabbi Solomon Alkabetz, "For She (Sabbath) is the source of blessing,"

It is also possible that the blessing of the Sabbath is its holiness. According to this understanding the second part of the verse explains the first: 'God blessed the seventh day. He made it holy, and that is how He blessed it.'

Holiness is mentioned in the Torah for the first time in our verse. The seventh day is the first item of our world to be holy. This holiness certainly refers to the essence of the day. According to Rabbi Jonah of Gerona, the holiness of the Sabbath is the source of the holiness of the Jewish people.

The Torah relates to time as a matter of substance, not merely a dimension we pass through. Therefore time can be blessed and sanctified.

Apparently, although God created all, not all is holy. Only that which is sanctified is holy. The six days of the week are part of God's creation of time no less than the seventh day. Yet the six days are not holy. The seventh day, the Sabbath, God sanctified, and it is holy.

The final word of the verse, "to do", states that while God's creation is done, it was not meant to be the end of all creative activity. God created in order to do, that is, in order that more be done. With the end of creation the baton of activity is handed over to Adam.

Introduction to Genesis 2:4

On first glance there are several contradictions between the description of creation until this verse and following it. Commentaries from Rashi to this day have explained the verses in ways that resolve the contradictions. The Midrash uses these apparent contradictions to express important and deep ideas in their resolution.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik explained these passages differently:

The contradiction is not between the verses. The contradiction is in man. Both are true. They are not consistent with each other. Man lives with both aspects of his self, and with the internal conflict that results. This idea is presented fully in his book "the Lonely Man of Faith." Here we will try to interpret the verses following this approach.

From Genesis 2:4 until the end of chapter 3 does not continue from the previous verses. It starts all over. Up to now creation has been described with the universe as the focus. Man is mentioned as a creature within the world. His formation is the peak of creation, but part of it. He is created the same day as all who trod the earth. In the description of God's Sabbath man received no mention.

In the coming verses the focus is man. Any mention of other creations is in order to embellish the creation and centrality of man. These verses are the map of creation from a homocentric perspective.

Genesis 2:4

אלה תולדות השמים והארץ בהבראם ביום עשות ה' אלקים ארץ ושמים.

Man is the progeny of the heaven and earth. The story of man is the story of their generations. This account of the creation is the perspective of man. The heavens are mentioned here although they have no role, because man is the upshot of all creation. From man's perspective heaven and earth are created only upon his own formation. He is unaware of what took place before. Hence the verse presents the world's creation on the same day as man's.

In the previous chapter God is mentioned as creator in the first phrase. Here creation is mentioned before the creator. Man's understanding of God as creator is not immediate. Creation is observed by man before God as creator is understood. Hence the double phrase of creation in our verse, the first without God's name, the second with.

Elokim is God's title. The tetragramaton is his name. God relates to the universe by his title. Hence Elokim is how God is referred to in chapter one. He relates to man with his name. Hence the tetragramaton is how He is referred to in chapter two. The name Elokim is attached to God's personal name here to make clear that God in both chapters is the same.

Genesis 2:5

וכל שיח השדה טרם יהיה בארץ וכל עשב השדה טרם יצמח כי לא המטיר ה' אלקים על הארץ והאדם אין לעבד את האדמה.

When man was formed greenery was already present. What did not yet exist was fields. God created greenery as a jungle. Fields, many rows of a single crop, are man made. Fields do not yet exist because "man is not yet around to work the land." Man working the land is a post-Eden phenomena. Rain is, too. In Eden a river watered the trees. Only when man would work the land far from Eden would rain be sent by God to water the crops. "Not yet". The world we know does not yet exist.

Genesis 2:6

וואד יעלה מן הארץ והשקה את כל פני האדמה.

What watered the earth for greenery to grow if not rain? Mist.

Genesis 2:7

וויצר ה' אלקים את האדם עפר מן האדמה ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים ויהי האדם לנפש חיה.

Adam formed in this verse is made from two sources whose 'materials' merge with great tension. His physical source is the earth of the land. In fact, the name Adam, here, has its root in the Hebrew word for land, "adamah". On the other hand, Adam's breath, his life source, is blown into his nostrils by God. Man's life is divine. Nothing could be more lofty, more spiritual than that. Man has been set up to live in continual conflict between the lust of his body and the yearning of his soul. Perhaps his pure soul will have a

redeeming effect on his body. Perhaps his earthy physique will have a contaminating effect on his soul. Perhaps both.

All of the above stands in contrast to the description of Adam's creation in chapter one. There he is created, not merely formed. There no mention is made of his earthy origin. No hint is given there of any dichotomy between body and soul. His creation there is wholesome. There the name Adam comes from his being the "dmot", the likeness of God. There Adam's role is clearly defined even before his creation: he shall rule the earth and all living things thereupon. In our verses it will be a while before Adam figures out what he is doing here, and when he does it will sound a lot less majestic than it sounded on chapter one.

Adam as a grand detail within the rest of creation is at home, knows his role, and is in God's image. But in a perceived creation where he is at center stage and everything else is a prop, Adam is lost. He has no frame of reference. Adam is then both spiritually well beyond our humble world, and physically no more than earth itself. His role is certainly not innately understood.

Genesis 2:8

ויטע ה' אלקים גן בעדן מקדם וישם שם את האדם אשר יצר.

The Hebrew "vayita" means planting shoots. God took shoots from the choice trees throughout the world, and from them planted a garden in Eden.

The word "mikedem" means both 'east' and 'long ago'. Both meanings are implied here. The garden was in Eastern Eden. But the garden is of the distant past. It is not of our era. More about this will be explained in verses 2:10-14.

The word Eden itself means 'soft' in Hebrew. Man was not formed from the earth of Eden. He was formed somewhere else and then placed in Eden. It were as if the verse read 'and he placed there Adam who had been formed somewhere else.' By nature Adam's place is not the soft garden of Eden. He is made for rugged living. Only by divine providence does Adam find himself in the Garden of Eden.

Genesis 2:9

ויצמח ה' אלקים מן האדמה כל עץ נחמד למראה וטוב למאכל ועץ החיים בתוך הגן ועץ הדעת טוב ורע.

The verse emphasizes that every tree in the garden aroused desire, and was good to eat. This description is similar to that given the Tree of Knowledge in verse 3:6.

What is meant by the "Tree of Knowing Good and Bad"? Maimonides tersely explained that until man ate from the tree his capacity for distinction was only between truth and falsehood. As of eating from the tree he could make distinctions between good and bad. This commentary requires elaboration.

To know what is good or bad means to think and decide what is good or bad without ethical or legal criteria.

Before Adam knows good and bad he responded to beauty. Once Adam knows good and bad he does not merely respond. He decides upon and judges beauty. He judges whether it is good, and how good it is.

This judging blurs the distinction between moral goodness and esthetic goodness. Man comes to perceive beauty as a branch of morality, and sometimes as the essence of morality. Before Adam knew good and bad he desired and lusted beauty, and enjoyed it. For example, man and woman had a mutual desire whose pleasure they shared. But man who knows good and bad does not merely desire woman's beauty. He judges and rates it. Beauty becomes a value, upon which we sit in judgment.

Furthermore, esthetics are not merely judged. It can become the basis for rendering general judgment, including ethical judgment. A person who is beautiful, or sings beautifully, or acts beautifully, or writes beautifully, or paints beautifully, or plays ball beautifully, becomes a moral hero, whose opinion on moral and political matters is highly respected. To be good in beauty and art relieves one of personal ethical and moral responsibility, once man has eaten from the Tree.

To distinguish between the judgment of truth and falsehood and the judgment of good and bad is a major effort for man who has eaten from the Tree. Before eating from the Tree there was no need for this distinction, for man then judged only truth and falsehood, never good and bad. Before Adam ate from the Tree only God judged what was good- "and God saw it was good."

Genesis 2:10-14

ונהר יוצא מעדן להשקות את הגן ומשם יפרד והיה לארבעה ראשים. שם האחד פישון הוא הסבב את כל ארץ החוילה אשר שם הזהב. וזהב הארץ הוא טוב שם הבדלה ואבן השהם. ושם הנהר השני גיחון הוא הסבב את כל ארץ כוש. ושם הנהר השלישי חדקל הוא ההלך קדמת אשור והנהר הרביעי הוא פרת.

To explain these verses properly it will be necessary to elaborate.

On first glance these verses add nothing to the Garden of Eden story. If the reader would skip them their loss would not be noticed. This point further obligates us to seek out their meaning.

The verses present a picture of a river flowing through Eden and beyond, eventually breaking into four branches, each of which becomes a river in its own right. Two of them are known to us by their names in the verses: the Tigris and the Euphrates. The place of the Tigris described in the verse, east of Assyria, is similarly known, and indeed the Tigris flows there. The implication of the verse is that the Tigris and Euphrates have a common source, the river that flows from Eden. But although these two rivers merge one hundred miles before they together flow into the Persian Gulf, and are also connected further north by the Gharraf Channel, they do not share a source. However, their sources are not distant from each other. The Hazar Lake, the source of the Tigris, is about ten miles from the Keban Lake, the source of the Euphrates, in the Taurus Mountains. It is possible that in ancient times these two lakes were connected.

Saadya Gaon and Rashi teach us that the first river, Pishon, is to be identified with the Nile. They do not identify the Gihon. Saadya Gaon, though, does identify Kush, the land that the Gihon turns through, as Ethiopia. As such, the Gihon is an East African river that runs through Ethiopia. If it is one of the tributaries of the Nile, the Pishon and Gihon flow into each other and finally into the Mediterranean, just as the Tigris and Euphrates merge and flow into the Gulf.

The source of the Nile is somewhere south of the equator. Contrary to the simple reading of the verses, the Nile and Tigris-Euphrates systems do not share a source, nor is it imaginable. The distance between the sources of the Nile and the Tigris-Euphrates is thousands of miles on different continents. On the map of the ancient world, there are hardly two more distant points.

Because of all this, the Ibn Ezra sharply disagreed with the opinion that Pishon is the Nile. He identifies the Gihon as a river near Jerusalem. Indeed, the Bible speaks of a spring near Jerusalem by that name. But his claim ignores the verse placing the Gihon in Kush, hardly near Jerusalem by any interpretation.

Nachmanides responds to the Ibn Ezra's questions by saying the rivers come from a common underground source, far from their apparent sources on the face of the earth. But Nachmanides' suggestion neither fits the simple picture as described in the verses, nor does it fit reality as we perceive it today. It should be mentioned that Saadya Gaon had personal knowledge of the Nile, Euphrates, and Tigris, having lived part of his life in Egypt and part in Babylonia. He was certainly aware of the apparent conflict between his understanding of the verses and the reality. The Ibn Ezra mentions that the source of the Nile is south of the equator, far from the sources of the Tigris and Euphrates. It is fair to assume that Saadya Gaon was equally aware of this.

No earlier source is known to me identifying the Pishon as the Nile. It appears that Saadya Gaon and Rashi, received this information as a tradition from their teachers, in Egypt and Franco-Germany respectively. We have every reason to accept this tradition as ancient and authoritative. It was transmitted at least by Saadya Gaon with a full understanding of its conflict with our knowledge of these river's sources.

The receivers of the Torah must also have been aware of this conflict. Our patriarchs Abraham and Jacob were both in Haran, near the tigris, not far from the source of the Tigris and Euphrates, as well as in Egypt's capitol on the banks of the Nile. Abraham, particularly, had traveled the whole route from Ur Kasdim to Haran at least once, and knew the Tigris-Euphrates area very well. They must have heard that the rivers originate in the Taurus mountains, slightly northeast of Haran.

The people of Israel who lived by the Nile in Egypt are likely to have known of the distant southern source of the Nile, and of the distant northern sources of the Tigris and Euphrates. In fact, it was a 'problem' of the ancient world that all known rivers flowed from the north to south except for the Nile, which flowed from the south to north. This well known problem implies that all knew that the source of the Nile was nowhere near the sources of the Tigris and Euphrates.

In other words, the Jewish people receiving the Torah understood that the description of the Four Rivers dividing from the river that flows through Eden does not match the reality.

It would appear that this is the intended message of the verses. The world of Eden is not reflected in our reality. When God drove Adam out of the Garden, the Edenic world closed and disappeared from us. Search the globe, and you will not find Eden, just as you will not find a common source for the Nile, Tigris, and Euphrates. We do not understand the meaning of these rivers originating together in Eden. This is possible only in a different world, where north and south collide and unite upon a spot called Eden.

At the time the Torah was received two cultures dominated the ancient world, Egypt and Babylonia. Was Adam Babylonian or Egyptian? Which of these cultures is primary, and which secondary? These verses tell us that Adam comes from a place where there is a river which is the source of both the rivers of Egypt and Babylonia. Adam is beyond the dichotomy of Babylonian and Egyptian culture. No civilization can claim original man as exclusively its own. This is the message of these verses.

And if Eden is not subject to questions from our actuality in terms of its location, neither is it subject to other questions from contemporary knowledge. Eden is a different reality, not the same as our own. Everything is different, except for one thing. Man today seems to share quite a bit with Adam of Eden. Except for the results of eating from the Tree and being exiled from the Garden, Adam today and Adam of Eden are virtually identical twins.

Genesis 2:15

ויקח ה' אלקים את האדם וינחהו בגן עדן לעבדה ולשמרה.

Eden is not man's natural habitat. Adam is formed outside Eden and then planted in the Garden, just like the trees. Man's natural habitat is the brutal world outside Paradise. In order to be worthy of living in Eden he must rise to fulfill his purpose there.

Grammatical difficulties from which the English reader will be spared make the translation of the last two words of the verse questionable. While Adam is expected to serve and guard, it is not at all clear what he is expected to serve or guard. For grammatical as well as practical reasons, the Garden does not appear to be the object of this service or guardianship. The implication of the verses is that everything in the Garden is taken care of. God personally planted the saplings. The river running through waters them. How much yield is necessary for two people anyways?

It is possible that the 'service and guardianship is related in the next two verses. The service is the commandment to eat of the fruit of the Garden. The guardianship is the prohibition from eating of the Tree of Knowing Good and Evil. Adam's purpose in the Garden is the fulfillment of these two commandments. By doing so he fulfills God's service and guardianship.

Genesis 2:16

ויצו ה' אלקים על האדם לאמר מכל עץ הגן אכל תאכל.

God begins his communication with man not with blessing, nor information, but rather with command. Here Adam is not God's agent in ruling the world, but rather God's subject, obligated to obey His command. Even the relating language condescends: God commands upon Adam. Woman will also be obligated in this command, but the command is stated when Adam is still alone. Sin is often social in its violation, but the command is particular, and falls on the individual.

It is a welcome blessing that God first communicates to Adam in the first chapter. Here Adam first hears from God a command.

It is important to emphasize that the obligating command is more central to the religious relationship than the act of obedience. Before performing a mitzvah a Jew blesses 'you

who have sanctified us with your commandments'. God sanctifies us first and foremost by commanding us. A Jew is defined as a person obligated to the commandments, regardless of whether he fulfills them. The relationship is formed through the obligation, by the command itself.

The double language encouraging Adam to eat of the fruit of the Garden indicates that the fruit are not merely permitted, but are rather commanded. Adam is commanded to eat from every tree in the garden, although not every fruit. God demands of Adam to enjoy the great variety of fruit He made available to him. Adam serves God here not by controlling His world, but rather by enjoying His Garden.

Genesis 2:17

ומעץ הדעת טוב ורע לא תאכל ממנו כי ביום אכלך ממנו מות תמות.

Adam is prohibited from eating of the Tree of knowing Good and Bad. The meaning of Knowing Good and Bad was explained in verse 2:9. The double language death decree in Hebrew, which translates "Thou shall surely die" does not imply that the fruit is poisonous, but rather decrees a punishment. To eat from this tree is a sin, and its punishment entails maximum severity. Later in the Torah this phrase refers to the most severe Torah punishment, death by stoning. Here too the language indicates maximum penalty.

Adam does not understand clearly the implication of 'knowing good and bad', and God does not explain it to him. This opens man up to the suggestion of the serpent, and results in his surprise upon seeing the outcome of eating the fruit.

This prohibition is given to man as an unexplained law, called in Hebrew a 'choq'. The power of the prohibition comes not from the rationale, but rather from the authority of the Commander.

It is not mentioned that Adam is informed of the existence of the Tree of Life. By fulfilling the commandment to eat from each tree Adam would come to eat of its fruit as well, and thereby live eternally. The banishment from Eden prevented Adam from doing so, inevitably leading to the fulfillment of the mortality punishment decreed upon him. Eternal life is in Eden alone. Outside Eden is natural life, which includes death.

Genesis 2:18

ויאמר ה' אלקים לא טוב היות האדם לבדו אעשה לו עזר כנגדו.

According to Ibn Ezra the verse translates 'It is not good for man to be alone'. But Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik renders 'It is not good for man to be lonely.' Adam has an existential lacking, that upon satisfying, will cause him to joyously proclaim "this time a bone of my own bones and flesh of my own flesh." This exuberance is much better understood if Adam is here being redeemed from loneliness, than if he is merely no longer alone, and therefore supports Rabbi Soloveitchik's interpretation. The help Adam will get from his mate will not be in work or accomplishment. It will be in life itself.

At this point only God understands Adam's lacking. Adam makes no request for a mate, and does not yet seem to know what he is missing.

Notice that God's presence does not redeem man from solitude. As thirsty as man is for God, His nearness leaves an infinite distance that is unbridgeable. As close as he may be to God, Adam without his mate is lonely.

Genesis 2:19

ויצר ה' אלקים מן האדמה כל חית השדה ואת כל עוף השמים ויבא אל האדם לראות מה יקרא לו וכל אשר יקרא לו האדם נפש חיה הוא שמו.

The formation of the animals is mentioned here in context of Adam's potential mate. Fish, who do not share the land with man, are not mentioned. The animals, formed from the land, are theoretically potential helpmates for Adam. The birds, who at least share Adam's abode, are candidates as well.

(The word 'et' that appears before the mention of the birds but not before the mention of the animals seems to separate the birds from the beasts, and limit the statement of formation from the earth to the beasts, leaving the source of the formation of birds unmentioned.)

God here demonstrates to Adam his own human intellectual capacity and superiority. He relies on Adam to name all living things in his realm. God accepts Adam's appellation. His life, after all, is a function of the breath God breathed into him. God seems anxious to hear how Adam will name the birds and the beast. To do so requires expertise in both language and the living.

At the same time that Adam is being demonstrated his own intellectual prowess, he is realizing the gaping chasm between his own intellectual prowess and that of the rest of the creatures.

Genesis 2:20

ויקרא האדם שמות לכל הבהמה ולעוף השמים ולכל חית השדה ולאדם לא מצא עזר בנגדו.

The verses imply God has a hidden as well as open agenda. The open agenda is the formation of the animals and their naming by Adam. God's hidden agenda is to awaken Adam to awareness that he is lonely, and to realize he needs a helper in life. It is possible to be lonely and unaware. That is Adam's state. God creates a situation to arouse in Adam this awareness. God will not present Adam with Woman if he is not aware of his need for her. He would never appreciate her. Let Adam first realize what he is missing. This happens through the naming. Adam not only understands each animal to name it; he finds himself evaluating them as potential life mates. He had not intended to do so, but does so instinctually. When he realizes what he is doing in his thoughts, he understands that he has not found a helper to be with him. And, he realizes how much he wants one. Now God is ready to bring before him Woman.

Genesis 2:21

ויפל ה' אלקים תרדמה על האדם ויישן ויקח אחת מצלעותיו ויסגר בשר תחתנה.

Why does God anesthetize Adam upon taking the limb?

Although God is about to present Adam with his most desired treasure, with the one thing he feels he lacks, Adam might not be willing to part with his flesh to receive a life helpmate. If awake, he will protest. If imposed upon him forcibly despite his frantic

instinctual protest, the woman he receives will forever represent deep defeat, and evoke memories of horror and resentment. God puts Adam to sleep, without asking, without informing him what will happen. He will find out only upon being presented with the result. This way Adam can ignore his missing limb, and appreciate the great gift he is receiving.

Genesis 2:22

ויבן ה' אלקים את הצלע אשר לקח מן האדם לאשה ויבאה אל האדם.

The verse portrays the uniqueness of male female origins for man as opposed to animal. There are two differences.

The first: Woman is built from the body of Man, not separately. Man and Woman are from a single united essence. Their union, therefore, is actually a reuniting.

The second: God brings the woman to Adam. Adam does not wake up from his slumber to suddenly find a compatible mate at his side. Adam is introduced to the woman by none other than God. They are brought together not through physical or social attraction, but rather by Divine matchmaking. “And God brought her to Adam.”

In the Hebrew verb word “vayvieha” sexuality could also be understood. This seems to be assumed by Rashi in his commentary to verse 2:23. Adam is not left to deal with sexuality by instinct. God aids Adam in this first sexual union with the woman.

Genesis 2:23

ויאמר האדם זאת הפעם עצם מעצמי ובשר מבשרילזאת יקרא אשה כי מאיש לקחה זאת.

One can hear the joy in Adam's voice in this pronouncement. The joy is not merely upon finding a life partner. It is upon the realization that his partner is from his own bone and flesh. Their merging will not be merely a partnership. It will be a union, indeed, a unity. By presenting him with a woman God redeems man from the loneliness that gapes between him and all other living beings. Man could truly befriend and love only one made of the same earth and spirit as he. It is as a result of this powerful attachment that Adam calls woman ‘man’ in feminine form. “For from man she is taken.”

Genesis 2:24

על כן יעזב איש את אביו ואת אמו ודבק באשתו והיו לבשר אחד.

The second part of this verse completes the story of Woman's formation. “And he will cling to his wife and they will be one flesh.” Adam becomes complete and becomes a single whole flesh only through clinging to his wife. The verse does not clarify what this ‘clinging’ actually is. The words are open to be understood both physically and existentially. The “single flesh” that results is a new unit of life, the conjugal couple, which comes about through the attachment of Man and Woman to each other. Man and Woman merge through sexual relations, through the commitment to keep those relationships exclusively mutual, and through the mutual creation of a single joint life that attaches the conjugal pair at all times, regardless of the physical distance between them. “Clinging” is not an act. It is a continual reality.

The verse takes for granted that each man has only one wife. The lofty ideal that rises from the words 'and he will cling to his wife and they will be one flesh', do not leave room for bigamy. There is no oneness in duality. Bigamy is a violation of the conjugal life idealized in this verse.

The words 'Therefore man shall leave his father and his mother' are not relevant to Adam. They speak to us, and tell us that the conjugal relationship is the heritage of all mankind, and is not an isolated experience unique to Adam and his wife. However, conjugal unity in future generations requires a preparatory act. For future man to become 'one flesh' with his wife, he must leave his father and mother. Here is proof that clinging to woman is not merely sexual. To copulate with a woman it is not necessary to leave one's parents. It is the existential attachment, the conjugal life, which cannot be created without man leaving the unit of life in which he developed- his parents' home. This was not necessary for Adam, who had no parents, and had no family living unit before his marriage to his wife. But for man today to unite conjugally with his wife as Adam did to his, he must leave his parents. This is no license to violate the Fifth Commandment, the mitzvah to honor parents. Nevertheless, for man to truly cling conjugally to his wife, he must distance his personal life from that of his parents to some extent, in order to create a new privacy between him and his wife to whom he clings.

Genesis 2:25

ויהיו שניהם ערומים האדם ואשתו ולא יתבשו

Bodily shame is not essential for humanity. This is so despite its integral role in our life today. God made man straight. Despite man's origin in dust, 'the likeness of God' need not be ashamed of any organ God blessed him with, and certainly not the organ through which he will be able to procreate, and fulfill God's blessing. Nor is the mutual attraction between Adam and his wife a cause for shame. This attraction is also part of God's creation. Their mutual nakedness, which heightened and intensified this attraction greatly, is still no cause for shame. This is how God created Adam and his wife, naked and mutually attracted. "And they were both naked, Adam and his wife, and they were not ashamed."



Genesis 3:1

והנחש היה ערום מכל חית השדה אשר עשה ה' אלקים ויאמר אל האשה אף כי אמר
אלקים לא תאכלו מנל עץ הגן

The serpent is the force that encourages sin. It is God's creation, as it says in this verse "And the serpent was the slyest beast of the field that God had made." The serpent is not against God's will, and certainly not God's competitor. God saw fit that Man's free will

should have to deal with and counteract a force pushing him to sin. This force turns each opportunity to sin into a test of Man's devotion to God. In effect, it is the hurdle that allows the spiritual athlete to perform.

The Hebrew word for 'naked' in the previous verse is the same as the word for 'sly' in this verse. The sameness is striking, and calls us to compare their meanings. In fact, their implications are opposite. The nakedness of Adam and his wife indicates their simplicity, naivete, openness, and freedom from all worry. The slyness of the serpent indicates sophistication, cunning, subtlety, seductiveness, deceptiveness, and even crookedness. It is amazing how the same word means both of the above. But they do go together. Man's nakedness and the serpent's slyness fit together perfectly like a lock and key.

"Did God really tell you not to eat from all the trees in the garden?" Exaggerating the prohibition is a common way of encouraging its violation. The exaggeration evokes the defense "It's not as bad as you're saying it is." The residue left of that defense is that there is some truth to the accusation, and the commitment to obey has lost its outer layer.

An examination of Genesis 2:16 shows that God said the exact opposite of what the serpent attributes to him: "From all the trees of the garden should you eat." The forbidden tree is the exception to the rule. The serpent succeeded in refocusing the forbidden tree as the essence and rule. The woman doesn't swallow this completely, but her response in the next verse indicates she no longer perceives all the trees as permitted.

Genesis 3:2

ותאמר האשה אל הנחש מפרי עץ הגן נאכל.

"From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat."

The woman's statement does not technically change God's statement of permission, but it amputates the spirit of freedom from it. God said "from all the trees of the garden you shall surely eat (double verb form in the Hebrew)". The woman diminishes the perspective of the realm of the permissible first by removing the word "all", second by referring only to the fruit and not to the trees, and third by reducing the verb to its single form. Furthermore, the double verb form implies obligation; the single, mere permission.

All this is the result of the woman's reevaluation of God's word, compromising it with the exaggerated question of the serpent.

Genesis 3:3

ומפרי העץ אשר בתוך הגן אמר אלקים לא תאכלו ממנו ולא תגעו בו פן תמתון.

This verse quotes the woman's presentation of the prohibition of eating from the tree. It is best understood by comparing it with God's original command as quoted in Genesis 2:16-17. The fine differences between these two 'versions' reveal much as to how the prohibition has been worked over in the mind of the woman, and probably Adam as well. We will focus on four differences:

1) From our verse it appears that the woman places no emphasis on the nature of the forbidden tree. She does not mention that it is the tree of knowledge of good and bad. Her focus is on its prohibition. 'Who cares why God forbade the fruit, rock bottom it's forbidden! The reason why one shouldn't know to distinguish between good and bad is itself unclear! Better forget the details and just avoid the fruit!' The approach is straight

and simple, but simplistic as well. As soon as the serpent scratches it, it is found thin without depth. Obedience is the bottom line, but that bottom line can use the thickness of understanding to withstand attack.

2) God did not forbid touching the fruit. This prohibition is a creation of the woman's imagination. She nevertheless appends it to God's original statement. Extending the prohibition to include touch is in line with the woman's defense against violation: distance. She distances herself from the fruit intellectually by not referring to it as the tree of knowledge of good and bad. She distances herself practically by imagining the prohibition includes touching. None of this is going to help.

3) As is clear in Genesis 2:16, God did not merely say not to eat of the fruit; He commanded. The woman reduces the significance of God's command by referring to it as a simple statement. It might be understood as mere advice.

4) In Genesis 2:17 it says regarding one who eats of the fruit "you shall surely die", as opposed to the woman's version "lest you die". God's words are definitive. The woman leaves room for doubt. Furthermore, the language in 2:17 makes clear that death is a punishment. The woman's "lest" allows it to be understood as an unfortunate result. If God 'commanded' it makes sense that He will punish. If God merely 'said', He might end by warning of the natural dangers of such an action, as if the apple were poisonous.

Concluding this verse one can say that the words of the woman pave the way to violation, at the same time as they reveal efforts intended to protect her from violation.

Genesis 3:4

ויאמר הנחש אל האשה לא מות תמתון

It is amazing that although the woman misquotes God, the serpent negates God's exact words. God says "Thou shall surely die," and the serpent contradicts "Thou shall not surely die". The serpent is not dependent on us for his information. He has his own sources, be they our own subconscious, or his own connections.

The words of the serpent continue through verses 4 and 5 . Their division into two verses comes from the qualitative difference between the two parts of the serpent's message. The message of verse 4 is that the serpent denies the word of God. God said one thing. The serpent said the opposite. That the serpent dares deny God's word creates doubt and weakness in Man's trust in God, even though the serpent provides no basis for his denial.

Genesis 3:5

כי יודע אלקים כי ביום אכלכם ממנו ונפקחו עיניכם והייתם כאלקים ידעי טוב ורע

The serpent never tells the woman to eat the fruit. He does not even overtly suggest it. Had he done so, she would probably have disregarded him completely. Instead, the serpent undermines her belief in God and His commandment. Her will to obey God is so weakened that desire succeeds in overcoming her. The serpent weakened her spiritual stature, and then she sinned on her own.

In the previous verse the serpent flatly contradicted the word of God. In our verse he does four things:

He brings the quality of the fruit as the source of knowledge of good and bad to the center of the woman's attention;

He praises the quality of knowing good and bad;

He describes the results of eating the fruit as becoming godlike;

He claims God's motivation in forbidding the tree stems from jealousy, lest Man become like God.

Let us elaborate. In contrast to the woman who avoids mentioning the qualities of the tree, the serpent focuses on them. "For the day you eat from it your eyes will open, and you will be like gods, knowing Good and Bad." The serpent reminds the woman of the tree's nature, and brings her to reconsider eating of it. Lest the woman doubt, the serpent reassures her that to know good and bad is splendid. "Your eyes will open up." The difference between eating and not eating is like the difference between the seeing and the blind.

The serpent further argues that as a result of knowing good and bad one becomes like God. Divine qualities such as infinite ability, omniscience, power of creation, absolute justice, are not essential features of divinity, according to the serpent. All man needs to know is good and bad, and he is divine. "And you shall be like gods, knowing Good and Bad."

The woman is created in the form of God. She contains the desire to overcome the limitations of being merely the form. She aspires to divinity, and that is what the serpent promises the woman, divinity.

The serpent creates a competition in the woman's mind between the human being and God. The serpent implies that God forbade the fruit to prevent Man from becoming divine. The sense of competition causes the woman to resent God and His commandment.

The serpent talks to the woman in plural, thereby including Adam. He expects the woman to bring Adam into the picture.

Notice that in this verse again the serpent uses God's own language in contradicting Him. In Genesis 2:17 God says "For on the day you eat from it you shall surely die." In 3:4 the serpent has already said they would not die. Here the serpent gives his version of what will happen the day they eat: "For God knows that on the day you eat from it your eyes will open, and you shall be like gods, knowing good and bad." Although the woman did not use those words, the serpent is aware of the exact expressions of God, and uses them to counter His words. For the serpent, after all, is the woman's own evil inclination personified.

Genesis 3:6

ותרא האשה כי טוב העץ למאכל וכי תאוה הוא לעינים ונחמד העץ להשכיל ותקח מפריו ותאכל ותתן גם לאישה עמה ויאכל.

The woman focuses on the tree. Suddenly she finds it the most desirable tree in the garden. What she sees in it is all in her imagination. She perceives it as good to eat before she has tasted it. Gazing at it arouses desire before she has experienced it. She feels the tree will bring her intelligence, which she seems to equate with knowing good and bad.

She takes a fruit. For a moment she considers whether to continue, when she suddenly finds the fruit in her mouth, its taste on her pallet, crushed between her teeth. She has

eaten, and has not dropped dead on the spot. She does not sense any new knowledge. But the taste of sin is good. She offers some to Adam, here called “her man”. Adam is seduced into eating the fruit through the full power of femininity mustered by the woman. “She gives also the her man (who is) with her.” Adam finds the woman no less convincing than she found the serpent.

Genesis 3:7

ותפקחנה עיני שניהם, וידעו כי עירמים הם, ויתפרו עלי תאנה, ויעשו להם חגרת.

Eating of the fruit of knowing good and bad brought Adam and the woman to know that they were naked, something they had not previously paid any attention to. This understanding comes only when they have both eaten of the fruit. The woman is not embarrassed to appear undressed before Adam until he, too, partook of the fruit. Why does knowledge of good and bad make the primordial couple concerned with their nudity?

Until they ate of the tree, beauty and sexual sensuality were matters of desire and pleasure. They were not subject to intellectual evaluation, criticism, or judgment. As a result of eating from the tree, good and bad, that is, Pleasure and its lack, becomes a subject of intellectual rigor, esthetics. Esthetics is a subject worthy of examination, criticism, and judgment, comparable to true and false or right and wrong. When Adam and the woman ate from the tree, their mutual gazing brought not merely desire and love, but criticism and judgment. Suddenly they were not merely taking in their mutual beauty, but sizing each other up. When the woman was alone in having eaten, Adam did not realize how she was viewing him. Once they had both eaten, their mutual gaze included both lust and criticism, both love and judgment. Each of the couple felt it in themselves, and realized they were being viewed the same way. The bodies were no longer personal enticers, but rather objects open to critical judgment. Even a high grade does not prevent the degradation and depersonalization of this judgment. In effect, man and woman are judging each other as they would a piece of art, a chandelier, or an old wine. The simple personal love and desire has been lost. Shame of nakedness is a reaction to this judgment. Man and woman can relate to each other in physical love only after overcoming, one way or another, this shame that impedes their fulfilling their natural mutual desires.

Earlier, at the end of chapter 2, the Hebrew word for naked is “arumim”. Now they are referred to as “airumim”. Malbim explains that the former means simple nakedness, while the latter refers specifically to uncovered pubic areas. Practically they are the same. The difference is in attitude. The “arum” is not ashamed. The “airum” is.

This is the result of knowing good and bad.

Genesis 3:8

וישמעו את קול ה' אלקים מתהלך בגן לרוח היום ויתחבא האדם ואשתו מפני ה' אלקים בתוך עץ הגן.

God’s presence is not felt while the serpent encourages man to sin. While Adam is being tested he is alone, without any apparent supervision. Man is tested for his ability to act as if in God’s presence although he appears to be absent. God shows up right after man sins, just when Adam doesn’t want to see him.

Adam is embarrassed again, this time because of sin. It is not clear whether Adam understands the difference between these two shames, nakedness and sin. Shame attacks him on all sides.

Genesis 3:9

ויקרא ה' אלקים אל האדם ויאמר לו איכה.

The mindsets of hiding and sinning merge in Adam's flight from God. Adam is no longer where he was. He has changed his position. His position has changed in respect to God as well.

God's question is not an accusation. It is an introductory question that makes clear that the asker (God) knows that the questioned (man) is no longer where he was. Implications of physical shame or spiritual sin are left for Adam to clarify.

Genesis 3:10

ויאמר את קלך שמעתי בגן ואירא כי עירם אנכי ואחבא.

Adam decides to explain the change in light of his physical shame, exclusively. He does not confess to sin. Yet instead of saying "I was ashamed" he said "I feared". Adam is stumbling on his words. From nakedness one is ashamed, not brought to fear. No doubt Adam meant he was awed by God's arriving presence, and hid his naked body. But Adam is not convincing. Nakedness does not call for fear of God's arrival unless there is sin to hide.

Adam fears the voice of God because he has sinned. He thus reveals his sin as he is refusing to admit it.

In front of the woman the fig leaf belt covered enough. But before God nothing covers enough, once one has sinned. Hiding is the only alternative.

Genesis 3:11

ויאמר: מי הגיד לך כי עירם אתה? המן העץ אשר צויתך לבלתי אכל ממנו אכלת?

God does not accuse. He merely asks, and only based on the information Adam had volunteered. "How did you come to understand the significance of your nudity? Who told you? Or, did you eat from the tree I commanded you not to eat from?" God wants Adam to confess without being accused. That would be a redemptive act. Instead of confessing, Adam admits to the facts but denies guilt.

Genesis 3:12

ויאמר האדם: האשה אשר נתתה עמדי הוא נתנה לי מן העץ ואכל.

Instead of confessing, Adam agrees to the facts but refuses responsibility. By Adams report the woman is directly responsible, and indirectly, God himself.

"This is the helpmate you gave me? I would have been better off without her. Had you not given me the woman I would not have committed a sin.

In fact, God is ultimately responsible for sin. Without God's command there would be no sin. In Adam's blaming God and rejecting responsibility, he rejects the mitzvah relationship between God and Man.

Here is the first instance of the male human being blaming his female partner for his own failure.

Genesis 3:13

ויאמר ה' אלקים לאשה: מה זאת עשית? ותאמר האשה: הנחש השיאני ואכל.

The woman receives her own opportunity to confess to her sin. She is judged separately from Adam, and could have been exonerated even if Adam would have been sentenced to punishment. But like Adam, she admits to the fact, but attributes responsibility to others. However, while Adam takes nine words to fend off blame, the woman takes only two (in Hebrew). The woman blames the serpent, the evil inclination itself. If Adam's defense is mistaken, the woman's is virtually nonexistent. Do we expect to keep God's commandments only when nothing at all is pushing us to violate them?

Common to Adam and the woman is the statement "and I ate" (one word in Hebrew). Agreement to the fact, even without accepting responsibility, is a backhanded confession. With that minimal admission God decrees responsibility.

Genesis 3:14

ויאמר ה' אלקים אל הנחש: כי עשית זאת ארור אתה מכל הבהמה ומכל חית השדה על גחנך תלך ועפר תאכל כל ימי חיך.

That force within us that encourages sin, the animalism within Man, is the first to be cursed. The animal within Man is indeed cursed. Our sages tell us "Man does not die having fulfilled even half of his desires." Material frustration is rampant. The moment our physical desires are satiated we find ourselves craving the beyond. "Cursed are you beyond any animal." Man is aware of the harsh incongruity of body and soul. He knows that from the perspective of his animalistic desires he crawls on his belly and eats dirt. No one escapes this curse. The loftier one's soul becomes, the more jarring its forced unity with the body and its animal desires. Only a person who has completely surrendered to the animal within him can ignore this tension. Such a person would effectively be an animal, and there is no greater curse than to be an animal if you could have been a person.

Genesis 3:15

הוא ישופך ראש ואתה תשופנו עקב. ואיבה אשית בינך ובין האשה ובין זרעך ובין זרעה

The mutuality of sexual desire before the sin enhanced the personal relationship between man and woman. The sweetness of their physical pleasure complemented and completed their personal and existential relationship, resulting in their uniting as one flesh. Now, sexual desire takes on a new dimension. It will hereby make its own claims that will not be limited to the enhancement of conjugality. Sexuality remains a necessary component of the conjugal relationship, but often lusts beyond the human quality, demanding satisfaction regardless of its positive or negative effect on the couple. Uncontrolled sexuality strains conjugality. Sometimes this is due to one-sided attitudes and demands within the relationship itself. The strain becomes much more damaging when sexuality runs wild completely beyond the conjugal context.

Overcoming this desire calls for restraint, and often results in frustration. This new sexual dimension is animalistic, and it is therefore represented in the Torah by the slyest of

beasts. It causes tension between husband and wife, as well as between the humane and animalistic tendencies within the human personality. Man stumps on the serpent by restraining and frustrating his animalistic desires, and the serpent stings man's foot, when his animal desires run wild.

Genesis 3:16

אל האשה אמר: הרבה ארבה עצבונך והרנך בעצב תלדי בנים ואל אישך תשוקתך והוא ימשל בך.

The Hebrew plus perfect tense used here indicates that the punishments of the serpent, woman, and Adam were all pronounced at once.

The woman's punishment is twofold. The punishment for eating of the tree is the pains of pregnancy and labor. But she is further punished for bringing Adam to sin. The Sforno explains she used her conjugal influence in luring Adam to follow her way. Here her punishment is a measure for measure. 'You shall long for your husband, and he will rule you.' This longing does not appear to be sexual. Men do not lag behind women in this regard. This longing is for conjugality, the desire to marry and find favor in the eyes of one's spouse. While men desire all this, our verse informs us that women feel these needs more acutely, putting them at a disadvantage in conjugality that results in 'rule'.

Adam's rule over the woman is a curse for her, not a commandment to him. It is certainly appropriate that Adam do his best to help the woman overcome the difficulties of this situation, and to use the woman's longing for his companionship to form and solidify the family.

Making as if this longing does not exist is unlikely to make it disappear. It may also make it more difficult to deal with.

Genesis 3:17

ולאדם אמר: כי שמעת לקול אשתך ותאכל מן העץ אשר צויתך לאמר לא תאכל ממנו ארורה האדמה בעבורך בעצבון תאכלנה כל ימי חיך.

"Because you listened to the voice of your wife."

Adam uses the woman as an excuse for his sin (3:12). He thought that if he could blame his sin on God's gift to him, perhaps the responsibility would be directed back at God or at the gift herself, woman.

But God sees Adam acquiescing to the woman's request as an essential part of his overall failure. Adam did not merely eat from the tree. He obeyed the voice of the woman rather than the voice of God.

Genesis 3:17-19

ולאדם אמר: כי שמעת לקול אשתך ותאכל מן העץ אשר צויתך לאמר לא תאכל ממנו ארורה האדמה בעבורך בעצבון תאכלנה כל ימי חיך. וקוץ ודרדר תצמיח לך ואכלת את עשב השדה. בזעת אפך תאכל לחם עד שובך אל האדמה, כי ממנו לקחת, כי עפר אתה, ואל עפר תשוב.

The source of Adam's curse is the source of his physical being, the land. In his sin Adam preferred to satisfy the physical within him rather than have the spirit God breathed into

him rule his body. The physical land does not reward Adam for satisfying his bodily desires, but is rather estranged from him. Peace is made between Adam and the land only when in death he returns to it. Adam's efforts to become like God end in bitter mortality, showing Adam to be ultimately no more than dust.

Adam's curse affects the woman equally. She too is subject to the work and fluctuation of agriculture. She too returns in death to the land from whence he came.

Genesis 3:20

ויקרא האדם שם אשתו חוה כי הוא איתה אם כל חי.

The woman has already been named 'ishah' (2:23). Something has happened that calls for a new name. This event is likely to have been the eating from the tree. The name 'ishah' implied that Adam and she were of one flesh and bone, being male and female expressions of the same being. Adam no longer wants the woman to be so closely identified with him. The woman's new name, 'Chavah', is not rooted in words that refer to Adam. It refers to her as capable of bearing child, a function Adam does not share with her. The new name distances her from Adam.

Nevertheless, there is something comforting about the name. In the aftermath of the curse of pain and suffering during pregnancy and labor, Adam emphasizes the bright side of childbirth. Eve will be the mother of all humankind.

So in renaming Eve, Adam is both distancing her and comforting her. Adam and his descendants are quite capable of expressing conflicting messages and emotions at once.

As to which of these expressions is essential and which secondary, their ensuing relationship speaks for itself. Adam and Eve are not intimate for the next one hundred thirty years.

The Midrash points out the similarity between the Aramaic word for serpent and Eve's new name. In the words of Rabbi Acha, "What the serpent did to Eve, Eve did to Adam." This implication in her new name, not at all explicated in Scripture, is difficult to ignore once pointed out, and sharply states the way Adam looks at Eve in light of the sin as expressed in her new name.

Genesis 3:21

ויעש ה' אלקים לאדם ולאשתו כתנות עור וילבשם.

The curses have been distributed. God is concerned that Adam is still in Eden and may eat from the tree of life. He is also concerned for Adam's shame and need for clothing. This second concern came first. God's goodness precedes his justice. On the spot, God provides Adam and Eve with clothing.

The fact that this need comes from Adam's sin in no way deters God from providing what is lacking. Adam is not told "You got yourself into this." God's goodness is wholesome and unconditional. And it comes back to back with the judgment of expulsion from Eden.

Genesis 3:22

ויאמר ה' אלקים: הן האדם היה כאחד ממנו לדעת טוב ורע ועתה פן ושלח ידו ולקח גם מעץ החיים ואכל וחי לעולם.

God was willing to allow Adam and Eve to be like Him by eating of one of the two trees at the center of the garden. God wanted that Adam should eat of the tree of life, and be eternal like God, and that Adam should forgo the esthetic judgment attained by eating of the other tree. But Adam and Eve insisted on imitating God through esthetic judgment, and ate from the tree of knowledge of good and bad, and thereby lost the privilege of eating of the tree of life.

Adam, even eternal and esthetically astute, can in no way be rationally confused with the Divine. But Man himself is less rational than we like to think, and is easily brought to equate his own grandeur with God's. All the serpent had to say was "And you shall be like gods, knowledgeable of good and bad," and Eve went for the fruit. The thought that there might be more to God than knowing good and bad is beyond her. As long as Adam lacked esthetic judgment his immortality did not fool him into thinking he was Divine. But now that he knows good and bad, God decrees upon him mortality, to establish unforgettably that Man is not God.

So Death is decreed upon Adam in two ways: death itself, and mortality. Death is his punishment for eating from the forbidden tree. Mortality is decreed as a preventive from Man losing his perspective of his frailty, in effect, his humanity, before God. Man may know good and bad, but he will return to the dust from whence he came.

While repentance may redeem Man from Divine punishment, it cannot free him from the contemporary human condition. All men, including the righteous, will remain mortal.

Genesis 3:23

וישלחהו ה' אלקים מגן עדן לעבד את האדמה אשר לקח משם.

The Ibn Ezra and Radak see the "sending" and "chasing away" in this verse and the next as synonymous. But the Sforno, Malbim, Hirsch, and Ntsiv all see these words as expressing different ideas. God sends Adam with a purpose and goal: to receive his punishment. This however would not prevent his occasional return to Eden. In addition to leaving Eden to serve his punishment, Adam is driven out, never to return. He is chased away to prevent his eating from the tree of life.

The "land from which Adam was taken" is a term with a double entendre.

Adam was taken from land. That the dust from which he came and in which he will be buried is also the labor of his life compounds the tragedy.

Adam will not labor the blessed soil of Eden, but rather the plain soil outside of Eden from which he was taken (2:8). Adam has not merited the supernatural angelic paradise to which he was elevated, and is demoted to his natural earthen habitat.

Genesis 3:24

ויגרש את האדם וישכן מקדם לגן עדן את הכרבים ואת להט החרב המתהפכת לשמר את דרך עץ החיים.

Adam is driven from Eden. Although it is clear that God has driven him out, God's name does not appear in the verse. With the exile of Adam, God has gone into hiding.

Eden is shut. The cherubs and the revolving blade not only prevent entry to Eden, they hide its ever existing. The Garden of Eden cannot be found on the planet. There is no river from which the Nile, Euphrates, and Tigris flow. The world of Adam and Eve after the exile is Edenless. All we have left from the garden is ourselves.

There is, however, hint where to look for the path of the tree of life. The cherubs are mentioned in only one other place in the Torah- the Holy Tabernacle. There they stood above the Ark, peacefully protecting the Tablets upon which God wrote the Ten Commandments. If these are those cherubs, then the path to the tree of life must be through the holiness of the Tabernacle, and the observance of the Ten Commandments that reside at its center.

With this the creation story from the perspective of Man comes to a close. Our Rabbis have commented that Adam's formation, the command not to eat of the tree, Eve's formation, the sin, and the exile all took place on the same day. The eternity of Paradise turned into a fleeting moment. We are left to confront our life in our natural habitat, and to redeem our spirit through the seeking out of God in our own world.



Genesis 4:1

והאדם ידע את חוה אשתו ותהר ותלד את קין ותאמר קניתי איש את ה'.

The Rabbis of the Midrash disagreed as to whether "Adam knew Eve" takes place while they were still in Eden, or only after their exile. Rashi insists that the verb form used is the plus perfect, implying this event had already taken place in the Garden. If so, the pregnancy and birth of Cain preceded the decree that pregnancy be long and difficult. Shortly after Adam knew Eve Cain was born. It is with sincere gladness that Eve says "I have acquired a man with God." The sharing of the creativity of life with God is a religious experience beyond compare.

The verb "to know" is already mentioned regarding the tree of knowing good and evil. Onkelos, however, translates these verbs differently. The knowledge of the tree is passive, judgmental. Adam knows Eve with knowledge that leads one to action. As Adam stares at Eve's beauty, notices and knows greater details of her body, he is more and more propelled to act upon this knowledge with physical consummation. This is the

knowledge that God granted Adam and Eve from within themselves. For this knowledge the fruit of the tree was unnecessary.

We have already explained that the woman was named “Eve” only after the sin and decree. Her being called Eve in our verse might indicate that our verse takes place after the sin. But it can just as easily be claimed that although the event is a throwback, since her renaming has already been mentioned, the new name is used in all further references.

Eve, who actually bore the child, decides the name. Based on the principle “the craftsman acquires the increased value his skill has brought to the item,” Eve can truly say that she has acquired a man with God. Their partnership in formation results in a continuing partnership in acquisition and claim.

Genesis 4:2

ותסף ללדת את אחיו את הבל ויהי הבל רעה צאן וקין היה עבר אדמה.

By the birth of Abel no “knowing” is mentioned. The Midrash therefore concludes that there was no separate sexual act to bring about his birth, and therefore, Abel is Cain’s twin brother. If so, Abel was probably born in Eden. It is the opinion of Tosfos (Sanhedrin 38b) however, that Abel was born after the exile.

The Torah tells us who named Cain and why he received that name. For Abel we are told neither the reason for the name, nor whose idea it was. The act of naming is not mentioned at all. It appears that the naming of Abel takes place during the depression of being driven from Eden. It is for this reason that he is called in Hebrew “Hevel”, meaning vanity, naught. Everything had become vain. All good, all comfort, all closeness to God, was lost. Now all is nothing. The whole act of naming him has been blacked out. Perhaps even the conjugal sweetness that brought his conception has been darkened. Only his name is left, testament to Adam and Eve’s reaction to their forced flight from Eden.

This explanation of his name leads us to accept the opinion of Tosfos that Abel was born after they had left Eden. It is possible, however, that Abel was born in the Garden, as stated in the Midrash, but before they succeeded in naming him they were driven out, and there behind the cherubs and the revolving blade they called their second son Abel-nothingness.

The verse emphasizes that each brother had his own profession. Their endeavors reflect the results of eating from the tree. Cain works the land after his parental family is driven from a garden that produces fruit without toil, and in the aftermath of the ground being cursed.

Abel pastures sheep for their shearing. (Eating meat was forbidden. Milk is not mentioned in chapter one as an option for human consumption. The mention of sheep in the verse without “cattle” also points to wool. While Cain’s land may give him linen, that will not keep him warm at night or in the winter. It is unlikely that the most primitive horticulture could expend efforts on anything but basic grains.) Wool is the raw material from which clothing is made, necessary as of when Adam and Eve became aware of their nakedness. Abel’s occupation allows for dignified body clothing after the exile.

Cain needs Abel for clothing. Abel needs Cain for bread. Their support is interdependent. It appears this division of labor was planned out by the brothers.

Genesis 4:3

ויהי מקץ ימים ויבא קין מפרי האדמה מנחה לה'.

With this verse a new chapter in the relationship between Man and God is begun. Until now any initiative in this relationship came from God. God blesses Man. God commands Man. Here for the first time Man takes the initiative in communicating with God. This initiative, however, is laden with pitfalls. Getting close to God involves more obligation than one may realize. There is a path by which to approach God, and whoever tries to pave his own road may find himself more distant than when he started.

The offerings of both Cain and Abel are called in Hebrew “minchah”. This word appears to be the original term designating man’s gift to God, regardless of whether it is an animal or vegetable offering. Rabbi Jacob Mecklenberg in his commentary “HaKtav veHakabalah” explains that the denotation of “minchah” is a gift given by one of lowly stature to one much greater, such that the receiver does kindness with the giver by agreeing to receive the gift, thereby creating association between himself and the lowly giver. It is not the giver who is providing for the receiver. It is the receiver who allows the giver opportunity to offer him a minchah.

In Rabbi Mecklenberg’s explanation of minchah we discover the foundation of ritual sacrifice in the Torah. God does not need our gifts. We need that He accept them from us. The minchah is brought to God to allow us to give God something, and thereby to connect ourselves to Him. If God relates to our offer, He has turned to us, and our offer is successful. If our offer does not have this result, it has failed.

According to the Midrash, Adam brought a sacrifice in Eden. Nonetheless, this offering is not mentioned in Scripture. The simple reading of the verses brings us to conclude that Cain and Abel were the first to bring offerings.

Adam in Eden, so close to God, His own handiwork, who heard from Him blessing and commandment, felt no need to connect with God through an offering. But Cain and Abel who grew up without this direct connection to God, sought out the Divine. They wanted God to care for them, to be happy with them. They needed to bring a minchah.

Cain brought the fruit of his labor at the end of the season. It must have been the end of Cain’s first season as farmer. Cain brought of his fruit without any selectivity or distinction amongst them.

Genesis 4:4

והבל הביא גם הוא מבכרות צאנו ומחלביהן וישע ה' אל הבל ואל מנחתו.

The word “chelveihen”, according to Onkelos and Rabbi Yosi Ben Chanina, refers not to the fatty parts of the animal, but rather to very fat animals, considered very desirable. This seems the simple reading of the verse. Abel brought two types of animals in his offering, each with its own expression of gratitude and subservience to God:

The firstborn. Abel gave God the first offspring of his flock and took only the remainder for himself. God comes first.

The fat animals. Abel brought the highest quality animals before God in addition to the firstborn. The best is for God.

Abel decided that it was not enough to offer just anything to God. What is offered to God must be chosen based on a selective process, resulting in items deemed uniquely appropriate to be a minchah.

The uniqueness of the offering is not merely more appropriate, but rather essential to the notion of the lesser giving to the greater. It is only this way that the one offering can express the message of the gift through the item itself.

God turns to Abel and his minchah. The word 'vayisha' Rashi explains means 'turn'. It is strikingly similar to the Hebrew word meaning 'redeemed'. This notion is being hinted to as well. By God receiving Man's gift, Man is redeemed. "And God redeemed Abel and his minchah".

Genesis 4:5

וְאֵל קַיִן וְאֵל מִנְחָתוֹ לֹא שָׁעָה וַיַּחַר לְקַיִן מְאֹד וַיִּפְּלוּ פָּנָיו.

Here we have a junction where religious and social difficulties meet.

Cain's offering begins as a purely religious service that God does not accept. This does not mean it was sinful. That it failed to be worthy of God's acceptance is a lesson to Cain for the future. God's refusal to receive Cain's minchah has nothing to do with Abel.

But Cain doesn't see it that way.

Cain's reaction to Abel's success turns this religious worship into a competition. Cain feels not only rejected by God. He sees himself as failing in a religious competition with his brother.

"Cain became very angry". It is not clear from the verse whether Cain's anger is at God or at Abel. This ambiguity is intentional in the verse. The direction of Cain's anger is not worked out within Cain's mind either. But practical options point in only one direction. Against God not much can be done. Against Abel there are options.

"His face fell". Cain's face falls from shame. It was not the physical shame that resulted from eating of the tree. This was the shame of failure. Nor is it an internal shame here. It is rather a shame before God and Abel. The confusing anger directed against both God and Abel results in Cain taking out all his anger on Abel.

This merging of a problem between men with a problem between God and Man is a precedent for many social difficulties originating in religious devotion. It appears that these realms cannot be separated. Man does not succeed in separating out his relationship with God from his personal contact with the people around him.

Genesis 4:6

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֵל קַיִן: לָמָּה חָרָה לְךָ וְלָמָּה נִפְּלוּ פָּנֶיךָ.

With these words God states that anger, sadness, and depression are not appropriate responses to spiritual difficulties. These will only prevent Man from putting himself back together and approaching God. A person looking to better his actions should shake off negative emotion. It will get him nowhere.

Genesis 4:7

הלווא אם תיטיב שאת ואם לא תיטיב לפתח חטאת רבץ ואליך תשוקתו ואתה תמשל בו.

This verse expresses the instability and fragility of Man's spiritual world. If Man works on moral self-improvement he will attain spiritual greatness. But if he does not, he will not merely stay put. He runs the risk of moral degeneration. This idea is represented in the verse by "sin" lurking at the entrance. Sin is the companion not only of those who actively seek it. It also accompanies those who do not work to avoid it.

The verse explaining the relation of Man and sin is strikingly similar to the verse explaining the relationship of Man and Woman in her punishment. The desire for sin is attached to Man no less than woman feels attached to her husband. While it is a man's role to encourage and satisfy his wife's conjugal yearnings, it is his responsibility to rise above his desire to sin and rule over it. Rashi explains that the phrase "and you shall rule it" is not stating an obligation, though one certainly exists. It is stating that Man can overcome his desire. He is not enslaved by it, and is capable of ruling it.

Cain, presently in the throes of a burning desire to murder Abel, aware how horribly sinful that would be, hears God tell him that he can overcome and rule.

Genesis 4:8

ויאמר קין אל הבל אחיו ויהי בהיותם בשדה ויקם קין אל הבל אחיו ויהרגהו.

We are not told what Cain said to Abel. Perhaps he spoke words without content, and effectively said nothing. Cain wanted to explain to Abel why he was angry, so that Abel might apologize. But as Cain spoke he realized he had nothing to say. Abel cannot apologize for doing nothing wrong. Cain's anger at Abel is displaced. The anger is actually at God, who did not turn to him and his offering. Abel cannot apologize for God. Cain's words were confused, unconvincing, irrelevant, and empty. They further frustrate him, until he finally explodes in the murder of his brother.

Cain murders Abel in the field. The field is the territory of Cain, worker of the land, as opposed to the desert, territory of the shepherd. Cain cannot merely kill his brother. He is fully aware of the implications of such an act, and is quite wary of actually going ahead. Cain "rises" (ויקם) to the occasion.

The gall to do it Cain finds only in the field, on his own turf.

The verse's emphasis on fraternity makes clear that Cain was acutely aware of their relationship at the time of the murder. On the contrary, brotherhood here has turned from a source of love to a source of jealousy.

Genesis 4:9

ויאמר ה' אל קין: אי הבל אחיך? ויאמר: לא ידעתי. השמר אחי אנכי?

God's question of Cain is similar to his question of Adam, with an important difference. In both cases God asks "where". God is in search of Man. By Adam God is asking where is the sinner. By Cain, God asks where is he who was sinned against. In sinning against God the focus is the sin. In sinning against man the focus is the result. This is particularly so in murder.

God might have asked Cain “Where is Abel?” without mentioning that he is his brother. By identifying Abel as Cain’s brother in the question God indicates fraternal responsibility. Even had Cain been unrelated to Abel’s disappearance, the question would be in place. Cain and Abel are not strangers, nor casual acquaintances. They are brothers.

Cain thinks God does not know what happened. He has good reason for thinking that. It is not just that God asks. It is that God did not prevent the murder. Cain can’t imagine that God would realize that Abel is about to be murdered and would not prevent it. That God avails Man the freedom to sin against Him is one thing, but how could God allow Man to harm his fellow, to murder? Where was God when Abel was murdered?

Cain asks this question both as the murderer and the mourning brother. Cain attributes his freedom to kill to God’s ignorance.

The realization that Man’s free will extends even to murder, and God will not interfere, surprises, confuses, and shocks. God so controls the world, yet in the realm of morality he leaves us free and wild. He will not prevent us from descending to the lowest levels of violence and corruption, and beyond. Man has freedom not only to sin against God, but also to attack, to kill, and not only an individual, but even a community, even a nation, perhaps all mankind. The potential of our activity goes far beyond our expectation, far beyond our desire. Most of us would be happy with the freedom of artistic creativity, thought, and speech. A drop of moral freedom is wanted to enable us to prove ourselves ethically. But who needs the freedom to kill and destroy? Why doesn’t God limit us?

But He does not. Our freedom of will and action is absolute, with all the violent, destructive, and murderous potential that implies. God avails us all this not without His knowledge, but with full and ultimate realization. Short of miracles, in the realm of immorality we are in our own hands.

This is what God meant when He told Cain “You can rule over you passion (4:7). We are capable of the worst, but we are equally capable of controlling ourselves and avoiding it. If our passion controls us, we must live not only with our sin, but also with its results; both results for the sinner, and results for the victim of the sin.

Cain could have responded to God’s question “I don’t know” without raising the accountability issue. But Cain decides to debate God head on. Besides claiming innocence, Cain further claims he is not an address for the question. Fraternity is irrelevant. Brotherhood is purely biological, and has no moral implication.

Cain would like to live his life as if Abel were dead, even if he would be alive. This argument of Cain is actually ideological protection against guilt for the murder. (This is the case although he is in the midst of denying it.) According to Cain each man stands alone against a Hobbesian world with no social contract. It was brotherhood that made him jealous in the first place, and it is this brotherhood that he denies through the murder.

Genesis 4:10

ויאמר: מה עשית? קול דמי אחיך צעקים אלי מן האדמה.

Since Cain denies any knowledge of Abel, and lies outright, God accuses him immediately. Cain thought that by murdering him, Abel would cease to exist. No more jealousy. No more competition. No more brother. To that God responds “The voice of

your brother's blood cries out to me." Abel is neither quiet nor silent as a result of his murder. On the contrary, he continues to exist as a victim of murder. He cries. His blood, that is, his murder, has a voice of its own. As long as Abel was alive he could be avoided. Now that he has been murdered the voice of his blood will never be silenced.

In a world of few people, other creatures take on added significance. Cain works the land. The land is expected to side with Cain in his struggle with Abel, the shepherd. Because of his sin, even the land supports Abel, and serves as a base for the voice of Abel's blood to reveal Cain's travesty. "The voice of your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground."

It is not Abel's blood that cries out, but rather your brother's blood. His cry is all the more shrill because it was your brother. You are your brother's keeper.

Genesis 4:11

ועתה ארור אתה מן האדמה אשר פצתה את פיה לקחת את דמי אחיך מידך.

Cain is cursed. In the sin of Adam and Eve they were punished, but not cursed. Only the serpent was cursed. Murder is more severe than forbidden fruits. Murder is compared to inciting idolatry, the serpent's sin (Sanhedrin 29a). In murder, as in incitement, the results of the sin fall upon others. Cursedness is a punishment for those whose sins harm others physically or spiritually, and thereby disrupt society.

If Cain thought he would benefit from the earth soaking up and thereby hiding his brother's blood, he was wrong. The land is weakened by taking in the murdered blood, and no longer gives its full strength.

Genesis 4:12

כי תעבד את האדמה לא תספ תת כחה לך, נע ונד תהיה בארץ.

Man needs land for two purposes. One is for agriculture. The second is for settlement. In Hebrew when referring to agricultural land it is called "adamah". When used for settlement it is called "eretz". Every man needs land to settle. Cain used it for agricultural work beyond settlement. Cain's punishment prevents his use of the land for his professional trade, and furthermore in that realm of land use in which he and Abel shared, settlement. The use of land as living room, which Abel has been prevented from by murder, is withheld from Cain as well. It appears that this is the idea behind exile as a punishment for reckless murder. The murderer is forbidden from maintaining his abode, just as he has made it impossible for the murderer to do.

By Torah law, a murderer receives capital punishment. "He who spills the blood of man, by man shall his blood be spilt." (Genesis 9:6). Why does God not kill Cain? It appears that the death penalty for murder must be done by man. "By man shall his blood be spilt." It is a punishment of vengeance (see Exodus 21:20). Death by Divine act is not a punishment of vengeance, and the murderer is not subject to it. In lieu of death by human vengeance, such as when the murder is unintentional, or is not punishable on technical grounds, the punishment for murder is exile. Cain's exile was of the most severe sort, given to murderers who are or are nearly intentional. He has no refuge, and is compelled to flee forever. (See Maimonides Law of Murderer 6:4.) He shall wander incessantly through the land.

Genesis 4:13

ויאמר קין אל ה': גדול עוני מנשוא.

As opposed to Cain's response to God's question and God's response to him, both of which are introduced with a single Hebrew word, "He said", Cain's response to his curse is introduced with a full phrase: "Cain said to God". Cain has been attacked by God's curse, and is momentarily paralyzed by it. It takes him time to gather the guts to have a bargaining position to negotiate with God, and further chutzpah to actually express it. Adam and Eve did not respond at all upon hearing their punishment. How is it that Cain, whose sin is so much more severe than his parents, dares argue with God while his parents accepted their fate in solemn silence?

Cain seems to feel he has a complaint. It is hidden, and never gets explicated, but exists. God made it possible for Cain to commit the murder. God could have prevented it. By saying "Is my sin too great to bear?" Cain is implying "If my sin is too great to bear, why didn't you prevent it from happening? Why did you allow Abel to suffer at my hands? Why didn't he merit your aid? Why is it that during the crime you are beyond interference, but when the time comes to punish your presence is so strong?"

But this is how God runs the world. Man sins, God does not prevent him, and then God punishes man. Man is responsible for his actions. It is for man to make this world worthy of existence on moral grounds. It is only through Man's absolute freedom to act that makes his moral and religious deeds meaningful. Without the real possibility of evil, goodness loses its significance. It is only through this opportunity to choose between right and wrong that Man can become an ethical being.

Genesis 4:14

הן גרשת אתי היום מעל פני האדמה ומפניך אסתר והייתי נע ונד בארץ והיה כל מצאי יהרגני

In this verse we see how Cain perceives his curse. That the land will no longer deliver its strength to him is equivalent to being driven off it. Working the land for Cain was not merely a career. It was his life's calling and purpose.

The results of his instability were seen not merely as exile, but as opening him up to being killed. He would have no permanent home to where he could seek refuge. It is striking that the first murderer is himself concerned of being killed. He, more than anyone else, understands that it could happen. The murderer fears murder.

Who is it Cain is afraid will murder him? Would Adam or Eve avenge Abel's death at the cost of losing their remaining son? I don't think so. Nor do Cain's words point to his parents in particular. Cain is not afraid of anyone. He is just afraid. "If I killed, someone might kill me." His fear is a direct outgrowth of the murder. This is not part of the punishment. It is part of the sin.

What has God said that makes Cain conclude "I will be hidden from your face"? This is Cain's interpretation of "You are cursed". His interpretation seems correct. The cursed is hidden from God. He lives excluded from God's presence. This appears to be the essence of the curse. God mentions it first of all. In effect, this is a harsh extension of the situation that caused the sin in the first place. God did not relate to Cain and his offering.

One might expect that the exclusion from God would be prominent in Cain's retelling of his overall punishment, likely to be mentioned first, or last. Cain, however, lists it in the middle somewhere. Although he wants God to turn to him, to face him, it is but one aspect of his life, and not necessarily the most important. This was his attitude in his offering as well. Exclusion from God's company is in the middle of a list that begins with his being driven from the land and ends with his inability to settle down. Being informed of his punishment for murder does not change his basic perspective.

Genesis 4:15

וַיֹּאמֶר לֹהֹת לְכֹן כָּל הָרֶג שְׁבַעֲתִים יִקָּם וַיִּשֶׂם ה' לְקִין אוֹת לְבַלְתִּי הַכּוֹת אוֹתוֹ כָּל מִצְאוֹ

Of all the complaints Cain had against his punishment- curse, God relates only to his last point; his fear of being killed. On the essence of his curse, God does not relent. But his fear of being killed is merely a psychological outcome of his killing Abel. To overcome this God is ready to help him.

But the results will affect Cain nonetheless. In order for Cain to be protected from all who come to harm him, he must go public as a murderer. Cain's only protection from his imaginary pursuer is to openly appear with the mark of Cain, revealing his identity and sin. In order not to fear being killed, Cain is prepared for all to know that he is a killer. Cain chose shame over fear.

Genesis 4:16

וַיֵּצֵא קַיִן מִלִּפְנֵי ה' וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּאֶרֶץ נוֹד קִדְמַת עֵדֶן

God's agreement with Cain to protect him from attackers is their last communication. Cain's exit from being before God is not a location exit, but rather a social one. God's refusal to turn to Cain and his offering has frozen and deepened. As accursed and driven away Cain can no longer stand before God. Just as all men stand before God regardless where they are, Cain is hidden from God wherever he may be. The name of his land of settlement, "Nod", indicates in Hebrew "wandering", making clear the land was the area in which he wandered, as God decreed. The land is east of Eden, where the cherubs that protect the Garden of Eden from man's entry reside. Cain, like his parents, is excluded from that closeness to God man craves.

Genesis 4:17

וַיֵּדַע קַיִן אֶת אִשְׁתּוֹ וַתְּהַר וַתֵּלֵד אֶת הַנּוֹךְ. וַיְהִי בְנָה עֵיר, וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם הָעֵיר כְּשֵׁם בְּנוֹ הַנּוֹךְ.

The verse implies that Cain knows his wife only after Abel is murdered, and after his relation with God is severed. This creates a stark contrast between the original conjugality between Adam and Eve and that between Cain and his wife. Adam and Eve marry within the divine bliss of Eden, with God himself responsible for their joy. "Make so happy the loving couple just as you made happy your creations in Eden of old" is the blessing by which we bless every couple getting married. Cain's marriage comes in the aftermath of his personal failures in relating to both God and his brother. His conjugality comes at once with his flight from God and his past. It represents his immersion in the here and now, in the life that God has left Cain, in the absence of his countenance. It is perhaps for this reason that the act of knowing between Cain and his wife is here mentioned, though it will rarely be mentioned again. It is in knowing his wife that Cain finds

personal and social success, after failing with God, his brother, and probably his parents. His wife accepts him as he is, with all his faults.

Cain calls his son “Hanoch”, which means “educate” or “dedicate” as an imperative. The Torah does not give the reason for the name, but it would appear that Cain is making a statement with it. He even names his city with the same name-statement. Cain is telling himself: “Educate, dedicate your son. In fact, dedicate your life! Do not just live. Have a goal, a purpose.”

But what will be the content of Cain’s education and dedication? As a murderer rejected from God’s grace, Cain’s education is not towards the religious, but rather to the material development of the world. Cain builds a city. At this point the small population does not call for a city. But Cain builds a city with an eye to the great urban future, and develops the world for the future of his progeny, the only future the world has at this point. The material development of the world by Cain and his descendants will be further explained in the professions of Lemech’s sons.

Genesis 4:18

ויולד לחנוך את עירד ועירד ילד את מחויאל ומחייאל ילד את מתושאל ומתושאל ילד את למך

One senses the verse racing from Cain to Lemech. We receive no details, not even ages, of Irad, Mechuyael, or Methushael. Only one aspect of their lives is revealed to us, and that is relating the childbearing process to the father or the mother. From Cain to Irad there is a gradual change regarding how the mother’s contribution to bearing children is understood. It begins by attributing everything to her, and ends by rendering her irrelevant. In verse 17 when Cain’s son is born we are told “she bore Hanoch”. When Hanoch’s son is born, his wife is not mentioned, nor is the birth attributed to her, but neither is Hanoch stated as the bearer of the child. “Irad was born to Hanoch.” If Hanoch’s wife is not mentioned as the bearer, neither is Hanoch. When Irad’s son is born, Irad gets full credit. “And Irad bore Mechuyael.” The grammar implies Irad bore Mechuyael himself, as if he had suffered nine months pregnancy and labor pains. This expression continues with Irad’s son and grandson: “and Mechiyael bore Methushael, and Methushael bore Lemech.” In Cain’s marriage, the credit of birth goes completely to the mother, just as it was with Adam and Eve (see Genesis 4:1). In the birth of Hanoch’s son, bearing of the child is something that happens for Hanoch, though not by him, and with the childbearing mother unmentioned. In the next generation childbearing is attributed completely to the male. The role of the woman is merely that of the incubator of her husband’s seed, warming it to ripen into a child.

Childbearing is one of the most important feminine activities, both from the woman’s personal perspective as well as that of society. Attributing childbearing to men robs the woman of a great deal of her importance, and her biological contribution to the family continuity. It signals a descent in the importance of woman in the eyes of man. This approach continues in the lineage of Cain from Irad to Mechiyael to Methushael, and is thus the accepted approach in three continuous generations. Cain’s distance from God, and emphasis on building up the world while ignoring God, brought man to relate to his wife in a depersonalized manner. Cain’s descendants are too involved in world development to focus on relationship building, even with their conjugal flesh and bones. The severance of the relationship with God strains the conjugal relationship as well. Man

claims even childbearing as his own, viewing the woman as a mere utensil in his own biological creativity. This approach reaches its acme in the next verse.

Genesis 4:19

ויקח לו למך שתי נשים, שם האחת עדה ושם השנית צלה.

The objectification of the woman as an item necessary for childbearing though not actually a parent leads us to Lemech's innovation: two wives. The Midrash tells us this practice was common in the generation destroyed by the flood. Nevertheless, Lemech is the first biblical personality about whom this is mentioned.

The verses in chapter 2 that relate Eve's creation powerfully indicate the one to one relationship between man and woman in conjugality. (See Genesis 2:19-24 and our commentary there, in particular verse 24.) There is no room for bigamy. One cannot become one flesh with one woman while being shared with another. By marrying one woman one should no longer be existentially lonely. Another woman contributes nothing in this way, and might interfere with the existential community established with the first wife.

As a result of the lowered status of woman in the three generations preceding Lemech, and their depersonalization as objects aiding childbearing rather than parents, their role as the bone, flesh, and existential helpmate of their husband is extinguished. When Lemech enters center stage the woman has been reduced from a partner in life to a functionary. Her roles includes satisfying her husband's sexual passion, incubating children, and household duties. There is no person here with whom to be conjugal. If woman are merely functionaries, better two than one. This must have been Lemech's reason for taking two wives.

The Midrash, following the line of reasoning presented above, sees in the two wives not only an increased quantity of feminine functionaries, but division of labor as well. Lemech, whose sons each founded a different skill, had his two wives divide the functions of sexuality. Adah was to be the incubator of his children. Tsilah's body was to be free from pregnancy to be continuously available for Lemech's sexual pleasure. Lemech thereby institutionalizes the objectification of the woman. [footnote: Abraham and Jacob took second wives to enhance conjugality of their uniquely strange situations.]

Given the Midrash's understanding of Lemech's designated specialties for his wives, one ought consider what their life will be like if he succeeds in implementing his intentions. Adah will be husbandless except for purposes of pregnancy. Tsilah will be barren and childless for life.

Genesis 4:20

ותלד עדה את יבל. הוא היה אבי ישב אהל ומקנה.

The name Yaval is given without explanation. It's meaning is "he who brings forth produce". Lemech's eldest is expected to come up with the goods.

It is strange that Yaval is called the father of all cattle herders, since Abel preceded him as a shepherd. The answer to this question seems to be in the connotation used for cattle by Yaval, "miqneh", whose denotation is "acquisitions".

Abel shepherded sheep. He benefited from their wool , and perhaps their dairy products, and probably provided these to his parents and brother.

Yaval's intention as shepherd was not to benefit from its commodities, but rather to turn it into a profitable industry and bring him wealth. He developed a method of raising and herding that accomplished this goal, creating a market of cattle, dairy, and wool, that he founded. Many followed suit, but he was the father of this trade. In doing this he continues in the dedication of Cain to the development of the world. The focus of his developmental activity is economic.

Genesis 4:21

כל תפש כנור ועוגב. ושם אחיו יובל. הוא היה אבי

Yuval's name is similar to his brother's, Yaval, but has a different grammatical form. Yaval is he who produces. Yuval implies that production will take place by itself, without effort. Yuval the person does not involve himself in basic needs such as food and clothing, but rather in raising man's spirit through music. He develops string and wind instruments, both their creation and their musical adaptation. "This is a great wisdom" observes the Ibn Ezra. The direction of Yuval's development is every different from that of his brother's. But he, too, is involved in initiating universal development, though in the area of music, where spirit, wisdom, and pleasure cross.

Genesis 4:22

וצלה גם היא ילדה את תובל קין, לטש כל חרש נחשת וברזל, ואחות תובל קין נעמה.

Lemech's intention as stated in the Medrash that Tsilah would not bear children did not succeed. The prophylactic methods of those days did not work. Today, Lemech would succeed.

The first word of the name of Tsilah's son has the same root as his brothers' names. The second word is Cain's name. The name as a whole should be translated "the way of Cain should be brought forth".

Tuval Cain's occupation is the sharpening and forming of brass and iron utensils. Unlike his two brothers, it is not stated that Tuval Cain was the founding father of the craft. We will suggest two reasons for this:

It is possible that there were metal workers who preceded him, and Tuval Cain merely excelled in this work, and perhaps advanced it. The use of metallic utensils was both for agriculture and weaponry. It is likely that early metal utensils could serve both a field and battle function;

It is possible that Tuval Cain invented metal work, but was not the father of the craft, because of how the craft is defined. The craft is murder and killing. Tuval Cain advanced weaponry, but the founding father of killing is Cain himself. Tuval Cain advances Cain's path, making killing easier and more efficient. According to Nachmanides, Lemech argued the moral case of Tuval Cain's industry by explaining that weapons don't kill, people do.

By the leadership of Lemech's sons man's mastery of the world took great strides forward. The creation of wealth, music, and metallurgy makes the world begin to appear like a micro-version of our own. But no moral progress is recorded. As for our entrepreneur,

our musician, and our weapons producer, history has not shown those who man these professions to be likely leaders of moral virtue.

Scripture doesn't inform us what Naamah's occupation was, or what effort she creatively furthered. Our sages have disagreed on what kind of 'sweetness' her name implies (sweetness is the English translation of Naamah). Was she sweet in her conduct, or in the physical favors she dispensed? The first view has her radically different in her ethical behavior from the rest of her family. If so, it was her personal lifestyle and not her mission to others, and therefore it is not mentioned as her occupation. The other view sees her as passively available for the sweetness of her callers, leading overtly to the moral dead end to which her family is directed.

Genesis 4:23-24

ויאמר למך לנשיו:

עדה וצלה שמען קולי

נשי למך האזנה אמרתי כי איש הרגתי לפצעוילד לחברתי.

כי שבעתים יקם קינולמך שבעים ושבעה.

The story of these two verses seem unconnected to the verses that precede and follow them, with the exception of the reference to Cain being avenged seven fold. This reference, therefore, will be the launching pad of our comments.

Lemech, by his own testimony, is a murderer. "For a man I killed with my cut, and a child with my wound." He is loyal to the way of Cain. Lemech is the crown prince of Cain's family tradition of educating children to develop the world, but concomitantly continues to utterly neglect moral and ethical education. Indeed, murder could be a very effective instrument of world development. It is fair to assume that Lemech killed to advance world development, or perhaps to advance himself within that development. God's mercy on Cain to prevent his being killed by others is all Lemech remembers of Abel's murder. That Cain was cursed and hidden from God's presence, that the land ceased producing for him, that he could not strike roots in any community, all this is not recalled by Lemech, or is not important to him. Cain's story as told by Lemech has turned into a fable proving that murder is not so bad, and that God tolerates it. The intended moral education to be had from God's punishment of Cain is turned by Lemech into a sign of tolerance.

With Lemech's family, Cain's attempt at future education peaks in terms of industry, art, and technology, and reaches its low point of morality.

Our sages disagree as to why Lemech explains his murder to his wives. Rashi says Lemech is trying to justify himself to them. According to Nachmanides, Lemech is justifying the weapons industry that Tuval Cain has developed, and he has not committed any murder. Weapons don't kill, people do. "Have I killed a person or child? All I did was make weapons!"

Malbim, however, understands Lemech's words not as a question, but as a statement, and it is his commentary that we have been assuming. Lemech is threatening his wives. Murder is no big deal, says Lemech. Cain was forgiven, and so will I be. I've done it in the past, and I'm quite open to doing it in the future. You would do well to keep me happy. You never know what I might do if I get upset.

The limits of God's tolerance of Lemech's murders and his treatment of Adah and Tsilah becomes clear only at the end of parshas Breishis.

Genesis 4:25

וידע אדם עוד את אשתו ותלד בן ותקרא את שמו שת כי שת לי אלקים זרע אחר תחת הבל
כי הרגו קין.

Lemech's poetic expression regarding murder ends the story of Cain and his descendants. The successes of his cultural and technological advancements are as clear as his moral failure. In this verse we get the response of Adam and Eve to the situation. It appears from our verse that Adam and Eve had separated since their union that resulted in Abel. Thus the Hebrew word "od", meaning "further", or "again". Perhaps in the aftermath of the sin of eating from the tree, their relationship cracked in a nearly irreparable way. Their natural attraction and mutual desire was deadened as a result of their mutual failure in fulfilling the one mitzvah God gave them, resulting in their being driven from Eden. Mankind would continue from Cain and Abel, they said, justifying their abstinence. Even when Abel was murdered still childless, Cain could still populate the world. But as the years moved on the parents of mankind observed what was happening, and slowly concluded what kind of world was developing. Adam and Eve had hoped that the coming generations would rectify what they had wronged. Instead, murder had become a legitimate model for future generations. All the culture, technology, and finance do not cleanse spilt blood and violence. Adam and his wife reach the conclusion that a new source of progeny be founded. To leave the situation as is would be to grant victory to Cain's act of murder, and everything it stood for. To renew mankind with moral commitment they realized they had to repair their marriage, and to bear a child that will be educated in the spirit of Abel, whose offering was accepted by God.

The verb "vateled" attributes the birth to Eve, the mother, unlike the later generations of Cain's descendants.

Genesis 4:26

ולשת גם הוא ילד בן, ויקרא את שמו אנוש. אז הוהל לקרא בשם ה'.

Our commentaries explain that "to call in the name of God" refers to prayer, and to publicizing God's name. Cain and his family were not into this. His failure to bring an offering that God would accept brought him to focus on internal human development without relating to God. Perhaps his being hidden from God's face made any relationship with God impossible.

Prayer begins with the birth of Enosh. Adam, while viewing prayer positively, had great difficulty relating to God directly since being driven from Eden. Seth was the first person to pray. What brought Seth to pray was the birth of his first child. Society had taken on Cain's attitudes and morals. To bring a child into this society and raise him therein was a responsibility not to be taken lightly. Seth's worries were ultimately expressed in prayer. Seth prayed for Enosh's proper spiritual development, and taught Enosh to call in the name of God upon every significant life experience, to call in praise, and to call in need and request.



Genesis 5:1

זה ספר תולדת אדם. ביום ברא אלקים אדם בדמות אלקים עשה אתו.

Chapter 5 begins Genesis anew. The book up to this point has brought us to an intolerable low of human morality and spirituality. The eating of the tree of knowledge, the murder of Abel, the abuse of wives, and the diminished significance of human life, portrays man at the low point of his human existence. Just as Adam and Eve started all over by parenting Seth, the Torah begins anew as well. In this new book the spiritual development of Seth's patriarchy is stated, leaving out Cain, his progeny, and everything they represent. This is the book of the generations of Adam that will ultimately populate the world, because they have the moral quality necessary for surviving the flood. Their tradition of morality will bring forth a wholly righteous man who will find grace in God's eyes.

The first element of Adam's spiritual development is that he is made in God's form. Man therefore has the potential to be ethical, and has the free will to make such a decision. He is a spiritual creature with a soul full of great aspirations.

Genesis 5:2

זכר ונקבה בראם ויברך אתם ויקרא את שמם אדם ביום הבראם.

The spiritual power embedded in man's soul is the heritage of both male and female. With this statement the Torah rejects Cain's children's abuse and objectification of the woman. The woman is called Adam the same as man. Despite the many differences between males and females, they are both Adam. They are both God's image. They are both responsible for their actions. They are both the subjects of the world's creation and the receiving of the Torah.

This is the only place mentioned that God called man "Adam". Nachmanides explains that it is not the first man who is being named here, but rather the human species. That is why the name includes male and female. Individuals are given names by people, not by God. Eve and her children were given names by people. Adam the individual is never named. He takes on the collective name personally as the first example of the species. By God calling our collective a name, he creates a relationship with that collective. We are called upon to relate as a human collective to God both by communal prayer and by collective behavior. If God relates to all of us as a unit, we have no choice but to relate back as that unit.

Genesis 5:3

ויחי אדם שלשים ומאת שנה ויולד בדמותו כצלמו ויקרא את שמו שת.

In this verse we are informed that Adam's separation from Eve after their exile from Eden lasted one hundred thirty years. That's longer than most of us live. It is a good caliber of how long it takes man to forgive and forget, or at least forgive and overcome.

Seth is conceived with a "hifil" verb. Adam, Seth, and all their descendants of this line propagate with this verb form, implying a significant role for the woman in the process, though she is not mentioned.

Seth is in the form and image of his father. That means he is in the form and image of God. These traits of Adam were not because he was God's direct handiwork, in which

case his descendants would not inherit these qualities. Being in God's form and image is intrinsic, indeed, definitional to humanity. We are informed that Seth inherited God's form and image from his father although he is born of human mortals, and after the exile from Eden. Seth's descendants will also inherit these godly traits from him, up to this very day.

Genesis 5:4

ויהיו ימי אדם אחרי הולידו את שת שמנה מאות שנה ויולד בנים ובנות.

Stating the number of years after Seth's birth indicates that life after having a child is of a different quality than the life before. This change in life comes to Adam only with Seth's birth, not with those of Cain and Abel. At the birth of his first two sons Adam does not yet know what fatherhood is, does not understand paternal responsibility. Cain and Abel develop without parental guidance, and the results show it. Only with Seth does Adam have a child understanding the significance of this new stage in his life.

Genesis 5:5-17

ויהיו בל חיי אדם אשר חי תשע מאות שנה ושלושים שנה וימת.

ויחי שת חמש שנים ומאה שנה ויולד את אנוש. ויחי שת אחרי הולידו את אנוש שבע שנים ושמנה מאות שנה ויולד בנים ובנות. ויהיו כל ימי שת שתים עשרה שנה ותשע מאות שנה וימת.

ויחי אנוש תשעים שנה ויולד את קינן. ויחי אנוש אחרי הולידו את קינן חמש עשרה שנה ושמנה מאות שנה ויולד בנים ובנות. ויהיו כל ימי אנוש חמש שנים ותשע מאות שנה וימת.

ויחי קינן שבעים שנה ויולד את מהללאל. ויחי קינן אחרי הולידו את מהללאל ארבעים שנה ושמנה מאות שנה ויולד בנחמ ובנות. ויהיו כל ימי קינן עשר שנים ותשע מאות שנה וימת.

ויחי מהללאל חמש שנים וששים שנה ויולד את ירד. ויחי מהללאל אחרי הולידו את ירד שלשים שנה ושמנה מאות שנה ויולד בנים ובנות. ויהיו כל ימי מהללאל חמש ותשעים שנה ושמנה מאות שנה וימת.

It is the opinion of the Radak that the ages listed for Adam and his eight descendants were typical of the era preceding the deluge. That Enoch's life is presented as being cut short at 365 years supports this view. We thus conclude that physical life in the pre-flood world was essentially different from the post-flood era. The prayer of Moses, recorded in the ninetieth Psalm, informs us "the number of our years is seventy, and for the especially strong, eighty." The average duration of human life at the time of Moses is less than a tenth of the average duration from Adam to Noah (not counting Enoch). This sharp difference given without any explanation, leads us to expect little in terms of comparing the physical features of that era with our own. 900 year lives, though, are merely beyond our experience, not beyond our imagination. The world of Eden, in which the Nile and Euphrates share a common source (see commentary Genesis 2:10), seems completely beyond our senses. The post Eden pre-flood world is a world like our own with incomparable physical dimensions.

Rabbinic commentary on these verses is sparse. The forthcoming words are an attempt to breathe essential relevance into this genealogy, and not to view it merely as a connecting passage from the stories of Adam to those of Noah.

The number of years of life, as well as those from progeny until death, are essentially constant during the first five generations. While they vary, they do not vary much, nor do they rise or fall consistently. The lifetimes span from 895 to 930. The years of life from progeny to death range between 800 and 840.

On the other hand, the age of progeny itself moves steadily downward (130, 105, 90, 70, 65), so that Mahalalel becomes father of Jared at half the age Adam becomes father of Seth, despite the life span remaining essentially the same. The cause of this is not stated.

It is fair to assume that decreasing the age of progeny resulted from an equivalent decrease in the marital age. (footnote: The above comments do not take into consideration the births of Cain and Abel. Since this genealogy starts with Adam's creation and relates only to the birth of Seth, ignoring his older brothers, for the purpose of understanding these verses we will ignore them as well. See commentary to Genesis 5:1.) It appears that the patience to postpone marriage to a mature age was declining with the march of the generations. This decline of patience, as well as the psychological and moral decline in other areas of life that probably accompanied it, is hinted to in the Hebrew meaning of the name by which Mahalalel called his son, Jared, "descent". The capitulation to the drives of this ancient equivalent of adolescence comes at the price of immature parenthood. The assumption that the ability to procreate conjugally is license for parenting is built on disdain for the need of maturity to raise and educate children. It is possible that as the generations marched on the moral education of children was seen as unnecessary, or even detrimental. The harnessing of natural impulses may have been seen as harmful to the health of the developing adolescent. Slowly but surely the age of conjugality dropped to fit the desires of the youngsters of that age.

Genesis 5:18

ויחי ירד שתים ושישים שנה ומאת שנה ויולד את חנוך.

With Jared the order of generations takes a sharp turn that results in the birth of a man God favors to survive the flood. The first sign of this turn is the age he begins to have children. That age descends in each generation from Adam to Mahalalel, from one hundred thirty to its half, sixty five. Jared does not marry until shortly before the age of 162, 32 years later than the latest of his predecessors, 97 years later than his father. We interpret Jared's actions as follows:

Jared, looking around the world five generations into history, has independently condemned the situation of parents bringing children into the world and marrying them off without moral education. He concludes that parenting demands child moral education, and that such parenting requires maturity he does not sense he has. Puberty is not a moral license for having children.

Jared delays marriage for years and decades, nearly a century later than the age his father bore him. Only near the age of 162 does he feel ready to take on the full human implications of "be fruitful and multiply." Only then does he bear a child, and call him Enoch, "Educate", the true challenge of parenthood.

Genesis 5:19-20

ויחי ירד אחרי הולידו את חנוך שמנה מאות שנה ויולד בנים ובנות. ויהיו כל ימי ירד ששים וששים שנה ותשע מאות שנה וימת.

One would assume that Jared's late marriage would result in fewer years left to live following his wedding. We have no proof that this was not the case. But Jared does live a full 800 years after he fathers Enoch, crossing a threshold comparable with his predecessors, and equal to the number of years Adam lived after bearing Seth. Jared merits a long life after his marriage, and the total years of his life are 32 more than Adam, the longest living person recorded up to this point in the genealogy.

Genesis 5:21

ויחי ינוך חמש וששים שנה ויולד את מתושלח.

Jared's conclusion that parental maturity is not guaranteed upon reaching capacity to procreate creates a religious difficulty, at least intellectually. If man is not yet mature enough to parent, why does God provide man with the physical capacity to do so when so young? Jared himself may have been perturbed by this question, despite his certainty that this was indeed the case.

The resolution was found in his own life experience. Not all are ready for parenthood at puberty, but some are. Enoch, Jared's son, was one of these, and therefore married at the same young age his grandfather Mahalalel did, 65. This age appears to be the age at which one reached puberty in that era.

One suspects that the powerful education and rearing that Jared afforded Enoch had a lot to do with his emotional capacity to rear children at the age of his fertility. Thus, this anomaly of incongruence between the human body and soul has been resolved. God does not guarantee maturity when the body can reproduce. It is up to Man to develop his child's maturity maximally through proper parenting. It is then possible that physical maturity will coincide with parental qualification. And that possibility is enough reason for God to grant us all physical prowess in our early youth.

Genesis 5:22

ויתהלך חנוך את האלקים אחרי הולידו את מתושלח שלש מאות שנה ויולד בנים ובנות.

Until Enoch, people just lived. Enoch, However, walked with God. Onkelos interprets the verse "walked with the fear of God". The verse implies that only after Enoch fathered Methuselah could he be characterized as walking with God. Walking with the fear of God is a spiritual level requiring a full family life with wife and progeny.

One may assume that Enoch's attainment of closeness to God is tied up with the unique education and rearing he received from his father Jared. The wording "walking with God" implies bringing one's daily activities in line with God's expressed will. Enoch attained this religious level by continuing the way of life he learned from his father.

It is noteworthy that Adam, Jared, and Enoch lived their lives after first progeny in years multiples of a hundred. These years seem to have been carefully parceled out by God. The meaning of the length of man's days eludes us, but it appears that these three men, the first of all, Jared, and the son raised and taught, were providentially provided for in a unique way.

Genesis 5:23

ויהי כל ימי חנוך חמש וששים שנה ושלוש מאות שנה.

Enoch's years reached a significant number, the number of days in a solar year. In Enoch's relatively short life there is numerical wholeness. Perhaps this indicates that despite his fewer years, Enoch's life should not be seen as cut off. In fact, it is the others' mentioned who come close to living a thousand years and fall short. Enoch's life has its own internal timing with its own standard of fullness. Death is a notion mentioned by others in this genealogy. While Enoch's life clearly ends, it ends in spiritual advancement rather than abruptness.

Genesis 5:24

ויתהלך חנוך את האלקים ואיננו כי לקח אתו אלקים.

When Man walks with God, the end of his life is seen not as death, but rather as an elevation to a greater attachment to the creator of body and soul. Enoch does not 'die'. He is taken by God.

Enoch the son of Jared shares his name with Enoch the son of Cain. The common calling calls for a personal comparison, particularly regarding the quality the name evokes.

Enoch son of Cain was educated to build the physical universe. Enoch son of Jared was educated to become a moral personality who walked with the fear of God. The divinely chosen survivor of the coming flood descends from Enoch son of Jared,, Noah, who is also described as one who walked with God. It is not the builder's education, but rather the moral education that will serve as foundation of the coming new world.

Genesis 5:25-27

ויחי מתושלח שבע ושמונים שנה ומאת שנה ויולד את למך. ויחי מתושלח אהרי הולידו את למך שתים ושמונים שנה ושבע מאות שנה ויולד בנים ובנות. ויהיו כל ימי מתושלח תשע וששים שנה ושבע מאות שנה וימת.

Methuselah, raised by Enoch, follows in his grandfather's footsteps, as opposed to his father, in waiting many years to marry. Up until Noah, he marries later than anyone else mentioned. One can assumed that this happened with Enoch's direction and influence. Enoch was wise enough to realize that his son's character was more similar to his father's than his own, and tailored his development accordingly.

It is our tradition that although Methuselah dies in the year of the flood, he was not a victim of God's deluge. He died a week before, allowing Noah to mourn his passing appropriately. From the Midrash it appears that Methuselah merits a death of dignity, but his life is limited to the pre-flood era. Thus the longest life recorded in the Bible is ended in anticipation of the flood, thirty-one years short of a millennial birthday. For God, even a full thousand years is merely a passing day (Psalms 90:4). Man does not make it through a passing day of God.

Genesis 5:28-29

ויחי למך שתים ושמנים שנה ומאת שנה ויולד בן. ויקרא את שמו נח לאמר זה ינחמנו ממעשנו ומעצבון ידינו מן האדמה אשר אררה ה'.

Once again we meet a descendant of Seth who shares a name with a descendant of Cain: Lemech. We take that as a signal to compare the two to understand what distinguishes Seth's family from Cain's.

We are told much about the careers of the children of Lemech of Cain. By Lemech of Seth we hear the father's goals for his son as expressed in the explanation he gives for naming him. Lemech of Cain succeeds in raising children who excel in developing the world. Lemech of Seth hopes his son will comfort others from the pain of God's curse.

Lemech of Cain bears a son who seeks a good life by evading God's curse of the land. He will involve himself in cattle, music, and metalwork, bypassing God's curse. Lemech of Seth hopes his son will confront God and his curse. He sees this confrontation on two levels: "our actions" and "the sorrow of our hands." Our actions are the source of our poor relationship with God. Lemech hoped Noah would lead man out of the abyss of sin he had dug himself into. Repentance from our evil actions would redeem the world from the pain and sorrow endemic to our sustenance, rooted in God's punishment of Adam and Eve. Lemech has a deep sense he is living in a cursed world. He looks to his newborn son to lead the world back into God's favor.

One may also compare the statements quoted from our two Lemechs. Lemech of Cain, according to Rashi, justifies killing. According to Ramban he justifies murderous weapons. According to Malbim he threatens murder. His words ignore God's reproof and punishment of Cain's murder, and indirectly make light of them. Lemech of Seth is acutely aware of God's chastisement of Adam and Eve, understands that Man's actions are the foundation of his relating to God, and hopes his son will bring mankind to make a better world.

Genesis 5:30-31

ויחי למך אחרי הולידו את נח חמש ותשעים שנה וחמש מאות שנה ויולד בנים ובנות. ויהי כל ימי למך שבע ושבעים שנה ושבע מאות שנה וימת.

Regarding Adam and Jared we find a number divisible one hundred for the years of their life following the birth of their child. It is possible that this indicates a wholeness they attained in light of this birth. By Lemech the number of years before and after Noah's birth make no impression, but their sum total, 777, may indicate something special.

Lemech, who passed away before his father, five years before the flood, does not attain the roundness of a hundred in the vital numbers of his life. But it is he who raises a son for the sake of bringing God's favor back to the world. The count of his years results in a memorable number. The efforts of his life are memorable as well. It is he, not Lemech of Cain, who actually does live a life of many sevens of years.

Beginning from Jared there is a successful educational endeavor that results in the birth of a man worthy of God's grace in the face of the flood.

ויהי נח בן חמש מאות שנה ויולד נח את שם את חם ואת יפת.

While the Christian chapter separates this verse from the four that follow, the ancient Jewish tradition has this verse as part of a paragraph of five sentences that signs off the genealogy from Adam to the Flood. In this paragraph we are provided the following information:

Names of the heads of family that will carry the world to the other side of the Deluge;

State of family and morality as the world population increased;

God's intolerance of the Man developing;

Reference to the real men who became the heroes of mythology in years to come.

The advanced age, five hundred, at which Noah begets a son, is striking. The age of begetting until now had a range, sixty-five to one hundred eighty seven, with distinctions meaningful to the man themselves and to us who study them. But five hundred is completely off the charts. Furthermore, Noah is alone in beginning fatherhood at the turn of a century of life. Why did Noah refuse parenthood so long, and what made him change his mind upon turning five hundred? Our answers can only be speculative.

The pre-flood world of Noah was in a sorry state. Violence and abuse, particularly men taking advantage of women, is the accepted state of affairs. Perhaps Noah asked himself, "Why should I bring children to such a world? Shall I beget children to be oppressed, or worse, to be oppressors? Can I expect to raise them in a moral bubble? To be a fruitful and multiply in this environment is not a blessing, but a curse. I will not."

This was Noah's original approach. Slowly but surely, upon turning five hundred, when even men of that era had most of their centuries behind them, Noah arrives at a different conclusion. "The world is not worthy of children, but I am worthy of begetting them. Could it be God's will that the wicked multiply, and I should not even attempt to raise and educate children to truth and justice? Am I morally free of even trying to create an oasis of moral sanity to perpetuate Man's goal to be in the ethical image of God?"

Realizing his days are numbered, Noah finally marries and begets three sons. It is these he will try to raise in the environment of his own righteousness and trust in God.



Genesis 6:1

ויהי כי החל האדם לרב על פני האדמה ובנות ילדו להם.

The purpose of this verse is to give background for the next, but its relevance is unclear. Of what significance is it that the number of people is becoming numerous, and what does it mean by “they were having daughters”? Were they not having sons?

Regarding the last question, the Malbim and Ntziv interpret that a disproportionate number of girls were being born. Kimchi, however, insists that the birth of the girls is mentioned because they are the topic of the next verse, but no implication is made regarding their disproportionate birth.

While Kimchi is more loyal to the simple literal reading of the text, his interpretation leaves us wondering what lesson this verse teaches.

The answer seems to be found in another irregularity in this verse. The verb form for the daughters being born is in the super-passive. We have already discussed the significance of other forms of this verb in chapter 4 verse 18. While there is nothing ungrammatical in the usage of the super-passive here, the use of this unusual verb form calls for interpretation.

Here it appears to indicate absolute lack of interest in their birth. Pre-flood society has diminished the function of women to essentially two: reproduction and pleasure (see commentary to Genesis 4:19). Their value was functional, not personal. With the depersonalization of the wife, the significance of daughters dropped accordingly. Since daughters would always provide their reproductive and pleasure functions to other families, all personal interest in their birth and growth was lost. It is likely that fathers took no interest in protecting their daughters from those who abused them. This is the message of the verse, and the extreme passive description of their birth.

Genesis 6:2

ויראו בני האלהים את בנות האדם כי טבת הנה ויקחו להם נשים מכל אשר בחרו.

After Man has dehumanized his wife and treated his daughter's birth as inconsequential, matrimony by agreement has lost its significance. Women are grabbed. They are grabbed without their own consent. They are grabbed without their husband's consent. In the new debased state of the pre-flood generation, with people abundant and population figures of no concern, women are for pleasure alone, and free to grab. These abusive men are called here “sons of Elohim” both literally and in ironic sarcasm. They are children of powerful men who come upon women at will, sometimes forcing them into marriage, sometimes forcing themselves upon the women physically without any relationship. Their fathers may be judges, large scale employers, warriors, or have any other position that gave their children a sense of mastery over others.

They are also called sons of Elohim in ironic sarcasm. These are, after all, examples of “tselem Elohim”, men God blessed with free will and able to imitate God's example. Far cry are these men from the “image of God” He had hoped for.

Man's confusion of truth and beauty has debased not merely truth, but beauty as well. Instead of beauty being appreciated and enjoyed, as in God's creation, it is used and abused. Feminine humanity is no exception to this abuse. It is its prime focus.

Genesis 6:3

ויאמר ה' לא ידון רוחי באדם לעלם בשגם הוא בשר והיו ימיו מאה ועשרים שנה.

Before God punishes Man for the evil society he created, he decides to correct a fallacy. Man left to live almost a thousand years does not know what to do with his time. His allotment must be severely shortened to make him aware of his natural mortality. The creation of a just society is a joint effort of God and Man. God mandates it encouragingly to Man, but it is ultimately the human decision that is decisive. God has found Man who sees himself as living forever an unsuccessful partner in building the moral world God wants for us. He therefore slowly lowers Man's lifetime expectancy to be maximally 120. Once Man knows he is not around forever, there is greater hope that he will strive to accomplish God's role for him within the limits of his life.

Genesis 6:4

הנפלים היו בארץ בימים ההם וגם אחרי כן אשר יבאו בני האלהים אל בנות האדם וילדו להם המה הגברים אשר מעולם אנשי השם.

The verse ends and sums up the pre-flood period by briefly referring to mythical characters (Malbim). The Torah informs us they lived before the flood, and were called "Nfilim". The word means 'miscarried fetuses' in Hebrew. It may hint that their greatness fell flat in the flood. It seems that Man's imagination developed the majesty of these "heroes" to the point that they were considered deities by the period the Torah was given. It is also possible that they were perceived as divine in their own era. The Torah quietly informs us that they were merely valiant warriors, not gods.

At issue here is not only their assumed divinity, but also the fact that they were seen as candidates for the divine. It may be assumed that these mythical characters participated in the abuse of the attractive women then taking place. The statement of our verse that they existed in those days and afterwards during the era of the abuse of the daughters of Adam implies that they were amongst the 'bnei elohim' who participated in this crime. This would be in character of many of these figures as they appear in the myths.

Their participation in this abuse had no effect on their reputation. They were admired, feared, and perhaps worshipped before this abuse became common, and continued to be idolized while and after this abuse took place. Moral stature was not a criteria for identifying the great, the divine. Godliness was attributed to the powerful. The gods were literally feared, and for good reason. This developing religion was mistaken not only in the essence of the divine, but also in its personality. The merciful and gracious creator who loved and forgave was forgotten.

Genesis 6:5

וירא ה' כי רבה רעת האדם בארץ וכל יצר מחשבת לבו רק רע כל היום.

In these final four verses the Torah moves from a description of man's situation to describing God's perspective and reaction.

In this verse God takes stock of the land He created and man's activities upon it. Adam has wrought much bad upon the land. The bad has countered the good that God saw upon each of his creations. Adam has replaced God's good with his own bad.

Furthermore, man's desired intentions are all nefarious. Adam not only does bad things. The bad he does accurately reflects his bad intentions. He has already done much evil. He plans on doing more. An evil society has sprung up.

God did not create Adam good or bad. It was up to man to mold himself. That molding has taken place, and he is actively and intentionally evil. Man's evil thoughts indicate how deeply imbedded man's evil is. They also bode poorly for the future. Things will only get worse if Adam is left to his machinations.

Originally, the world was very good. Man has uprooted God's good and instilled evil.

Genesis 6:6

וינחם ה' כי עשה את האדם בארץ ויתעצב אל לבו.

In this verse we are told God's internal reaction to the conclusion He reached above. He regrets creating man. Adam is an experiment that failed. This regret is rationally drawn. But God reacts emotionally as well. He is saddened.

The verse is wrought with philosophical difficulty. For God to regret is for His opinion to change. Is not God unchanging? Furthermore, since God knows the future, why did He not take it into consideration when he created man? And isn't God beyond emotion? How could He be saddened?

Our greatest commentators dealt with these three questions. The Ibn Ezra dealt with the first, Rashi with the second, and Maimonides with the third. But the cornerstone of all understanding of the verse must be Nachmanides' opening words: "The Torah speaks in the language of men." We are limited both in our capacity to understand God, as well as in our inability to express the little we grasp. Despite this, God insisted on communicating His thoughts and feelings to us. God talks in the language of men despite its imprecision, its limitation, and its anthropomorphism. God regrets. God is sad. Despite His being wholly other, He wants us to comprehend something of Him within the limits of our understanding and terminology.

We are permitted and encouraged to think of God in the terms He uses to describe Himself. We need not philosophize away the significance and relevance of these expressions. God wants us to relate to His thoughts and feelings, and not to evade their meaning by tossing them into the wastebasket of philosophic detachment. The danger of imperfect perception of God's thoughts and feelings are less concerning than the danger of concluding that God does not care about what we do or what happens to us. Let us appreciate and take seriously God's presentation of His thoughts and feelings. (The spirit of the above commentary is found in Rabbi Hirsch's commentary on the verse, as well as in the writings of Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik.)

Genesis 6:7

מעל פני האדמה מאדם עד בהמה עד רמש ועד עוף ויאמר ה' אמחה את האדם אשר בראתי כי נחמתי כי עשיתם. השמים

God's thoughts and emotions result in decision. God will destroy man and his world. Adam has internalized his evil action, and no hope is left.

The verse implies a double decree of destruction. The first is the destruction of man. The second is the destruction of all living things including man. The dual decree reflects the

dual creation of man, a creation of the world with man part of it, and a creation of man as the world's focus with everything else being subsidiary. To decide upon world destruction, God must regret creation from both of these perspectives. Man as the essence is no longer worthy. The world at large has been contaminated by its pervading human evil. Its existence is no longer justified.

God is not limited by His previous action. His present regret will be acted upon, even to the nullification of His grand creation. Adam was granted free will to be evil and harm the world, but God will not continue to tolerate evil man or his world.

Genesis 6:8

ונח מצא חן בעיני ה'.

God wipes away man and his world, but finds the seed of the next world in a son of Adam: Noah. Noah's credentials are irrelevant in this set of verse. His righteousness does not reflect the generation of the flood. This generation is to be completely wiped out. But the creation of the new world of Noah will not be ex nihilo. Noah is the raw material taken from the previous world, from which to form our world.

In describing the flood, the name of God always used is Elokim, the name of God as creator and judge. But the arrival at this decision in our four verses calls God by the Tetragrammaton, his personal name, God's name by which he relates with mercy. God's personal relation and concern with Adam does not allow Him to tolerate the world situation. God does not abandon man and his world to evil folly. The world cries out painfully, and mercy warrants its destruction. This same quality of mercy brings God to redeem with grace Noah, an ember of this world brought to zero, from which to launch new earthly life.

נשלם הגהה ראשונה בי"ה ניסן תשס"ט, יום הזכרון למורינו הגרי"ד זצ"ל

