

« Pinchas Polonsky, a notable refusenik of the Soviet era, is today a prolific thinker and writer, introducing Jewish philosophy to the broader public. His latest work, deeply influenced by the teachings of Rabbi Yehuda Leon Ashkenazi, one of French Jewry's leading philosophers, will introduce his monumental ideas to a wider audience. »

Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, Chief Rabbi of Moscow, President of the Conference of European Rabbis (CER)

BIBLE DYNAMICS – EVOLVING PERSONALITIES AND IDEAS

Biblical personalities are traditionally perceived as larger-than-life, heroic figures, who surmount incredible obstacles to advance the world. And yet, little emphasis is placed on their own personal evolution.

But according to the centuries-old Kabbalistic tradition revealed in our times by Rabbi Y. L. Ashkenazi (Manitou), the heroes of the Torah are evolving personalities who undergo profound change over the course of their lives,



while acquiring new ideas and personal qualities through their ongoing dialogue with God. The *Bible Dynamics* commentary is a unique interpretation of the Torah through the lens of this tradition.

Pinchas Polonsky was born in Moscow in 1958, and from 1975 was active in Russia's religious Jewish underground. After emigrating to Israel in 1987 and settling in Samaria, he continued to study and teach at the Bar Ilan and Ariel universities.

Dr. Polonsky is among the most popular Russian-language authors, having published over twenty books on Jewish practice and philosophy, of which the best known are: *Gates of Prayer*; *Rabbi A. I. Kook*; *The Jewish view on Christianity*; and *Israel and Humanity – a New Stage of Development*.

His life quest is modernization of Judaism within the traditional framework.

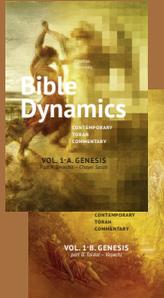
The previously published Russian edition of *Bible Dynamics* is a complete commentary on the entire Pentateuch. The present volume is the English translation of this work.

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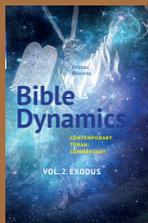


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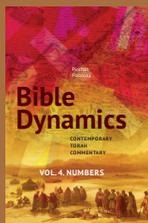
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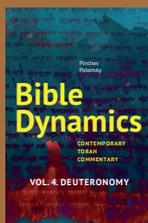
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part B



Exodus



Numbers



Deuteronomy

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Pinchas Polonsky

BIBLE DYNAMICS
Evolving Personalities and Ideas

Contemporary Torah Commentary

Following the teaching of
Rabbi Yehuda Leon Ashkenazi (Manitou)
and Rabbi Ouri Cherki

GENESIS
Chapters 1-3

Translated from the Russian
by Betzalel (Todd) Shandelman



5782 / 2023

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(1967-2020)

the president of Genesis Philanthropy Group
and the passionate Jewish leader
whose life was dedicated to strengthening bonds
between Israel and the Diaspora



We are very grateful

to Mikhail Fridman

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of the "Bible Dynamics" commentary into English



PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

The Midrash notes that “every generation has its expounders,” and new commentaries to the Torah are needed in every generation. Our own times likewise call for new approaches to understanding the Torah. The *Bible Dynamics* commentary, based on the kabbalistic ideas of Rabbi Y. L. Ashkenazi (Manitou), seeks to provide such a new understanding.

The need for new commentaries arises as cultures and societies constantly change and evolve, and are forced to confront new problems. Naturally, the previous commentaries retain their importance, but they are no longer sufficient. New approaches are paramount for preserving the relevance of the Torah for successive generations.

Our own generation is undergoing especially rapid and radical changes in all areas of Jewish life. The following deserve special mention.

- The creation of the State of Israel and the return of the Jewish people to their land have occasioned a dramatic shift in the Jewish worldview. Life in exile demanded from the Jewish people, and from Judaism, an approach that focused on self-preservation, and consistently strived for isolation and conservation. But contemporary Israeli life, in an independent state on equal footing with other nations, places different demands on the Jewish people, and orients them instead toward extroversion: development and advancement, universalism, shared human values, and a need and desire to influence world history and global culture.
- The interest of the peoples of the world in Judaism has increased tremendously in our time. While the Jews were in exile and subjected to persecution, other nations showed little interest in Jewish culture and tradition, because “a poor man’s wisdom is scorned” (Ecclesiastes 9:16). The larger world’s ever increasing interest in Judaism today is due in large measure to Israel’s significant successes and

achievements. These changing circumstances require a completely new approach to interpreting the Torah.

- Jewish psychological and cultural integration into the Western world has brought the secular Jewish reader and the non-Jewish reader closer together than ever before. A significant segment of the Jewish people is already so far removed from tradition that it views it from the outside looking in. While those Jews still feel a sentimental attachment to Judaism, overwhelmingly they are already a part of the non-Jewish world, culturally speaking, and can move closer to Judaism only as a part of that larger world.

All these changes create new questions, and new aspects and meanings in the Torah are thus revealed.

The contemporary reader might be a free-thinking traditional Jew or a Jew entirely removed from tradition, or he might be not even Jewish at all, but undertakes reading the Torah simply because it is an important component of humanity's rich spiritual heritage. The key features and needs of contemporary readers can be summarized as follows:

1. The Torah commentators of the past addressed themselves primarily to observant Jews who lived within the tradition. Contemporary readers are different, and they view the Torah text differently. Most readers today live in a far more open world, which gives them an "external" perspective, in the psychological or even the physical sense. Their view of the Torah too is thus a view "from the outside".
2. The traditional Jewish reader of the past was mainly interested in observing the commandments. It was important for him to understand precisely how the commandments and their details, with which he was already largely familiar, related to the Torah text. A contemporary student of the Torah, on the other hand, is very likely more interested in ideas that will promote his personal development. Rather than viewing the Torah primarily as a source of commandments and

laws, the contemporary reader will more typically be seeking values and ideals.

3. For the traditional Jewish reader, the Torah was the ultimate legacy. There was never any question of which tradition he should choose; it was only a matter of deepening his knowledge of a text that he took for granted as his very own. For the modern reader, however, the Torah is only one of many spiritual sources with which it must compete. Any Torah commentary today must take this competitive challenge into account.
4. It seems most relevant today to read the Torah as an engaging narrative of uniquely human characters and personalities, each with his or her own challenges and doubts, and having many aspects of greatness to be sure, but shortcomings and flaws as well. Any meaningful reading of the Torah must thus include the dynamics of development – the evolution of people, ideas, and concepts. Commentators of previous ages saw the leading characters of the Torah as a source of lessons and teachings exclusively, and not as personalities *per se*. In passing from one book of the Torah to the next, those commentators also typically disregarded any transition in the development of ideas and concepts, perceiving the entire Torah instead as a single monolithic, instantaneous event.

* * *

The modern reader's needs are rather difficult to address. One notable attempt toward developing a new understanding of the Torah was made in the mid-twentieth century by Yehuda Leon Ashkenazi (Manitou), a prominent rabbi and Kabbalist, who through his innovative ideas and concepts formulated a new approach to understanding the text of the Torah and its narratives.

Yehuda Leon was born in Algiers in 1922. His father David was the last chief rabbi of Algiers, and the family had its own kabbalistic tradition. He received an education that was both deeply religious and broadly secular.

During the Second World War Ashkenazi fought in the French resistance. He moved to France after the war, and became a key figure in the post-war revival of French Jewry. (By this time, he was known by his cognomen “Manitou”.) After the Six-Day War of 1967 he emigrated to Israel, where for three decades he was a dean of the Merkaz Ha-Rav yeshiva of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, and spiritual leader of French Jewry’s religious Zionism movement. He died in Jerusalem in 1996.

Teaching mainly in French throughout his life, Ashkenazi exerted a far-reaching influence on French-speaking Jewry. He wrote very little, focusing mostly on lecturing and teaching, with the result that relatively few of his teachings have appeared in other languages, nor even in Hebrew until only very recently. In the English-speaking world (not to mention other languages) Ashkenazi and his ideas are virtually unknown even to this day.

The Bible Dynamics commentary is based primarily on the lectures of Ashkenazi’s devoted disciple Rabbi Ouri Cherki. (But it also includes a number of the author’s original ideas and additions.)

Rabbi Ouri Cherki is among the most prominent modern Israeli proponents of the ideas of Rabbi Yehuda Leon Ashkenazi-Manitou. The school that Rabbi Cherki has founded presents Rabbi Ashkenazi’s approach in a systematic way, through a series of Torah lectures that have never before been published in written form.

The ideas that Rabbi Ashkenazi reveals allow us to see the Patriarchs as dynamic personalities who evolved and changed throughout their lives. He teaches us to ask questions like the following: How did Abraham and Isaac, Jacob and Moses evolve in the course of the Torah’s narratives? How did their views and ideas change over time? How and why do the ideas of Leviticus and Numbers differ from those of Genesis and Exodus? And why are the Torah’s commandments, and the development of the Jewish nation, presented differently in the book of Deuteronomy as compared with the earlier books of the Torah?

In former times such questions were deemed unacceptable. Instead, the questions were usually posed along the following lines: What is great about Abraham? What example does he set for us, and what is he trying to teach

us? How can we reconcile the apparent contradictions between the book of Deuteronomy and the Torah's previous books?

On the other hand, certain questions were never raised. For example: How did Abraham himself change in the course of his life story, and how did he himself understand it? How are we to understand that Deuteronomy has its own unique approach to presenting the commandments? Such questions, for a very long time considered too privileged for the public consciousness, could be discussed only by a narrow coterie of kabbalistic sages.

Even today the members of certain religious circles, upon hearing that the Patriarchs developed as personalities, or that Moses saw the commandments variously in different periods of his personal development, are moved to protest, because they see this viewpoint as portraying the Patriarchs as imperfect, and not "as they must be." After all, if a person is said to have developed, that can only mean that at first there was something that he failed to understand, and only later came to understand. How can we say such things about the Patriarchs, or about Moses? Who are we to judge them? Against their greatness we are all but insignificant; how dare we evaluate their development? Nor can the eternal commandments, given from Heaven, ever develop or change!

People accustomed to this mode of thinking believe that dynamics and development testify *ipso facto* to imperfection, and they therefore deem it unacceptable to speak of the Patriarchs and the commandments in such terms. Such a view of development, however, is the vestige of a medieval mindset, in which any ideal must be completely static, and all truly great things must remain ever constant and unchanging.

To the new-age thinking, however, the value of dynamics and development is, on the contrary, quite obvious. When a person fails to develop or advance, this is seen today as an essential shortcoming, even if that person is one of the "greats". Under this revised approach, the dynamics and development that a person undergoes speak only in his favor, and make him so much greater in our eyes. We sense not only the pragmatic, but also the spiritual and religious value of such personal dynamics. And as concerns

the commandments, it seems reasonable and natural that God would reveal different facets of the commandments to the Jewish people in different periods. The particular emphasis in a given era would depend on the Jewish people's stage of development at that time.

These are just some of the teachings of the Kabbalah that were once transmitted only to select individuals, but today can finally be made public, to become a part of our general consciousness.

* * *

All of a human life is a dialogue between man and God. The participants in this dialogue are individuals, nations, and humankind as a whole. The Almighty wants every human being, and every society, regardless of size, to become more perfect, and to that end He constantly confronts us with new tasks and new problems.

As we manage to cope with each succeeding task, God gives us yet another and another, thus continually advancing us to successively higher levels. When, as sometimes happens, we are not able to cope with a given task, God gives us an easier one, and after we solve it, He returns us to the original, more difficult problem. As we continue solving each subsequent problem in a long series of tasks, humanity gradually improves, and man advances closer and closer to God.

Our ability to understand the Patriarchs as dynamically developing personalities is an essential element of this process. It is our hope that this book will succeed in serving that purpose.

* * *

This Addendum to Volume 1 of *The Bible Dynamics* includes a commentary on the first three chapters of Genesis omitted in the previous edition of Volume 1, that started with § 4, the story of Cain and Abel. The numbered paragraphs in this Addendum begin with § 1 and end with § 3, thus completing the previous edition of Volume 1.

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My very special expression of gratitude goes first to Rabbi Ouri Cherki, one of modern Israel's most outstanding rabbis and religious philosophers, a disciple of Rabbi Z.Y. Kook and Rabbi Y.L. Ashkenazi (Manitou). The lessons of Rabbi Cherki allowed me to explore the uniquely innovative approach to the Torah on which the Bible Dynamics commentary is based.

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Pinchas Polonsky



For the complete list of reviews, see
<http://pinchaspolonsky.org/reviews>

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§ 1. General Overview of Genesis and Its Opening Chapters

§ 1.1. THE STRUCTURE OF THE TORAH, AND THE PLACE OF THE BOOK OF GENESIS WITHIN IT

The Torah (by which we mean here the Five Books of Moses, also known by its Greek name, the Pentateuch) consists of the following books:

1. Genesis is the book of Creation. It tells the story of the creation of the world, and the birth of mankind and the Jewish people. Genesis is also the book of concealment (the natural world hides God's presence, and the universe obscures God's visibility from man). Everything that has ever been created contains within it the potential for any human being, and for humanity as a whole, to advance toward God. But initially that potential is hidden. In the book of Genesis it remains entirely concealed.
2. Exodus is the book of Disclosure, the book of Revelation. It tells the story of the Exodus, the birth of the Jewish people

(which is also a revelation in its own right), and the Revelation at Mount Sinai, where God made His presence known to the world.

3. Leviticus is the book of Holiness – the path by which a human being can find his connection with God. Holiness also provides tools for expediting that journey. Leviticus speaks of the Temple and, in particular, the laws of holiness that relate to food consumption and many other aspects of everyday conduct.
4. Numbers is the book of the Road – the wilderness wanderings. It recounts the travels of the Jewish people *en route* to the Holy Land, and describes the transformation that they undergo along the way.
5. Deuteronomy is the book of Self-determination. In this book Moses delivers his own instructions to Israel on how they are to live autonomously in the Holy Land. (Moses does so entirely of his own initiative. The contents of the book of Deuteronomy are all his own; none of it was dictated to him by God.)

All of these concepts will be explained in much greater detail in the *Bible Dynamics* introduction that appears at the beginning of each of the five books of the Torah.

§ 1.2. THE NAMES OF THE BOOKS OF THE TORAH

Many people mistakenly believe that the European names of the Torah books (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) are of non-Jewish origin. But this is not the case.

In ancient Jewish tradition each book of the five books of the Torah has two names – one name indicating the overall topic of the book, and a second name that derives from the book’s opening words.

The names that reflect the subject matter of each book were eventually translated into Greek and Latin, and from there to other languages, thus becoming fixed in European culture. The names that derive from the opening words of each book are the ones used in Jewish terminology today.

For example, in ancient times the second of the Torah's five books was known as *Sefer Yetziat Mitzrayim*, "the Book of the Exodus from Egypt." This was later shortened to "Exodus."

The third book of the five was called *Torat Kohanim*, "the Law (or teachings) of the Priests." In the European translation kohen was replaced by "Levi" as the more general term, and the name of the book became "Leviticus."

The fourth book was known in ancient times as *Chumash ha-Pekudim*, "the Book of the Census," which in the European tradition became "Numbers."

And the fifth book was called *Mishneh Torah*, "the Repetition of the Torah," which then became "Deuteronomy," from the Greek, meaning "the second law."

The title of the Torah's first book strayed furthest from the original. *Sefer ha-Yesharim*, "the Book of the Upright" (or "the Just," i.e., the Patriarchs), became "Genesis" – also from Greek, meaning "birth" or "creation," i.e., "the Book of the Creation of the World."

The contemporary Hebrew names of the Torah books (*Bereshit*, *Shemot*, *Vayikra*, *Bemidbar*, and *Devarim*) are used today for the books themselves and also for the first weekly portion of each book. We therefore distinguish by referring to the Torah books by their European names, while we reserve the Hebrew terms for those initial weekly portions.

§ 1.3. THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK OF GENESIS

Genesis is divided into twelve weekly portions, grouped into six pairs. Each pair treats a single topic, while presenting two different perspectives on that topic. Thus we have the following arrangement:

(A) The Creation of Humanity

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------|
| (1) <i>Bereshit</i> (1:1-6:8): | Mankind-1 |
| (2) <i>Noach</i> (6:9-11:32): | Mankind-2 |

(B) The Patriarchs of the Jewish People

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|
| (3) <i>Lech Lecha</i> (12:1-17:27): | Abraham-1 |
| (4) <i>Vayera</i> (18:1-22:24): | Abraham-2 |
| (5) <i>Chayei Sarah</i> (23:1-25:18): | Isaac-1 |
| (6) <i>Toldot</i> (25:19-28:9): | Isaac-2 |
| (7) <i>Vayetze</i> (28:10-32:3): | Jacob-1 |
| (8) <i>Vayishlach</i> (32:4-36:43): | Jacob-2 |

(C) The Sons of Jacob

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| (9) <i>Vayeshev</i> (37:1-40:23): | Jacob's sons as individuals-1 |
| (10) <i>Miketz</i> (41:1-44:17): | Jacob's sons as individuals-2 |
| (11) <i>Vayigash</i> (44:18-47:27): | Jacob's sons as progenitors
of the tribes-1 |
| (12) <i>Vayechi</i> (47:28-50:26): | Jacob's sons as progenitors
of the tribes-2 |

§ 1.4. WEEKLY PORTIONS (1) *BERESHIT* AND (2) *NOACH*

The first two weekly portions of Genesis, (1) *Bereshit* and (2) *Noach*, deal specifically with the creation of the human race.

Within the structure of the book of Genesis, those first two portions serve as a preface to the history of the Jewish people. They also set the framework for the future mission of the Jewish people – to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod. 19:6), “by which all families of the earth shall bless themselves” (Gen. 12:3, 28:14), “a covenant people, a light of nations” (Isa. 42:6).

Humanity has two successive primogenitors – Adam and Noah:

- *Bereshit* is the Torah portion of Adam, the first primogenitor of mankind. It speaks of the essence of man as an individual personality.
- *Noach*, the portion of the second primogenitor of mankind, Noah, speaks of human society as a single multinational entity.

Accordingly, the Hebrew expression *ben adam*, “son of Adam,” denotes a person as an individual. And the expression *ben noach*, “son of Noah,” means a person as a part of humanity.

The internal structure of these weekly portions is as follows:

(1) *Bereshit*:

- (1:1-3:50) The creation of the world
- (4:1-4:15) Cain and Abel
- (4:16-6:8) The descendants of Cain and Seth, and the events that led to the Flood

(2) *Noach*:

- (6:9-9:17) Noah and the Flood
- (9:18-10:32) The resettlement of peoples after the Flood
- (11:1-11:9) The Tower of Babel
- (11:10-11:32) Humankind after the Tower of Babel

§ 1.5. THE FIRST WEEKLY PORTIONS AS “MYSTERIES OF THE TORAH”

Opinions vary in Jewish tradition as to whether the stories of the Bereshit and Noach portions are meant to be taken literally.

The Talmud calls these texts “mysteries (or ‘secrets’) of the Torah.” It is unlikely that a straight-forward, literal reading is consistent with such a characterization.

Therefore, in our commentary we will not pursue the questions that arise when reading these portions literally – such as the relationship between religion and science in the story of the creation of the world; the question of the actual age of the world; did a flood covering the entire surface of the earth really occur; did one pair of each animal species actually survive in Noah’s Ark? And so on.

The true meaning of the Torah stories does not consist in questions of that type. The Torah is not a textbook on astrophysics or geography; rather, it is designed to reveal to men and to mankind their true path in life – the internal mechanisms of the universe. As we study the Torah, that is where the focus of our attentions must be.

**WEEKLY
PORTION 1**

BERESHIT

**(“WHEN GOD BEGAN
TO CREATE ...”)**

§ 2. The Creation of the Universe in Seven Days

§ 2.1. CREATION AS AN ETHICAL PRINCIPAL (1:1)

(1:1) When God began to create heaven and earth –

(1:1) When God began: There are two versions of the Creation story told here in the opening chapters of Genesis. The first story (Gen. 1) speaks of the seven days of Creation. And the second story (Gen. 2 and 3) – of Adam and Eve’s brief stay in the Garden of Eden. We will first consider each of the two stories separately, followed then by a discussion of the relationship between the two.

When God began to create: The very first action ascribed to the Almighty in the book of Genesis is the action of creating. God is He Who creates. This is His first characteristic.

God began to create: The ethical basis of the Abrahamic (i.e., biblical, monotheistic) religions is the principle of *imitatio Dei* – emulating God. Beginning from the premise that man is created in the image and likeness of God, that principle further asserts that the true path that man must follow is the path that extends and deepens man’s “God-likeness” (which must, however, always remain partial and limited, of course).

The Almighty has no visible image. One aspect of God’s invisibility is that His representation in human experience is not through visual appearance, but through actions. It thus follows that a person seeking to come closer to God must try to emulate the Almighty in His actions.

Accordingly, every description in the Torah of God’s actions is a lesson to man – how he can “become more like God.”

And since God is the Creator, the ideal for man (or, more precisely, one such ideal) is to be a creative, to produce something new, and to be guided by creative work. This means, most importantly, that every human being must be the creator of his or her own life. Creative activity is thus the primary religious value, because it is that which brings a person closer to God.

To this the Kabbalah adds: any action that a person undertakes that makes him “more God-like” by bringing him closer to the Almighty enables him to receive and appreciate a greater volume of Divine light, which he then experiences as personal pleasure and satisfaction. This is the source of the pleasure that a person derives from his own creativity, and from other actions that are comparable to Divine acts (as we shall describe below).

* * *

We should note in addition that the ideal of creativity, and of *imitatio Dei* in general (like any other principle or ideal) must not be absolutized. Different and even opposing ideals can coexist, provided they balance each other. Moreover, God’s law (i.e., observance of Divine commands and restrictions) is the sacred boundary that must never be crossed even in pursuit of an ideal. Adam and Eve are prime examples of what happens when this rule is violated. When Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and bad,

they embraced the unlawful path of becoming like God (see Gen. 3:5), which led to their expulsion from the garden of Eden.

Heaven and earth: God created the heavenly and the spiritual, but also the earthly, material, and ordinary. Both of these realms are ultimately Divine. Any search for God solely in the sphere of spirituality will be incomplete. Man must find God in the realm of the ethereal and heavenly, but also in everything that is material and earthly.

§ 2.2. THE FIRST DAY: GOD CREATES LIGHT (1:2-3)

(2) the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water –

(3) God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.

(2) The earth being unformed and void: The Hebrew expression *tohu va-vohu* is very well known from this passage, but is otherwise fairly uncommon. (It appears twice more in Hebrew Scripture: Isa. 34:11 and Jer. 4:23, both of which give a clear impression of echoing this verse itself.)

Tohu va-vohu can be translated variously: “The earth was in a state of frantic chaos, confusion, formlessness, muddlement, devastation.” But all these variants come to emphasize the same point: that no human mind can comprehend or imagine what that initial stage of Creation was like.

As already noted, Jewish tradition calls these first chapters of Genesis “a Divine mystery” – the text must not be taken literally. It therefore makes no sense to look for contradictions – or, conversely, agreement – between the Torah’s account and scientific theories (the Big Bang or evolution by natural selection, for example). The book of Genesis offers a different perspective on the structure of the universe than the one which the natural sciences are committed to

discovering. The Torah is not a physics or geology textbook, but a book about the essence of man and his place in the world.

(3) God said, “Let there be light”: The Midrash adds: the original light was so intensely bright that it would have immediately blinded anyone who saw it. The Almighty therefore hid that light away, to be revealed only to the righteous in the World to Come. Thus:

- (i) The Universe is designed such that God is concealed, for only that way can a man not be blinded by His grandeur, and develop independently. The Midrash therefore connects the Hebrew *’olam*, “universe,” with *ne’elam*, “concealed.”
- (ii) In the course of history mankind gradually advances toward revelation of the original Divine light. And in this does the essence and meaning of all of man’s spiritual quests consist.

“Let there be light”; and there was light: In the language of the Torah, the expressions “Let there be light” and “and there was light” are essentially the same (except for a small prefix *va-* that changes the tense from future to past): *yehi or* and *va yehi or*, respectively.

In this regard the Midrash notes that light was created exactly as God had commanded. But in the subsequent days of Creation there are significant differences between what God ordered and what actually arose. We will analyze this important feature of the Creation of the universe at the relevant points in the text.

§ 2.3 GOD REVIEWS, ASSESSES, AND NAMES (1:4-5)

(4) God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness.

(5) God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, a first day.

(4) God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness: As explained earlier, according to the principle of *imitatio Dei* all descriptions of God’s actions in the Torah are actually lessons meant to teach people how they should behave. Thus, just as God separated the light from the darkness, so likewise should a person practice that kind of separation in the world – separating light from darkness, i.e., evaluating what is good and what is bad, knowing the difference and behaving accordingly.

And there was evening and there was morning, a first day: Evening is mentioned first, and then morning. Noting this, Jewish law considers a day of twenty-four hours to always begin and end at sunset (or dusk). All dates in the Jewish calendar are calculated this way. But in particular, the observance of Shabbat (the Sabbath) and Jewish festivals always begins at nightfall and continues through nightfall of the following day.

The Hebrew word *erev*, “evening,” is cognate with the word *le-arev*, “to mix.” And similarly, *B-K-R*, the root of the word *boker*, “morning,” means to “analyze, distinguish, isolate.” Indeed, as the sun sets in the evening the outlines of visible objects mix and blur, and in the morning, with the arrival of daylight, those objects again become separate and distinct.

Thus, the words “And there was evening and there was morning” can be further understood as “God first mixed, and then He distinguished.” This description emphasizes the fundamental unity and identity of all things in their “origin,” before their essential differences become ultimately apparent.

In this spirit, Jewish tradition inculcates in us a mystical feeling of the profound unity of everything in the universe, notwithstanding that we must, in practical life, distinguish between good and bad, between what is permitted and what is forbidden.

A first day: The days of Creation are of course not ordinary days in the conventional meaning of the term. As a general rule, the

Hebrew word *yom* does not always mean “day” in the usual sense. It can also denote an interval or era of a particular length, as in this case.

Those who try to reconcile the Torah’s account of the Creation with the cosmological (scientific) history of the universe usually understand the “days” of Creation as periods of aeonian length – each lasting many millions or even billions of years.

But it is more generally useful in studying these passages to abandon issues of chronology, and instead to consider the days of Creation as the elements from which the universe is constructed. In particular, the Kabbalah correlates the days of Creation with the *Sefirot*, which constitute, as it were, a palette of colors that God uses to paint the universe. A bit later we will analyze this approach in considerably greater detail.

§ 2.4. THE SECOND DAY: THE SEPARATION OF THE WATERS (1:6-8)

(6) God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the water, that it may separate water from water.”

(7) God made the expanse, and it separated the water which was below the expanse from the water which was above the expanse. And it was so.

(8) God called the expanse Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

(6) God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the water, that it may separate water from water”: Transformations of water are mentioned several times in the Creation story: the separation here of the water below from the water above, the separation of the sea from the dry land (Gen. 1: 9), and so on.

Water in Jewish tradition is a symbol of life, mercy, and Divine grace. This grace is transformed in order that the entire world will not be inundated. It is the only way that the world can exist at all.

In this verse the separation of “the water below” and “the water above” teaches us to seek Divine grace in both realms – the upper and the lower worlds. That is, in both the spiritual and the material.

(8) God called the expanse Sky: The concept of heaven (sky) changes in the course of this very story. At first the heavens stand in opposition to the earth, but then they separate the sources of Divine grace, which emanates from both the upper and lower worlds. Soon we will see further examples of how the Creation story incorporates such rethinking of fundamental concepts.

§ 2.5. THE THIRD DAY: THE CREATION OF DRY LAND, AND PLANTS, TREES, AND FRUITS (1:9-13)

(9) God said, “Let the water below the sky be gathered into one area, that the dry land may appear.” And it was so.

(10) God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering of waters He called Seas. And God saw that this was good.

(11) And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation: seed-bearing plants, fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And it was so.

(12) The earth brought forth vegetation: seed-bearing plants of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that this was good.

(13) And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.

(9) God said, “Let the water below the sky be gathered into one area, that the dry land may appear”: If the earth had remained

completely flooded with water (and in a symbolic sense, if mercy and grace were found everywhere without exception), no one could possibly survive in such an environment. A person would remain inactive and unable to develop at all, drowning in all-consuming mercy.

But people must grow up to be creative and constructive. The water was therefore gathered separately, and dry land appeared on which mercy (water) is less abundant, making it possible for humans to advance independently, and for the world to develop.

(10) God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering of waters He called Seas: Here the concept of *eretz*, “earth,” is transformed. Above (Gen. 1:1) earth is contrasted with heaven (“When God began to create heaven and earth ...”). But here earth stands in opposition to the seas – a completely different meaning,

Throughout the Creation there is a rethinking of concepts, like vessels that are emptied, then refilled, as it were, with new content. And likewise, human creativity requires that we continuously re-think definitions and concepts, constantly revising our terminology.

And God saw that this was good: On each day of Creation the Torah says that God saw that what he had done was good. This is because each day represents a different aspect of the universe, and every aspect has goodness laid in its foundation.

Just as God at every stage saw that what He had done was good, so should we cultivate the ability to see that same goodness in the surrounding world – in each of its components, and in the universe as a whole. This is yet another way that humans can approach God by becoming like Him.

(11-12) And God said: Let the earth sprout ... fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit ... The earth brought forth ... trees of every kind bearing fruit: Although we find repeated many times in the Creation story the statement, “and it was so” (Gen. 1:7, 9, 15, 24, 30), the book of Genesis is never satisfied with that alone.

Rather, it tells us in specific terms just how things in the world came about, and why they are the way they are.

In all the days of Creation except the first, if we compare what God orders with what actually comes into being at His command, we notice significant discrepancies. In this verse, for example, God commanded that “fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit” should appear. That is, the word “fruit” is applied even to the trees themselves. But the next verse says that “the earth brought forth ... trees of every kind bearing fruit.” (Just “trees,” not “fruit trees”).

To explain this discrepancy the Midrash says as follows. The original Divine plan included that the trees themselves would be “fruit” suitable to be eaten as food, just like the fruit that grows on those trees. But the earth produced only “trees bearing fruit” – the trees themselves were not edible. The earth failed, as it were, to comply with the Divine order!

“Trees” and “fruits” are symbolic of process and result. Trees can be seen as only a conduit, a pathway to the emergence of fruits. The trees themselves are not edible and have no food value. Likewise, many processes in our daily lives have no intrinsic value – we engage in those activities only because they “bear fruit.” We perform tedious, monotonous work just to earn a salary, we travel boring roads on our way to interesting places, we endure humdrum technicalities in preparation for engrossing events. But when the process itself is enjoyable, things take on an entirely different and added dimension – when we do our favorite work, or go on a pleasant walk, for example. The Midrash believes that in the World to Come “trees” will fulfill God’s original order and will become “edible.” That is, all human action, besides “bearing fruit,” will have value *per se*. That is, all humans in whatever they do will always enjoy both the process and the result in equal measure.

Thus, the Divine word as spoken at the Creation determines the trajectory of the development of the universe as it is ideally meant

to be. But what actually arose at the Creation is only the beginning of that path. Moreover, man is given the opportunity and the ability to improve the world according to the Divine plan, and his own condition as well, by arranging the world such that he can do only what he likes to do and what he enjoys doing.

Thus the world was created imperfect, and yet God confirmed that “it was good.” The world was not supposed to be perfect from the outset. But humans were given the opportunity to improve and perfect the world, becoming God’s partners, as it were, in the creation of the universe.

§ 2.6. THE FOURTH DAY: THE SUN, THE MOON, AND THE STARS (1:14-19)

(14) God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate day from night; they shall serve as signs for the set times – the days and the years;

(15) and they shall serve as lights in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth.” And it was so.

(16) God made the two great lights, the greater light to dominate the day and the lesser light to dominate the night, and the stars.

(17) And God set them in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth,

(18) to dominate the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that this was good.

(19) And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

(14) As signs for the set times – the days and the years: One of the functions of the luminaries is to facilitate organizing human life according to a calendar.

(15) And they shall serve as lights in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth: The luminaries in the heavens exist not for their own sake, but for the illumination of the earth. And by analogy, all that is heavenly (i.e., all spirituality) exists not for its own sake, but in order to illuminate the lives of the people on this earth.

(16) God made the two great lights, the greater light to dominate the day and the lesser light to dominate the night: On its face, this verse is self-contradictory. It begins by saying that “God made two great lights.” But the same verse soon informs us that in fact one of them is greater and the other lesser.

The Midrash offers the following explanation. The sun and the moon were originally both large – they were luminaries of equal size. But the moon was unhappy and came before to the Almighty to complain: “Two kings cannot wear the same crown.” That is, only one of the two can be dominant. To this God replied: “That being the case, go then and diminish yourself. Since you insist on a hierarchy, it is you who shall be subordinate.”

The result was threefold:

- (i) The moon became smaller than the sun.
- (ii) The moon emits not its own light, but shines with only reflected light.
- (iii) The size of the visible moon is not constant. It decreases as it approaches its new moon phase, then increases again as it becomes a full moon.

Then the Midrash adds that this condition is only temporary. With the correction of the universe in the World to Come, the moon will again become equal to the sun.

This midrash should not be taken literally, of course. In its typical style, the Midrash clothes a philosophical concept in the garb of a parable. It is saying that ideally the luminaries of the world (and man too is a “luminary”) should all be equally prominent. But in any real society there is always a hierarchy, someone who is more important

and someone else less so, because “two kings cannot wear the same crown.” But even while we recognize the need for hierarchy in practice, we must not idealize it. Man’s hierarchical social structure is merely an expedient. Ideally, humanity should be striving, if only gradually, to a state where all luminaries (that is, all people) will be equal in § 2.5. The Third Day: The Creation of Dry Land, and Plants, Trees, and Fruits (1:9-13)

§ 2.7. THE FIFTH DAY: SEA CREATURES AND BIRDS (1:20-23)

(20) God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and birds that fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.”

(21) God created the great sea monsters, and all the living creatures of every kind that creep, which the waters brought forth in swarms, and all the winged birds of every kind. And God saw that this was good.

(22) God blessed them, saying, “Be fertile and increase, fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.”

(23) And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

(20) God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and birds that fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky”: The creatures of sea and sky were created before the terrestrial ones, which were created only the next (sixth) day. The true essence of life derives from water (Divine grace) and from the heavens (ideals and spirituality). Only after those elements of the universe are firmly in place can life then take root on the land where man dwells.

(21) God created the great sea monsters: Water (which represents mercy) is the source of all life, but it is also fraught with danger. The first of the sea creatures mentioned are “the great sea monsters.” The archetypal sea monster in Jewish tradition is the Leviathan, associated with the Divine impulse that is embodied in nature, but lurks in the depths of the sea. It is both important and dangerous.

Of every kind: A salient feature of Divine creation is the diversity of life forms. And, in particular, the very numerous genera, species, and subspecies of animals.

(22) God blessed them, saying, “Be fertile and increase, fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth”: The animal world, unlike the plants, received God’s special blessing. Plants lack a soul; they live only “biochemically.” But animals, on the other hand, need more than just biochemistry to survive – they need mental and emotional fortitude. And that is why they receive an additional blessing.

§ 2.8. THE SIXTH DAY: ANIMALS OF THE DRY LAND, AND HUMAN BEINGS (1:24-30)

(24) God said, “Let the earth bring forth every kind of living creature: cattle, creeping things, and wild beasts of every kind.” And it was so.

(25) God made wild beasts of every kind and cattle of every kind, and all kinds of creeping things of the earth. And God saw that this was good.

(26) And God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth.”

(27) **And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.**

(28) **God blessed them and God said to them, “Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.”**

(29) **God said, “See, I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food.**

(30) **And to all the animals on land, to all the birds of the sky, and to everything that creeps on earth, in which there is the breath of life, [I give] all the green plants for food.”**
And it was so.

(26) Let us make man: The Hebrew is, *na'aseh adam*. The word *adam* has two related meanings. It is the proper name of the first man in this story of the Creation. But more often *adam* means, simply, “man.” Even when used in that second, generic sense, the Hebrew word *adam* has no feminine or plural form. It can mean “man” as an individual human being (a man), and also the human race as a whole (mankind).

Grammatically, the feminine form of *adam*, would be *adamah*, which has a different meaning: “earth, land, soil.” Thus, the “wife” of mankind is the very earth from which Adam was created (Gen. 2:7), and which by God’s decree he cultivates (Gen. 3:17, 23).

(26) And God said, “Let us make man ...”: The text does not say “Let me make man,” but “Let us make man.” This is the only instance in the Creation story where God’s actions are indicated by a verb in the plural form. In all other Divine acts of the Creation a verb in the singular is used.

Just whom does the Almighty mean here when He says “us”? And why is it phrased that way only for the creation of man, but not

the heavens, the earth, plants, or animals? The commentators offer many different answers to these questions, each one choosing the answer that is closest to him – the answer that he feels affords him the fullest understanding of the text, and of life.

Of all those answers, we wish to focus on the following one. Here God is addressing the man himself – Adam, the human about to be created, but also every person in the most general sense. God says to him: “Let us together, you and I, make a man out of you.” Together we will make of you a human truly worthy of the name. That is why the plural of the verb “to make” is found only here with respect to humans, but not any other elements of the universe, not even the animals. Man, unlike animals, is not born in a ready-made state. Man’s completion awaits *him*. He must work to complete himself. This process of the first man’s self-transformation will be described in detail in the second Creation story that follows this one (Gen. 2, 3).

As we shall soon explain in detail, Adam spent only one day in the garden of Eden, the sixth day of Creation, at which time the world was still being created. All the events that took place in the garden still belong to the process of Creation – not to “ordinary” life that began after the Creation became complete with Adam and Eve’s expulsion. In the garden, Adam radically altered his own nature and acquired new qualities. He “completed himself” – through his dialogue and interaction with God, and sometimes in disagreement with Him.

After man was expelled from the garden his inclination to self-transformation diminished, but did not entirely disappear. Even today it continues to operate within each individual, and also at the level of humanity as a whole.

(27) And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him: This one verse sums up the entire essence of biblical theology, which consists in the fact that God, the Creator of the universe, created human beings in His Own likeness. It thus follows that God loves man, treats him as His Own son, and helps him to

develop. The principle of *imitatio Dei* mentioned earlier, the moral imperative of ethical monotheism, is likewise based on the idea of man's likeness to God.

Male and female He created them: “Male” and “female” are terms most often applied to animals, and with respect to humans even sound somewhat crude. But this is an exact translation of the Hebrew *zachar u-nekeivah*, which emphasizes the aspect of biological sex. The second Creation story (Gen. 2:23) uses a different terminology – *ish and isha* – “man” and “woman.” These are words that can be used only with reference to humans.

Thus, in the first Creation story man and woman are created immediately as a couple, like all the other animals of the natural world. This contrasts with the second chapter of Genesis, where we read that Adam was created alone – which runs contrary to nature.

We will explore the differences between the first and second Creation stories in much more detail below.

(28) God blessed them and God said to them, “Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it”: This is God's very first commandment to man. It consists not only in biological reproduction, but also in dominating the world and transforming it.

In essence, God is commanding man to build a civilization. Civilization is “man's power over nature.” Thus, the Torah considers civilization, including scientific and technological progress, not merely a “convenience” for mankind, but a true spiritual and religious value – the fulfillment of a Divine commandment. To oppose scientific and technological progress is to oppose spiritual development, and is therefore morally wrong.

The Divine imperative to build a civilization is given to humanity as a whole, seeing that it can be accomplished only by all of humanity collectively, not by any individual person or even a single nation that chooses to act in isolation from all other nations.

(29-30) God said, “See, I give you every seed-bearing plant ... they shall be yours for food. And to all the animals on land ... [I give] all the green plants for food”: In the garden of Eden, all animals, and Adam and his wife too, were vegetarians.

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (the founder of religious Zionism and the movement for Orthodox modernization of Judaism) maintained that vegetarianism is in fact the ideal in Judaism. But he also stressed that this ideal must not be propagandized, because humanity must come to it naturally and of its own accord.

Other Divine ideals must likewise be adopted by the world only gradually, in the natural course of societal development. (Universal peace is another such ideal.) Any attempt at premature realization of these ideals can only prove disastrous.

§ 2.9. GOD FINDS THE END RESULT OF THE CREATION “VERY GOOD” (1:31)

(31) And God saw all that He had made, and found it very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

(31) And God saw all that He had made, and found it very good: We noted previously that God found every part of the universe good after he had created it. But here the Torah tells us that “God saw all that He had made, and found it very good.” This “very good” means that in addition to the high quality of each individual element in the system, all the components taken together were well balanced and consistent with one another.

The Midrash offers us a different understanding of this verse, namely: “God saw all that He had made, and found it very good” means that the world generally inclines toward goodness. But par-

adoxically, “very good” means that the structure of the world also includes a potential for evil.

In other words, the evil that exists in the world exists precisely for the sake of the good. Absolute goodness cannot exist only as a ready-made gift from God. Rather, it must arise as the result of man’s continuing independent development, as he strives to overcome evil. Therefore, because the Almighty wished to give mankind such goodness that is genuine and complete, and not merely a token level of goodness, He also had to lay the potential for evil in the very foundation of the universe, and then to give man the ability to overcome it by his actions. Evil is a necessary element of the universe, and not merely a concession to the world’s imperfections.

§ 2.10. THE SEVENTH DAY: THE SABBATH (2:1-3)

(2:1) **The heaven and the earth were finished, and all their array.**

(2) **On the seventh day God finished the work that He had been doing, and He ceased on the seventh day from all the work that He had done.**

(3) **And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation that He had done.**

(2-3) On the seventh day God finished the work that He had been doing: That is, the seventh day is itself an essential part of the Creation. God completed the work of Creation by creating the seventh day, the Sabbath, which is different, however, from the rest of Creation, because it is not something material, but a special time whose purpose is to bring holiness into the world.

And He ceased: The Hebrew verb SH-B-T (whence *Shabbat*, “the Sabbath”) has two closely related meanings: to cease, and to rest.

And He ceased: I.e., He stopped transforming the universe.

On the seventh day: The Torah makes clear that the last day of the week is the seventh day. (It is the day that the world calls “Saturday.” In the Christian calendar, the “day of rest” was later moved to Sunday, which in that system also became the “seventh” day of the week.)

From all the work that He had done: The word *melachah* is used here, which means “creative work” – work that brings something new into existence. At the Creation of the world only that kind of work was important, and it is precisely the performance of those categories of work that Jewish law prohibits on Shabbat. Writing even a single letter is “creative work,” and is therefore forbidden on Shabbat. But transporting even a large and heavy object from place to place within a private domain, although this is obviously work, it is not “creative work,” and is therefore not forbidden on Shabbat.

(3) And God blessed the seventh day: The essence of a blessing is a positive increase, whether material or spiritual.

And declared it holy: Holiness comes about when we use the material elements of the world to improve and reinforce the human connection with God.

Because on it God ceased from all the work of creation that He had done: Since the world did not come into existence spontaneously, but was created, it has meaning and purpose. The weekly Shabbat celebrates the creation of the universe – i.e., the meaning and purpose that are embodied within it. The Shabbat therefore brings holiness into the world.

This concludes the first of the two versions of the story of the Creation.

§ 3. Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden

§ 3.1. THE CREATION OF THE HEAVENS, THE EARTH, AND PLANTS (2:4-6)

(4) **Such is the story of heaven and earth when they were created. When the Lord God made earth and heaven –**

(5) **when no shrub of the field was yet on earth and no grasses of the field had yet sprouted, because the Lord God had not sent rain upon the earth and there was no man to till the soil,**

(6) **but a flow would well up from the ground and water the whole surface of the earth –**

(4) **Such is the story of heaven and earth:** Here begins the second of the two versions of the story of the Creation.

Such is the story of heaven and earth when ... the Lord God made earth and heaven: This verse serves as a header line for what follows, and shows that the story starts here anew from the very beginning, with the creation of heaven and earth. The story of Adam in the garden of Eden that follows is not an elaboration of the details of the first version of the story, but a new, different version.

The two versions (which we shall call “the first story” and “the second story”) recount the same set of events, but describe them differently:

- (i) The first story (Gen. 1:1-2:3) details what happened on each of the seven days of Creation. Each day gets roughly the same amount of coverage, and the story concludes with a description of the Sabbath.
- (ii) The second story (Gen. 2:4-3:24) opens with a brief overview of how the heavens, the earth, and plants were created. It then recounts in detail Adam and his wife’s stay in the garden of Eden and their expulsion from it, which ends the second Creation story.

The two stories differ in style, emphasize different ideas, and refer to God by different names. Each story has its own perspective on the essence of man, his ideals, and the tasks facing him.

Having already presented above the first Creation story, we now present our reading of the second story, followed by a comparison of the two.

Since the essence of man is portrayed differently in the two stories, we will call those two descriptions “first Adam” and “second Adam.” He is of course one and the same person, but considered from two points of view.

When the Lord God made earth and heaven: The first story calls the Almighty *Elohim*, translated as “God,” while the second uses the name *Adonai Elohim*, “the Lord God.”

The name of an object is not only what people call it, but also an indicator of how they relate to it. For example, the same person can have different names within his family circle, at the workplace, and in official documents. Similarly, each of God’s various names highlights a different aspect of Divine manifestation in the world – i.e., a different type of human connection with God. In this respect the first story differs significantly from the second.

(5) When no shrub of the field was yet on earth ... because the Lord God had not sent rain upon the earth and there was no man: Here we already have the first contradiction between the two Creation stories. In the first story plants appeared on the third day, even before man, whereas in the second Creation story, so long as Adam had not yet been created neither did any plants grow. And below (Gen. 2:19) we find the same contradiction regarding the animals. In the first story they appear before man, but in the second, man is created first, and only then the animals.

We can try to reconcile such contradictions and to smooth over the difficulties. For example, the Midrash (which we will cite in greater detail below) explains that “vegetation was planted on the third day, but it did not grow until the sixth day, after Adam appeared.”

There is, however, another approach, in which, rather than trying to reconcile the contradictions, we perceive them as a different perspectives on the world. In the first Creation story everything that fills the universe – luminaries, plants and animals – are all created before man and independent of him. Man arrives at the very end, when the world is ready and waiting for him. This emphasizes that the world has its own independent value, and is important in its own right, while man is only an appointed official, as it were, of that world – entrusted with governing and managing it.

But in the second story the situation is presented differently – the world makes no sense at all without mankind. Without man nothing in the universe has any value *per se*. He is not only in charge of running the universe, but its very essence.

We will further expand on these two approaches below.

Because the Lord God had not sent rain upon the earth and there was no man: The Midrash adds: when Adam was created, he saw that plants already existed, but they were not yet growing. He tried to understand the reason for that. He examined the plants, and determined they lacked water. So Adam prayed for rain, and in

response to his prayer rain began to fall, and the garden was able to grow.

This midrash is telling us that Adam ruled the world through knowledge. It was sufficient in the garden just to ponder a problem and devise a solution. The world was immediately transformed simply as the result of that knowledge.

And there was no man to till the soil: We noted earlier that grammatically, *adamah*, “earth,” is the feminine form of *adam*, “man.” The earth and the human race are described here as forming a couple, as it were.

(5) No man to till the soil: Thus, in both the first and second stories Adam cultivates the earth and transforms the world. But that cultivation is presented differently.

In the first Creation story, Adam is instructed to rule the world that was created earlier, but even without him the world is extremely significant as its own independent entity. In the second story, Adam is commanded to eat from the trees of the garden, i.e., metaphorically, to experience the world, which exists only to provide Adam with objects of cognition. This world has no actual value of its own.

(6) But a flow would well up from the ground and water the whole surface of the earth: An alternate translation is: “But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole surface of the ground.” As long as the earth is waiting for man to appear, there is no rain. The earth’s vitality is maintained only through a mist. Before the arrival of man, the vitality of the world is ephemeral at best.

§ 3.2. GOD CREATES MAN (2:7)

(7) the Lord God formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.

(7) ... From the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life: The “dust of the earth” – the physical essence of nature – unites with the breath of life that the Lord “blows into his nostrils,” i.e., with man’s Divine soul. Only then does Adam become a living being.

Both of these components in man are Divine. Therefore, any disregard for material life, any attitude that is concerned “only with the spiritual,” cannot lead to a full life for mankind or for any person.

§ 3.3. THE LORD PLANTS A GARDEN (2:8-9)

(8) The Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom He had formed.

(9) And from the ground the Lord God caused to grow every tree that was pleasing to the sight and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and bad.

(8) The Lord God planted a garden in Eden: Eden and the garden of Eden are distinct concepts. In the next verse (Gen. 2:10) the text says, “A river issues from Eden to water the garden.” I.e., the garden is located near Eden, adjacent to it.

A garden is a space where trees grow, from which visitors to the garden can derive sustenance. Eden (Hebrew, *eyden*, literally “pleasure, elegance, finesse, consummate perfection”) is the source of water and vitality that feeds the garden.

(8) And placed there the man whom He had formed: God puts Adam in the Garden, but not in Eden. Thus, Adam was originally placed not in paradise itself, but only on the threshold of paradise.

And now two paths lie before him. Adam can advance to Eden, to a more sublime region of the universe. Or he can be expelled from the garden into the outside world.

Given that human history has taken the second path, the task of humanity is not merely to return to the garden, but to finally reach Eden.

(9) Every tree that was pleasing to the sight and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and bad: All the trees in the garden were “pleasing to the sight and good for food” – including the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and bad.

In later sections we will explain in detail that Adam’s problem was not about eating from the tree of knowledge. A thirst for knowledge of good and bad is by no means sinful. On the contrary – it is the realization of the Divine plan.

The problem, however, was that Adam acquired knowledge of good and bad before he was permitted to do so. For all knowledge there is a proper time. It was premature knowledge that led to the breakdown of the system, and to Adam and Eve’s expulsion from the garden.

With the tree of life in the middle of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and bad: These two trees correspond to man’s two most driving passions, which were also second Adam’s two greatest objects of fear and centers of attraction: the passion for personal immortality, and the passion for essential knowledge (that is, such knowledge of good and bad that had the power to alter and advance Adam as a person).

Both of these passions distinguish him from the first Adam, who had no such aspirations.

The Adam of the first Creation story represents, more likely, not just an individual human being, but an entire race – all of humanity. From the very beginning he is focused on being fertile and increasing, as God had commanded him to do (Gen. 1:28), and thus he views himself and his descendants as an indivisible unit. He therefore has

no reason to fear his own personal mortality, because even after his death the race will live on.

Also, Adam of the first story has no passion for essential knowledge. Since he is a ruler and a leader, his only interest is in the technical knowledge that will enable him to successfully rule the kingdom. He is not interested in essential knowledge, which can change him as a person, but has only very limited practical value.

In later sections we will explore the difference between first Adam and second Adam in greater detail.

§ 3.4. THE RIVERS THAT ISSUE FROM EDEN (2:10-14)

(10) A river issues from Eden to water the garden, and it then divides and becomes four branches.

(11) The name of the first is Pishon, the one that winds through the whole land of Havilah, where the gold is.

(12) (The gold of that land is good; bdellium is there, and lapis lazuli.)

(13) The name of the second river is Gihon, the one that winds through the whole land of Cush.

(14) The name of the third river is Tigris, the one that flows east of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

(10) A river issues from Eden: We might be puzzled to find that here in the midst of the story of Creation, while the universe and man are still being formed, there is an unexpected interpolation of “metaphysical geography” – the mention of the rivers of Egypt and Mesopotamia.

In Jewish tradition the expression “to drink of the river’s waters” has also a figurative meaning: to feed on the culture and vitality of

a given nation or country. Thus, this verse is teaching us more than geography. It is teaching us that the cultural sources that later appeared in Egypt and Babylonia in fact originated much earlier, in the garden of Eden, during mankind's primordial existence there. Those cultures are offshoots of the "river" that issues from Eden.

In the story of Abraham, later in this book of Genesis, the integration of these fundamental world cultures into Jewish tradition will be considered in greater detail, as a topic in its own right.

(Of course, there is no point in trying to identify the actual location of Eden based on the descriptions here of these rivers. The story of the Creation is not intended as a geography lesson. Rather, it is a description of the internal spiritual structure that underlies the universe and all of human life within it.)

(10) A river issues from Eden to water the garden: The source of the water is Eden; the garden only draws nourishment from it. Thus, the garden is not the highest point. Eden is on a higher level than the garden.

And it then divides and becomes four branches: Only one river flows out of Eden, and its unity is preserved in the garden. But that unity then terminates, and four main rivers are formed instead – that is, the sources of four different directions taken by human civilization.

(11-12) The name of the first is Pishon, the one that winds through the whole land of Havilah, where the gold is. (The gold of that land is good; bdellium is there, and lapis lazuli): Opinions differ in Jewish tradition concerning the identification of this river, Pishon. Some say it is the White Nile, but according to others (e.g., Josephus Flavius) it is the Indus or the Ganges. If so, Pishon is the source of Indian civilization, in which, as this verse tells us, gold and precious stones play a particularly important role (as compared, say, with Egypt and Mesopotamia).

(13) The name of the second river is Gihon: Jewish Tradition identifies Gihon with the Nile. Egypt is thus the second of the fundamental civilizations of mankind.

The one that winds through the whole land of Cush: Cush is Ethiopia (or perhaps even the whole of northeast Africa). The sources of the Nile are located there.

(14) The name of the third river is Tigris, the one that flows east of Asshur: Asshur is Assyria. This is the third of the four fundamental world civilizations. Along with Babylon, it is mentioned later in the book of Genesis in connection with the resettlement of nations immediately after the Flood (Gen. 10:10-11).

And the fourth river is the Euphrates: Babylonian civilization is very closely associated with the Euphrates.

§ 3.5. ADAM AND THE FRUITS OF THE GARDEN (2:15-17)

(15) The Lord God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it.

(16) And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat;

(17) but as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die.”

(15) The Lord God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it: Literally, “to work it and to guard it.” Adam does not sit idle in paradise. He tills the garden, tends it and protects it.

And yet, as Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden God tells Adam (Gen. 3:19): “By the sweat of your brow shall you get bread to eat.” And then we read, “So the Lord God banished him from the

garden of Eden, to till the soil from which he was taken” (Gen. 3:23). This shows that the work that Adam performed in the garden prior to the expulsion was not “by the sweat of his brow” – it was intellectual, not physical work. As already noted, Adam had no need of physical strength to till and tend the garden. He did so through his spiritual and intellectual powers.

But after Adam is expelled from the garden, powers of the mind are not enough. He must then toil physically – “by the sweat of his brow.”

To till it and tend it: “Tend it” here in the Hebrew is *leshomrah*, “to guard it.” Adam must protect the garden not from the serpent or from the other animals, who pose no actual threat to the garden. The only creature on earth capable of destroying the garden is Adam himself. When he later violates God’s instructions, the garden will cease to exist for him. Thus, the greatest potential for destroying it lies with Adam. He must guard and protect the garden, first and foremost, from *himself*.

The commandment to preserve and protect the garden was given not only to Adam at the metaphysical level, but as an instruction to the entire human race. This is the ecological principle of protecting all of the environment from man’s destructive influences. We must therefore regard such protection as a religious value and a Divine commandment.

But at the same time, it is essential that we do not absolutize the ecological principle. It must be properly balanced against the opposing point of view by incorporating it into the comprehensive structure of all the values that we uphold. God commands man not only to protect nature (the “garden”), but also to build civilization – to “fill the earth, master it, rule... all the living things that creep on earth” (Gen. 1:28). In other words, to transform the earth. This entails a generally moderate approach to ecology that balances man’s technological prowess for transforming the world against the need

to protect and preserve the environment. Judaism rejects the kind of environmental extremism that exalts virgin, unspoiled nature to the detriment of technological progress and the advancement of human civilization.

(16) And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat: The Hebrew here for “you are free to eat” is *achol tochel*. Such reduplicated phraseology appears often in the Torah, and is difficult to capture in translation, but following convention, those two words here would be translated as “you shall surely eat.” Or, in this case, even more forcefully: “Of every tree of the garden you must eat!” It is not merely permission, but an actual command to eat from every other tree except this one.

The positive command to eat from every tree of the garden (rather than the prohibition of eating from the tree of knowledge of good and bad) is in fact the very first commandment that Adam receives. Here, eating from those trees is meant in a metaphorical sense. Through cognition, study, and assimilation of the full diversity of the external world man is commanded to make it a part of himself. This is the meaning of God’s command to Adam to eat the fruits of every tree of the garden.

It was in acquiring this knowledge – “eating of every tree” – that Adam’s work in the garden consisted of. And since the garden was the place where God’s presence was manifest, the connection between the material and the spiritual was likewise manifested there in a very explicit form. Adam’s spiritual and intellectual work of comprehending the world was immediately realized also on the material level.

* * *

In the popular conception paradise is a place of relaxation. But the Jewish idea is quite different. A person who finds himself in paradise is occupied with work – intellectual work.

Are peace and idleness really the ideal paradise? If they are, one can die there of boredom! Rather, paradise must be a place where one works and creates (“to till and tend the garden”). But it is not physically strenuous work. It is enough there to experience, to devise, to understand, and to invent. The material result, the embodiment of those efforts, is realized spontaneously.

(17) But as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it: Adam was permitted to partake of almost every branch of knowledge (“every tree”). Only this one tree was forbidden to him. And yet, the meaning of the prohibition is not explained. To Adam, who has set his sights on acquiring knowledge of every kind, it is incomprehensible. The prohibition is therefore a major problem for him.

For as soon as you eat of it, you shall die”: Literally, “For on the [very] day you eat from it, you shall die.” Adam did in fact eat the fruit of that tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and bad, but he did not die that day. We must therefore understand “you shall die” to mean, “you will become mortal” – which did actually happen immediately, as soon as he transgressed the Divine command.

* * *

Having prohibited Adam from partaking of the tree of knowledge of good and bad, God nonetheless does not at this stage declare the tree of life likewise off-limits to Adam, although this does occur later (Gen. 3:22-24). There are a number of options for understanding this, of which we offer two:

- (i) The two trees are essentially one and the same tree. The aspect of knowledge of good and bad was actually a “portal” to the discovery of its aspect as the tree of life.
- (ii) Before Adam’s fall, the tree of life was not forbidden to man. That became necessary only because of the distortion of man’s nature that arose as the result of his eating prematurely from the tree of knowledge of good and bad.

§ 3.6. THE CREATION OF WOMAN (2:18-25)

(18) The Lord God said, “It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him.”

(19) And the Lord God formed out of the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that would be its name.

(20) And the man gave names to all the cattle and to the birds of the sky and to all the wild beasts; but for Adam no fitting helper was found.

(21) So the Lord God cast a deep sleep upon the man; and, while he slept, He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot.

(22) And the Lord God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman; and He brought her to the man.

**(23) Then the man said, “This one at last
Is bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh.
This one shall be called Woman,**

For from man was she taken.”

(24) Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh.

(25) The two of them were naked, the man and his wife, yet they felt no shame.

(18) The Lord God said, “It is not good for man to be alone”: This might be translated very literally as “Being is not good [when] a person is alone.” The problem is not that loneliness is uncomfortable, or that a person is bored without company, although that too is true. No, the problem is much deeper. If Adam is alone, it means that all of existence is improperly constructed and arranged.

The Midrash explains: God inhabits the upper worlds alone. Thus, if Adam likewise is to be alone in the lower worlds, he will fancy himself a complete and perfect reflection of God.

Man can properly develop only through plurality and diversity, not through “the one and only correct point of view.”

(18) It is not good for man to be alone: This is a problem only for Adam of the second Creation story. Adam of the first story is always busy transforming the world around him, and is thus never alone. Moreover, about first Adam we read, “And God created man in His image ... male and female He created them” (Gen. 1:27). In the first story, Eve was created immediately, together with Adam. Loneliness is a problem only for second Adam, because he is focused on acquiring knowledge, and on the inner world of his own soul.

Note too that the first Creation story says about every aspect of the universe, “And God saw that this was good.” But in the second story we find from the very beginning quite the opposite assessment, “It is not good” for man to be alone.

The world of the first story is positive from the very start, and remains so throughout. Adam lives in harmony with his surroundings and rules over them. Conversely, the world of the second story

is problematic from the start. It very soon devolves into conflict, and ends with a tragic exile.

I will make a fitting helper for him: The Hebrew is *eizer ke-negdo*. The Hebrew word *neged* can mean “correspondingly, in like manner, to the same extent.” Thus the translation given here, “a fitting helper.”

But *neged* just as often means “against, in opposition to.” According to that sense of the word, the literal meaning of *eizer ke-negdo* is “a helper who opposes him” (or, a “helper-opponent”). Paradoxically, the partners of a couple help each other by virtue of their opposition. The opposition is itself the help.

A counterbalance is needed in any system, whether personal, familial, social, or even mechanical. Without that opposition equilibrium will be lacking – in the system itself, and in the people who depend on it. In order for Adam to develop and advance, a counterbalance is therefore created for him within the family – a “helper-opponent.”

(Of course, everything said about Adam in this context applies equally to both men and women, because the word *ha adam* means a person, i.e., a human being, whether male or female.)

(19) And the Lord God formed out of the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky: After God has spoken of Adam’s need for a helper-opponent, we would have expected to read next about the creation of Eve. But first the Torah tells us about the creation of animals.

And brought them to the man to see what he would call them: As already noted, any name reflects not just the object itself, but the manner in which people relate to it. Thus, to name something or someone is to establish the type of connection it will have with other people and things.

And whatever the man called each living creature, that would be its name: In the first Creation story, the animal world existed before man and independently of him. But in the second story,

the world is constructed such that it centers around mankind. The essence of the animals is therefore determined by the names that Adam gives them, the nature of the animals' connection to man, their function with respect to him.

(20) And the man gave names to all the cattle and to the birds of the sky and to all the wild beasts: Because Adam understood the precise relationship of each living creature to man, he was able to give them names.

But for Adam no fitting helper was found: Adam had to feel convinced based on his own experience that no animal could be his mate. Only after this experience of communicating with the world did Adam “grow up” – he became capable of having a relationship with a woman. Hence the narrative proceeds from there directly to the creation of Eve.

(21) So the Lord God cast a deep sleep upon the man: The operation of creating Eve from a part of Adam happens in a dream. In the course of any development process there are often stages that, although indispensable for achieving the result, are nonetheless difficult for a person to witness directly. If he sees such stages in all their explicit detail, he cannot perceive the results normally later. Therefore, such critical stages of development must occur while hidden from the person's consciousness.

He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot: Originally, Adam was complete and self-sufficient. But the flip side of self-sufficiency is unwillingness and unreadiness to advance and develop. In order to promote Adam's development, God removed one of his ribs, thus rendering him incomplete, and giving rise to a desire within him to find his missing part – his alter ego.

(22) And the Lord God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman; and He brought her to the man: “Fashioned” here in the Hebrew is *va yiven* – literally, “built,

constructed,” from the Hebrew root *B-N-H*, associated also with the concept of *binah*, “intuition, discernment.” Thus, in this verse the verb *va yiven* can also mean that by creating Eve and bringing her to Adam, God gave Adam an added dimension of understanding. A little later we will discuss the importance of this concept for understanding the Kabbalah’s approach to the relationship between man and woman (see § 8.4).

(23) Then the man said, “This one at last: With “at last,” here Adam himself acknowledges the importance of his previous experiences for appreciating what he is now being given. Now that he is thoroughly convinced that the animals cannot not provide a mate for him, he is able to appreciate the creation of a mate from his very self.

Is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called Woman, for from man was she taken: It is from this initial unity that future compatibility can be created. If Adam’s mate had been taken from a source completely separate and independent of him, that compatibility could not have come about.

This one shall be called Woman, for from man was she taken”: Only at this moment do the concepts of man and woman appear. These go beyond the mere biological differences between the sexes as emphasized in the first Creation story (see Gen. 1:27).

Woman: The Hebrew word *ishah* can mean either “woman” or “wife.”

Adam continues to give names to the entities of the surrounding world, and so he names his mate as well. However, it is not a proper name, but a functional one, similar to Adam’s earlier assessment of the animals with respect to himself. This approach, which perceives Woman only in terms of her function, shows that Adam does not yet see her as an independent personality. In the near future, this mistake will lead to the problem of the tree of knowledge of good and bad.

Only during the process of his expulsion from the garden will Adam perceive his relationship to his wife in a new light, and he will give her the proper name Eve (Chavah).

(24) And clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh: Jewish tradition understands this “clinging” to mean intimate relations, and “become one flesh” as meaning birth of a child. I.e., together they create common flesh – a new human being. According to this interpretation, marriage alone is not “clinging” that makes a couple “one flesh,” and can be dissolved.

In the Christian view, however, the words “so that they become one flesh” are often understood as referring to marriage, and not only to bearing children. This view therefore deems marriage indissoluble.

Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh: This verse uses the same terminology as the previous one, “man” and “woman.” (As already mentioned, *ishah* can mean either “woman” or “wife.”) Thus it continues to express Adam’s awareness of the relationship between himself and his wife.

A straightforward reading of the text sees these words not as a continuation of the direct quote from Adam, but an idea articulated by God: “I, the Almighty, have arranged that a man leaves his parental home, unites with his wife, and bears children with her. This assures continuity of the generations within the human race.”

The Midrash, however, understands these words as spoken by Adam based on his own experience – that immediately after God brought Woman to Adam (Gen. 1: 22), he “clung” to her, i.e., entered into an intimate relationship with her, and they “became one flesh” – she gave birth to a child (Cain). It was then that Adam understood and acknowledged the fact of procreation as the path of human development, which is what he is describing in this verse.

Note too that since there is no gap between cognition and realization in the garden, there is also no gestation period – the interval between “knowing” a spouse and having children. In subsequent sections we will examine this idea in greater detail.

(25) The two of them were naked, the man and his wife, yet they felt no shame: As spouses, they had no reason whatsoever to feel shame at each other’s nakedness. Any such shame they might have felt was shame before God. And in fact, after they partake of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and bad, “then the eyes of both of them were opened and they perceived that they were naked; and ... hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden” (Gen. 3:8).

Accordingly, the Midrash understands this absence of shame at being naked as referring not only to their physical nakedness, but also the psychological aspect – a state of “I have nothing to hide.” And likewise, their shame and their need to be clothed meant that something new had happened that they did indeed need to hide.

Thus, their need to be clothed arose not as the result of their knowledge of good and bad, but because they had violated God’s commandment. So long as they were not guilty of any wrongdoing, they are had no reason to be ashamed and nothing to hide from the world. This was their “nakedness.” But after transgressing, they cannot be fully transparent to the outer world. They need clothes.

§ 4. The Episode of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil

§ 4.1. THE FALL OF MAN: HIS FIRST SIN (3:1-8)

(3:1) Now the serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild beasts that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say: You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?”

(2) The woman replied to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the other trees of the garden.

(3) It is only about fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said: ‘You shall not eat of it or touch it, lest you die.’”

(4) And the serpent said to the woman, “You are not going to die,

(5) but God knows that as soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like divine beings who know good and bad.”

(6) When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable

as a source of wisdom, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate.

(7) Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they perceived that they were naked; and they sewed together fig leaves and made themselves loincloths.

(8) They heard the sound of the Lord God moving about in the garden at the breezy time of day; and the man and his wife hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

(3:1) The serpent: As already noted, the entire Creation story of Genesis is meant to be understood not literally but allegorically. This applies, in particular, to the episode of the serpent and Adam and his wife’s transgression of eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and bad.

One point that is paramount in this regard is that Jewish tradition considers the serpent not a seducer from the outside, but the personification of the “evil inclination” that lurks within every human being. The conversation in the garden with the “serpent” represents the internal dialogue of every person with his or her own passions.

It is not merely a story of seduction and deception. Rather, the story is emphasizing that God created man as a complex and internally contradictory being, because it is those very traits that give man the capacity to develop. And an essential aspect of that complexity is that man is curious – he craves what is forbidden. He is very good at convincing himself of what he wants to believe, and that he should behave badly. All this is very problematic, of course, but necessary for man’s development. And those are the qualities that the serpent personifies – man’s “evil inclination.”

In the Torah’s account of the episode, only the woman speaks directly with the serpent. But, as noted, Adam at this stage still considers his wife an inseparable extension of himself (he does not see her as her own independent person). The world’s first couple there-

fore engages in this dialogue with the serpent together, albeit from the female point of view.

Now the serpent was the shrewdest: Except for a slight difference in vocalization, *arum*, the Hebrew word used here for “shrewd,” is the same as the word for naked, “*arom*.” In all events, both words are spelled the same, they are homonyms. In this chapter that word is used to describe Adam and his wife’s nakedness (Gen. 2:25), and also the serpent’s shrewdness (Gen. 3:1, which immediately follows Gen. 2:25). Thus, the Torah is telling us quite clearly that there is a connection between those two meanings of the word.

As already mentioned, Adam’s nakedness meant, firstly, psychological nakedness. At that point he still had nothing to hide. Because no one posed any threat to Adam, he had no need to adopt a defensive stance. This was, as it were, the kind of “primitive naivete” that leaves a person unprepared for any deception. And therefore, even the simplest trickery (perpetrated by the person’s own inner evil inclination) leads immediately to a negative result – in this case a violation of a Divine command.

Adam and his wife come to understand that such naivete is dangerous (“Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they perceived that they were naked” – Gen. 3:7), because it leaves a person vulnerable to treachery. And so they now understand that they need “clothes.”

It is important to note that while Adam was in the garden, the process of his creation was not yet complete. Adam and his wife became ordinary people in the full sense only after their expulsion from the garden. But here man’s formation is still a work in progress, and he himself participates actively in that process.

Now the serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild beasts that the Lord God had made: He was the shrewdest of all the wild beasts – but not more shrewd than human beings. Although the serpent was ultimately able to “outwit” the humans, this was not a part

of the plan from the outset. And this means that man is capable of resisting the serpent – he can in fact cope with his “evil inclination.”

He said to the woman: The serpent addresses himself not to Adam, but to Adam’s wife. Or, more precisely, he appeals to the feminine side of the world’s first human couple. There are several possible reasons for this:

- (i) The woman is more emotional, and thus easier to persuade.
- (ii) Since Adam’s wife was created after he had already received the commandment not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and bad, she knows of this prohibition only from Adam, not directly from God. She is therefore more apt to disregard its importance.

The woman’s perception of this commandment is itself the first example in human history of a “religious tradition.” It thus incorporates within itself all the attendant shortcomings of tradition, as compared with teachings received directly from God.

“Did God really say: You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?”: The Torah’s presentation here of the serpent’s words is a classic example of the techniques of deception (including also self-deception). This method, which has remained substantially unchanged through the ages, has been the method of choice for deceivers and seducers in every era.

Firstly, the serpent does not explicitly encourage the woman to violate the prohibition. He begins with generally amiable conversation, showing interest in people’s problems, sympathizing with them and expressing, as it were, a genuine desire to help them. His primary tactic is to exaggerate the prohibition in order to make it seem awkward and unnatural. Before the serpent is finished, God is already a ruthless autocrat who forbids people from partaking of the fruit of any and all trees. But at the same time the serpent never says any of this in so many words; he only creates this mood and this image through his adept use of well-phrased leading questions.

The goal of such a provocative dialogue is to force the human to make excuses. As soon as the woman becomes defensive, she will almost certainly err in some detail. The attack then exploits that small mistake so as to discredit and delegitimize the system in its entirety.

(2) The woman replied to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the other trees of the garden: Since the serpent conducts himself like a friend, the woman too responds to him kindly, hesitant to refute his words head-on. She does not say, “All that is a lie,” but formulates her response in positive terms: “The situation is not nearly as bad as you say.” But this desire on her part to speak gently and avoid conflict itself increases the likelihood that she will commit a serious error.

(3) It is only about fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said: ‘You shall not eat of it or touch it, lest you die’ ”: Although she does not identify this tree by name, it is for her “the tree in the middle of the Garden” – at the very center of her attention.

God said: ‘You shall not eat of it or touch it, lest you die’: The fact is that God never forbade touching the tree. The woman is exaggerating the prohibition. Because she is defending herself, she errs and exaggerates.

(4) And the serpent said to the woman, “You are not going to die: In order to demolish the prohibition the serpent must first remove any fear of punishment.

The Midrash adds the following. In order to make his refutation of the Divine word more convincing to the woman, the serpent actually pushed her against the tree. When she touched it and nothing untoward happened, the serpent said: “You stated that touching the tree would cause death, but as you can see, no such thing has happened. And that means that everything else that you were saying is also wrong. You can eat the tree’s fruit as well with no ill effects.” Thus, when the woman added her own strictures to God’s words, this only worked against her.

The meaning of this midrash is that a person’s “evil inclination” quickly detects even the lesser inaccuracies in his position, and seeks, using those errors as examples, to demonstrate that he is wrong about the overall picture as well.

The Midrash is also teaching us not to confuse the essence of a thing with “additions” grafted on to it for its protection. In Jewish tradition (and, incidentally, in many other religious and social frameworks as well), the principle of “building a fence around the law” is very common. The “fence” is a set of supplemental prohibitions designed to distance a person from the possibility of a yet more serious violation of a core precept. The Midrash is not opposed to the concept itself of building that fence around the law, but it is teaching us the importance of distinguishing between the law itself, and the fence built around the law to protect it.

(5) But God knows that as soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like divine beings who know good and bad”: After removing all fear of the consequences of a violation, the serpent must now make the violation itself attractive.

In fact, the serpent spoke the truth. But it was only a partial truth. By eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge, Adam did indeed acquire Divine qualities. But Adam and his wife, by “illicitly acquiring” elevated levels of knowledge, destroyed their ability to cope with the special powers that they possessed in the garden, and thus inexorably doomed themselves to expulsion. The serpent, however, said nothing about that aspect.

Thus, the main deception perpetrated by the serpent on Adam and his wife consisted, essentially, of presenting elements of partial truth as the whole truth. (He spoke of the spiritual qualities that they would acquire by eating the fruit, but he did not inform them what the full consequences would be.)

Throughout the future history of mankind, learning how to deal with this form of deception will be essential to correcting Adam’s

error in the garden. In any situation one must strive to grasp the complete picture, rather than focusing on only its most alluring aspects. We must analyze the full consequence of our actions, and not get carried away by catchy slogans. This is an important element of growth and maturation for every individual, and no less so for humanity as a whole.

Your eyes will be opened: This much is undoubtedly true: a person who has experienced good and bad, and knows the difference between them, sees the world in a completely different way.

And you will be like divine beings: But this is also true: knowledge of good and bad brings a person closer to God. It is important to note that the desire to be like God is one of man's most compelling desires, and the serpent uses this fact to his advantage.

(6) When the woman saw: I.e., she understood and acknowledged the correctness of the serpent's arguments.

That the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom: Invariably, in any object of desire three characteristics are especially attractive to people: that it is tasty, that it is beautiful, and that it is interesting.

She took of its fruit and ate: We might have expected the woman to first discuss the matter with Adam. Such a discussion could have brought to light the very points that the serpent was so careful to hide. But she did not do so.

Engaging in a discussion of relevant issues, even those that at first seem quite "obvious," will very often reveal potential problems, and prevent serious mistakes in judgment.

She also gave some to her husband, and he ate: The English translation here has elided one additional word that appears in the Hebrew – *immah*, "with her." Thus, the literal translation is: "She also gave [some] to her husband *with her*, and he ate."

But "with her" seems superfluous here (which is why the translation has chosen to omit it.) However, we accept as a general principle

that there is no superfluous word (or even letter) in the Torah. It must be assumed that a word that appears superfluous on its face is in fact imparting some additional level of meaning to the text. And so it is in this case.

The Midrash explains: Adam's wife offered Adam the fruit precisely at the moment when he was "with her" – that is, engaged with her in intimate relations. At such a moment, Adam was incapable of rationally discussing the problem that his wife had raised. (As already noted, Adam and his wife began their sexual relationship immediately, even before they had eaten the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and bad.)

But there is another possible interpretation of *immah*, "with her," namely: Adam did not refuse his wife's offer, because he considered the two of them a single, indivisible unit – he was "with her." As noted earlier, Adam at this stage calls her "the woman," i.e., he relates to her and refers to her by function: "Then the man said, 'This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called Woman, for from man was she taken' " (Gen. 2:23). He sees his wife as an extension of himself – flesh of his flesh, like his own hand, say, or leg. They act as a single unit. If she eats the fruit, then he eats "with her," and there is no need for any discussion about it.

According to either of the two interpretations of "with her," the problem is rooted in the fundamental absence of dialogue between Adam and his wife. In terms of modern psychology, Adam and Eve's relationship is based on a "natural" romantic love between "soul mates" who need one another to be complete (as opposed to a conscious love, a relationship that is created in a dialogue – purposefully, decisively, and with intention). Romantic love, or romance, although exalted and extolled by the Romanticism, is by no means seen here as an ideal.

(7) Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they perceived that they were naked ... and made themselves loin-

cloths: The serpent had said that their eyes would be opened, and they would be like divine beings who know good and bad. And both of those points were actually realized. But hardly in the manner that the woman was expecting based on the serpent's words. The "opening of the eyes" led to the shame of nakedness, and the unlawful path of becoming like God led to their expulsion from the garden.

As already noted, they have no reason to be ashamed of physical nudity, since they are husband and wife, and there is no one else with them in the garden. Hence, the "perception of nakedness" mentioned here is about spiritual and psychological, not physical, nakedness.

By partaking of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and bad, they had "eaten" the understanding of good and evil – it entered into them and became an actual part of them. (A little later, using the terminology of the Kabbalah, we will significantly expand on this idea.) The result was that their "eyes were opened" to the nature of good and bad. They experienced the sensation of good and bad – they were able to feel how good can become bad and vice versa. This is the true "opening of the eyes" – the ability to feel and experience the world's complexity and multi-faceted versatility.

At that point they "perceived that they were naked," i.e., psychologically naked with respect to this mixture of good and bad. Previously they had no need to clothe themselves – they conducted themselves openly and trustingly. But now they understood that in a complex world such openness is far too dangerous.

They need clothes, firstly, as a psychological defense, the kind that allows a person to stand in opposition to (i.e., to remain independent of) the world at large. Clothing validates the inviolability of their personal space, and removes them from the realm of the natural world. They become subjects, as it were, and not merely objects.

This need to clothe their psychological nakedness reflects a new awareness of their situation. They now understand that they were far too gullible with respect to the serpent. All this influences their

desire to establish a “psychological defense,” as expressed in the loincloths that they have now made for themselves.

Adam and his wife violated God’s commandment because of the overwhelming sense of unity between them, which rendered any dialogue between them and any discussion of the problem superfluous and therefore impossible. Dialogue is possible only between two distinct interlocutors who still maintain some distance between themselves.

The purpose of the loincloths was to separate them from each other, to give each of them independence and subjectivity. They therefore covered their intimate organs, which was their point of strongest connection.

They sewed together fig leaves: The well-known idiom and image of a fig leaf as a cover of nakedness derives from this verse.

They sewed together fig leaves and made themselves loincloths: This is the first recorded action undertaken by man on his own initiative, with the goal of transforming the surrounding world. Before eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and bad, Adam and his wife fit neatly into the situations and tasks that God (or the serpent) had established for them – i.e., the natural world, both external and internal. But now man’s conflict with God and with nature has given him the impetus for independent creativity.

(8) They heard the sound of the Lord God moving about in the garden: The Hebrew, here translated as “sound,” is *kol*, which more often means “voice.” It was not God moving about, but His voice.

In other words, it was not God Himself passing through the garden, but the dissemination of the Divine voice, i.e., His message – Revelation. The entire period of Adam’s stay in the garden represents the process of human development, an important part of which is dialogue with God.

And the man and his wife hid: It is natural for a human being to “hide from God.” Dialogue with God is always difficult and painful, because it requires a person to examine and correct his shortcomings.

And the man and his wife hid from the Lord God: The verse below (Gen. 3:10) emphasizes that they were hiding because they realized that they were “naked,” and were loath to have an encounter with God in such circumstances. Adam and his wife, after being burnt by their failure to live up to the previous Divine instruction, the prohibition of eating from the tree of knowledge of good and bad, are hardly looking for a new Revelation at this time. They are hiding from it.

After “his eyes were opened,” man’s relationship with God became more complicated. His previous childish attitude was simplistic but understandable: God is the source of everything good and right, and you just have to obey Him. But after a child has gone through a crisis and matured as the result of it, it is no longer easy for him to open up and relate to his parents.

Although Adam and his wife have violated the prohibition, at the same time they feel that they have made spiritual progress – their eyes have been opened. Does this mean that by forbidding them to eat that fruit God has misled them? And if so, how can they now believe in a new Revelation? The complete trust they had put in God seems to them now, in retrospect, very naive. But they have no new and better approach to replace it. The entire episode has thrown them for a loss, and all they can do is hide. A meeting with God is the last thing they want right now.

Among the trees of the garden: Actually, the Hebrew is not *be-toch atzei ha-gan*, “among the trees of the garden,” plural, but *be-toch etz ha-gan* – literally, “among the tree of the garden.” It means, of course, the one special tree – the tree whose fruit they had eaten in violation of God’s commandment.

Adam and his wife hide from God as they delve ever deeper into the problems of knowing good and bad. That is, they ask and probe impenetrable questions about good and bad.

This is the classic method of hiding from God and avoiding a direct encounter with Him. Instead of engaging in dialogue, the person evades and postpones the inevitable, all the while convincing himself that he is well on the road to solving important metaphysical problems that are in fact inherently unsolvable.

§ 4.2. THE TRIAL, THE VERDICT, AND THE SENTENCE (3:9-21)

(9) **The Lord God called out to the man and said to him,
“Where are you?”**

(10) **He replied, “I heard the sound of You in the garden,
and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.”**

(11) **Then He asked, “Who told you that you were naked?
Did you eat of the tree from which I had forbidden you to
eat?”**

(12) **The man said, “The woman You put at my side – she
gave me of the tree, and I ate.”**

(13) **And the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this you
have done!” The woman replied, “The serpent duped me,
and I ate.”**

(14) **Then the Lord God said to the serpent,
“Because you did this,
More cursed shall you be
Than all cattle
And all the wild beasts:
On your belly shall you crawl**

And dirt shall you eat

All the days of your life.

(15) I will put enmity

Between you and the woman,

And between your offspring and hers;

They shall strike at your head,

And you shall strike at their heel.”

(16) And to the woman He said,

“I will make most severe

Your pangs in childbearing;

In pain shall you bear children.

Yet your urge shall be for your husband,

And he shall rule over you.”

(17) To Adam He said, “Because you did as your wife said and ate of the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’

Cursed be the ground because of you;

By toil shall you eat of it

All the days of your life:

(18) Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you.

But your food shall be the grasses of the field;

(19) By the sweat of your brow

Shall you get bread to eat,

Until you return to the ground –

For from it you were taken.

For dust you are,

And to dust you shall return.”

(20) **The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all the living.**

(21) **And the Lord God made garments of skins for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.**

(9) **The Lord God called out to the man and said to him, “Where are you?”**: Literally, the Hebrew *ayekka* means “where are you?” But God’s question to Adam here is not about location. God means: “What is going on with you?” He is calling on Adam to analyze his situation.

Because God wants man to develop and advance, He poses a question that invites and requires introspection. In fact, all of human life is, essentially, a series of such Divine questions.

(10) **He replied: “I heard the sound of You in the garden, And I was afraid:** Here again the literal translation is, “I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid.” Adam does not want to hear God’s voice, to receive a new Revelation. Psychologically he is not prepared for that.

Because I was naked, so I hid”: The Hebrew *ki eirom anochi* includes no actual verb, and is better translated in the present tense: “Because I am naked.” (Past tense would be, *ki eirom hayiti*, “for I was naked.”)

Although Adam and his wife are now wearing loincloths, he continues to consider himself naked. This means that although the loincloths were, psychologically speaking, sufficient clothing in the interior of the garden, they were insufficient for conversing with God.

An encounter with God requires a person to be seriously “clothed,” that is, it demands an elevated sense of one’s own personality and independence. Adam felt that he was ill-prepared in that respect – that mere “loincloths” were not sufficient clothing for receiving Revelation.

I was naked, so I hid: Adam feels that an encounter with God at this time is a real threat to him. If he is not sufficiently clothed – i.e., if he is not protected as a personality – that encounter and that Revelation can destroy him.

This is true in other situations as well. A person who is not prepared to meet God will sooner succumb in that experience than advance.

Likewise, mankind's overall lack of preparedness for such a meeting with the Divine is the reason that God in our world remains hidden, never making His presence overt.

(11) Then He asked: "Who told you that you were naked?: God is asking Adam: "What makes you think that nakedness is a problem?"

Did you eat of the tree from which I had forbidden you to eat?": God continues to pose questions that are designed to help Adam come to an understanding of his situation.

(12) The man said: "The woman You put at my side – she gave me of the tree, and I ate": Instead of answering God's question, and thereby taking responsibility for what has happened, Adam passes the buck, as it were, betraying his excessive dependence on his wife.

The woman You put at my side: This detail is extraneous, and completely irrelevant for answering the question that was asked. It demonstrates Adam's lack of gratitude to the Almighty: a gift graciously bestowed is blamed as the source of serious problems.

Adam's words also express an idea that is quite prevalent in our times as an excuse for denying responsibility. Namely: the criminal is not to blame – he was motivated (even compelled) by his circumstances to commit the crime. The fault for the crime committed lies not with the criminal himself, but only with his environment and with society.

(13) And the Lord God said to the woman: “What is this you have done!”: By appealing to the woman separately, God is emphasizing her independence as a personality in her own right.

The woman replied: “The serpent duped me, and I ate”: Another possible translation is, “The serpent seduced me, and I ate.” The woman is saying: “The serpent made it look so attractive that I could not possibly resist.”

The serpent is too important to the woman, almost central to her world. This will require a correction, to be achieved in the process of the expulsion from the garden.

(14) Then the Lord God said to the serpent: In the preceding verses God gave Adam and his wife each their turn to speak, and to offer some defense of their actions. But He gives the serpent no such opportunity. The serpent is not a distinct personality; it merely represents man’s inner drives and aspirations. God therefore does not question the serpent, but instead proceeds immediately to pronouncing the serpent’s verdict and sentence.

“Because you did this, more cursed shall you be than all cattle and all the wild beasts: If we understand the serpent not as an ordinary animal, but as a personification of man’s evil inclination, then we should understand the expression “more cursed shall you be than all cattle and all the wild beasts” to mean “more cursed than all other human passions.” At the very beginning of this story (Gen. 3:1), we were told that the serpent (i.e., the evil inclination) “was the shrewdest of all the wild beasts that the Lord God had made.” That is, more cunning than all other passions. And here likewise the evil inclination is “cursed” (i.e., its status is reduced) in comparison with all other passions.

On your belly shall you crawl and dirt shall you eat all the days of your life: Since the woman has stated that she was unable to resist the arguments of the serpent, the situation changes such that

conversations with the serpent become impossible (or at least much less likely).

Says the Midrash: “Previously the serpent had legs, but now the Almighty has deprived it of those.” At the beginning of the story the serpent conversed with the woman; that is, it was on the level with humans. But now the situation is changing. The serpent, and the evil inclination it represents, is at the bottom, in terms of its position (“on belly”) and also the food (“dirt”) that nourishes it.

(15) I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; they shall strike at your head, and you shall strike at their heel”: In the garden initially there was a dialogue between man and his evil inclination. But that dialogue failed: human weakness proved decisive, and the struggle ended in man’s defeat.

God therefore now transforms the relationship between the man and the serpent into a conflict, because the overall effect of that conflict will be to protect man from the serpent’s influence. On the battlefield one tries to kill the enemy, not to enter into dialogue with him.

This is a necessary measure, but also a major loss for all. Instead of entering into dialogue with his evil inclination, man must now fight to suppress it. And of course such a war cannot be won.

In the course of his future development, man, by his own efforts, in order to return to the level he formerly occupied in the garden of Eden, will need to overcome this state of war and learn to engage in constructive dialogue with his “evil inclination.” In the modern world, a significant part of psychology and cultural studies is directed toward overcoming just that conflict, and searching for such a dialogue.

(16) And to the woman He said, “... Yet your urge shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you”: The woman decided to eat the fruit after conversing with the serpent, without consulting

Adam. That is, her connection with the serpent was more meaningful to her than her connection with Adam. Her correction therefore lies in strengthening her psychological dependence on her husband, in order to weaken the dominance of the serpent.

However, this dependence of woman on man is not positive overall. It was established very early in human history as a necessary measure. But in order for humanity to rise again to its former level in the garden of Eden, this dependence must be overcome. That will happen in the long process of the development of civilization, including the development of psychology, and advances in the structure of society.

(16) And to the woman He said, “I will make most severe your pangs in childbearing: This too is an aspect of strengthening the connection between women, family, and children. That which is achieved only with great difficulty is incomparably more greatly valued and appreciated.

Likewise, the challenges that will arise after the expulsion from the garden are a necessary measure for the early stages of human history. For humanity to return to the level of the garden of Eden, the difficulties of pregnancy and the pain of childbirth must be overcome. In the process of the development of civilization, this happens gradually through advances in medical science.

(17) To Adam He said, “Because you did as your wife said ... cursed be the ground because of you; by toil shall you eat of it all the days of your life: The woman’s ordeal entails difficulty in pregnancy and childbirth, but Adam’s hardship is connected with feeding himself and his family. In modern terms – earning a livelihood.

By eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and bad at his wife’s urging, Adam demonstrated excessive dependence on her – that his “nourishment” derived, as it were, completely from her. God therefore reorients Adam to being properly sustained by the

earth – surmounting agricultural obstacles in order to grow crops. By overcoming these difficulties his position as head of the family is reinforced, and he becomes less dependent on his wife.

(18) But your food shall be the grasses of the field: Here man is commanded to remain a vegetarian. But he failed to uphold this principle and took to eating animals. After the Flood, God will endorse that practice (Gen. 9:3).

(19) By the sweat of your brow shall you get bread to eat: As already noted, even in the garden Adam was expected to work (see Gen. 2:15). But only after the expulsion did he have to work “by the sweat of his brow.” This underscores the essential point that Adam’s work in the garden consisted not of physical work, but intellectual endeavors.

In the garden there was sufficient understanding and knowledge such that a command, as soon as it was properly expressed, was in the material world as good as fulfilled. But now man must not only understand what is correct behavior – he must bring it to fruition himself.

However, requiring Adam to engage in physical labor is a compulsory measure enforced by the Almighty. The early history of mankind required it, because only in its confrontation with the material world can spiritual development take place. If, however, man is to rise again to the level of the garden of Eden, he must eventually transcend this need to “work by the sweat of his brow.” That is, civilization must ascend to the level of achievement where man can transform the material world through the power of his understanding, without any actual physical effort.

Until you return to the ground – for from it you were taken. For dust you are, and to dust you shall return”: At the moment of their expulsion from the garden Adam and his wife become mortal. The entire future development of civilization – in science and

technology, and also in the humanitarian realm – is targeted at finding a means to overcoming human mortality.

(20) The man named his wife Eve: The world knows Adam’s wife as Eve, of course. But it is important to note that Adam gave his wife a personal name only at this moment, as they are being expelled from the garden of Eden. Until now she was known only functionally and impersonally as “Adam’s wife,” or just “the woman.”

Only now does Adam begin to perceive his wife as an independent personality. Thus Adam, of his own accord, and without direct instruction from God, is already beginning to correct his mistakes.

Eve: In Hebrew, *Chavah* – literally, “giver of life.” The essence of this name is that by this time she has already given birth to a child. (For more on this point see the commentary on Gen. 4:1 below.)

Because she was the mother of all the living: The straightforward meaning is that Eve is the mother of the entire human race, because all people who have ever lived were and are Eve’s descendants.

However, we can also understand this verse as saying that Eve is the mother of every living thing. In this second Creation story the entire world exists only for man and in connection with him. The birth of Adam’s descendants is therefore the reason for the existence of every form of life in the world.

(21) And the Lord God made garments of skins for Adam and his wife: Adam and his wife had already made loincloths for themselves (Gen. 3:7), which insulated them from the outside world and gave them a sense of psychological security. But those loin-cloths were not sufficient to enable the couple to engage in dialogue with God.

Moreover, Adam and Eve are now gradually transitioning into a society. Social life in the full sense requires a high degree of separation between individuals, and for that loincloths are not enough.

Garments of skins: In the Hebrew, “skins” appears here in the singular – *`or*, “skin, hide, or leather.” Opinions vary in Jewish tradition as to the meaning of the word *`or* here – whether these garments were made of a material similar to animal skin, *or* of a material like that “which grows on animal skin,” i.e., God made for them woolen garments. Or, God now gave them skin, that is, their own human skin, meaning that until then Adam and Eve were not corporal beings in the full human sense. In all events, the garments that God made for Adam and Eve were real and substantial.

(However, there is even an opinion that these were “garments made from light.” The Hebrew words for “skin” and “light” are very close – *`or* and *or*, respectively – which in European pronunciation of Hebrew are usually not distinguished at all.)

And clothed them: Thus, man’s efforts to create clothing for himself, which at first he did at his own initiative and as the result of his sin, are now confirmed from Above.

* * *

Question: are we to believe that Adam and his wife’s situation in the garden of Eden, being completely naked as they were, was the ideal?

Answer: no, nothing of the kind. That state was by no means ideal, but only the starting point from which their further development had to proceed. The goal of that development is not to revert to the garden, the starting point, but to return to Eden, which represents a new stage of development that will continue from there. Clothing is one aspect of that development.

§ 4.3. ADAM AND EVE ARE BANISHED
FROM THE GARDEN (3:22-24)

(22) **And the Lord God said, “Now that the man has become like one of us, knowing good and bad, what if he should stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever!”**

(23) **So the Lord God banished him from the garden of Eden, to till the soil from which he was taken.**

(24) **He drove the man out, and stationed east of the garden of Eden the cherubim and the fiery ever-turning sword, to guard the way to the tree of life.**

(22) And the Lord God said: “Now that the man has become like one of us, knowing good and bad: The “us” means God and man. The Almighty here confirms the words of the serpent: “As soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like divine beings” (Gen. 3:5).

Thus, eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and bad did actually advance mankind. But that advancement was achieved through improper means, and therefore now requires correction through Adam and Eve’s expulsion from the garden.

What if he should stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life: Until now, the tree of life was not forbidden to man. (Only the tree of knowledge of good and bad was forbidden. All other trees were permitted.) But now that man has violated the commandment, it has become necessary to separate him from the tree of life.

And eat, and live forever!”: To live forever a person must eat from the tree of life repeatedly, and not just once. But because expulsion from the garden blocks all access to that tree, man now becomes mortal. Although awareness of his own mortality creates a fundamental existential problem for man, it is this problem that

motivates a person to realize and acknowledge his mistakes, and to correct them through repentance.

(23) So the Lord God banished him from the garden of Eden: The verb used here is *shallach*, literally “to send forth.” The root *SH-L-CH* may have positive connotations – to send a person on a commission for his own benefit. This aspect of meaning suggests that Adam and Eve’s expulsion from the garden of Eden was not a punishment, but a means of correction.

To till the soil: In the garden, knowledge and understanding were themselves enough to change the world. This afforded man enormous opportunities, but it also alienated him from reality and led to serious errors. In order to be able to correct himself, man is now faced with the reality of having to physically cultivate the land.

(24) He drove the man out: Here (compared to Gen. 3:23 above) a different verb is used – *garesh*, “expel, drive out” – which has exclusively negative associations. Adam is being sent away not only for his correction, but in order to deny him access to the garden.

And stationed east of the garden of Eden the cherubim: A cherub (plural *keruvim* or cherubim) is a kind of angel that straddles the boundary between different worlds. Here the cherubim separate the garden of Eden from the ordinary world.

In Exodus (25:18, and also elsewhere), the cherubim are described as an essential element in the structure of the Temple. In that case their purpose is to separate the sacred space of the Temple from the ordinary world. We will discuss the cherubim in more detail in our commentary to the given passages of the book of Exodus.

The cherubim and the fiery ever-turning sword: A fiery (luminous) ever-turning sword is a ray – a straight line – that, when spinning, has the appearance of a circle.

In the Kabbalah, a ray (*kav*) is the manifestation of Divine Providence that advances the world toward its goal, while a circle (*iggul*) represents the natural world. Thus, the ray that has the appearance of a circle as described in this verse is the hand of Providence externally disguised as nature – the ordinary course of events.

To guard the way to the tree of life: Guarding the way to the tree of life means that Divine providence is not detectable in the material world, because it is disguised as ordinary, natural processes.

Any person who can transcend this safeguard, i.e., who is able to detect “the ray behind the circle” – the guiding ray of Providence behind the mask of the natural course of events – will be able to pass through the barrier separating man from the tree of life. And thus can one overcome death.

§ 4.4. THE SIXTH, SEVENTH, AND EIGHTH DAYS OF CREATION

Adam’s exile from the garden meant that he became mortal, i.e., he became human in the conventional sense of the word. Thus, the moment of that expulsion is the completion of the creation of man and of the creation of the world.

When we reconcile the first and second Creation stories, we understand that Adam’s short-lived stay in the garden took place on the sixth of the seven days of Creation. And the expulsion happened at the end of the sixth day, just before the onset of Shabbat, at the moment when God was completing the transformation of the universe.

The first day of the “normal,” ordinary functioning of the universe, when the Creation is already complete, is the Shabbat of the first Creation story. Adam and Eve pass this day outside the garden.

As noted earlier, in the first Creation story each of the days ends with the phrase “And there was evening, and there was morning, a

[day number]th day.” But the description of the seventh day, Shabbat, does not end with any such words. Thus, the seventh day seems to have never reached its completion.

Indeed, the Midrash explains: “God’s Sabbath, on which the Almighty rests and refrains from remaking the universe, has not ended. It continues on. It is the very world we are living in.

According to this approach:

- On the sixth day humanity was initially created and assumed its basic form.
- The seventh day, God’s Sabbath, represents the entire history of human civilization, which continues even until today. The number seven is associated with the cycle of nature, as we find also in other aspects of the Torah.
- The eighth day is not mentioned in the Creation story, although the concept does appear later in the Torah. It symbolizes a transition to the “supra-natural” level – the level at which man’s connection to God becomes overt, and is no longer hidden (as it is for us today in this natural, ordinary world). Tradition associates the attainment of this level with those commandments in which the “eighth day” is mentioned – for example, circumcision (Gen. 17:12) and the Temple service (Lev. 9:1). The eighth day is understood as representing the World to Come, the world in which man will engage in open dialogue with God. The entire history of mankind, taking place on the “seventh day,” is seen as preparation for humanity’s transition to that “eighth day.”

It is interesting and important to note that Jewish chronology, which reckons its years from the creation of the world (*anno mundi*), begins its count not from the first but from the last day of Creation; i.e., that count does not include the first six days. The decisive initial moment in Jewish chronology is the moment that the creation

of man became complete – the moment of his expulsion from the garden.

According to the Jewish calendar, the current year (in which this is being written, 2020 CE) is the 5780th year of man’s existence within the interval that is “God’s Sabbath.”

§ 5. The Two Types of Man

§ 5.1. TWO PROJECTIONS THAT MUST BE RECONCILED

Thus, the book of Genesis opens with two stories about the creation of the universe and of man:

- (i) The first story (Gen. 1:1-2:3) describes in detail the seven days of Creation, giving each day (i.e., each aspect of Creation) approximately equal space, and ending with a description of the Sabbath day.
- (ii) The second story (Gen. 2:4-3:24) speaks only briefly of the creation of heaven, earth, and plants. It then goes on to describe in detail the creation of man and the episode of the garden of Eden. The second story ends with man's expulsion from the garden.

These two stories give us two “projections” – two different views of one and the same event. The Adams of the first and second stories represent two sides of man's inner essence. The Torah submits these two views for our analysis, and wants us to understand the conflict between them.

Each of the stories has been analyzed above in isolation. Let's now see whether we can reconcile and unify them.

In our comparative analysis of the two stories of Creation that follows, we largely follow the ideas of Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik, a foremost Jewish religious philosopher of the second half of the twentieth century, and leader of the American Modern orthodox movement. However, some elements of the analysis are our own original contributions.

§ 5.2. DOMINANT MAN, COGNITIVE MAN

One of the first differences between the two Creation stories that command our attention concerns the question of the independent value of the external universe – the world in which God places man.

In the first of the two stories, each day of Creation is given approximately the same space and level of detail. The sixth day, and man's appearance on that day, receive roughly the same amount of coverage as each of the other days, when the dry land and the seas, the heavenly bodies, and the plants and animals appeared. This means that from the first story's point of view the world has independent value. Since it is given a place in the Torah, it is quite reasonable to conclude that the universe is valuable in God's eyes. In this sense, we can say that the first story is cosmocentric.

But in the second story, the situation is different. Only two or three lines describe the creation of the greater world (Gen. 2:4-5). The story consists primarily of details of the creation of man. This means that from the point of view of the second story, only human beings have any real value. As no other part of the universe merited a detailed description, we conclude that those parts have only incidental significance at best, being only a proving ground for perfecting

the human soul. The universe apart from man has no inherent value *per se*. In this sense, the second story is anthropocentric.

In the first story, Adam is created “in the image and likeness of God,” and is tasked with ruling over nature (Gen. 1:26). Man is king, and all of nature is his kingdom. He realizes his human value and his Divine potential by transforming the world. Creative and active, man builds and promotes civilization. In this respect he is likened to the Almighty, the Creator of the universe. Thus, a person who creates and transforms does so not merely to satisfy his own practical needs, but as the fulfillment of a Divine mandate. It is therefore proper and expected that we experience nothing less than true religious delight when we witness the achievements of science and of human civilization that are transforming the world.

And yet, the foundation of man’s greatness is the grandeur of the world itself, and the enormous value embodied within it. Clearly, the true dignity of a king lies not in his own power or wisdom, but in the greatness of the kingdom that flourishes under his rule and because of it.

The second story also emphasizes Adam’s own Divine origins. About that the first story says, “The Lord God formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being” (Gen. 2:7). But the second story views the Divine greatness of man differently. Nothing is said here about man’s dominion over the natural world. For the second story this is not essential. The second Adam is by no means the king of outer space, which holds no interest for him. He is a world unto himself, and within himself. God commands him “to eat of every tree of the garden” (Gen. 2:16), that is, to incorporate the entire universe into his own being. He is concerned not with dominating the world around him, but with the transformation of his own soul, the knowledge of good and bad.

In contrast to the first story, in which God creates the entire universe before creating man, and that world is therefore independent of him and valuable even in and of itself, the universe of the second Creation story exists only as an adjunct to man. “No shrub of the field was yet on earth and no grasses of the field had yet sprouted, because the Lord God had not sent rain upon the earth and there was no man to till the soil” (Gen. 2:5).

In the first story there is Adam and the world. But in the second story – Adam and the garden. The world exists on its own, independently of man. But the garden exists only for man’s sake, so that he may eat its fruits and develop and advance himself.

The universe of the first story is immense. Adam is appointed ruler of the natural world, but achieving true dominance over the continents and the seas, over the sun and stars, will require extensive labor on his part – enormous efforts in the scientific, technical, and social spheres to enable civilization to develop.

Moreover, in the first story God gives Adam no limiting commandments. Adam is limited only by reality itself.

In contrast, the circumstances of the second story are quite different. There is no immense universe for man to dominate – an extremely difficult task at best. In the garden, all trees are accessible; their fruits sit only an arm’s length away. But God suddenly commands man to restrain himself in the presence of one of those trees and not dare to taste its fruit. This entails no physical difficulty whatsoever, but it demands supreme moral effort, and in the end that restraint proves no less difficult than the sum total of all the scientific and technical efforts of building civilization, as in the first story.

Thus, the Torah speaks of two types of *Homo divinus* (Divine man). Those two realize their divinity in completely different directions.

In the first Creation story, man is adam *ha-kovesh*, the dominating “man of power,” *Homo dominans*. The Almighty entrusts him with

the task of “filling the earth and mastering it” (Gen. 1:28). He therefore looks outward, focusing on his ability to transform the world.

But in the second story, man is *adam ha-ochel*, an “eating, consuming man,” who consumes and assimilates into himself all knowledge about the world, a “knowing man,” *Homo cognoscens*. He aspires to be an *ochel*, “eater, consumer,” because the Almighty has commanded him to know the world by eating the fruits of all the trees of the garden. His entire life is focused on the process of cognition in all its various stages. He seeks to “eat” everything, to absorb and contain the whole world within himself. His attentions are turned inward to his own experiences and sensations.

§ 7.3. “HOMO” AS GENUS AND “HOMO” AS INDIVIDUAL

The first Creation story describes Adam as a member of the human race. His female counterpart is created simultaneously with him, and the two of them are instructed to “be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it” (Gen. 1:28). These processes are interconnected, because “filling the earth” and “mastering” it cannot be achieved by an individual, but only when all of mankind as a unified race embraces that task.

“Man” in the expression “man as master of nature” does not mean an individual human being, but humanity as a whole. Therefore, although Adam of the first Creation story is a self-sufficient personality created in the image and likeness of God, he can fully realize the purpose of his human existence only within the framework of humanity as a unified society.

The second story, on the other hand, describes man as an autonomous individual focused on his sensations and experiences. Adam’s wife is not created simultaneously with him; he receives her only

after experiencing a certain episode of personal loneliness (Gen. 2:18). More precisely, Adam gets a wife only after a personal crisis, in which he unsuccessfully tries to find a mate among the animals (Gen. 2:20).

Moreover, the second story says nothing explicit about the importance of bearing children, but alludes to it only obliquely within the context of the phases of general human experiences that Adam and his wife also undergo (Gen. 2:24). The names of their offspring and a detailed account of their children's lives appear only later, after the expulsion (Gen. 4:1 ff.).

Adam of the first story was created as one component of a harmonious family unit, as a member of humankind and nature as a whole. He cannot be alone, because being alone is antithetical to his very essence.

But second Adam is presented as inherently lonely and conflicted. Crises of personality are an integral aspect of his humanity.

§ 7.4. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ELOHIM, “GOD,” AND ADONAI, “THE LORD”

In the first story the Almighty is always *Elohim*, “God.” The second story refers to God as *Adonai Elohim*, “the Lord God”.

As already noted, a name is not merely a handle for referring to an object. Just as significant, if not more so, is the use of a name to define the nature of the connection that humans establish with it.

Almost everything in our everyday experience has not just one name, but several, and the names of persons are especially numerous. We variously identify a person by given name, surname, nickname, title, and so on. Different names and types of names thus represent different types of relationships with the objects, persons, or ideas so named.

Likewise, the different names by which we refer to God are indicative not of differences in the essence of God himself, which is immutable and never varies, but of the different types of connection that humans create and maintain with God; i.e., the different ways that the Almighty's presence manifests in our world. When certain verses in the Torah refer to God by names specific to those passages, the Divine names so used indicate the types of relationships between man and God that are operating in those passages.

*** * * The name *Elohim*, "God" * * ***

The Divine name *Elohim* encountered in the first story is by no means specific to the Almighty. Just as in the western vocabulary words such as "god," "gods," and "divine," do not necessarily refer to the Almighty – that is, to the One God of the Jewish scriptures – so can the Hebrew word *elohim* refer, more generally, to a variety of "higher powers," including even "other" (i.e., false) gods, and even more generally, to magnitude, power, and judgment. Thus, *elohim* is, as it were, not a proper noun, but a common, descriptive noun.

Grammatically, *Elohim* is a plural noun. But when used to refer to the Almighty, it takes a singular verb, e.g., *bara Elohim* (Gen. 1:1) – literally, "Divine [powers] created." According to Jewish tradition, this grammatical anomaly expresses, as it were, "a plurality of higher forces acting in unison." The harmony of the laws of nature and the beauty of the surrounding world is the manifestation of the Almighty in the attribute of *Elohim* – God as the "soul of the universe," responsible for the natural order.

Elohim designates also the God Who manifests in the law – both natural and moral law. Moreover, *Elohim* is the God Who proclaims and exacts judgment, because judgment means, essentially, actualizing the law.

In summation then, Tradition understands the Divine name *Elohim* as “the name of Divinity as manifested in judgment, law, and order.” But it also applies to other worldly forces that govern nature, law, and order.

But all these attributes are “cold” and detached with respect to mankind. According to this worldview, a human being is just one component of the universe (who dominates, however, all other creatures and creations), and the same laws that govern the other elements of the universe govern humankind as well. Man does not stand out from the world as something fundamentally different. This man is the Adam of the first Creation story. And that is why God in that story is called *Elohim*.

***** Adonai (Y-H-W-H, the Tetragrammaton), “Lord” *****

But unlike *Elohim*, God’s name *Adonai* (the Tetragrammaton, “the four-letter name,” *Y-H-W-H*) refers exclusively to the Almighty. I.e., it is the name of God’s that is reserved for Him alone.

According to Jewish tradition, this four-letter name is “ineffable,” that is, “unpronounceable.” Accordingly, in manuscripts and printed texts of the Torah the letters of this name never have their own vowels. Rather, the four-letter name is always vocalized, if at all, with vowels borrowed from either *Adonai* (most common) or *Elohim* (less common).

Grammatically, the combination of the four Hebrew letters *yod*, *he*, *vav*, *he* (*Y-H-W-H*) can be seen as a kind of fusion of the past, present and future tenses of the Hebrew verb *H-Y-H*, “to be” (which is why this name is sometimes translated as “The Eternal”). However, it would be better to consider this name a kind of unique and special “hieroglyph,” rather than an ordinary Hebrew word derived through normal grammatical rules.

When addressing the Almighty (in prayer, or when the Torah is read publicly), this name is pronounced as if written *Adonai*, (“[my] Lord”), and from this substitution comes the common translation of this word as “Lord” in English, or its equivalent in European languages.

But when in Hebrew this name is used in the “third person” – i.e., when it is used not to address God directly, or in formal prayer or reading of scripture, but when Jews refer to or speak *about* God, e.g., in discussions of the meaning of the prayers or of general Torah concepts – it is traditionally pronounced *Ha-Shem*, which means, simply, “The Name.” (That is, “the name I am not allowed to enunciate here, but surely you know which and Whose name I mean.”)

The Tetragrammaton *Y-H-W-H* speaks of the Almighty as a “Personality” Who stands above and outside of the natural world of human experience. It is a level of Divinity that exceeds the level of *Elohim*. It is the exaltation of God above nature, law, and order, and the transcendence of these earthly categories. It represents the miraculous and the supernatural, Divine grace, and paradox.

A person’s connection with such a level of Divinity is expressed in the concept of *berit* – “covenant, union, pact.” A covenant is a special contract between God and man whose purpose is to transcend and surmount natural elements.

Thus, *Elohim* and the Tetragrammaton *Y-H-W-H* represent two “opposite” manifestations of the Almighty.

Elohim is the Almighty as the God of Nature, Who works through the natural order of things. In this mode God’s connection with man is as with any other part of the world, through nature. It is the name that the Torah uses to refer to God in the first Creation story.

Conversely, the Tetragrammaton refers to the Almighty as the God of the Covenant, Who exceeds the natural, Who transcends nature. This is God’s name in the second Creation story.

The combination of both levels of Divinity is expressed in the phrase *Adonai Elohim*, “Lord God.” It means: “The Almighty Who engages in personal dialogue with man, but is manifested in the harmonious functioning of the laws of nature and human experience.”

§ 7.5. THE TREES OF KNOWLEDGE
AND OF LIFE AS RELEVANT ONLY TO ADAM
OF THE SECOND STORY

The tree of knowledge and the tree of life, while centrally important to the second Creation story, are not mentioned at all in the first story. This means that these trees are critical to second Adam, but are of no interest to first Adam.

First Adam, who dominates the world, considers himself firstly an integral part of the human race. He perceives himself as one of the elements of humanity. He is therefore concerned primarily not with personal immortality, but with the immortality of his species – perpetuating himself in his descendants and followers. Personal death for him amounts to nothing more than tearing just one of the millions of threads in a fabric. Although, like any living being (that is, at a purely biological level), he too fears death, the problem of individual immortality is not critical to him.

Accordingly, the tree of life, which confers individual immortality, is not a driving passion for “dominant Adam,” and nothing is said about it in the first story.

Nor does Adam of the first story have any passion for knowledge of good and bad. As a ruler, he is quite pragmatic with respect to matters of knowledge: he needs to know only as much as is required

to properly manage the world. It is a scientific approach. Knowledge has to be “operational.”

But knowledge of good and bad is a completely different kind of knowledge. It is essential knowledge, vital for the development of one's own soul, but by no means of pragmatic importance. It has no “practical application.” Therefore, first Adam has no interest in such knowledge.

But for second Adam the situation is quite different. The tree of knowledge and the tree of life are at the very center of the garden – i.e., they are the center of attraction for everything that he is and aspires to.

For second Adam knowledge is important *per se*, irrespective of its application. Cognition is the expansion of his inner world, and this in itself is valuable to him. He is concerned with the development of his inner world exclusively; “pragmatic” knowledge for correcting the outside world is of no interest to him. He is preoccupied with eternal, essential, unsolvable problems, especially the question of knowledge of good and bad.

For *Homo cognoscens*, personal immortality too is critical, because what he values most is his inner world, and upon his death that world will cease to exist. Death for him is not merely the severing of just one of millions of threads in a fabric. Rather, it is nothing less than the collapse and disappearance of the entire universe.

§ 7.6. A SYSTEMATIC SUMMARY
OF THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN
THE TWO STORIES

We can thus formulate the following outline of the differences between the two Creation stories:

Dominant Man <i>Adam ha-kovesh</i> <i>Homo dominans</i>	Cognitive Man <i>Adam ha-ochel</i> <i>Homo cognoscens</i>
The first Creation story is cosmocentric.	The second Creation story is anthropocentric.
Each of the seven days deals with one aspect of Creation, and equal space is given to all.	The entire story is focused on man. Other aspects of Creation are mentioned only briefly.
The world has independent, objective value, irrespective of man.	Man is the only true value. The external world has no independent value; it is only a proving ground for man's internal development.
Man dominates the world around him.	Man is "a world unto himself."
Man is portrayed as representing the entire human genus,	Man is portrayed as a distinct, individual personality,

<p>and man and woman are therefore created simultaneously.</p> <p>First, the story speaks of the importance of bearing children (“Be fertile and increase”), and only then about realizing human potential (“fill the earth and master it”).</p>	<p>and Adam is therefore created alone (and lonely).</p> <p>First, he is tasked with realizing his human potential (“Of every tree of the garden you must eat” – alternate translation). Only then, after experiencing the crisis of loneliness, is he given a mate. The only mention of childbearing is an oblique allusion.</p>
<p>The male-female relationship is a partnership for creating a family and bearing children, the foundation of human existence and advancement.</p>	<p>The relationship between man and woman is that she is a “a fitting helper” (or “helper-opponent”) for him. This facilitates his proper personal development, man’s knowledge of himself, and man and woman’s knowledge of each other.</p>
<p>Because every person considers himself, most importantly, a part of humanity, he is more concerned with the immortality of the entire human race than with his own personal immortality.</p>	<p>Because every person considers himself, most importantly, an individual personality, he is very concerned with his personal immortality. The question of humanity as a whole is not even considered.</p>

<p>The path that humanity embraces is what is most important to every human being, because that is the continuation of his own existence.</p>	<p>Every human being’s personal world is the most important thing to him. Other people and even all of humanity are not his world, but different worlds beyond his.</p>
<p>The emphasis is on pragmatic knowledge, because human realization consists in transforming the world, and pragmatic knowledge is conducive to and necessary for that.</p>	<p>The emphasis is on the non-pragmatic knowledge of good and bad, because human realization consists in advancing and developing one’s soul.</p>
<p>Man’s world is the entire universe. As such, it has no specially designated center.</p>	<p>Man’s environment is a garden – a separate, small corner of the universe. And it has a well-defined center – the tree of knowledge of good and bad and the tree of life.</p>
<p>Man lives in harmony with his family and with the world. There are no explicit, restrictive commandments that he must observe.</p>	<p>Man is lonely. He lives in an inherently contradictory world, as the most alluring fruit is the very fruit he is forbidden to eat.</p>

<p>The Almighty is called <i>Elohim</i> – “the God of Nature.” Man’s encounter with God happens through nature, law, and order.</p>	<p>The Almighty is called <i>Adonai Elohim</i> – “the God of the Covenant, as manifested through nature.” Man’s encounter with God happens <i>beyond</i> nature – through the supernatural, Divine grace, and paradox.</p>
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It is important to note that both Adams are God-like. Each embodies one of the two aspects of Divinity: man who dominates the world, and man as “an entire world within himself.”

To come closer to God, and to become like Him, every person must combine and integrate both of those aspects. We must walk on two legs, so to speak, alternately advancing each leg in turn – domination over the world on the one hand, and inner advancement and enrichment of our souls on the other. In the larger sense, these two aspects correspond to the technical and humanitarian spheres of civilization. Any attempt to advance in only one direction to the detriment of the other, to treat them not as adjuncts but as opposing forces – regardless of which of the two directions is given prominence – will not lead to an acceleration of progress, but will amount to “throwing one leg too far forward.” The person will lose his balance and will very soon fall.

And in fact, that is exactly what happened to man in the episode of the tree of knowledge of good and bad, which we will consider in greater detail below.

§ 8. The Creation of the Universe and the Structure of the *Sefirot*

§ 8.1. THE CONCEPT OF THE TEN *SEFIROT*

As noted in the preface to this volume, this *Bible Dynamics* commentary is heavily influenced by Kabbalistic ideas. Although we have not used the terminology of the Kabbalah in the earlier parts of the commentary, to make further progress in understanding the Creation story we must now do precisely that.

We will introduce Kabbalistic terminology only gradually, as required to shed light on the text of the Torah and its meaning.

* * *

The foundation of the Kabbalah's conceptual apparatus is the ten *Sefirot*. These are ten fundamental parameters into which any integral system can be decomposed, be it the universe (macrocosm), or man (microcosm), or the Jewish people, or any other self-contained, integral system of any size or scale.

Using the language of the *Sefirot* makes it possible to view the world around us differently, to see things that we did not notice

before. One goal of this commentary on the book of Genesis is to allow the reader to experience this new perception at a basic level at least.

Needless to say, our presentation of such complex ideas must be imprecise and only approximate. But we hope that it will serve as a worthy introduction – only the first step in the reader’s advancement toward a deeper and fuller understanding of this far-reaching area of knowledge.

* * *

Each *Sefirah* (literally “counting,” plural *Sefirot*) is “a distinct and bounded aspect of Divine manifestation”, which (unlike the Divinity as a whole, which is infinite) can be reckoned and described.

To name only a few examples of such “bounded aspects of Divine manifestation”: Will, Illumination, Understanding, Grace, Justice, and Beauty. All of these are Divine and immensely significant, but none of them encompasses the Divine manifestation in its entirety.

We can think of the *Sefirot* as a palette of colors with which God draws the universe and governs it. Each *Sefirah* is one of the colors in the palette.

Just as white light (sunlight) can be decomposed into a full spectrum of distinct and “finite” colors, and a complex picture can then be painted with them, so does each separate and distinct *Sefirah* stand out from the Almighty’s infinite light.

The *Sefirot* are the basic elements of the spiritual structure of the universe, parameters of the Divine governance of the world. And man’s own internal structure can likewise be seen as consisting of these same *Sefirot*, since man, after all, is created in the image and likeness of God. (Every human being, through introspection, will find each of the ten *Sefirot* within himself.)

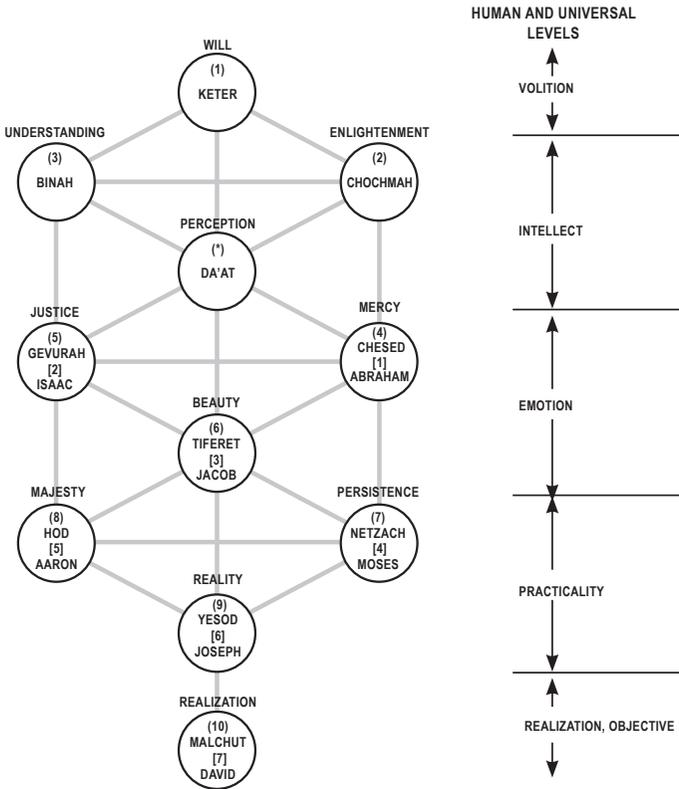
Of the ten *Sefirot*:

- The first three *Sefirot* are considered “internal” (“higher, concealed”) attributes, describing the design of the universe.
- The remaining seven *Sefirot* are “external” (“lower, manifest”) attributes – the realization of the aforementioned design. Therefore, these seven manifest themselves sequentially over the seven days of Creation.

An analogous structure manifests itself as well in any other integral, creational entity – in the formation and structure of the Jewish people, for example.

§ 8.2. THE *SEFIROT* SYSTEM

Presented graphically, the system of the *Sefirot* usually appears as follows:



The *Sefirot* system describes the process of descent of the Divine light from the primordial Divine Will (*Keter*, “Crown”) that motivates it, unto its concrete realization in our world (*Malchut*, “royalty, kingdom”).

In the diagram above, the number corresponding to each *Sefirah* is indicated in parentheses at the top of its circle. But the *Sefirah* of *Da`at* has no number, and is marked instead with an asterisk (*). In the Kabbalah, *Sefirot* could be seen from both “external” and “internal” perspective. From the “external” perspective, *Keter* is a proper *Sefirah*, while *Da`at* is not – it is “less” than a proper *Sefirah* and is not quite an independent element. From the “internal” perspective, *Da`at* is a proper *Sefirah*, while *Keter* is seen as the element “above” the system of *Sefirot* – the primary will of God. Thus, there are ten *Sefirot* in total from both “external” and “internal” perspective, although in fact the system (and the diagram) has a total of eleven elements.

Hebrew is read from right to left. Therefore, for example, *Sefirah* (4), *Chesed*, seen on the right vertical line (*Sefirot* 2-4-7), precedes *Sefirah* (5), *Gevurah*, which is located on the left vertical line (*Sefirot* 3-5-8).

The name of each *Sefirah* is written inside its circle, and above the circle is an approximation of the meaning of the *Sefirah*. (Those are by no means literal translations of the names of the *Sefirot*!).

Each of the seven “lower” *Sefirot* is marked with the day of creation to which that *Sefirah* pertains. This number (1 through 7) can be seen in brackets under the name of *Sefirah* in each of those seven circles. And below this number in each of those seven *Sefirah* circles, the name of one of the Patriarchs (or other founding personality of the Jewish nation) appears – the personality with whom that attribute is most closely associated.

For example, the *Sefirah* of *Chesed* represents the category of Mercy. It is number 4 of the ten *Sefirot*, and corresponds to the first day of Creation. Among the founding personalities of Jewish history this attribute corresponds to Abraham, the first Patriarch of the Jewish nation, with whom the quality of *Chesed* is most closely associated.

The conceptual meaning of the *Sefirah* of *Gevurah* can be approximated in English as “Justice.” (The literal meaning of the Hebrew word “*gevura*” is “might, power.”) It is the fifth among the ten *Sefirot*, and corresponds to the second day of Creation. Of the leaders of the Jewish people, *Chesed* corresponds to Isaac, the second Patriarch, whose most prominent personal quality was *Gevurah*.

We will not analyze in full detail here the structure of each *Sefirah*, but in the course of the narrative we will elaborate on those elements of the structure that are needed to shed light on the given passages of the Torah.

Here we will consider the application of the three “upper” *Sefirot* to the process of cognition, and later – discussing the stories of the three primary Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) – we will explain how the three *Sefirot* of the emotional level can be applied for understanding the Torah.

§ 8.3. THE COGNITION PROCESS: *CHOCHMAH, BINAH, AND DA`AT*

The following is an illustration of how the *Sefirot* system can be applied for achieving a deeper understanding of the relationship between Adam and his wife (and, thus, man and woman generally) in the second Creation story.

For this to work we will need to consider the three *Sefirot* related to the process of cognition: *Chochmah*, *Binah*, and *Da`at*. These three attributes are associated with the events in the garden of Eden, the essence of which was knowledge of the universe (expressed allegorically as “eating the fruits of every kind of tree”), and with the crisis that arose in that connection.

Upon consulting a standard Hebrew dictionary we learn that the word *chochmah* means “wisdom,” *binah* means “understanding,

intuition,” and *da`at* means “knowledge.” However, the Kabbalistic understanding of these terms does not coincide with the literal meanings of those words.

Chochmah, the first stage of cognition, is enlightenment, illumination, an initial idea of an object as a whole, the answer to the question: “What?”

Binah, the second stage of cognition, is an understanding of the structure of an object, its conceptual makeup and its function, the answer to the question: “How?”

For example, at the level of *Chochmah* a person knows what he wants to say, but does not yet know how to say it. At the *Binah* level he already has the ability to express that thought.

The word *Binah* at its grammatical radix is cognate with the root *B-N-H*, *boneh*, *livnot*, “to build,” *ben*, “son” (i.e., the essential element of building a family or clan), and the Hebrew word *even*, “rock, stone” – which is building material. Here the two-consonant radix *B-N* is common to roots associated with the concept of construction. Thus, *Binah* represents the building of a structure.

Thus, *Chochmah* is an idea that is already understood internally, but not yet formulated. And *Binah* is its formulation – its development into a formalized structure.

In the Kabbalah, when establishing a correspondence between the letters of the Tetragrammaton *yod*, *he*, *vav*, *he* (*Y-H-W-H*) and the sequence of the *Sefirot*, *Chochmah* corresponds to י, *yod*, and *Binah* corresponds to ה, *he*. These are the first and second letters of the Divine name, respectively.

Chochmah, the fundamental point of cognition, corresponds to *yod*, which graphically is only a point having no internal structure. The letter י, *yod*, has no inner space – its “white part” is completely outside of it. Such lack of internal space symbolizes this letter’s outward orientation, its extroversion. Thus, *Chochmah*, illumination,

is a “point” that seeks to expand and unfold in order to acquire an external form.

(Note that the expression “not one iota” is obviously of Hebrew origin, since the letter *yod*, which in Aramaic and likewise in Greek is called “iota,” is the smallest of all the letters of the Hebrew alphabet.)

Binah corresponds to the letter ה, *he*, which, on the contrary, has inner space in the fullest sense, almost like a fence built around a perimeter. This is due to the concept of *Binah* as “constructing a building,” the essence of which is allocating and organizing internal space. This reflects the introversion of the *Binah* attribute, its inward orientation.

A little later we will consider *Chochmah* and *Binah* as representing the relationship between man and woman, and *Da`at* as their connection with the tree of knowledge of good and bad.

§ 8.4. MAN AND WOMAN AS *CHOCHMAH* AND *BINAH* (2:21-23)

The process of creating Woman is described in the Torah as follows:

(21) So the Lord God cast a deep sleep upon the man; and, while he slept, He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot.

(22) And the Lord God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman; and He brought her to the man.

**(23) Then the man said, “This one at last
Is bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh.
This one shall be called Woman (*ishah*),
For from man (*ish*) was she taken.**

(23) This one shall be called Woman (ishah), for from man (ish) was she taken: The Torah here is emphasizing the grammatical connection between the words *ish*, וִישׁ, and *ishah*, וְיִשָּׁה. Namely: The letters *aleph*, א, and *shin*, ש, which taken together spell the word *eish*, אֵשׁ, “fire,” are common to both *ish* and *ishah*, “man” and “woman,” while only the letters yod and he distinguish them.

Thus, since *Chochmah*, as just explained, corresponds to the letter *yod*, and *Binah* to the letter *he*, the relationship between man and woman corresponds to the connection between *Chochmah* and *Binah*.

The following diagram illustrates this relationship:



(22) And the Lord God fashioned (literally, built) the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman: The process of creating Woman from the rib of Adam (the arrow in the above diagram, representing the progression from *Chochmah* to *Binah*) is described in the Torah with the word *vayiven*, וִיבֵן, “fashioned, built, rebuilt.”

At the same time, because of the relationship of the roots of the words *boneh*, *livnot*, “to build,” and *Binah*, “understanding,” the same verb *vayiven* can be understood not only as “he (re)built,” but as “he endowed with the additional attribute of *Binah*.” When God took Adam’s rib and rebuilt it into Woman, out of *Chochmah* a new attribute appeared: *Binah*. (Apart from its concrete, literal meaning, “rib,” the Hebrew word *tzeila* can also mean “side, edge, aspect.”)

The letter *yod*, which represents *Chochmah*, has no inner space and “is all outside,” symbolizing male extraversion, a man’s outward

orientation, his realization outside of himself. The letter *he*, *Binah*, which has space inside, symbolizes female introversion – woman’s realization within.

This difference between man’s extroverted orientation and woman’s introverted orientation manifests itself at several levels:

- (i) Anatomical differences.
- (ii) Physiological differences: for a man, time flows outside of himself, but for a woman – within her, in the form of menstrual and hormonal cycles.
- (iii) Differences in the process of childbirth: a man produces his child outside of himself; a woman builds her child within her own body.
 - (iii-a) Moreover, in the process of conception and childbirth a man contributes a cell, spermatozoon, in which a potential of a future child already resides, but it has not yet manifested itself externally. This is *Chochmah*, the “idea” of an object. But after a man’s spermatozoon fertilizes a woman’s ovum, a woman during her pregnancy actually builds the child out of that man’s one cell. This is *Binah*, “building” or “understanding” of an object.
- (iv) Differences in psychology and value orientation: a man normally strives outwardly – for self-realization in the outside world – building his career, for example. But for a woman, the more important value is normally her self-realization in her own inner space, hedged off from the outside world – building her family and her home. (These differences are not absolute, of course. Self-realization in external achievements is important for women as well. And building a family and a home are also important goals for a man. But as a general principle, men and women differ significantly in these aspects.)

- (v) Differences in decision-making: men are mostly occupied with determining what needs to be done, but women – with how to do it.

So we see that the aspects of masculine vs. feminine character correlate according to that same *Chochmah-Binah* scheme. Thus, we have used concepts of the Kabbalah to perceive the structural similarity and connection between aspects of the world's functioning that initially seemed entirely unrelated.

§ 9. Understanding the Episode of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Bad Based on Principles of the Kabbalah

§ 9.1. PROBLEMS IN THE EPISODE OF THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

In this section we will try, by applying concepts of the Kabbalah, to answer the following questions:

- (i) What benefit did Adam receive from eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and bad, and in what way did it change him? In other words, what does “knowledge of good and bad” actually mean?
- (ii) Why did God forbid that tree to man? We take it as a given that the Almighty wants every person to advance by understanding the world more deeply. Wasn’t this tree one of the best paths to such advancement?
- (iii) Why did God expel Adam from the garden? If the problem was only that Adam had to be prevented from eating the fruit of the tree of life (Gen. 3:22), was it not possible to protect

Adam from that in some other way, without expelling him from the garden entirely?

There is no end to these types of questions, of course. We will propose just one of many possible approaches to answering the questions just posed.

In the following discussion, we will proceed from the premise that since God created man in His likeness and image, God treats man as a son. And that God loves mankind and strives for his advancement and success in every way that a human father would. Absenting that premise, which is in fact the very foundation of the Torah's view of the relationship between God and man, no inquiry into the biblical God or reasoning about His relationship to man is possible.

§ 9.2. WHAT DID ADAM GAIN BY EATING THE FRUIT OF THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE?

Let us then begin with the first of the three questions posed earlier. How did eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and bad benefit Adam? How exactly did it change him?

The simple answer will obviously not suffice. It goes something like this: “By eating that fruit, Adam learned what good and bad are. Until then he had no idea what good and bad actually were, or even that there was such a concept of good and bad.”

But wasn't God's command, to eat from every other tree but that one, itself a message about what should and should not be done? In other words, that there is right and wrong, good and bad?

Of course, God's commands are only a basic introduction to understanding the concepts of good and bad. But isn't this also the level of a child who has received clear instructions from his parents of what to do and not to do? Although the child does not yet understand

the meaning of those instructions, surely we cannot say that he is totally clueless about the concepts themselves.

Moreover, if man had no understanding at all of good and bad, God could not have held him accountable for violating the prohibition, just as we cannot hold a child responsible for improper behavior on issues in which he has no ability whatsoever to distinguish between good and bad.

It thus seems obvious that man must have had at least a basic understanding of the concept of good and bad even before he ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge.

A better answer to that question (what did Adam gain by eating the fruit) might be that he acquired emotions – an actual desire to commit acts of good or bad. This approach would presume that before the incident of the tree of knowledge of good and bad man had no emotional aspirations, that he was essentially just a rational calculating machine. But then, after eating the fruit, he became a “real” human being with all the emotions and passions that that entails.

But this approach too seems incorrect. Let’s think about this. If man had no passions, and was only a rational mechanism that always followed instructions to the letter, then he would never have come to violate God’s commandment! We must therefore conclude instead that Adam had passions, attractions, and desires even before he ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge.

Nor can we agree with the supposition that the result of eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge was Adam and his wife’s sexual relationship, which, according to this version was the direct consequence of “the fall of man.” But as already noted, God commanded Adam and his wife from the very beginning to “be fertile and increase” (Gen. 1:28). Thus, sex and childbearing cannot have

come about under the influence of the tree of knowledge, let alone having been the consequence of breaking a commandment.

In summation then: From the very fact that God gave Adam the commandment we must conclude that Adam already had at least a basic grasp of the concept of good and bad. Moreover, his subsequent violation of that commandment shows that he already had passions and aspirations as well. So the original question returns. Given that Adam already had all that, how did he change and what new characteristics did he acquire by eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and bad?

§ 9.3. THE MEANING OF THE ATTRIBUTE OF *DA`AT*, “KNOWLEDGE”

To understand the meaning of the episode, we need to analyze the very concept of *Da`at* (literally, knowledge), which the Torah uses in the expression *etz ha-da`at tov va-ra`*,” “the tree of knowledge of good and bad.”

According to the Kabbalah, the Sefirot of the intellect develop sequentially as follows. The first stage is *Chochmah* (the initial understanding of a concept as a single, integral point or idea). *Binah* then extends that understanding (wherein the preliminary idea develops further into a detailed knowledge of the overall structure). Only then can the person proceed to acquire *Da`at*, “knowledge, cognition,” which is the process of internalizing and establishing a personal connection with the subject. He must “eat” (assimilate) the concept, as it were.

Let us illustrate this with a concrete example:

- (i) When a person knows (in principle) that there is a process that we call “reading,” this is the level of *Chochmah*.

- (ii) When he knows the meaning of each letter, and how words are formed from them, this is the level of *Binah*.
- (iii) When he can finally put all that together and actually read, then he has achieved *Da`at*. This is “eating” – consuming, assimilating, internalizing – i.e., mastering the topic or skill, making it his very own.

Human understanding that has attained the level of *Da`at* goes beyond a mere intellectual action; rather, it reaches to the very foundations of one’s personality. The fruit of the tree of knowledge enters into the knower, and changes him. A person who can read is an entirely different person from one who cannot read. This is why the Hebrew term *da`at* is used also to refer to an intimate relationship, as in, “Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain” (Gen. 4:1). *Da`at*, means not just obtaining or acquiring knowledge, but the kind of knowledge and cognition that create a solid internal connection.

That is the level that Adam attained with respect to knowledge of good and bad, the level of *Da`at* that he achieved by eating that fruit, and which gave him much more than information about good and bad. Rather, it immersed and engaged him in a profoundly intimate connection with good and bad, by making good and bad integral elements of the human personality.

Until then, man knew that good and bad existed – i.e., he had a concept of them at the level of *Chochmah*. He even knew just what actions he was allowed to undertake and which were forbidden. Thus, he had also attained the level of *Binah* with respect to good and bad.

However, he had not yet had any actual personal experience with them. His knowledge of good and bad remained theoretical. Man had passions and inclinations that fascinated and attracted him (for otherwise he would not and could not have violated the prohibition). However, they were not yet a part of his inner essence, but distinct,

as it were, from his personality. Only after eating the fruit did Adam assimilate good and bad within himself – he felt an inextricable connection of his personality with good and bad. In other words, with respect to good and bad he ascended to the level of *Da`at*.

The Midrash says as follows. The serpent in the garden is the *yetzer ha-ra`*, man’s “evil inclination” – the personification of the human passion to do bad things. At first the serpent lay outside of man. This was a state of the world in which a person could distinguish the serpent’s influence from that which came from within himself. He could distinguish his passions from his personality, just as we can today distinguish and distance our personality from “external information” that we know because we have read it in books, even if we cannot relate to it from within ourselves. But once man had eaten and digested the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and bad, that separation became impossible, because good and bad were now an integral part of the human personality, a part of man’s own “I.”

After eating that fruit, Adam acquired not an intellectual ability to distinguish between good and bad, but, on the contrary, a sense of their indistinguishability. It was not two separate trees, a tree of good and a tree of bad, but just one tree. Both attributes were combined in one and the same tree, demonstrating that good and bad had grown together as one, for they have a common root in the Divine universe.

The fruit of this tree unites good and bad within itself, allowing a person to possess knowledge of both attributes in their utter inseparability. This is a crucial point that advances a person spiritually. A person who lacks this perception cannot truly understand good and bad.

A child sees the world in black and white. To him good and bad live on different shores. But as a person matures, his world becomes

filled with intermediate hues and shades, a continuous spectrum of transitions that connect the polar opposites.

Thus, by eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge Adam came to understand the impossibility of separating good and bad unambiguously. That understanding is simply a necessary and positive stage in the process of becoming an aware and responsible adult.

But all that happened because Adam had violated a commandment. Adam plucked the fruit of the tree of knowledge prematurely, when that fruit had not yet ripened. Or more precisely, but what is the same thing, Adam himself had not yet ripened to readiness to receive self-knowledge at that level.

Because every type of self-knowledge has its proper time.

§ 9.4. WAS GOD PLANNING TO ALLOW MAN TO EAT THE FRUIT OF THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE?

Was the prohibition of eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and bad meant to be absolute and everlasting? Or was that prohibition perhaps only temporary, and God was planning to permit that fruit to Adam at some future time?

The Torah text gives no clear and unambiguous answer to this question. But note that Torah says, “And from the ground the Lord God caused to grow every tree that was pleasing to the sight and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and bad” (Gen. 2:9). Thus, both of those trees, along with every other tree in the garden, are described as “pleasing to the sight and good for food.”

The Midrash therefore contends that God was indeed planning from the very outset to allow man to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge. But Adam jumped the gun – as the Midrash says, just three hours before the arrival of Shabbat. (Recall that the entire ep-

isode takes place on the sixth day of Creation, what we call Friday. These “three hours” mean that Adam and Eve transgressed well before God’s work of the sixth day was complete.)

Had Adam not eaten the fruit and violated the prohibition, the Midrash continues, the Almighty would have allowed him to recite the Sabbath *kiddush* over the juice of the fruit of that tree. (*Kiddush* is a benediction that is recited over wine every Friday night at the onset of Shabbat, and which serves to officially consecrate the holy day.)

Shabbat *kiddush* is normally recited over wine. This midrash alters our understanding of what happened in the garden, by telling us that cognition of good and bad is, as it were, an “intoxicating influence.”

Wine deprives a person of rational, clear-headed, “sober” analytical activity. But at the same time, even while obscuring the clarity of details, it sparks the imagination and awakens emotions allowing for an integral, holistic view of the world and what is happening in it. Thus it adds an essential aspect to man’s knowledge of the world.

A viewer who closely examines every brushstroke on the canvas of a painting deprives himself of the opportunity to see the whole picture. Likewise, if we examine every phenomenon in the world under the microscope of our minds, we may lose sight of the main point. The expression *in vino veritas*, “there is truth in wine,” apart from its conventional, popular meaning, expresses also this same idea. A person who is too sober, who subjects everything to cold, rational analysis, in fact fails to see the world as it is, and does not really understand it.

Of course God wanted man to mature, to develop and advance in his knowledge, to feel the very essence of both good and bad within his soul. God therefore intended to eventually allow man to partake of the fruit of the tree of knowledge.

The prohibition was only temporary. And that was Adam's mistake – he understood the ban as permanent and eternal, which led him to believe that unless he violated the prohibition he would never be able to move forward in that aspect.

§ 9.5. PROHIBITION AT THE CONSCIOUS AND UNCONSCIOUS LEVELS

The reason for forbidding Adam temporarily to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge was to prepare him to eat that fruit correctly. That is, to eat it such that man, having internalized the connection between good and bad, would avoid any wrongdoing, and would not destroy the world in which he lives.

That preparation was to consist of two parts:

- (i) By eating the fruits of every other tree Adam would gradually grow and mature, as he learned about life in all its aspects.
- (ii) By refraining from eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and bad, man would eventually internalize within himself the general principle of observing Divine commandments, making it an immanent, essential part of his nature and personality.

Every human being experiences prohibition at various levels. Some prohibitions exist at a conscious level and under a person's control, but when that control is suddenly removed, a violation will ensue. But other prohibitions migrate to the level of the subconscious, and are thus imprinted on the human mind to such a degree that they (barring extreme circumstances) will not be violated even when conscious control is removed.

Even when inebriated a person will not, by far, violate any and all prohibitions indiscriminately. By restricting control of his con-

sciousness, intoxicating beverages free a person from only those prohibitions that are restrained by the power of the mind. Conversely, alcohol poses no threat to deeply assimilated prohibitions that have already infiltrated the subconscious. A civilized human being will not take to robbing or killing after drinking a small amount of wine. But a savage who has only recently begun to abide by civilized behavioral norms may in fact be induced, under the influence of even slight intoxication, to engage in such criminal behavior.

Had Adam resisted temptation and not eaten the fruit, even without understanding the meaning of the commandment, the Divine prohibition would then, through his own self-restraint, have become an integral element of his personality, a feature of his subconscious. “If I must not, then I must not!” – irrespective of whether or not I understand the reasons.

This would have laid the necessary groundwork for Adam’s next stage of cognition – the awareness level of *Da`at* with respect to good and bad. And then Adam, having recited the Sabbath *kiddush* on the juice of the tree of knowledge, could have combined two mutually exclusive elements – acquiring “intoxicating knowledge” even while preserving his complete control over the world. Adam could then have remained in the garden of Eden, and would not have been driven out.

So, here we come to the reason why Adam’s eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge resulted in his expulsion from the garden, and protecting the tree of life from him would not have been sufficient.

The garden was a situation of enormous opportunity given to mankind. In the garden, as we discussed earlier, there was no divide between human cognition and realization. As man had unlimited potential to experience and know the world, he was its sovereign master. His knowledge alone was enough to change the universe. Eating the fruit brought in its wake a mixture of good and bad in the

human soul: Adam realized within himself the knowledge that good and evil are essentially inseparable, that they derive from a single source.

But such knowledge is not only important; it is downright dangerous. Likening its effect to that of wine is not a mere figure of speech. Having “drunk the wine” of knowledge of good and bad, but at the same time retaining full power over the world (i.e., remaining in the Garden), man could have avoided observing any and all restrictions, and would eventually have destroyed all of Creation.

For the sake of analogy, let us try to imagine that Adam, living in the garden of Eden and enjoying unlimited power there, was, as it were, standing at the “control panel” of the entire universe. Wielding such immense power is the realization of man’s Divinity, and is thus a very good thing. But on the other hand, drinking wine is also not bad, and the knowledge of good and bad brings Adam closer to God. The problem is that these two types of “good” are grossly incompatible: there is no place for a habitual drinker at the control panel of a nuclear reactor.

As we deepen our knowledge of good and bad within ourselves, we cannot always manage to remain within the required boundaries; that is, to understand evil but not to perform malevolent acts. When intoxicated we cannot avoid pressing the wrong button or flipping the wrong lever – which in the garden of Eden could easily destroy the world.

In order to prevent any such monumental catastrophe, God expelled man from the garden, thereby limiting the extent of his power over the world.

§ 9.6. THE NEED FOR SELF-RESTRAINT IN COGNITION

We noted earlier that Adam of the second Creation story, “cognitive man,” *Homo cognoscens*, by no means cogitates in order to wield power. His cognition, *Da`at*, is preoccupied not with acquiring practical information, but with forming connections deep inside his soul with the diversity of the universe. *Da`at* must be thought of not as objective, impersonal information, but as knowledge that participates in (or leads to participation in) the object of that knowledge in an empathic relationship with it. In this sense, human cognition is truly “cognition.” (From *co*, “with, together,” and *gnosis*, “knowledge.”)

And since cognition in the garden was inseparable from realization, every act of cognition there led to genuine, tangible changes in the world.

The Midrash cited above speaks further of how Adam gained true knowledge of plants by penetrating into their inner nature with a feeling of such profound empathy that plants became a part of his personality – he attained the level of *Da`at*. But then, when Adam came to understand that rain is a vital necessity, he began to pray for it, whereupon the Almighty sent rain upon the earth, and the plants grew. Thus Adam’s knowledge of plants was immediately realized in the flourishing of the garden.

As he sensed that the animals were a part of himself, Adam was able to give them names, i.e., to correlate the animals with himself by structuring the animal world and its relationship to humans. When Adam knew animals at that level, they became a part of his household. He “tamed” them.

Knowing his wife was then Adam’s next challenge. The immediate result of that knowledge was the birth of their child. (Cain and Abel, the Midrash makes clear, were both born in the garden.) Since

there was never a gap between cognition and realization in the garden, human pregnancy and childbirth became a painful and protracted process only after Adam and Eve's expulsion.

The process of knowing the world was not just permitted to Adam; it was *required* of him by fiat. From the very outset God commanded Adam: "From every tree of the garden you shall surely eat" (Gen. 2:16 – alternate translation).

Adam therefore craves knowledge of good and bad. But he must deal with the Divine prohibition – a veritable wall that blocks his process of cognition. Not only is that prohibition incomprehensible to "cognitive Adam," which is why he feels no motivation whatsoever to observe it. But much more – it is the very contradiction and antithesis of his entire being.

* * *

In satisfying his profound urge for knowledge, *Homo cognoscens* does it not only for his own sake, but as a service to God, his fulfillment of the commandment, "From every tree of the garden you must eat." Performing this service is for him something natural, understandable, and enjoyable.

But man's fulfillment of the second part of that commandment, the prohibition of eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and bad, runs counter to his entire essence as *Homo cognoscens*. To him this prohibition is pointless, and an unbearable challenge.

Observing that prohibition demands from him a different kind of service. It is the service of restricting knowledge, of suspending the process of approaching God. Finding a balance between approaching God and blocking that approach, between the joys of the cognitive process and the need to place boundaries on cognition, is an inordinately difficult and challenging task.

§ 9.7. THE IMPROPER ROAD TO PERFECTION: A GUARANTEED COLLISION COURSE

Did eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge help Adam to advance to a higher stage of development? Did he become more perfect by virtue of that transgression?

On the one hand, it seems intuitively clear to us that a person who has eaten the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and understands that good and bad are inextricably linked, surely understands this world better than someone who has no concept of that connection, and in the utter simplicity of his soul can see the world as only black and white.

But on the other hand, is it possible in principle that violating a Divine instruction – committing a grievous sin – can lead to human advancement? Is it not self-evident that the result of such a sin can only be a fall?

And yet, it seems to us that both of those contradictory statements are true. Having tasted the fruit of the tree of knowledge, Adam indeed ascended to a new level of understanding. But at the same time, the inevitable result of his transgression was that he would fall.

God wished to allow man to attain the heights and the depths of knowledge of good and bad, not from the very outset, but only after learning first to uphold God's commandments, even if he could not initially comprehend their meaning. Unless he first acquired that vital capability, Adam would never be able to cope with his prematurely acquired level of *Da`at*.

A thirst for knowledge is of course an inseparable part of what it means to be human, and a necessary part of human life. The problem begins only when man's thirst for knowledge overwhelms every other consideration, including his connection with God, ultimately leading to his destruction.

The prohibition of eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge was only a temporary imperative that served to teach man the skill of abiding by restrictions. After all, the ability to restrain oneself and not partake of that which is forbidden is itself a necessary stage of human advancement. The awareness of the limitations of cognition is itself a form of cognition. Only after having achieved that level could Adam have advanced yet further.

Eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge put Adam, as it were, behind the wheel of a vehicle with a vastly more powerful engine. This ultimately moved him further down the road. But because Adam had not yet acquired even the most basic driving skills, the inevitable result had to be a catastrophic wreck.

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This article was written by Dr. Pinchas Polonsky (Ariel University, Israel), Galina Zelobovskiy, Gregory Yashgur, and Raphael Ben-Zvi (Bar-Ilan University, Israel), and appears in issue 31 of Conversations, the journal of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

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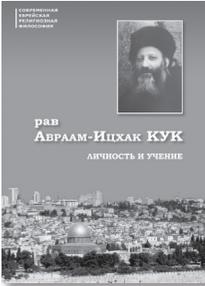
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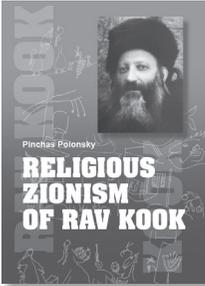
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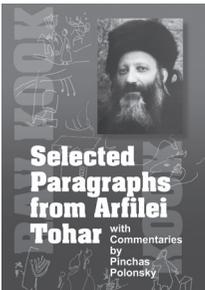
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