**PARASHAT HASHAVUA**

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**PARASHAT BEREISHIT**

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In memory of Rabbi Jack Sable z”l and

Ambassador Yehuda Avner z”l

By Debbi and David Sable

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Dedicated in memory of Michael ben Avraham z"l,

whose yahrzeit is 28 Tishrei,

by Family Rueff.

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**Human Society from the Garden of Eden
until the Double Exile**

**Rav Yoel Bin Nun**

**The Name *Elohim* and the Tetragrammaton**

 Much has been said about the duplication in the account of creation in *Bereishit* chapter 1, which uses the name *Elohim*, and chapter 2, which uses the Tetragrammaton. Before we address this issue, we must first consider the original meaning of these terms in Hebrew.

 The name *Elohim* is a common noun, whereas the Tetragrammaton is a proper noun. How do we know which one is which? Hebrew language authorities have taught us that a common noun takes a *heh ha-yedi'a*, the definite article, "the" – *ha-adam*,the man; *ha-ir*,the city; *ha-aretz*, the country; *ha-shamayim*, the sky; and the like – whereas a proper noun does not take a *heh ha-yedi'a*, because it is already fully defined. A *heh ha-yedi'a* cannot be added to the names Avraham and Sara, Yitzchak and Rivka, Yaakov and Rachel, Moshe and Miryam, David and Avigayil, and the like.

 We find that the name *Elohim* takes a *heh ha-yedi'a* – *ha-Elohim* – something that is impossible for the Tetragrammaton. Our early authorities understood from this that we are not dealing here with parallel terms, but rather with a common noun and a proper noun. R. Yehuda Ha-Levi writes:

Therefore, the name *Elohim* is directed at the entire world and humanity in general, and it expresses the general and universal idea of a single God, whereas the Tetragammaton expresses revelation, direct connection, personal and unmediated relationship, Divine supervision of the individual. (*Sefer Ha-Kuzari* 4:3)[[1]](#footnote-1)

The second distinction between a common noun and a proper noun relates to declension. A common noun is subject to declension – you can form a single word for "my country" (*artzi*), "your country" (*artzekha*), "our country" (*artzeinu*), "our city" (*ireinu*), "your houses" (*bateikhem*) – but a proper noun cannot be declined, as there is no word for "our Reuven" (*Reuveneinu*) or for "your Shimon" (*Shimonkhem*), or the like.

It is possible to say *Elohai*, "my God," *Elohekha*, "your God," *Eloheinu ve-Elohei avoteinu*, "our God and the God of our fathers." But the Tetragrammaton cannot be declined.

Therefore, it is clear on the simple, linguistic level that the appearance of the Tetragrammaton parallel to the name *Elohim* does not indicate a double source or different stories of creation. Rather, it indicates a new perspective, a subjective perspective that involves Divine revelation and personal connection. From an objective perspective, it is possible to believe that God is one and that He created everything in the world, to fear Him, and even to recognize His kingdom, but without worshipping Him, praying to Him, or speaking to Him. Only through revelation in the name of the Tetragrammaton is there truly a mutual dialogue and personal connection of prayer, worship, and observance of *mitzvot.*

The Torah begins the first time in the style of the fear that is reflected in the common noun, in the authoritative expression, from which stems the monotheistic principle – God is one! Then it begins a second time, adding the personal connection that creates an unmediated relationship. The unmediated relationship is so significant in this chapter that the creation of man is described as physical labor (*Bereishit* 2:7, 15): "Then the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul… And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden to work it and to keep it."

**Was the Garden of Eden Created for Pleasure?**

The relationship and connection allow for mutual affinity between God and man, and therefore "the Garden in Eden of old" is the site of the *Shekhina*, the first Temple. This is also indicated by the formulations found at the end of the chapter, where the site of the Temple is blocked: "And He placed at the east of the Garden of Eden the *keruvim*" (*Bereishit* 3:24). The Garden of Eden is Adam's Temple! He was not created there; "the man" (*ha-adam*)was created from "the ground" (*ha-adama*), and only afterwards did God place him in the Garden of Eden. It is important to be precise: God did not put him there for pleasure or recreation, but "to work it and to keep it." Working the garden and keeping it were cast upon him as tasks coming from the Holy.

**Is the Tree of Knowledge the Tree of Intellect?**

"The tree of the knowledge [*ha-da'at*] of good and evil" (*Bereishit* 2:9) is not the tree of the intellect, for in the continuation it is written (*Bereishit* 4:1): "And the man knew [*yada*]Chava his wife." The "knowledge" described here is the unmediated connection between a man and his wife, a connection of actual union, and it involves good and evil! Therefore, it was not man's eating of the fruit of the tree that created reason within him, and the Rambam in his *Guide for the Perplexed* (I:2) rightfully rejected such explanations.

The connection between a man and his wife and the connection between man and God can contain good, but they can also contain evil. This is man's test.

**Man and Woman**

 Most commentators understood the word "*ha-tzela*" in the verse, "And *ha-tzela*, which the Lord God had taken from the man, made He a woman" (*Bereishit* 2:22), as referring to one of Adam's ribs. They read the story of the formation of the woman as a hegemonic account, in which the man is the primary creation, and the woman is but an adjunct, "a help-mate for him" who was taken from "the rib," which represents the womb.

Many women, and men as well, are repelled by this interpretation and its implication, but this is the accepted explanation.

It was actually Rashi, following one opinion in the *gemara* (*Eiruvin* 18a), who offered an egalitarian explanation, arguing that *ha-tzela* means "side," as the term is used in reference to the *Mishkan.* Rashi and *Chazal* understood that man was created with "two faces," with the male and the female joined together from behind as a single creature.

Why did God create man with two faces, according to this explanation? It should be remembered that it was already stated previously: "Male and female created He them" (*Bereishit* 2:27). It is thus clear that from the very outset man was created as a single creature, male and female, with no separation between male and female in man. From this we understand how the Torah fights against idolatry, which recognizes male gods and female goddesses, and how it teaches about a single God-Creator, who has neither sex nor sexuality, and who is master of all the powers in the world, including the male force and the female force.

This is also the meaning of the most difficult verse in the account of creation:

And God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” (*Bereishit* 1:26)

How can the "one God," who embraces all of the powers, say (*va-yomer*, in the singular): "Let us make (*na'aseh*, in the plural) man"? The great difficulty leads us to an equally great insight. Man, too, was created in this world as a single creature that embraced all of his powers, both the male force and the female force. Therefore, the next verse, "And God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them" (*Bereishit* 1:27), is in fact an explanation of: "And God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’" The plural wording is used here to include the male force and the female force and to say that they are one.

The one God, who embraces the creative connection of male and female, created the world, and the one man in the world, who embraces the creative connection of male and female, attests to his Creator.

Those who think that it is possible to separate between the male and the female in God, even just in thought, do not truly understand the Torah (or true Kabbala), for the Torah rejects this idolatrous idea.

Man too was created as a single creature, and only in "a deep sleep" were male and female separated from each other. Why were they separated? R. Kook explained this in a unique way.[[2]](#footnote-2) The separation of male and female is what made free choice possible. Only after the separation could man – both of his parts – say: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman (*Isha*), because she was taken out of Man (*Ish*)" (*Bereishit* 2:23). This statement expresses an awareness of free choice, which is the foundation of the establishment of a nuclear family – a man, a woman, and their children – free from the control and exploitation of the larger clan: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall be one flesh" (*Bereishit* 2:24).

The initial creation is perfect in its primal oneness, but it is marked by coercion and does not allow choice. When the male and female are connected at their backs, they cannot choose.

According to R. Kook, the separation of the male from the female is what allows a man and a woman to choose, but it also creates the possibility of sin. This is the meaning of the appearance of the serpent in the Garden of Eden. In the Torah, the serpent represents the evil inclination, and especially the evil inclination related to forbidden sexual relations. The serpent is the lover and the lover is the serpent. The Torah calls this evil inclination "serpent." This, of course, is an allegory; when a man and a woman are together and they can join in proper manner, the serpent appears in order to destroy the holiness that they have created. This is what Rashi explains (*Bereishit* 3:1): "It [the serpent] saw them naked and engaging in relations before all, and he coveted her [the woman]."

In contrast to the "culture" of blurring (which uses the term "lover"), the Torah sets up a red warning sign against the serpent-lover. When he is called a serpent, we understand with whom we are dealing, with all of his maneuvers and their consequences.

The serpent has a method of seduction: "God [*Elohim*] has said: You shall not eat of any tree of the garden" (*Bereishit* 3:1). The serpent changes the way reference is made to God, for (unlike the entire chapter), he refers to God by way of the name *Elohim* alone. In effect, he is saying: Everything is forbidden to you! God does not want you to enjoy the world or to be able to create in it; all pleasures and all creative activity He keeps for Himself.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Anyone who hears this phrase, "everything is forbidden to you," should already know that this is the serpent's seduction. Surely God said to Adam: "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat" (*Bereishit* 2:16-17). When someone hears, "everything is forbidden to you," he begins to be defensive and to explain, and he falls into the trap of the serpent's seduction, as is described in the words of the woman (*Bereishit* 3:2-3).

After their eyes were opened, they knew "that they were naked" – the sin gave rise to shame. Although a sense of shame because of sin is a great thing, before the sin there was no need for shame. The Torah's account (*Bereishit* 3:5-7) is, of course, ironic. Instead of "And you shall be as God" – "And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked."

There is here another formative lesson here. Even though everything is revealed before Him, God enters into judgment with humans and allows them to put forth their arguments. But as people do, Adam and Chava blame the other; he blames her, and she blames the serpent. The serpent alone has nothing to say. *Chazal* said about this (*Sanhedrin* 29a) that we do not plead on behalf of a seducer. Arguments could have been made on behalf of the serpent, but (in contrast to modern sensitivities) God did not want to give the serpent the opportunity to defend himself; a seducer is a master of unfair play, and he therefore forfeits his right to a fair trial.

At the end of the account, the Torah records that God made for Adam and his wife "garments of skins, and He clothed them" (*Bereishit* 3:21). The first garment that they made for themselves expresses their shame, "a fig leaf" to cover their private parts (*Bereishit* 3:7). But the garment that God made for Adam was a garment of honor! From here developed all the honorary garments, especially the priestly garments – "garments of skins," like the priestly garments, to stand before God (even at a time of humiliation and expulsion from the Garden of Eden).

**The Root of Exile**

To our great surprise, the wording of Scripture indicates that there was a certain truth in what the serpent said:

Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever. (*Bereishit* 3:22)

But what can this be?

According to one view in the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 56b), Adam was commanded about *kilayim*, forbidden mixtures – that is to say, not to crossbreed different species, but rather to preserve the world as it had been created. The source for this is a precise reading of the first command given to Adam: "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it" (*Bereishit* 2:16-17).

This is how we can understand the serpent's seduction: If God creates hybrid creatures in nature, perhaps something very fine might emerge from the crossbreeding of a woman with a serpent.

The Torah emphasizes the "expulsion." The expulsion of man from the Garden of Eden was the result of lust for forbidden sexual relations; Kayin's expulsion "from the face of the land" (*Bereishit* 4:14) to a life of wandering was the consequence of his act of bloodshed. Lust for forbidden sexual relations leads to expulsion from the site of the *Shekhina* (= the Temple), and bloodshed leads to expulsion from the land. The root of exile in the Torah is found in the double expulsion – from the garden and from the land.

**Kayin’s Civilization**

All of the creative skills appear in the dynasty of Kayin. Kayin himself was a farmer and a city-builder, and his descendants were inventors; Yuval, Yaval, and Tuval-Kayin developed tent-dwelling and cattle-raising, music and cutting instruments, and technology (*Bereishit* 4:17-22). On the face of it, this is civilization at its best.

What characterized this civilization, however, is bloodshed: Kayin killed/murdered his brother, and at the end of the dynasty, Lemech killed a man and a young man (*Bereishit* 4:23-24). This is, then, a very talented but murderous civilization; it lacks humanity, it lacks rest, and it lacks consolation, and these are the very foundations of existence.

The names in Kayin's dynasty parallel and are similar to those in the dynasty of Shet. Only Shet, Enosh, and Noach lack parallels in Kayin's dynasty:

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| Parallels between the dynasties of Shet and Kayin |
| Adam |
|  | Shet |
|  | Enosh |
| Kayin | Keinan |
| Chanoch | Mahalalel |
| Irad | Yered |
| Mechuyael | Chanoch |
| Metushael | Metushelach |
| Lemech | Lemech |
| Yaval, Yuval, Tuval-Kayin | Noach |

Apparently, these names were first introduced by the descendants of Kayin, and the descendants of Shet borrowed from them. But in the dynasty of Kayin there is no Shet, who is the foundation of the world, no Enosh, from whom comes humanity (*enoshiyut*), and no Noach, from whom comes rest (*menucha*) and comfort (*nechama*).

From here we can draw a great lesson: A civilization might pride itself on its inventions, its technology, and its creativity, but if it harbors bloodshed, it has no future.

According to *Chazal*,something remained from the dynasty of Kayin as well – Na'ama the daughter of Lemech the Kayinite was Noach's wife[[4]](#footnote-4) – and so it may be argued that she saved something of the Kayinite creativity.

**“If you do well, shall it not be lifted up” (*Bereishit* 4:7)**

 I will present here the novel explanation of this verse offered by my revered father, Dr. Yechiel Bin Nun, according to which God's admonition of Kayin has an "abridged double condition": "If you do well to lift up your countenance that has fallen, [it will be good]; and if you do not well, sin couches at the door." If you lift up your head, and overcome your depression and your inclination toward jealousy and revenge, [it will be good]; but if not, your passions are liable to take control of you.[[5]](#footnote-5)

 A person can control his anger and other tempestuous emotions – "and you may rule over it."

**“Then men began [az *huchal*] to call upon the name of the Lord”**

This section ends in the days of Enosh, and the commentators offer two interpretations as to what happened in his time.

*Az huchal* – in the sense of *chol* (mundane) and *chilul* (desecration), for then people started to worship idols and call idols by the name of God. This is the way the verse was understood by Rashi, R. Saadya Gaon, and the Rambam (beginning of *Hilkhot Avoda Zara*).

*Az huchal* – in the sense of beginning (*hatchala*), for then people began to call upon the name of God and pray. This is the way the verse was understood by the Rashbam and the Ibn Ezra.

 R. Ovadya Seforno combines the two interpretations: Then the righteous men of the generation began to call upon the name of God, because the wicked people had desecrated it. In the days of Enosh, people desecrated the name of God, and the righteous of the generation began to stand up to this desecration by called upon the name of God, the Tetragrammaton, and praying to Him. We already noted earlier that prayer is possible only with the Tetragrammaton, as it reflects the personal relationship between man and God.

In the next chapter, we return in essence to the end of chapter 1, to the name *Elohim* standing alone.

**“Creator of Man” – “Man” (*Ha-Adam*) as a Family Name**

 In the "book of the generations of Adam" (*Bereishit* 5:1), "Adam" is a family name (as in chapter 1), and not a personal name: "Male and female created He them, and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created" (*Bereishit* 5:2). Based on this, *Chazal* instituted two blessings of *Yotzer Ha-Adam* (Creator of Man/Adam) in the *Sheva Berakhot*, the seven blessings that are recited at a wedding. Together, the groom and the bride create Adam when they marry, and if they merit establishing their family without the serpent, God will gladden them as He gladdened the first man in the Garden of Eden.

**The Dangers of Mystical Interpretation**

Chanoch lived, and then "he was not, for God took him" (*Bereishit* 5:24). The Torah does not explain his disappearance. In the apocryphal literature of the Second Temple period, Chanoch ascends to heaven, he sees the upper firmaments and heavenly Temples, and angels reveal to him the mysteries of creation and the laws of heaven and earth. Whole worlds that were hidden from ordinary people were revealed to Chanoch, especially the mysteries of the luminaries, and most importantly of the sun.

The fact that Chanoch lived for 365 years alludes, of course, to the 365 days of the solar year. In fact, the sects of Chanoch in the Second Temple period adhered to a solar calendar, arguing that it was the true calendar, and withdrew themselves from the lunar calendar of Jerusalem. It is no wonder that the *midrashim* of *Chazal* almost completely ignore Chanoch, blocking thereby the mystical path.

The *benei ha-Elohim* ("sons of God") (*Bereishit* 6:2), as heavenly angels who came down to earth and took as wives *benot ha-adam* ("the daughters of men"), were also ignored by most of the commentators. Onkelos translated the term as *benei ravrevaya* (“the sons of great ones”), and in his wake, R. Sa'adya Gaon and the Rambam explain that the reference is to "officers, strong men," the sons of those who think of themselves as God, who took "themselves wives, whomsoever they chose," as was common among kings and rulers in the ancient world (from Pharaoh to Achashverosh).

It was through this abduction of women that the generation of the flood corrupted the world.

The Ramban explains that the early generations of people in the world were called "sons of God" because of their physical perfection, their size, and their strength. Thus, we see that Onkelos (whose translation of the Torah was incorporated by *Chazal* into the public reading of the Torah in the synagogue), R. Saadya Gaon, the Rambam, and the Ramban all recoiled from the mystical interpretations and blocked their entry into the mainstream of Jewish thought.

(Translated by David Strauss)

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1. Even Shmuel ed., pp. 156-157. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Orot Yisrael* 1, 13; *Orot*, p. 142. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For further discussion regarding the truth in the words of the serpent (3:22, and Ramban), and regarding crossbreeding as seduction to create new species, see my article (written with my son Eliad): "*Ha-Gan Be-Eden Ve-Ha-Adama – Chet Adam Ha-Rishon*," *Megadim* 54 (5773), and on my website. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Rashi, *Bereishit* 4:22, based on *Bereishit Rabba* 23:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See his book, *Eretz Ha-Moriya* – *Pirkei Mikra Ve-Lashon*, pp. 171-176. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)