



פרדס חיים

Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies Student Journal
5781 / 2020 - 2021 | Volume 1



Faculty Editor / Rav Raḥel Berkovits
Student Editor / Dana Flaherty
Copy Editing / Shoshana Gottlieb
Design and Layout / Valerie Brown
Cover Art / Meryl Salpeter



About Raḥel

Raḥel Berkovits has been teaching Mishnah, Talmud and *halakha* at Pardes for over twenty years. Raḥel lectures widely in both Israel and abroad, especially on topics concerning women and Jewish law and a Jewish sexual ethic. She is the *Halakhic* Editor and a writer for *Hilkhot Nashim*, the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance’s *Halakhic* Source-guide Series, recently published by Maggid Books. Raḥel is a founding member of Congregation Shirah Hadasha, a halakhic partnership Synagogue, and serves on their *halakha* committee. In June 2015, Raḥel received Rabbinic Ordination from Rabbis Herzl Hefter and Daniel Sperber. Raḥel loves playing basketball, especially with her Pardes Talmud class.



About Dana

Dana Flaherty is the 2020/21 Gender and Sexuality Fellow at Pardes. She is originally from a kibbutz in the north of Israel. Prior to her year of Jewish study, she graduated from Cambridge University with a degree in Politics and Sociology, and in her final year was elected as the president of the student union in her college, Lucy Cavendish. Before coming to Pardes, Dana had never turned a page of Talmud—she now intends to turn many more.



פָּרְדֵּס חַיִּים

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Building a World

Students' Reflections on the
First Two Chapters of *Bereishit*



From the Faculty Editor

תורה נקראת חיים
שנאמר (משלי ג:י)
עץ חיים היא למחזיקים בה

ותומכיה מאושר

אבות דרבי נתן לדיא

**The Torah is called Living,
as it says (Proverbs 3:18),
"It is a Tree of Life [etz hayyim] for
those who hold fast to it,
and all its supporters are
happy [mushar]."**

Avot D'Rabbi Natan Chapter 34:11

The *midrash's* comparison of Torah to a living, growing organism emphasizes that its body is always expanding—creating new roots, branches and leaves as more people study it. Just as the tree provides people with oxygen that sustains us, so too is Torah the breath and life of the Jewish people. We chose to name our Student Torah Journal *Pardes Hayyim* as a play on the notion of Torah being an *Etz Hayyim*. Our student body is made up of a diverse group of individuals, and each one brings their own unique voice as a learner and reader of Torah. Using art, poetry, street performance, midrash, creative writing and scholarship, they have each shown how they hold fast to Torah and how it is alive and growing in their lives today. Together, these living trees of Torah create the orchard that is Pardes. Their roots gain substance and sustenance from the same soil, but each tree develops in its own distinct fashion. Dana and I wanted the journal entries to all focus around the same core text, so that the reader could

really appreciate the multiple ways in which the same source could be read, understood, and discussed. We felt it would be fitting for our first edition of *Pardes Hayyim* to start at the beginning. Thus all of the pieces you are about to encounter use a verse or idea from the creation story, found in the first two chapters of *Bereishit*, as their starting point. The theme of the journal is "Building a World" and each contributor interacted with the concept in a different manner and from a different perspective.

We hope you will find *osher* as you wander through our orchard and encounter the living Torah of our Pardes learning community.

Raḥel Berkovits
Faculty Editor

From the Student Editor

Bereishit is the story of the beginning of all that exists. Throughout Jewish history, many commentators have grappled with the Torah's creation legend, questioning why it is represented the way it is, and wondering whether it is a true reflection of how our universe came into being. One of my favourite interpretations is that of Rashbam, who argues that the story of creation is not an exhaustive description, but rather it is used as a forward to the verse in the ten commandments about the obligation of Shabbat (*Shemot* 20:10).

Rashbam states on the first verse of Genesis:

אך זה הוא עיקר פשוטו לפי דרך המקראות שרגיל להקדים ולפרש דבר שאין צריך בשביל דבר הנזכר לפניו במקום אחר...

גם כל הפרשה הזאת של מלאכת ששה ימים הקדימה משה רבינו לפרש לך מה שאמר הק' בשעת מתן תורה זכור את יום השבת לקדשו [וגו'] כי ששת ימים עשה י"י את השמים ואת הארץ את הים ואת כל אשר בם וינח ביום השביעי, וזהו שכת' ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום הששי, אותו ששי שהוא גמר ששה ימים שאמר הקדוש ברוך הוא במתן תורה. לכך אמר להם משה לישראל, להודיעם כי דבר הקדוש ברוך הוא אמת, וכי אתם סבורים שהעולם הזה כל הימים בנוי כמו שאתם רואים אותו עכשיו מלא כל טוב? לא היה כן, אלא בראשית ברא אלהים וגו'

But this is the essential straightforward meaning, according to the way of Scripture: that it is standard to anticipate and explain a matter which is unnecessary, for the sake of a matter that is mentioned below in another place...

Also, this whole passage is about the work of the six days of Creation; Moshe our Mas-

ter puts it in advance to explain to you what the Holy One, blessed be He, said at the time of the Giving of the Torah (Exod. 20:7-10), "Remember the Shabbat and sanctify it, ... for in six days, God made the heaven and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day." And this is why it is written (Gen. 1:31), "... and there was morning, the sixth day" -- that sixth that was the end of the six days that the Holy One, blessed be He, mentioned at the time of the Giving of the Torah. That is why Moshe said this to Israel, to inform them that the word of the Holy One, blessed be He, is true. And lest you imagine that this world had always been constructed as you see it now, full of all good things? It was not thus; rather, "When God began to create, etc.,"

Rashbam claims that Moshe's reference to *Bereishit* is a rhetorical tool: it reminds *Bnei Yisrael* of the truthfulness of God's authority by undermining their current convictions. In our context, Moshe's plea becomes a reminder to not take the world around us for granted. It asks us to wonder about the nature of things as they are in the process of becoming, and to remember that the world we live in demands uncompromising reflection in order to understand its true nature.

Raḥel and I started this journal in the hopes of creating a platform for students of all backgrounds to further engage and develop our study of Torah as we make our first steps in the world of Jewish thought. Pardes is a place where we are able to uncover the words of Jewish texts by confronting our own embedded assumptions and beliefs. This should be true in any *Beit Midrash*, but how much more so in a



community that brings together Jews of all denominations, genders and nationalities! For these reasons, we found it befitting to choose the topic 'building a world' for our first issue. This notion allows us to reflect on the world around us and our place within it, through what is perhaps the most foundational Jewish text. What does it mean to create? How is creation contributing to building our world? And what are humanity's responsibilities in that process? These are some of the questions our students considered when reflecting on the first two chapters of *Bereishit*.

The range of essays, reflections and art pieces in this issue are evidence of the Talmudic statement in Tractate *Sanhedrin* 34a:

דבי רבי ישמעאל תנא: וכפטיש יפצץ סלע, מה פטיש זה מתחלק לכמה ניצוצות - אף מקרא אחד יוצא לכמה טעמים.

The school of R. Yishmael taught: "And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces" (Jeremiah 23:29). Just as a hammer breaks [a stone] into several fragments, so too, one verse [is stated by God and from it] emerge several explanations.

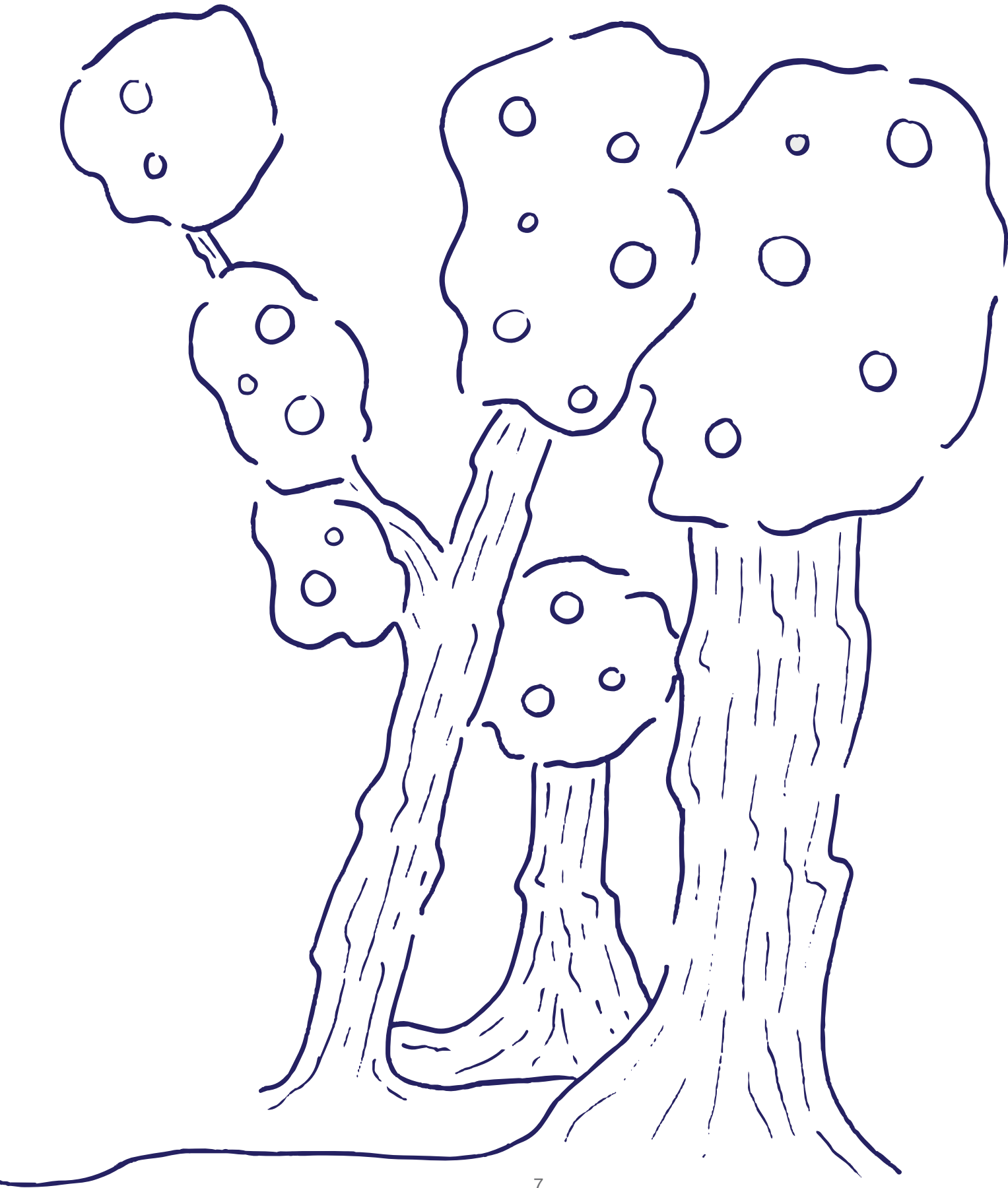
Each student brought their own perspective, using their own means of expression to form a unique interpretation of the text. Some students approached the question of creation through exploring the relationship between chaos and order. In her poem *Tohu V'Vohu*, Hannah Greenberg expresses the development of order out of chaos by interweaving Hebrew and English together to represent that process. Sarah Klein's painting *The Days of Creation* reflects the six days of creation as structuring the culmination of the day of Shabbat. In Claire Abramovitz's self-reflective personal piece called *This Used to be Blank*, she considers creation from the perspective of the creator

through her own work as a writer. Other students contemplated creation as a continual act of the present. In Ava Shaevel's street theatre piece called *The Relationship Between Heart and Brain: A Liberatory Puppet Play*, Ava personified the different stakeholders in the act of creation and showed how every creation is eventually an act of choice and a source for development. Sarah Klein's poem *Hiding and Returning* turns our awareness to our every breath as an act perpetuating God's initial breath into Adam. Others wondered about the nature of creation through relationships to others. Paige Harouse explores this in her essay *What Does It Mean to be Together?* arguing that while every act of creation in *Bereishit* is an act of duality, the creation of Adam in the second story of creation was singular, and thus seeks to explain this anomaly. Sarah Klein's poem *Sole Mate* thematizes creation through loss and search for love. Manny Samuels' essay *Paradise Lost and Regained* is a comparison of the romantic relationships of Adam and Chava, and Boaz and Ruth in showing the intertextual literary structure of their stories. Other students considered the implications of the creation story through the prism of gender, race and sexuality while reflecting on the relationship between justice and creation. In Yehudit Reishtein's essay *Infertility: The Loss of a World*, Yehudit analyses the experience of female infertility in *Tanakh* as it is framed by the designated role of women in family structures from the story of creation. Shoshana Gottlieb's short story *Creation III* gives the perspective of Chava as she reveals what it means to be created as a second thought to Adam. In the collage *[The Body in Space]*, Cliel Shdaimah draws on a *midrash* about the gendered roles in the creation of the sun and the moon that challenges and re-imagines its conclusion.

Erica Riddick's personal piece *Every Character, Every Word, Holds Meaning* is a rebuke of the treatment of slavery in Judaism, while considering the theological concept of all humans being 'created in the image of God'. Samuel Belmonte's drawing *Toe-vah?!* presents the contradictory nature of the idea of *B'tzelem* and *Toevah* through intricate symbolism of the relationship between the believer, the text and the community. Together, these works are woven to create our living orchard which we present to you here in our student journal.

On a more personal note, I really enjoyed working on this journal and getting to know each of my fellow students more closely through a different angle: through their words, paint brushes and remarkable efforts to produce this journal. I hope as readers you will enjoy the experience as I did.

Dana Flaherty
Student Editor



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He'll be a fitting helper: part of me **אֶעֱשֶׂה-לוֹ עֶזֶר כַּנְגִּדוֹ** and my compliment / He'll be worth the wait. / And while I wait, I'll work on me. / I'm going to live my life for me. / Preparing for us. / Our paradise with our opened eyes. [Sarah Klein](#)

וַיִּבֶן יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָעֶלֶע

אֲשֶׁר-לָקַח מִן-הָאָדָם לְאִשָּׁה

I assume life was blown into me, the same way God did for Adam, but I suppose I'll never know for sure. My story was never as important as his, the man formed from Dust. Who cares about the second human ever formed, if the stories are too similar?

[Shoshana Gottlieb](#)

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ

וּמִלֹּאן אֶת-הָאָרֶץ

These barren women described in the *Tanach* text do eventually fulfill the commandment received at creation. For when God says be fruitful and multiply, he addresses Adam who is still both male-female. When male and female are separated into independent beings, the ability to give birth becomes the focus of the Biblical woman's life, and the inability to do so cuts her off from normal female society. She has lost her place in society and her grounding in the world. [Yehudit Reishtein](#)

Reconciling **וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים** our long Jewish history with human enslavement may remain as elusive as the Moshiach. Or perhaps, closely examining the relationship between these two things is part of what will return us back to *Gan Eden* where ALL human beings are creat-

ed in the image of the Divine. [Erica Riddick](#)

לֹא-טוֹב הָיִיתָ הָאָדָם לְבִדּוֹ

There is something about the singularity and solitude of *HaAdam* that cannot continue—but what? Might God know something of loneliness?

If God is omniscient, that is all-knowing, then that answer should be yes. Yet knowing something abstractly is different than feeling and experiencing it. Has God felt what it's like to be lonely? And might God even dislike that feeling? [Paige Harouse](#)

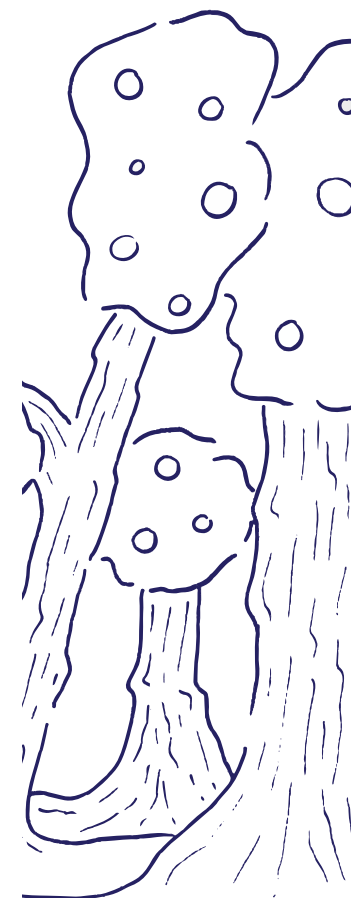
וְאֵד יַעֲלֶה מִן-הָאָרֶץ

A well springs up from the ground. The vibration of Mother Earth herself is a powerful force of love that overflows with life. The Creator was waiting for Earth to crave rain, waiting for Earth itself to muster up the *ruach* and intelligence needed to create it. [Ava Shaevel](#)

וְדָבַק בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ וְהָיוּ לְבָשָׂר אֶחָד

In this instance, the word “clinging” (דבק) indicates the human desire of marriage. We see, throughout *Tanach*, that this word is used in regards to relationships — it is the nature of humanity to cling to those we love. [Manny Samuels](#)

אֶת-הַמָּאֹר הַגָּדֹל לְמַמְשֶׁלֶת הַיּוֹם וְאֶת-הַמָּאֹר הַקָּטָן לְמַמְשֶׁלֶת הַלַּיְלָה Instead, there is a need for action, responsibility and ownership to be taken by both God and humanity to unlearn, reimagine, and create something better and different, something that does not rely on the diminishment of some to enable the existence and celebration of another. [Clitel Shdaimah](#)



וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְ

מִנו כְּדַמּוֹתֵנוּ

Instead I had the lifter struggling with the idea that he is *B'tzelem Elokim*, versus

the unclear commandment of *Lo Tishkav*. When doing *hagbah*, there is not only the fear of dropping the Torah, but also of the scroll tearing. Here the scroll is being torn apart by the very words it holds, warring against one another. [Sam Belmonte](#)

There is something beautiful about the pristine void of the blank page. There is some-thing beautiful in the *tohu v'vohu*. It exists a world unto itself. It doesn't have my ideas yet, it doesn't have my thoughts, it sits in its potential energy and it waits. [Claire Abramovitz](#)

בְּרֵאשִׁית א'- ב'

א בראשית ברא אלהים את השמים ואת הארץ **ב** והארץ היתה תהו ובהו וחשך על-פני תהום Instead, there is something beautiful about the pristine void of the blank page. There is some-thing beautiful in the *tohu v'vohu*. It exists a world unto itself. It doesn't have my ideas yet, it doesn't have my thoughts, it sits in its potential energy and it waits. [Claire Abramovitz](#)

וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִכָּל-מְלָכֵינוּ Even though our bodies are at rest from creation, we are still actively taking part of it. Human beings continue to add to the never-ending creation story, which couldn't be continued without us. I truly believe that every being can find a parallel or relationship to The Days of Creation, especially feeling part of Creation even while making time to rest during Shabbat. The Days of Creation are a window into infinity. [Sarah Klein](#)



This Used to be Blank

By Claire Abramovitz

The first action that happens in the entire Torah is creation. In the beginning there was creation. The beginning is a creative act. Beginning in and of itself is creation, is it not? When I sit down and see a blank page before me—more or less how this one was only minutes ago—I see formless and void. I used to imagine primordial chaos, *tohu v'vohu*, as akin to a Jackson Pollock—splotches, splatters, mess, no discernible shape or perspective.

But there is so much invisible chaos in a blank page. There is so much darkness on the white screen of Microsoft Word or Google Docs. When there is nothingness, a blank page before letters, the chaos exists not in front of you but in you. Primordial chaos then, perhaps exists in God's mind too. The idea of nothing, looking at nothing, looking at something void is extremely overwhelming. Where on Earth (quite literally in God's case) do I put my thoughts? How do I even begin to place them on this expanse?

There is something beautiful about the pristine void of the blank page. There is something beautiful in the *tohu v'vohu*. It exists a world unto itself. It doesn't have my ideas yet, it doesn't have my thoughts, it sits in its potential energy and it waits. Have you ever opened a brand new jar of peanut butter or tub of hummus and the stuff is just laying perfectly flat, unperturbed by your spoon or knife or bread or whatever? Haven't you ever felt just a little bad messing up such smooth factory formed perfection? Is that peanut butter, that hummus, waiting to be dipped into, waiting to be fundamentally altered from its state of blank perfection, not primordial chaos? Am I God? With

my spoon? With my knife? With my bread? With my whatever? Is it better to mess up something perfect but void than to let it sit forever?

When God opens up a blank page at the beginning of the world, did God imagine me? Was I something God just discovered along the way? Were you? The potential of me and you was created when God had the guts to create. The potential of me and you was created when God said, ah why not, to hell with it, let's make the world shall we. The potentials for me and you were created when God overcame what was formless and void, when God saw void not as a black hole but as a well.

It's no coincidence that I quite like the kabbalistic theory that the world was created with letters and words. I myself have created worlds of letters and words and I too, like God, have dared to call it good. I, too, have separated the light from the darkness watching black letters flicker on to a blinding white nothingness. How does a sentence change when I use a different word? How does the sentence change when I use a different word? How did the sentence change?

I know it's an old stereotype about writers, that we think we're God. It's insufferable isn't it? But is it wrong? I don't want to come to the defense of writers with God complexes worldwide. But I can't help seeing creation in, well, creation. Is it so wrong to say that in this regard God made us in the Divine image too? Is it wrong to call God an artist? God the Father, God the Redeemer, God the Content Creator? I don't think it's wrong to call God an artist. I don't think it's right to call the artist God. Godlike, God-esque, in a Godly role, sure. It's no secret that

we were made to mirror the Divine. After all, we are the ones who are imbued with the awesome power of creation.

We reenact creation by perpetuating human life on Earth, yes. But in that we are no different than any other animal on Earth. There were also probably tigers and elephants and ants and fish and birds born on April 16th 1997, the day of my birth. So in this regard is a tiger or an elephant or an ant or a fish or a bird like God? Why not? But what does a tiger or an elephant or an ant or a fish or a bird do with a blinding computer screen at 2am? Perhaps something, I won't say that they're entirely incapable, all of them. But they won't know what they've created if they create anything. It's monkeys with a typewriter. How many monkeys would it take in how long to recreate the story of creation? Isn't it wonderful that I know I live a version of it every day?

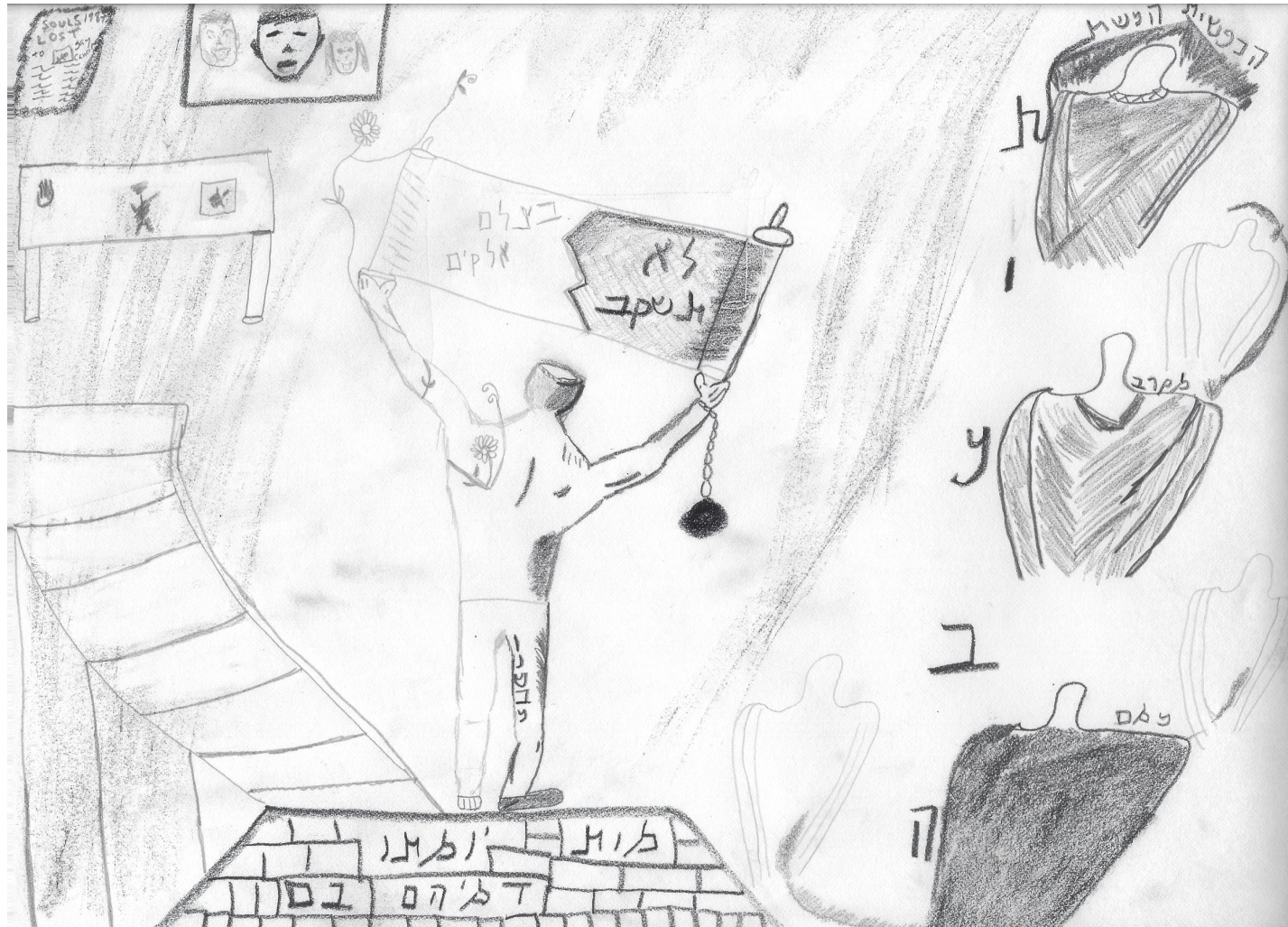
My works are the grandchildren of God. They are created in my image. They are my will manifested from the void. What a divine gift. What a gift to be granted. To be God's helper in creation.

I wonder what would happen if my characters talked back to me.



About Claire

Claire Abramovitz is a current Arts and Culture Fellow at the Pardes Institute for Jewish Studies. She is a lifelong learner of Jewish texts, playwright, author, poet, and artist. Jewish text and culture have always been a primary inspiration for her work. Most recently for her Fellowship project, she composed a collection of midrashic monologues and hopes to continue the project into the future along with her Jewish studies. Additionally, her play *To Rot in His Bones* was a semifinalist for the 10th Annual Jewish Playwriting Competition. She has also been published by the Jewish Literary Journal. When she's not writing, you can bet she's probably making some sort of soup.



Toevah?!

By Sam Belmonte

Artist Statement

When I lived in a small Massachusetts town, I was asked to do *hagbah* during *Parshat Achrei-Mot* for a few years in a row. It just so happened that during those years, the *parshah* coincided with the local Pride Parade. The congregation would listen to the *parshah*, have *kiddush* together at *shul*, and then walk into town, to the parade. These two experiences were an intense clash for me—listening to a *parshah* that condemned the very same people we would go and celebrate directly afterwards. The physicality of lifting the Torah—the focus, strength, and fluidity required to move the body and Torah as one, the precarious effort to hold the *sefer* above myself, the desire to hold on to the Torah even when it pained me to do so—felt like a miraculous representation; literally lifting up the Torah at a time when its contents felt tearing emotionally. The lifter here is crushed and struggling beneath the weight of the Torah on one side of his body while on the other he grows stronger and flowers sprout from the nourishing possibilities which the Torah gives him. Under his leg is written “*Vayishava*” from when Abraham makes his servant swear that he will find a wife for his son among his own people. In this moment an oath is made that will impact someone’s life who did not choose this oath. We all have to live with the choices made by the people who came before us, the people who raised us, and the people we live among now. The lifter bears this mark on the side with which he struggles.

At first I thought the only word I would have staring down at the lifter and the congregation would be “*Toevah*”. That singular word coming down from the Torah, for all to see, the lifter in his shame, the congregation seeing only the message and not the pain

or shame on the face of the lifter. I chose to have *Toevah* be the message coming from the people, not from God. The *Bimah*—built by people—holds the words “their death and their blood shall be upon them.” This phrase, originally interpreted as being aimed at LGBT people, I reverse, understanding it as violence enacted by the congregation and anyone who steps up onto the *Bimah*. Often our houses of worship are built on suffering, our relationship with God hampered by the stumbling blocks others put in front of us, like telling someone that who they are is an abomination in God’s eyes.

Instead I had the lifter struggling with the idea that he is *B'tzelem Elokim*, versus the unclear commandment of *Lo Tishkav*. When doing *hagbah*, there is not only the fear of dropping the Torah, but also of the scroll tearing. Here the scroll is being torn apart by the very words it holds, warring against one another. When asking us to hold the impossible, the Torah tears itself. How can it be that all people are *B'tzelem Elokim* while also calling some abominations? This dichotomy within the Torah is questionable. Therefore, I suggest that it is not the Torah but rather the people who inaccurately aim the word abomination at others.

The congregants, some of whom share the *Lo Tishkav* opinion and others whom share the *B'tzelem Elokim* perspectives, are depicted by their matching darkness or lightness with the Torah and the person lifting the Torah. Those who have the *Lo Tishkav* attitude are the ones projecting the judgment of *Toevah* upon their surroundings, at times cutting themselves off like in the top most figure, and at other moments infecting those around them with their wicked judgments, like in the bottom two figures.



These darker figures are the ones enacting the cutting off of souls from the covenant and from the people, not God, as depicted by the writing of *Hanefashot Ha'asot Mikerev Amim* over their shoulders. This is another instance where I am taking the blame aimed at LGBT people in the text, and placing it back upon the people who take the actions of cutting LGBT people off from their Jewish communities.

The stairs that ascend from the *Bimah* lead to my aunt's art studio, a place which represents love and belonging in my life. Here as a child I saw a newspaper article hanging on her wall about the AIDS crisis in the 1980s and I knew that in her home love was unconditional. The shadows coming from her studio stretch out to form a protective barrier between the lifter and the people's message of *Toevah*. The Torah, and thus his relationship with God, are within that protective space. This closeness with God is only possible through unconditional love. I imagine that for all of us who hold the Torah there are moments of intense pain, conflicts within our communities, and questions of why we don't let go and how can we hold up that which hurts us. At the same time I know there are also moments of unbelievable joy, love, and connection which are only possible through these relationships with Torah, God, and community. My favorite translation of the *Shema* is when "*Shema Yisrael*" is understood as "Listen Struggler". I hope that in sharing our struggles and our joys we can lighten each other's burdens and journey through the uncertainties of life together.



About Sam

Sam Belmonte lived in Massachusetts and New York where he worked in the public and mental health sectors before coming to Israel in August 2019. He plans to make aliyah, bike around as much as possible, and finally work on improving his Hebrew. Sam is currently a second year fellow at Pardes.



תהו ובהו By Hannah Greenberg

תהו ובהו

An infinite chaos, infinite unknown

תהו ובהו

Darkness surrounds, enrobes, swirls

The face of the abyss opens

Light shimmers, flashes

וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים

By the breath of the mouth of the holy one,

the world came into being

From chaos, order arises

From darkness comes light

The water gathered, opening up dry land

Creating space for all life

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים

Your words, your voice creates

Expanding the waters of life

The land blossoms and blooms

Separating chaos and order

תהו ובהו

ורוח אלהים מרחפת

Divine who watches over us

Elokim, we raise our voices to you

We plea for order in this chaos

Judge of the world, do not forget
compassion

תהו ובהו

Even in this infinite chaos and unknown

Life grows, mercy unfolds, judgment reigns

Order falls into place out of the Expanse,

The world forms out of the chaos

Out of the תהו ובהו



About Hannah

Hannah Greenberg is a student in Pardes Institute's Center for Jewish Education. She has her Masters in Education in Exceptional Children & Youth with a concentration in autism and severe disabilities from the University of Delaware. Hannah enjoys studying Talmudic *aggadah* and writing creatively. You can follow Hannah's study of *daf yomi* on her Instagram @dafyomiadventures.



Creation III

By Shoshana Gottlieb

I was born from a rib.

People always ask, why a rib? Some say because it shows that Adam and I were equals, created to stand side by side. That's very nice.

In reality, it's because we all have ribs to spare. Who would miss a single rib in the grand scheme of things, as opposed to a foot or a hand bone or a shin?

I was born of expendable things.

I assume life was blown into me, the same way God did for Adam, but I suppose I'll never know for sure. My story was never as important as his, the man formed from Dust. Who cares about the second human ever formed, if the stories are too similar?

I was taken from his side, and then I woke in the garden. And then I was his, no more important than the animals he had dominion over. A helper, a warm body, nothing more.

I wonder if God felt like a parent walking their daughter down the aisle, handing her over to a stranger.

I wonder if God felt like a parent taking their daughter to preschool for the very first time, leaving her with strangers who are supposed to take care of her, much too young to be without her parents.

I think maybe God felt like a parent bringing their son the perfect gift, placing me delicately at the foot of his bed, a surprise for him to play with when he wakes up.

I suppose Adam wasn't a stranger. We did share flesh, after all. A rib. A side. A perfect match.

I don't know why I ate the fruit.

We Knew each other and then, as my body ached, Adam slept.

For the first time in my short life, I was given the chance to be alone.

Alone in a garden filled with wondrous, overwhelming things. Lives that were so much more interesting than Adam and me.

A whole garden to wander through, a paradise to explore, and yet Adam slept.

The act of Knowing had exhausted him in a way that didn't seem to affect me. He Knew me, and that was it. No words of comfort, no acts of love.

Just seed spilled, and me, alone.

If the fruit was forbidden, then why put them in the centre of the garden?

If I, too, was not allowed the fruit, then why not tell me these rules Yourself? Why send

a messenger who muddled Your words?

Why set us tasks You know we will fail?

The leaves on the tree were delicate in the way I felt I also was. As though they'd crumple under a too-strong hand. As though they'd float away if they weren't attached to the thing that created them.

Adam had said we'd die if we touched the tree. But what is death to a woman who's only a few hours old?

I reached for a leaf, and I held it between my fingers for just a moment.

Perhaps if Adam gave me life, this tree can give me a new one.

The fruit hangs beside the leaf.

A thought slithers into my head, unwelcome and unstoppable.

Eat the fruit.

My hand is right there, still holding my leaf, and it brushes against the fruit.

And I wait once more for a death that doesn't come.

The voice slithers back,

Take from the fruit, like he took from you.

I grab the fruit, and with a familiar force, I pull it from its branch, I rip it from the tree.

I press its flesh to my lips

And then I take a bite.

At first, I don't take Adam the fruit.

The world doesn't feel all that different—I don't feel all that different—but suddenly it's as though I'm looking for something.

Suddenly, I wonder if there is More.

More than this garden, more than Adam. *More.*

At first, I consider finding a way out, I consider getting away.

But I look at the garden around me, I see the animals and their mates, I see the moon and her stars, the heavens and the earth.

What will be paired with my name?

I know, of course I know that it must be Adam. That our names are linked and might always be.

How could I leave Adam alone, with nothing but the seed of the fruit I have eaten? Would that not make me just as bad as him?

I take the fruit to Adam, so that he will seek More with me.

So that he will see that we cannot be alone, that man needs more from me than just Knowing.

Convincing Adam wasn't hard.



Man loves the things he cannot have.

Adam takes the fruit with an unnecessary force, as though if he were to spend another moment without it, he would perish. As though he needed to have the only thing that was just mine.

As his lips tear through its flesh, I wonder if a time will come when I regret giving it to him.

But I know that there is no way I could keep the want for More from him, the excitement that reverberates throughout my body is too much for any one person to hoard for themselves.

Adam bites the fruit.

His eyes wash over me.

I feel a blush rise in my cheeks, and the sudden need to hide myself from his gaze.

And then he says, his voice deep and unnerving,

“We should cover ourselves.”

I do as he suggests.

I don’t want his eyes on me.

God asks us where we are, and I beg Adam to stay quiet, to stay hidden, even if for just a moment longer.

“We hid because we are naked and afraid,” Adam answers.

I want to yell at him, that’s not even what he asked of us!!!

God asks, how do you know of nakedness? Have you eaten the forbidden fruit?

And then I feel his gaze upon me once more. Despite the leaves I wear, I feel the need to cover up even more.

“The woman you gave me, she gave me of the tree, and so I ate it.”

He says nothing of how he tore it from my hand, nor how he shoved it down his gullet without a moment of pause.

No, he throws me to the wolves without a second thought.

Does he not want us to share the More?

Does he just want to keep it for himself?

God turns and asks me why I ate the fruit.

And I want to ask God why we’re playing this game at all. I want to ask God why Adam cares for nobody other than himself.

I want to say,

You know why I ate the fruit.

But I realise that God wants me to answer, not for God to hear, but for Adam to hear.

And I refuse to let Adam put the blame on me.

So I glance around the yard, and I spot a beast that reminds me of the slithering thoughts that made me eat the fruit.

At just a few hours old, I think of a life where I had kept the knowledge of More

to myself.

I think of a life where I am the first woman, just as important as the first man. Where Adam is known for the first breath of life, but I am known as the mother of wonder and thought. Where maybe I am replaced, with someone else formed from another rib, but at least I am free, at least I have More.

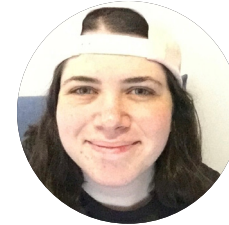
And then I blame the serpent.

I was born from a rib.

A bone that cages our breaths, our heart.

I was born from Adam’s cage.

And now I am destined to live in it.



About Shoshana

Shoshana Gottlieb is a writer, playlist maker and future educator from Sydney, Australia. Her thirteen years at a Chabad high school filled her with lots of religious neuroses, as well as a love for Torah. She spends arguably too much of her time watching and talking about films, as well as imagining which Jewish stories would make a good movie. Currently enrolled in Pardes’ Day School Educator Program, Shoshana hopes to become a *Tanach* teacher some time in the near future, and foster a passion for *Tanach* in a new generation of students. Her mother thinks she would’ve made a great doctor.



What Does It Mean to be Together?

By Paige Harouse

The world of *Bereishit* builds itself in pairs—night and day, sky and earth, water and land, good and bad. When the Divine creates animals, it is also in pairs, male and female. Thus, the duality of creation seems to define it; singular creation is absent from the *pshat*, the simple reading of the text. That is, until the second chapter of *Bereishit*. Whether understood as the do-over—Creation 2.0— or the extended edition that begins immediately after finishing the first story of creation, a second creation story is found in *Bereishit* 2:4. And so even the beginning of the Torah, the beginning of our biblical world, begins in duality.

Both iterations of *Bereishit* include the creation of humankind. In the first narrative, which is found in *Bereishit* 1:1-2:3, humankind is created in God's image and as male and female (*Bereishit* 1:27). In the second narrative, beginning with *Bereishit* 2:4, humankind is first created as one entity from which female and male are then derived. In various rabbinic texts, this human is called *Adam HaRishon*, the first human. In the text of *Bereishit* 2, this humanoid is mostly referred to as *HaAdam* (הָאָדָם), or the earthling. While many might erroneously refer to this creature by the name of Adam, this human is only described by name in *Bereishit* 2:20, after having given names to other creatures during its quest to find a suitable partner. For the sake of this essay, I will be calling this human creature either *HaAdam* or earthling because it is neither Adam nor Eve.

The search for a partner begins several verses earlier. After God puts *HaAdam* in *Gan Eden* to tend and till the soil (2:15), God commands *HaAdam* not to eat from

the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Bad (2:16-17). While many are interested in the conclusion of this story—the expulsion from *Gan Eden*—I am more interested in pausing in the early moments of *HaAdam*'s time in *Gan Eden*: what makes this earthling different from the human of the previous *Bereishit* story?

One immediate answer comes to mind: duality. In *Bereishit* 1, there is no first “human” so much as **two** first humans. Whereas, *Bereishit* 2 has a **singular** first human, *Adam HaRishon*.

God notices this fact. After placing *HaAdam* in *Gan Eden*, *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* remarks:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֱלֹהִים לֹא-טוֹב הָיִיתָ הָאָדָם לְבַדּוֹ
אֶעֱשֶׂה-לּוֹ עֶזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ:

The Lord God said, “It is not good for HaAdam to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him.” (*Bereishit* 2:18)

This verse alters the world of *Gan Eden*. Until then, the existence of a singular *HaAdam* had been neutral; nothing marked *HaAdam*'s creation in 2:7 as good or bad, complete or complete. *HaAdam* just was. Yet after being for a while, something propelled God to pronounce *HaAdam*'s aloneness as “not good.”

Until this point in the text, creation had only been described as “good” or “very good.” The description of creation as “not good” is startling. God thought it was possible to make *HaAdam*'s condition good by creating a partner for *HaAdam*. There is something about the singularity and solitude of *HaAdam* that cannot continue—but what? Might

God know something of loneliness?

If God is omniscient, then that answer should be yes. Yet knowing something abstractly is different than feeling and experiencing it. Has God felt what it's like to be lonely? And might God even dislike that feeling?

For a multitude of reasons, the answer is yes. One reason is because of the “לא-טוב”. (it is not good) God uses *tov* consistently earlier in *Bereishit* after creating¹. To negate goodness is concerning; yet the wording of “not good” as opposed to “bad” suggests that goodness is still attainable. For God, the path to goodness necessitates the creation of a helper, or עֶזֶר, for *HaAdam*. But why a helper?

The *pshat* answer seems to be because *HaAdam* is by themselves. After all, *HaAdam* is not described as “not good;” rather, it is the lone existence of *HaAdam* that is “not good.”

The word translated as “alone” is “לְבַדּוֹ.” This word could also be rendered as “on his own” or “only him.” But we must ask: how is *HaAdam* alone if God is omnipresent?

The medieval commentator Rashi offers one explanation.

רש"י על בראשית ב:י"ח

לא טוב היות וגו'. שלא יאמרו שתי רשויות הן, הקב"ה בעליונים יחיד ואין לו זוג, וזה בתחתונים ואין לו זוג (בראשית רבה):

IT IS NOT GOOD to be etc. — [I shall make an help meet for him in order] that they [people] will not say that there are two Deities, the Holy One, blessed be He, in the upper realm alone and without a mate, and

¹ *Bereishit* 1 refers to the first creation story which continues until *Bereishit* 2:3. *Bereishit* 2 refers to the second creation story which begins with *Bereishit* 2:4.

this one [HaAdam] in the lower realm without a mate (Bereishit Rabbah). (Rashi on Genesis 2:18)

According to this Rashi, which comes from the midrash collection of *Bereishit Rabbah*, *Adam HaRishon* was not alone. The first human had God. Yet God became concerned that some might misunderstand the nature of their relationship. After all, since God is the deity that rules from the Heavens (*Ba'Elyonim*) then why shouldn't *HaAdam* be the deity that rules in the Beneath (*Ba'Tachtonim*)?

In order to differentiate between God and *HaAdam*, God made *Adam HaSheini*, the second human, to be a proper partner for *Adam HaRishon*. *Bereishit* 2:18 emphasizes that *HaAdam* is the created whereas God is the Creator. While God remains alone, without equal, *HaAdam* doesn't need to if God thinks that is “not good.”

Or perhaps the Divine's creative action is one of compassion. By giving *HaAdam* the gift of companionship, *HaAdam* need not know loneliness. To me, it's an act rooted in experience. Not only might *HaAdam* not realize what's missing, but *HaAdam* might not have the full capacity to know. But God does.

And yet God doesn't. For God goes on to create the beasts of the earth and the birds of the sky yet amongst them is still no helper for *HaAdam*. The lack of a helper here is puzzling. Perhaps part of the process of finding an equal partner is rejecting those who are not. Yet, perhaps the Divine struggles to create what They do not know, since there is no partner for God.

There is also the issue of *HaAdam*. How are they supposed to recognize a creature that is “like him” (כְּנֶגְדּוֹ)?



Hizkuni's commentary on 2:18 is one answer to this dilemma:

לא טוב היות האדם לבדו מתחילה עלה - במחשבה לעשות לו זוג ולא מצא פתח לעשות עד לאחר קריאת השמות כדי שיתאוה לה ויחבבנה יותר

IT IS NOT GOOD FOR HAADAM TO BE ALONE - From the beginning, there was a thought to create a partner, a זוג, [for HaAdam]. And [God] found no opening to do so until after the callings of the names [of the creatures] in order so that [HaAdam] would desire her and would cherish her more.

According to Hizkuni, God knows what form HaAdam's helper should take. Rather than create it immediately, the Divine wanted HaAdam to feel like a companion was missing so that the appreciation would be greater.

Hizkuni's insights are helpful and remain relevant: appreciation often comes from a place of lacking. Yet Hizkuni's partner for HaAdam has a different focus than the partner in Bereishit 1. That pair of humans is described as male and female and then, shortly thereafter, are commanded to "be fruitful and multiply (Bereishit 1:28)." The chiddush of narrative in Bereishit 2 is that its beginning lacks the carnal reproductive drive. Rather, the reproductive idea is used to differentiate humankind from the Divine as a proper helper is being identified.

The more modern voices of Nechama Leibowitz and Samson Raphael Hirsch expand and explore the earlier idea that the creation of a second human was not only to create a partner, but to delineate the humans from the Divine.

About this, Leibowitz wrote:

But had the law of male and female reigning in the animal world not applied to him, the equilibrium of creation would have been violated; he would have made himself into a god. To safeguard his mission and function, to preserve intact the Divine plan in creation, he [HaAdam] could not be allowed to remain alone.²

Leibowitz's interpretation of "alone" is technical. She defines it as a statement of being, rather than an emotional loneliness. Thus Leibowitz asks us: though HaAdam is alone by virtue of being Adam HaRishon, the first earthling, is HaAdam lonely? Though both are adjectives, alone is a state-of-being whereas lonely is a feeling. One need not be alone, to feel lonely. One need only feel disconnected, or removed, or lost, to be lonely, even while in the same space as another. Conversely one can be alone without others and not feel lonely at all.

I believe that Adam HaRishon could feel loneliness yet couldn't name it. In that way, Adam HaRishon was in the first stage of life, just like human children today. There were many things that initial human could do, such as naming the tangible and working the earth. Yet such actions are only a fraction of the potential of humanity and the Divine recognized that. So God created a second human, Adam HaSheini. That creative act, described in Bereishit 2: 21-23, has consequences. The creation of a second earthling, who receives the name Chava later in Bereishit 3:20, opens the door to the future of humanity by allowing for a proto-society where companionship is valued and where being in relation to others is foundational to existence.

Tov, goodness, cannot come from a single creature. This is why God deems the

creation of a second human necessary. Tov comes from being able to form a community with others who are equal partners.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch influenced the above conclusion. In his commentary on Bereishit, Hirsch wrote:

HaAdam was there and around him everything [in Gan Eden] bloomed in paradise splendor, and still God hadn't said his: "Tov!" It's not written: "it's not good for HaAdam, that he is alone," rather: as long as he stands alone, it [Creation] cannot yet be good; the goal of perfection, which the earthly world would reach through him, cannot be perfectly achieved as long as he remains alone. ... [the Rabbis] teach us: it is first through the woman that humanity becomes humanity, Adam only exists when man and woman are together.³

Hirsch uses the word Mensch, meaning "people" to describe humanity. Humanity, he says, could not exist as an individual. A second person was needed to transform the singular human into humankind.

The language of the Torah shows this transformation and is why I've adhered to calling the first human HaAdam. This human is mostly referred to as "the human." The definite article, being "Ha," is dropped when the singular status of HaAdam is changed by the creation of the second human. The creation of the second human allows for the realization of the first. Only then can HaAdam become Adam, the name by which the first man is known. Hirsch, too, follows this convention in his writing, naming Adam only in the last line, once man and woman come together.

In Hebrew, working together is working "ביחד." Contained within this expression is the phrase "one." This word shares its grammatical root with the word "יחיד," meaning "only/alone."

Therefore, from aloneness comes togetherness— but only when individuals are able to assist and help one another.

Related to this, Hirsch writes:

And this woman should be "a helper in his like." At a cursory glance, this stipulation expresses the complete dignity of the woman. This statement doesn't even have the slightest hint towards a sexual relationship...And "a helper in his like" also speaks just as little to a subservient order. It is, more so, an expression of complete equality and equal independence. The woman is equal to a man, that is parallel, on the [same] level...⁴

This equality is a radical concept that separates humanity from the other creatures. Equality is something inherent in God's creation of humankind, yet it is a quality that needs to be acted upon by humans in community.

Fundamentally, this is why the creation of the second human is never described as tov, good. Whilst the reader may be waiting for God to announce its 'Good' status—as God does at the end of each day of creation—it never comes into fruition. The goodness of human equality, and the goodness of the societies we built upon it, is wholly human. This is a status only we can proclaim.

It is up to us, the readers of the text, to rid ourselves of the 'lo', and lead our humanity towards 'tov.'

³ Der Pentateuch. Übersetzt und erläutert von Samson Raphael Hirsch, 1903. Accessed on Sefaria. Personal Translation

⁴Ibid.

² Nechama Leibowitz, Studies in Bereishit, 13.



About Paige

An accidental semi-third culture kid who hasn't lived in her "permanent" address in over 10 years, Paige fell in with Jewish texts twice, once in academic settings, and then again in religious environments. A soon-to-be alum of the Experiential Educators Program, Paige is excited to keep learning at Pardes next year as a fellow before returning to Berlin, where she'll be working on a Masters in Jewish Theology and continue being active in various Jewish initiatives, notably with Hillel Germany. In addition to texts, she's interested in Shoah education, in which she previously worked, and understanding the various forms of memorial cultures and how we integrate the events of the past into the present. If you want to get her talking, ask her about "The rabbi who fell off the *bima*," the difference between German-speaking Jews and German Jews, and, on a remarkably different note, the best way to throw and catch a frisbee.



The Days of Creation
By Sarah Klein

Artist Statement

The Days of Creation are one of the few parts of the *Chumash* that never ceases to amaze me. Each time I read *Bereishit*, I am reminded of my own journey, humanity's story, our relationship to G-d and Earth, and so much more. I come to the text differently each time, and each time I see new, intricate nuances of the language, connections to my intimate relationships, connections to my blessings, and similarities in my life and path. The window spewing infinitely rainbow colors, which project The Days of Creation, reflects this concept in my piece. Furthermore, the left of my painting expresses how Shabbat is one of the pinnacles of Creation as an essential day of rest.

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. (Genesis 2:2)

Even though our bodies are at rest from creation, we are still actively taking part of it. Human beings continue to add to the never-ending creation story, which couldn't be continued without us. I truly believe that every being can find a parallel or relationship to The Days of Creation, especially feeling part of Creation even while making time to rest during Shabbat. The Days of Creation are a window into infinity.

Inspiration from Genesis:

Day 1 1:4

Day 2 1:7

Day 3 1:9, 1:11

Day 4 1:14-1:16

Day 5 1:20-1:21

Day 6 1:24, 1:26, 2:22

Shabbat 2:2-2:3



Hiding and Returning

By Sarah Klein

I am aware I am breathing.
I am aware I am breathing.

G-d separated בֵּין הָאָדָם וּבֵין הַקֶּשֶׁף
(Genesis 1:4)
Breathing in one, breathing out two.
Two separate breaths.

Yet when a breath fades into another
It becomes inseparable. Indistinguishable
Just like the moment The Divine breathed
life into Adam.

When I feel separated from G-d,
I feel distanced from the beings, animals,
and Earth around me.

Is there any עֶזֶר כְּנֶגְדִּי *ezer kenegdo*
for me?

I try to invite the noise of *Gan Eden*. Isn't it
just manifestations and garments of
The Divine?
The distractions give me a place to hide
my presence.

As I crouch, hiding from my breath, I sud-
denly hear...

איכה *Ayeka*, Sarah?
Where are you?
My name, my essence, my soul's name
instantly wakes me up like the *shofar*.

שמעתי *Sha'mati*. I heard you.
I am here, in the present, with my breath.

I can't hide from my breath.
My breath. My presence. My truth.

Now, I return on my path.

I am aware I am breathing.
I am aware I am breathing.

Sole mate

By Sarah Klein

The world chewed me up and spit me back
onto the cold, hard ground like an olive pit
left with remnants of meat. The scars and
chew marks carved into my sleeve. That's
where I left my heart.

Breath gives us life. But there is nothing
like a good ole punch in the stomach to
remind you what it feels like to have the
breath sucked out of your being.

Love hurts. Love hurt. I am exhausted.
The never-ending whip lash drags me
through life.

Where is my paradise?
The day my eyes were opened is the day
my paradise ended.

I finally felt the pain of birth.
The open wounds on my worn-out hands
that tried to salvage our love.

I remember love in *Gan Eden*.
I floated on a cloud home after our first
date.

Our love moved mountains, stilled waters.
My soul's smile permeated my being in
his presence.

It was a dream of paradise.
Our love spreading *chesed* to our world,
elevating goodness.

His heart hanging on my every word.
My unconditional support.

We cleaved as one, intertwined flesh who
left our homes.

His love like my drug, and my soul yearn-
ing for her thirst to be quenched.

We were frozen in time.
He was my mirror, for me. And I for him.

Then, he ate from the tree.
My garden exposed. My eyes opened. His
heart hardened.

The type of searing pain that brings us to
our knees as we wail WHY?
I grieved as my partner was no longer the
vessel before me.

"we need to lose paradise in order to ap-
preciate and yearn for it"
And I'll never forget our paradise.

But was it really paradise after all?
Was it always waiting to be exposed?

Now, I wander through life, without a sole-
mate ever since.
A piece of my rib, taken and not replaced.
Will I ever know paradise again?
It's not good for woMAN to be alone. So
where is he?

I've turned over every rock and kissed
many frogs.
Someday my prince will come. And he will
be made just for me.
Like I was made just for G-d.

He'll be a fitting helper: part of me and my
compliment.
He'll be worth the wait.
And while I wait, I'll work on me.
I'm going to live my life for me.
Preparing for us.
Our paradise with our opened eyes.



Gan Eden was merely a dream.
Instead I'll yearn for my awakened para-
dise.
My true partner, my Avraham.



About Sarah

Sarah Klein is a member of Pardes' Experiential Educators Program this year, and currently pursuing her Masters in Jewish Education through the William Davidson Graduate School. Sarah is an aspiring rabbi and educator, hoping to ingrain Jewish education with spirituality and action. Sarah was previously a Program Director at various conservative synagogues in Michigan. After spending the coming year at Pardes as a second year fellow, she intends to begin Rabbinical School back in the States.



Infertility: The Loss of a World

By Yehudit Reishtein

At the end of that first busy week of creation, God created the duality of human-kind: male and female.

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצִלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים
בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם: 1 וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם
אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ
אֶת־הָאָרֶץ...

And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them and God said to them, "Be fertile and increase, fill the earth ..." (Genesis 1:27-28)¹

The duality of Adam, as both male and female, is maintained for only a short time. Adam is referred to as plural only for a few more sentences. In the next two chapters, a more detailed telling of the creation story has the male being created first—and female from him—followed by a complete separation of their societal roles. God first assigned the dual male/female Adam to jointly procreate; they seem to have no other tasks in their life. In the more detailed telling of the story in Genesis, Chapter 2, God puts Adam, the single human, in the garden, and tells him to take care of it. Only during the creation of *Isha* (woman) from Adam, does he begin to be called *Ish*. Once they both eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, God assigns them separate roles. God tells Adam that his food will no longer be readily available, but that he will have to work hard for it:

בְּעֶצְבוֹן תֹּאכֶלְנָה כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ:

By toil shall you eat of it [the earth] All the days of your life: (Genesis 3:17)

When telling *Isha* how her role will change, God refers to childbirth as if she already knows about it, but God changes how she will experience it:

הָרְבָה אֲרָבָה עֲצָבוֹנְךָ וְהָרַנֶּךָ בְּעֶצֶב תֵּלְדִי בָנִים
I will make most severe Your pangs in childbearing; In pain shall you bear children. (Genesis 3:16).

Thus the roles are defined at the beginning of time: men farm the land and women bear children. As men and women grow crops, reproduce, and—as time passes—develop societies and cultures, all subsequent activities were apportioned by whose realm they seemed to fall into, as culturally determined by the society. The *Tanakh* does not appear to find division of roles and tasks relevant; it simply describes what things were like at the times events took place.

Interestingly, although the physical act of childbearing is designed by the Creator as an exclusively female activity, in the *Tanakh* text women disappear from the process completely. Generation after generation of men beget numerous children. In lineage after lineage, generations are reported as a man begetting his first son, who is mentioned by name, often followed by the phrase “and he begat sons and daughters,” none of whom are mentioned by name.² The man’s partner in the begetting is rarely mentioned. Women, unnamed and uncredited, fulfill their roles, bearing children

seemingly without difficulty and history progresses smoothly.

But in actuality, neither history nor biology is a smooth process, as we see with the introduction of Abram and Sarai.

וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם וְנָחוֹר לָהֶם נָשִׁים שֵׁם אִשְׁת־אַבְרָם
שָׂרִי...וַתְּהִי שָׂרִי עֲקָרָה אֵין לָהּ וָלֵד:

Abram and Nahor took to themselves wives, the name of Abram's wife being Sarai.... Now Sarai was barren, she had no child. (Genesis 11:29-30).

Sarai is the first barren woman documented in the *Tanakh*. This *pasuk* is the first time the word “עקרה” appears. To ensure the reader knows what it means, the text expands on the word: “she had no child.” One can almost see an exclamation mark at the end of that phrase—Sarai is a woman who cannot do what women do!

The root of the word “עקרה” is עקר (*a-k-r*), which means to uproot or displace. In traditional cultures, in which a woman’s place in society is defined by her place within her family, a barren woman has been uprooted or displaced. In some ways, she has no defined role, and may feel lost. The barren woman is often looked on with pity or scorn because she is unable to fulfill her role, as given at creation. Peninnah, Elkanah’s fertile wife, taunted her rival wife, the barren Hannah.

וַכְּעִסְתָּה צָרָתָהּ גַּם־כַּעַס בְּעִבּוֹר הָרַעְמָה כִּי־סָגַר
הָ” בְּעַד רִחְמָהּ:

Moreover, her rival, to make her miserable, would taunt her that the LORD had closed her womb. (I Samuel: 1:6)

When Elisha wants to reward a Shunammite woman for adding a room to her house in which he could stay when he traveled, He asks his servant, Gehazi, what he could do for her.

וַיֹּאמֶר וּמָה לַעֲשׂוֹת לָהּ וַיֹּאמֶר גִּיחֲזִי אָבֶל בֶּן
אִין־לָהּ וְאִישָׁה זָקֵן:

“What then can be done for her?” he [Elisha] asked. “The fact is,” said Gehazi, “she has no son, and her husband is old.” (II Kings 4:14).

Gehazi’s statement implies that a barren woman must want nothing more than a child. Penninah’s scorn and Gehazi’s pity illustrate the societal norm that the barren woman lacks something, that something being her proper place in society.

The centrality of women’s roles as mothers, can be seen even when a woman is shown as leading a busy life outside of the home. Deborah, the wife of Lappidoth, is both a prophet and a judge. She not only encourages Barak to lead the tribes, but accompanies him to battle. Yet, in her song of victory over Sisera, the commander of the Canaanite forces, she says,

חֲדָלוּ פְּרוֹזוֹן בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל חֲדָלוּ עַד שְׁקִמְתִּי דְבוֹרָה
שְׁקִמְתִּי אִם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל:

Deliverance ceased, Ceased in Israel, Till you arose, O Deborah, Arose, O mother, in Israel! (Judges 5:7)

Deborah claims that her position of leader is within the traditional female role by radically redefining the term “Mother.” This redirection of motherhood is one that few women in our tradition have followed. Although Yael killed Sisera (Judges 4:17-22)

¹All translations from Jewish Publication Society (1985).
Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures

²For example, see Genesis 5:3-31.



and Judith killed the Assyrian general Holfernes (The Book of Judith), it was rare for a woman to follow in Deborah's footsteps. The few who took on leadership roles, such as Queen Esther, are exceptions to the rule that a woman's sole role is within the family. These four women are almost the only ones who play a leadership role in the Bible.³

Rachel's inability to become pregnant upset her so much that she begged Jacob:

הָבֵה־לִּי בָנִים וְאִם־אֵין מִתָּה אָנֹכִי:
Give me children or I will die.
(Genesis 30:1)

Jacob replies to her angrily,

הֲתַחַת אֱלֹהִים אָנֹכִי אֲשֶׁר־מָנַע מִמֶּךָּ פְּרִי־בֶטֶן:
Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from thee the fruit of thy womb?
(Genesis 30:2).

Jacob seems unsympathetic to his beloved wife's suffering. He already has four sons, so her childlessness is not his problem. It is clear he does not understand her despair at being unable to fulfill her role. She lives with his three other wives, in close contact with these women who have fulfilled their maternal roles, bearing and raising their husband's children. Only she has been unable to do what God prescribed as women's role in the Garden of Eden.

Hannah too shows signs of depression in reaction to her childless state: she weeps and is unable to eat. Her husband even asks her why she grieves. Although Elkanah does not berate her, he is nonethe

³Athaliah, the mother of Ahazia, seized the throne after killing all the royal children except the infant Joash, who had been hidden. She ruled for six years. (II Kings 11:1-10). Queen Shlomozion also comes to mind as a female leader, but she ruled during the Second Temple period, and thus was not mentioned in the Tanakh.

less tone deaf, like Jacob, when he says,
וְלָמָּה יָרַע לְבָבְךָ הָלוֹא אָנֹכִי טוֹב לָךְ מֵעֲשָׂרָה
בָּנִים:

Why is thy heart grieved? Am I not better to thee than ten sons? (I Samuel 1:8)

A few verses later the text describes Hannah:

וְהָיָא מָרַת נַפְשׁ וַתִּתְפַּלֵּל עַל־ה' וּבָכָה תְּבִכָּה:
In her wretchedness, she prayed to the LORD, weeping all the while. (I Samuel 1:10)

When challenged by the High Priest Eli, she describes herself as

אִשָּׁה קִשְׁת־רוּחַ אָנֹכִי ...
כִּי־יָמַרְבַּ שִׁיחִי וְכָעַסִי דְּבַרְתִּי עַד־הֵנָּה...
I am a very unhappy woman....I have only been speaking all this time out of my great anguish and distress. (I Samuel 1: 15-16)

Abraham Joshua Heschel points out that although the word "רוח" means spirit, wind, or mind, it is often used in the sense of strong emotion or pathos (p. 315). Thus when Hannah says she is of sorrowful spirit (literally, severe or harsh spirit, קִשְׁת־רוּחַ), she is in anguish at being unable to conceive.

The anguish and despair of these women—Rachel's feeling that she might as well be dead and Hannah's loss of appetite, weeping, and grief—are signs of depression. Even today, in the modern world, with so many pathways open to women, the self-identity of a barren woman may suffer as she asks herself, "What is wrong with me that I cannot accomplish what other women do?" Infertile women often become

depressed or anxious, exhibiting higher levels of both problems than women who have children (Hart, Lakatos et al., Mancuso et al.).

Barren women seek out solutions to this problem. Modern women who have difficulty becoming pregnant may choose to undergo fertility treatment, an expensive, time-intensive procedure involving treatment with drugs that affect the whole body. The equivalent for women in ancient times was the use of herbs. Rachel used mandrakes, a plant used since ancient times as an aphrodisiac and to promote fertility (Encyclopaedia Britannica).⁴ Unfortunately for Rachel, they were not effective, and she remained barren for many more years.

Today, some infertile women hire a surrogate to carry a pregnancy and deliver a baby for them. The ancient world had a similar practice. In Genesis, both Sarai and Rachel gave their maids to their husbands as surrogates. As Sarai says to Abram:

בִּאֲנָא אֶל־שִׁפְחָתִי אוּלִי אֲבִנָּה מִמֶּנָּה

Consort with my maid; perhaps I shall have a son through her. (literally: I will be built from her). (Genesis 16:2)

When Rachel offers Bilhah to Jacob, she uses similar language:

הִנֵּה אָמַתִּי בִלְהָה בָּא אֵלַיָּה וַתֵּלֶד עַל־בִּרְכִּי
וְאֲבִנָּה גַם־אָנֹכִי מִמֶּנָּה:

Here is my maid Bilhah. Consort with her, that she may bear on my knees and that through her I too may have children. (literally: I will also be built from her) (Genesis 30:3)

⁴Rachel's use of the mandrake may actually have been counterproductive; she traded a night with her husband in order to acquire them, thus giving up a chance to conceive.

Both Rashi and Ibn Ezra point out that Rachel does the same thing as her predecessor Sarai. She was, no doubt, familiar with the family history and knew that Hagar's son Ishmael did not follow the ways of his father. Her giving her maid to Jacob to impregnate, hoping for a better outcome, is another sign of her increasing desperation.

Literally, מִמֶּנָּה means "I will be built from her." Rashi infers from this phrase that one who has no children is not built up; she is devastated or destroyed. In other words, a woman without children is wreckage, not a vital part of the world.

But devastated can also be used to designate an extreme emotional state. One who is overwhelmed by grief or anxiety may be described as being devastated. Although the Bible rarely mentions emotions, in the case of barren women, it makes an exception. The text does not shy away from the emotional reactions of these women to their infertility, describing their unhappiness and despair at their state as outliers within female society.

It is interesting to note that the text even describes the envy and jealousy a barren wife feels towards her more fortunate co-wife.

Rachel is described as feeling jealous:

וַתִּרְא רָחֵל כִּי לֹא יֵלְדָה לְיַעֲקֹב וַתִּקְנָא רָחֵל
בְּאֲחֹתָהּ

When Rachel saw that she had borne Jacob no children, she became envious of her sister (Genesis 30:1)

To many commentators, it was inconceivable that a righteous woman would envy another. Rashi says that Rachel envied Leah's good deeds, quoting *Bereishit Rabbah*. "Is it possible that she is more righteous than I? She has merited sons." Bartenura



expands on this explanation, pointing out that the text could not mean Rachel was jealous of her sister, for that would defame and shame a righteous woman.

The commentators thus gloss over all too human feelings of our matriarchs. It is natural for a barren woman to feel envy of those women who are able to give birth easily. It is understandable for her to feel anguished or depressed in light of her existence outside the normal world of women.

When Leah gives birth, she gives her sons names which refer to her relationship with her husband: Reuben, “The LORD has seen my affliction” and Simeon, “The LORD heard that I was unloved” (Genesis 29: 32-33), and so on, to Zebulun, “this time my husband will exalt me” (Genesis 30:20) No wonder that Rachel felt like she would die, when she had to interact daily with young boys whose very names reminded her that she herself had no children.

All of the classical commentators are men. One cannot help but wonder if their lack of attention to the plight of the barren woman is not partly related to their value in life, which unlike that of Biblical women, is largely based on the work world. Men also have the ability to procreate with women other than their wives. Abram, Jacob, and Elkanah all had children with additional wives or concubines; they all had offspring with another woman before their first, or more beloved, wife was able to reproduce. Perhaps it requires female readers of the text, with sensitivity to female physiology to explore more deeply and better understand women’s experience as described in the *Tanakh* text.

These barren women described in the *Tanakh* text do eventually fulfill the commandment received at creation. For when God says, פרו ורבו, be fruitful and multiply, he

addresses Adam who is still both male-female. When male and female are separated into independent beings, the ability to give birth becomes the focus of the Biblical woman’s life, and the inability to do so cuts her off from normal female society. She has lost her place in society and her grounding in the world.

But עקר has another meaning. In addition to uprooted or barren. It can also mean the essence, center, or the principle. Within the core of the אישה עקרה, the barren woman—the woman who has been uprooted from her traditional place in the world—lies the hope and the desire to fulfill her mission to be fruitful and multiply. Sarah, decades beyond her childbearing years, laughed in astonishment and pleasure when God told her she would soon bear a son (Genesis 18: 12-13). Rachel, Hannah, even the Shunnamite woman, never lost their hope that they too would one day bear children. And when that indeed happened, the אישה עקרה, the barren woman, finally found the place she belonged, as עקרת, the center of her family, at the center of a woman’s world.

As the Psalmist says,

מוֹשִׁיבֵי עֵקֶרֶת הַבַּיִת אֲסִי־הַבָּנִים שְׂמֵחָה

He makes the barren woman to keep house, and be a joyful mother of children (Tehillim 113:9).

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About Yehudit

Judith Reishtein worked as an RN in Critical Care and a nurse educator for thirty years, teaching nursing students in multiple programs. After retiring and making Aliyah in 2012, she changed her focus and began to engage in Jewish study. She studies in Community Education Programs at various institutions across Jerusalem. These studies made Judith want to delve more deeply into Jewish sources, and she is now in her second year at Pardes and plans to keep studying there for years to come. Judith has had her writing published in the world of medical and nursing literature, in the form of research articles and textbook chapters. More recently, her writing has turned to short stories loosely based on her experiences with patient care, some of which have been published. When she’s not learning at Pardes, Judith enjoys teaching English to young Ethiopians, doing fun things with her grandchildren, and exploring the wonders of *Eretz Yisrael*.



Every Character, Every Word, Holds Meaning

By Erica Riddick

בראשית א:כז

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים
בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם

בראשית טו:יג-יד

וַיֹּאמֶר לְאַבְרָם יְדַע כִּי־גֵר ה' וְרַעַף בְּאַרְץ
לֹא לָהֶם וַעֲבָדוּם וְעָנּוּ אֹתָם אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה:
וְגַם אֶת־הַגּוֹי אֲשֶׁר יַעֲבֹדוּ דָן אֲנִכִּי וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵן
יֵצְאוּ בְרִכְשׁ גָּדוֹל:

In *yeshiva*, we are told repeatedly over the hours of the days, and the days of the weeks, and the weeks of the years that every letter in the Torah holds meaning. Jews worldwide, spend our hours, and days, and weeks, and years studying the possible meanings and contradictions of our sacred text. Over time, Jews have made space to hear feminist and queer voices within the expanse of the Torah. However, despite the marginalization that made Jews into a diasporic people reflecting the diversity of the world, we are averse to acknowledge reflections of blackness or critically explore ethnicity, race within Torah. We contemplate meanings of the enslavement of the Jewish people by Pharaoh, and connect our histories of persecution throughout time beyond Egypt to the stories within the Torah, but look less critically at the enslavement of people held by the Israelites.

Careful examination of the use of the Hebrew word for slave reveals many uses within our tradition. The Torah uses the word עֶבֶד *eved* (slave) without distinction, versus עֶבֶד עִבְרִי *eved ivri* (Hebrew slave),

Bereishit 1:27

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

Bereishit 15:13-15

And He said to Abram, “Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs, and they shall be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years; but I will execute judgment on the nation they shall serve, and in the end they shall go free with great wealth.

and the Rabbis refer to עֶבֶד כְּנַעֲנִי *eved kanaani* (Canaanite slave) as a description of people who Israelites at times subjugate and enslave, distinct from other slaves. In other places, however, the term is used positively to describe the Jewish peoples’ relationship with God, as עֶבֶד ה' *eved Hashem* (servant of God)¹. There are moments when gender distinguishes עֶבֶד *eved*, identified as male, from שִׁפְחָה *shifcha* (female slave) and אִמָּה *ama* (female concubine slave)². We must decipher Near Eastern Biblical practices to understand the nuance between פִּילְגֶשֶׁת *pilegesh* (concubine) and אִמָּה *ama*. We can ponder instances when slaves are listed as a sign of wealth, and when slave ownership is conspicuously absent when naming wealth, even within the same story moment, separated by only five lines³).

These instances are ripe for careful analysis, from a perspective of race, ethnicity,

and our role as Jews in the marginalization of other human beings who also have the Divine spark within them. What are our thoughts on the ע-ב-ד root relationship between "slave" and "work", and the common ה-פ-ש root of "maidservant" and "family", or the phonetic relationship between אִמָּה *ama* and אִמָּא *ima*? How do these linguistic foundations influence not only the Biblical story, but our modern one? Repetition focuses our attention within the Torah, but in the case of slavery, with many seeing a distinction between Biblical and “modern” slavery—and with the latter subconsciously defined as “black”—do we allow our discomfort over an unreckoned history to permit us to ignore what the Torah demands we should never forget: that every letter holds meaning, and repetition bears focus? Judaism is built on a tradition of study and *mahloket* cycles which records dissenting viewpoints. At times, it feels we have a willingness to explore the fullness of something like עֲקֵדַת יִצְחָק *Akedat Yitzkhak* (Binding of Isaac), including its darker aspects, but reflect much less so on the foundational Jewish narrative of escaping slavery whilst also participating in the same system.

2019 was commemorated as 400 years since a 1619 landing of “some 20 and odd Negroes” in the “New World.” This historical simplification reinforces the idea that enslavement of Africans was perpetrated worst by the United States of America (USA), and does not convey that North America was where only a fraction of enslaved Africans were transported. This singular narrative does not acknowledge earlier documentation of a free black presence in 1513 in what is present day Florida⁴, nor does it note the existence of enslaved

Africans in the USA in 1526⁵. Focusing solely on the USA, does not fully acknowledge the international codification of enslaving Africans before 1619, which was happening in Bermuda, Spain, Portugal, Italy, and the Arab world⁶, nor does it reveal how the histories of the domestic enslavement of indigenous peoples is concurrently entwined within the history of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. What role did the verses on slavery in the Torah, from its first usage in *Bereishit* 9:24-27 on—and the examples of our revered ancestors who owned slaves—play in the development of how Africans from multiple countries were abducted, enslaved, stripped of their origin markers and identities, “created” into a “new” monolithic caste, and transported around the world to nearly every country?

Whilst the divinity of Torah offers timeless opportunities to reflect on its relevance in our modern lives on all topics, including slavery, Rabbinic commentary provides additional ancient documentation of early human enslavement. Relationships between the Torah and secular law can be seen in examples like *Parashat Mishpatim*. Does an unwillingness to unpack, **from within** Judaism—the enslaved also being the enslaver—affect how the legacies of slavery continue to be re-created in our world, in our lifetime? Why do we elevate Moshe, as an Israelite patriarch when he is tied to עֶבֶד *eved*, but ignore Bilha and Zilpah—Israelite matriarchs who birthed a third of our twelve tribes namesakes—when they are tied to שִׁפְחָה *shifcha*? What similarities exist between the uncertain status of Bilha and Zilpah as slave, servant or free with early African presence outside of Africa as free, indentured or enslaved? Why do we celebrate Jewish freedom from slavery and

¹ Joshua 1:13

² See examples sources: *Vayikra* 25:42-46, *Bereishit* 29:29, & *Mishneh Torah*, Slaves 9:8

³ *Bereishit* 12:16 versus 13:2

⁴ Time Magazine, 2019

⁵ Anti-Slavery, 2019

⁶ BBC, 2019 & USA Today, 2019

⁷ *Bereishit* 15:13, *Shemot* 12:40



oppression for 430 years⁷, but struggle with the idea of meaningful reparations after the enslavement of Africans for over 400 years? We speak of the faith Avram demonstrated in knowing generations of Israelites would be enslaved before realizing the prophecy of “return” to ancestral lands, but seem less willing to contemplate the parallel prophecies of Hagar. Both were foretold of countless offspring⁸. Both were foretold of parenting great nations⁹. Do we ignore a rare female character in direct relationship with God because she is a פילגש *pilegash*?

Some Torah Scholars see Torah as progressively transitioning from Godly intervention to human manifestation. From God as creator and savior, to people creating a world that sustains humanity with the resources and energy God continuously renews. Might our banishment from *Gan Eden* have been avoided if, instead of the circle of man blaming woman and woman blaming serpent, we had listened to God instead of hiding? If we had learned from our mistake? How does תשובה *teshuva* (return) relate to slavery? The lessons the Torah holds relative to the ancient institution of enslavement will remain unexplored until we choose to honestly look at all of the nuances from every direction. Yet, we balk at Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade reparations because of questioned ancestry after generations of family structures shattered by design. I believe there are ways to unearth and explore the traces of history left behind, when we value the research; not just for the descendants of stolen Africans, but for all members of the diasporic communities created through international slave trading. Reconciling our long Jewish history with human enslavement may remain as elusive as the Moshiach. Or perhaps, closely

examining the relationship between these two things is part of what will return us back to *Gan Eden* where **all** human beings are created in the image of the Divine.

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About Erica

Before coming to Pardes, Erica Riddick was a designer at a residential architecture firm. She was a 2018 JewV’Nation Fellow, and founded Jews of Color Sanctuary, which creates infrastructure for Jews of Color in Cincinnati and the Midwest. Erica has been a Jewish educator at Mercaz Conservative High School in Cincinnati, OH and co-led a Safety Conversation for 5th & 6th grade students at Temple Israel in Boston, MA. A storyteller at heart, Erica enjoys live action role-play gaming, improv and ballroom dancing, and strives for embodied learning/teaching that is also fun. Erica is currently developing a Torah exploration curriculum based on improv principles, and will be the National Havurah Committee Social Justice Fellow for the 2021 Summer Institute. Erica is curating writings on her time in Jerusalem that she imagines calling My Coronavirus Year Abroad: A Black Jewish Torahical Memoire of Israel.

⁸ Bereishit 16:10 & Bereishit 13:16

⁹ Bereishit 21:13, 21:18, 12:2, & 17:4-7



The Relationship Between Heart and Brain: A Liberatory Puppet Play

By Ava Shaevel



Artist Statement

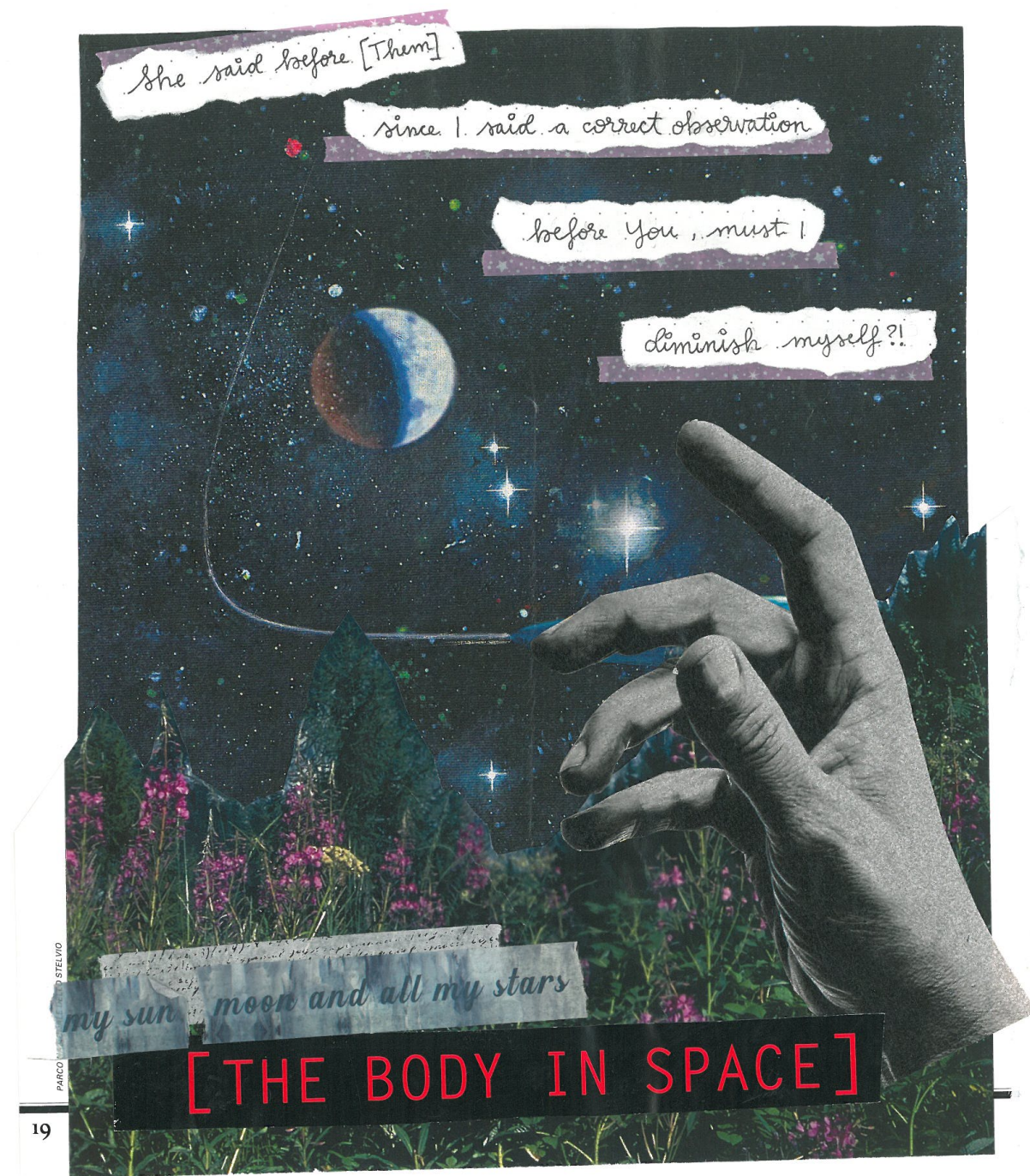
In the beginning of the creation story (*Bereishit* 2:5), there is no shrubbery yet to be found. Then, in verse 6, a well springs up from the ground. The vibration of Mother Earth herself is a powerful force of love that overflows with life. The Creator was waiting for Earth to crave rain, waiting for Earth itself to muster up the *ruach* and intelligence needed to create it. This story explores the *ruach* of Earth, how the forces on the ground create **with** the Creator, push back against the Creator, and ultimately, carve a path of creation for themselves. We on the ground are always re-rooting and trying our best to open up to the rhythm of unity among all lifeforms, and we must remember this interconnectedness; it is the ultimate will of the Creator.

The play can be viewed on YouTube by clicking [here](#).



About Ava

Ava Shaevel, 22, recently graduated from Emory University where they studied Religion, Sociology and Dance. Originally from Newton, Massachusetts, Ava is interested in the intersection of public artistic ritual as a form of education, accessibility to spiritual influence, and acceptance of expression. Ava attended Solomon Schechter Day School of Greater Boston for four years, during which time they were exposed to organized prayer, *Tanakh*, and Torah commentaries, all of which have continued to bring deep meaning into their life. Unsure what their next steps are, Ava is open to new opportunities and looks forward to continuing working in identity-processing spaces and a diverse community. They believe in the power of theatre to tell stories and tell deep truths, and love street theatre's ability to bring people of all backgrounds together. Ava was the 2020/21 recipient of the Wertman-Blum scholarship during their study at Pardes.



[The Body in Space]

By Cliel Shdaimah

Artist Statement

And God made the two great lights; there greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: and the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of heaven to give light upon the earth, a den to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the gift from the darkness: (Bereishit 1:16-18)

There is a *midrash* (BT *Chullin* 60a-b) regarding the creation of 'two great lights,' that details how the Moon was created to be smaller than the Sun. The Moon repeatedly calls out to God and argues with Them about her being diminished in favor of the Sun. It ends with God agreeing that humanity will help Them atone for "making the moon smaller" through ritual sacrifice. A question that came up for me in reading this midrash was: now that we no longer offer ritual sacrifices in this way, how can God continue to atone for this injustice? What could God ask us to do as conduits for this atonement? After much thought, I have come to the conclusion that this promise was an empty one. Moreover, atonement was not an appropriate answer in the first place. This process of atonement implies that it would have to be a never-ending cycle, that God will never be able to fully atone for diminishing the Moon as They did. If we look at this midrash as a parable about gender, God's promise of atonement is akin to acknowledging that there is misogyny that They both created and perpetuated, but there isn't anything They can do about it. More than that, it suggests that there is nothing much God can do to correct it other than saying 'sorry.' That is certainly not a good enough answer when it comes to misogyny and it is not a good enough answer when it comes to the Moon. It is not enough for God to ask for forgiveness or for

humans to aid Them in Their attempts at it. Instead, there is a need for action, responsibility and ownership to be taken by both God and humanity to unlearn, re-imagine, and create something better and different, something that does not rely on the diminishment of some to enable the existence and celebration of another. With this collage, I attempt to underline and celebrate the Moon's defiant and brave words, bring something that might represent God's attempt at atonement down to earth, and allow space for further critique and creativity within this story.



About Cliel

Cliel Shdaimah, 25, is a queer Jewish woman dedicated to exploring and creating queer, feminist readings of beloved texts (specifically Harry Potter and the *Tanakh*). She made Aliyah in 2019 after completing a BA in Gender, Women's, and Sexuality studies at University of Maryland, Baltimore County. Cliel began engaging with Torah on her own half-way through college where she took a couple of *Tanakh* classes and set up an ongoing *chevruta* with UMB-C's Hillel director. She chose to pursue learning at Pardes last year, interested in further exploring foundational Jewish texts and figuring out how to bring her feminist and queer lens to Torah a productive and creative way. This year, she chose to continue her education at Pardes as a Second Year Fellow, and has been working on several art projects as a way to find new ways into the text. Next year, Cliel will be heading back to the States to pursue a Masters in the Hebrew Bible at Yale Divinity School where she is committed to continue to find ways of bringing her different interests together in nuanced and imaginative ways.



Paradise Lost and Regained

By Manny Samuels

After the dramatic creation of Man and Women, there is a break in the narration in the form of a voiceover. The narrator tells us: “Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings (דבק) to his wife, so that they become one flesh.” (Genesis 2:24) In this instance, the word “clinging” (דבק) indicates the human desire of marriage. We see, throughout *Tanakh*, that this word is used in regards to relationships—it is the nature of humanity to cling to those we love.

The story of Ruth and Boaz, and their encounter on the threshing floor, can be viewed as a subversive sequel to the incident of forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. However, Boaz’s dialogue with Ruth that night raises some questions. Was his behavior and speech superhuman and commendable, or was he being insensitive to his and Ruth’s emotions? One of the connections between these two stories is the use of the word “clinging.” (דבק) When Boaz first meets Ruth, he says: “Listen to me daughter: Do not go out to glean in another field... but stay here and cling (דבק) to my girls. Keep your eyes on the field they are reaping, and follow them.” (Ruth 2:8) Could the use of דבק—like in *Bereishit*—indicate Boaz’s inner thoughts, his desire for an intimate relationship with Ruth? For the time being, it remains unclear: at this time, Boaz does not fulfill his responsibility of *Yibum*, levirate marriage.

The third chapter of *Megillat Ruth* begins with the harvest season about to come to an end. Naomi comes up with a plan to get Ruth and Boaz together: her plan is to send Ruth to the threshing floor and approach Boaz when he is alone.

“So bathe, anoint yourself, dress up, and go down to the threshing floor. But do not expose yourself to the man until he is finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he lies down, and go there and uncover his feet and lie down.” (Ruth 3:3)

Ruth agrees to follow Naomi’s plan. It should be noted that in contemporary interpretations ‘uncovering the feet’ is a euphemism for a sexual act¹. In fact, throughout this chapter, the author of the text has fun playing with the readers, dropping hints that a sexual encounter is about to occur. Hebrew words such as שכב (lying down—which appears no less than 8 times) לגלות (to reveal) הערמה (meaning a heap of corn, but rhyming with ערום, a word for ‘naked’ that also appears within Adam and Chava’s story) are used throughout, effectively teasing the audience.

Perhaps the most revealing connection between our two texts is Naomi saying “וידעת” (Ruth 3:4 - from the root ‘to know,’ in the same way that Adam “knew” his wife Chava in *Bereishit* 4:1.) Naomi was willing to place Ruth in a compromising position, both to advance her own needs for financial security, and to have a grandchild to honor her dead son’s memory. In this sense, she could be compared to the snake, with the only difference being that Naomi **also** had Ruth’s interests in mind. This stands in contrast to the snake: according to *Midrash*, the snake was only looking out for its own sexual interests—that is, it wanted Adam out

of the way so it could have Chava to itself.

It should also be noted that Ruth’s behavior is as commendable as Boaz’s: both characters seemingly overcome their sexual desires in difficult situations. Ruth is a Moabite, a tribe of people who are infamously immoral. With its roots in incest (*Bereishit* 19:30-38), Moab can be easily identified with sexual impropriety. However, unlike her tribe, Ruth’s actions are seen as morally just. After Boaz wakes, he tosses and turns; Ruth was holding his feet, so he could only move his upper body. The word used (וילפת) is also used in Judges 16:29, when Samson’s hands are tied to the pillars of the Pagan temple, and he can only move his lower body. With only his lower body moving, Samson is only capable of making sexual gestures. In the inverse, Ruth goes against Naomi’s hints to fornicate with Boaz. Instead, she takes control of the moment and very straightforwardly says: “I am Ruth your handmaid; therefore spread your garment over your handmaid.” (3:9) This is Ruth asking for Boaz’s hand in marriage, further proving her noble intentions, despite the compromising situation in which they find themselves.

If this is the case with Ruth, should we have expected Chava to resist the cunning of the snake? After all, this is the only commandment she and Adam were given, and eating the fruit was punishable by death. And yet, both Chava and Adam give into their physical desires. What was the snake offering that was so irresistible? The snake assures Chava that she will not die (3:4-5), that her eyes shall be open (פקח), and she will be like godlike. Having ‘open eyes’ is a phrase used when talking about spiritual growth that leads to prophecy: “Elisha prayed: ‘Lord, open his eyes (פקח) and let him see.’ And the Lord opened the servant’s eyes and he saw the hills all around Elisha covered with

horses and chariots of fire.” (2 Kings 6:17) By telling Chava that she will be godlike, the snake promises her the unique ability of creation, an all-powerfulness otherwise unattainable. Although Chava and Adam already had an inkling of good and evil, the snake promises Chava that her knowledge would be intensified and drawn even closer to God. Alternatively, the snake is promising that whichever path she chooses, she will have the ability to create her own sophisticated philosophies to justify them. Perhaps this free will and creative ability would have been provided to humanity by God at a later time, but in that moment Chava was crossing a clear boundary. When God questions Adam about what had happened, Adam chooses a path to take: he shirks responsibility and blames the woman. Chava, in turn, blames the snake.

As part of her punishment, Chava is told that “to your husband will be your urge and he will rule over you.” (Genesis 3:16) Indeed, there are many cases in Torah where women are silent and their husbands rule over them. For example, Abraham instructs Sarah to tell Pharaoh that they are siblings, and she goes along with the ruse (11:12-13). In the case of Ruth, she is instructed by Naomi to follow the lead of a man, Boaz. Instead, Ruth acts on her own accord, and tells Boaz exactly what **she** wants to tell him. This sequel to Genesis is correcting the submissiveness cursed upon women; it is telling us that women should have a voice in their own destiny. Furthermore, we can learn another message: when men like Boaz fail to act, women need to step up. This newfound equality reflects the equality that Adam and Chava shared before their sin.

In contrast to Adam, Boaz resists from giving into his desire for immediate gratification. The opportunity certainly existed, but

¹ A good outline of this is in Israel Drazin’s Time Of Israel article titled ‘What Did Ruth and Boaz Do on the Threshing Floor?’ (2017)



instead he acts responsibly by telling Ruth that he would first ensure that Ploni Almoni—first in line to marry Ruth—goes through the *chalitzah* ceremony. Boaz could have consummated his relationship with Ruth right then and there on the threshing floor, but instead he delays and makes sure that the proper procedure is followed. Doing what he considered right took precedence over any emotional connections he may have had with Ruth. Even more than that, he risked the chance of losing her to Ploni.

If we were to leave it there, we could frame the exemplary behaviors of Ruth and Boaz as a *tikkun* for the sin of Adam and Chava, showing us how all mankind could have been. However, we should acknowledge the bombshell dropped by Boaz: “*While it is true that I am a redeeming kinsman, there is another closer than I.*” (Ruth 3:12) Here we have Ruth in a compromising place alone with Boaz and making herself vulnerable; she was faced to make the first move toward reluctant romantic Boaz and ask him to marry her. He is certainly interested, and yet, shows a total lack of sensitivity. Should he have stuck to his deep-seated religious beliefs and followed custom, or should he have acted on his feelings for Ruth and consummated their relationship on the threshing floor? If Boaz had been more in touch with his and Ruth’s inner feelings, perhaps we would read a different story every Shavuot.

Ruth and Boaz very clearly function in a post-*Gan Eden* world: they have intelligence and emotion, they have the ability to choose between good and bad. They possess lust and desire, and must choose to overcome their temptations. Their behavior on the threshing floor—and throughout the entire *Megillah*—shows that humanity, despite our evil inclinations, is capable of living up to the ideals that God originally had

in mind. Our overabundance of kindness, going above and beyond what is required, and doing what is right came naturally to Boaz and Ruth, in a way that many others struggle with. Perhaps this *tikkun* to Adam and Chava’s behavior is why they merited to have the Davidic Dynasty, and eventually the Moshiach, descend from them.



About Manny

Manny Samuels has been studying at Pardes for the past four years. He owned and operated Manny’s Books—a popular stop for *yeshiva* and seminary students—for thirty years before his retirement. After selling books for so long, Manny decided it was time to see what was in those books himself, and learn the text inside. At the age of 72, Manny enjoys his full time studies at Pardes. He is married, has 17 grandchildren and 1 great grandchild. Along with his hobby of playing games, his grandchildren keep him busy in his spare time. Manny enjoys interacting with all types of Jews, and identifies as Open Orthodox.