

THE HMASH AS A GUIDE TO DEVELOP AND  
MAINTAIN THE OPTIMAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
GOD AND HUMAN BEINGS: A COMMENTARY ON THE  
BOOK OF GENESIS CHAPTERS 1-11

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## DEDICATION

I AM DEEPLY INDEBTED TO ALL THE TEACHERS, SCHOLARS, MENTORS AND FRIENDS WHO HAVE GUIDED MY PATH TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF TORAH THAT CONTINUALLY SUSTAINS ME AND ILLUMINATES MY LIFE.

THIS COMMENTARY IS DEDICATED TO MY BELOVED TEACHER, DR. JOB JINDO. DR. JINDO HAS TAUGHT ME TO VIEW THE LESSONS EMBEDDED IN THE TORAH AS ESSENTIAL CORRECTIVES TO MANY OF THE PROBLEMS FACING MODERN LIBERAL SOCIETY.

DR. JINDO EMBODIES THE OPEN AND PLURALISTIC SEARCH FOR TRUTH THAT IS THE CORNERSTONE OF THE ACADEMY FOR JEWISH RELIGION. TORAH IS INDEED “THE HERITAGE OF THE CONGREGATION OF JACOB” (DEUTERONOMY 33:4) YET IT CONTAINS INSTRUCTIONS AND TEACHINGS RELEVANT FOR ALL OF HUMANITY.

DR. JINDO’S CHARGE TO HIS STUDENTS IS TO MAKE TORAH RELEVANT TO ALL, JEW AND GENTILE, RELIGIOUS OR SECULAR. IT IS WITH THIS GOAL IN MIND THAT THIS COMMENTARY IS LOVINGLY DEDICATED TO DR. JINDO.

The *Humash* as a Guide to Develop and Maintain the Optimal Relationship Between God and Human Beings: A commentary on The Book of Genesis Chapters 1 – 11

A) GOALS: This commentary consists of eight units suitable for both teenagers and adult learners. The Book of Genesis chapters 1 – 11 is the basic text to be studied. The commentary is designed for an audience with modern sensibilities. It is written in an inclusive, pluralistic style despite the *Humash* seeming to be, on its face, a Jewish particularist guide. God's guidebook to developing the optimal relationship between God and human beings starts in the beginning of Genesis as a project to cultivate a sense of the transcendent to the whole world. As the drama unfolds, God's attempts to instruct humanity writ-large fail due to problems inherent in human nature and as a result, wickedness continues to multiply unabated. At the end of Chapter 11, God decides that cultivating God consciousness in the one being specifically created in God's image, is best nurtured over many generations by starting first with a small tribe. Beginning with Abraham, the new plan becomes to cultivate a sense of the transcendent first to the Hebrews (later called the Israelites) and ultimately through the Israelites, to the entire world.

The commentary seeks to convey two main points. The first is that the *Humash* has a unified and consistent outlook concerning problems inherent in human nature, as outlined in Genesis Chapters 1 – 11. Throughout the Guidebook, God provides a series of correctives to address these problems, thereby constantly re-establishing relationship and harmony between humans and the Divine. The second point is that God's expectations for human beings are based upon the level of God's presence in their midst that people have, as of that particular point in time, learned to comprehend. It's an unfolding awareness of God's presence only coming to full expression at the end of the *Humash*, culminating in a mutual relationship of love.

B) METHODOLOGY: The curriculum will focus on the *peshat*, the plain contextual meaning, through close attention to Biblical Hebrew grammar, key leitmotifs and Ancient Near East literary structures such as chiasm and poetic parallelism. Ancient Near East beliefs will be contrasted with the religious world view of the *Humash*, revealing similarities, as well as differences. The discontinuities with surrounding Ancient Near East cultures reveal and illuminate doctrines that are uniquely Israelite. Finally, inter-textual analysis of the Hebrew Bible will also feature prominently in deciphering the *peshat* of the text.

C) INTRODUCTION: Genesis begins with transcendence. God transcends nature, unlike the gods of surrounding Ancient Near East cultures who “were completely dependent on nature and fate. Their major interest was themselves, the satisfaction of their needs, their hates, and their loves. The gods of Babylonia were not interested in the private destiny of man.”<sup>1</sup>

In sharp contradistinction, the God of the Hebrew Bible is free from all limitations.<sup>2</sup> Yet God is lonely and creates a species in his image and likeness to cure this existential loneliness. “His personality finds its true expression in love for another personality...It is a great love that cannot be contained by the boundaries of the self, a love that seeks involvement of the divine heart with its human counterpart.”<sup>3</sup>

God’s first step to create relationship was to make Godself smaller both to carve out a space for creation as well as laying the groundwork for true relationship. Love always begins by making ourselves, our egos, smaller.<sup>4</sup>

God creates human beings in his image and tasks them with being stewards of creation.<sup>5</sup> God also endows humankind with free will. Only one creature on earth, man, can defy the will of God.<sup>6</sup> “God is teaching that love means giving up control and then having to live with the consequences.”<sup>7</sup>

Genesis Chapter 1 through 11 presents a set of problems that ensue from those consequences. Due to problems inherent in human nature, human wickedness proliferates over time, causing the blurring of boundaries between humans and the Divine. In response, God tries to teach humankind to control their urges and to imitate God’s lack of reflexive concerns to the greatest extent possible, while never compromising the free will of those created in his image. The goal of self-transcendence (maximizing transitive concerns) is that the more a human being forgets himself by focusing on others, the more human he becomes. Only a true focus on the other, whether human or Divine, can engender a true love relationship. Indeed, it is “not good for man to be alone”<sup>8</sup> and creation is deemed “very good,”<sup>9</sup> for God can now be in relationship with the human other, created in “God’s image”<sup>10</sup>

While creation is very good, it is not perfection. “Imperfections are necessary elements of love. However, like the disappointments and setbacks we experience in our own love relationships, they do serve to make us introspect and consider the meaning, the depth and the power of our love.”<sup>11</sup>

The Book of Genesis is specifically designed to cultivate this type of introspection. The full blown dialogical relationship of love will not reach its full fruition until the Book of Deuteronomy.

Unlike the other four books, Genesis is almost exclusively a book of narratives. (separated by genealogies). This form is essential for several reasons. Genesis not only relates the ancient story of God's evolving relationship with human beings but also serves as an invitation for contemporary readers to create meaning by reading themselves into the story and empathizing with the characters. The narrative form offers paradigms for what Abraham Joshua Heschel called situational thinking.<sup>12</sup> The sequencing of the narratives in Genesis is essential and noting progressions in the text uncovers the evolution of God's designs for relationships with the creatures made in his image. "The Bible is primarily not man's vision of God but God's vision of man. The Bible is not man's theology but God's anthropology, dealing with man and what He asks of him"<sup>13</sup>

Genesis relays narratives of falling short, making mistakes and learning from them. In every generation, humankind can access the Guidebook, empathizing with the travails of the characters so that we, too, can avoid the pitfalls inherent in human nature, thereby growing in our own personal relationship with God. After all, putting ourselves in the position of someone else is the foundation of self-transcendence.

<sup>1</sup>Yochanan Muffs, *The Personhood of God: Biblical Theology, Human Faith and the Divine Image* (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005) p14

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. "The true turning of God toward man was a total revolution in the religious world of the ancient Near East"

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. p13

<sup>4</sup>Jeffrey Segelman, "A D'var Torah for Parashat Bereishit", AJR Weekly D'var Torah (October 15, 2020)

<sup>5</sup> See Lesson 1D

<sup>6</sup> See Lesson 4C

<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey Segelman, "A D'var Torah for Parashat Bereishit", AJR Weekly D'var Torah (October 15, 2020)

<sup>8</sup> Genesis 2:18

<sup>9</sup> Genesis 1:31

<sup>10</sup> Genesis 1:27

<sup>11</sup> Jeffrey Segelman, "A D'var Torah for Parashat Bereishit", AJR Weekly D'var Torah (October 15, 2020)

<sup>12</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York, N.Y.: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1951) “Situational thinking is necessary when we are engaged in an effort to understand issues on which we stake our very existence.” p5

<sup>13</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man is not Alone* (New York, N.Y.: Jewish Publication Society, 1955) p 129

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### Unit 1: Genesis 1 and 2 – God’s Adaptation of Myth to Monotheist Ends pp1-5

- A) The Purpose of Genesis 1 – Demythologizing
- B) Theogony, Theomacy and Cosmogony
- C) The Divine Council: Genesis 1:26
- D) What is the Meaning of Being Created in God’s Image?
- E) What is the Climax of the Creation Narratives: The Creation of Human Beings, Shabbat or Something Else?

### Unit 2: The Relationship between Genesis 1 and 2 and How Do the Combined Accounts Correlate with Scientific Facts on the Origin of the Cosmos pp6-8

### Unit 3: Acquisition of the Knowledge of Good and Bad: The Beginning of the Unfolding Relationship between God and Man pp9-14

- A) What is the Knowledge of Good and Bad?
- B) The Role of the Snake: Unleashing Unlimited Scenarios and Bringing the Consequences of Knowledge to Light
- C) What is the Exact Content of the Knowledge? A Battle of Free Wills and the Need for Self-Transcendence
- D) Moral Choices, Making Mistakes and Mastering Urges: The Relationship between Chapters 3 and 4

### Unit 4: Humanity is Left to Exercise Unrestrained Free Will without Divine Guidance: A Prescription for Disaster pp15-26

- A) Why Doesn’t Cain Suffer the Consequences? The Connection between DAM, ADAM and ADAMA
- B) The Growth of Culture and Cities: Further Estrangement from God (Genesis 4:17 – 26)
- C) The Genealogy of Chapter 5: Hints of the End of Dam/Adam/Adama Framework for the Dialogical Relationship. A Change in the Ownership of the tzelem
- D) Enoch as a Last Gasp Alternative Model of Relationship between Humans and the Divine: Walking with God
- E) Noah’s Name and It’s Relationship to His Mission

F) The Divine Beings Seeking Human Partners – The Final Straw Leading to the Flood: Genesis 6:1–13

Unit 5: The Undoing and Re-Doing of Creation: The Ark as a Crucible of Kindness and the Triumph of God’s Mercy over God’s Judgment pp26-31

- A) Noah’s Relationship with God and the Mission
- B) The Undoing and Redoing of Creation
- C) Why God Changed His Mind: The Triumph of Mercy over Judgment

Unit 6 God’s Acts of Self- Limitation and Self Adjustment Salvage the Dialogical Relationship pp32-38

- A) God’s subtle Shift in Expectations about Procreation and God’s Huge Act of Self-Limitation
- B) God’s Self-Adjustment Creates a New Paradigm: A Unilateral Covenant and Taking Adama out of the Calculus
- C) A Unilateral Covenant Memorialized by a Special Sign

Unit 7 God’s Management of Human Foibles Post-Flood and Foreshadowing of Israel as the New Paradigm for Building the Dialogical Relationship pp 39-48

- A) Noah Gets Drunk: Sexual Sin Defines the Archetypes of Israel, her Enemies and her Allies
- B) The 70 Nations: The Criteria for Classification of the Nations and the Emphasis on Eber; Both Signal a Heightened Foreshadowing of Potential Major Changes in the Dialogical Relationship
- C) The Tower of Babel: Boundary Violations Leads God to Re-Scatter Humans Across the Globe

Unit 8 An Entirely New Paradigm for Creating an Optimal Dialogical Relationship: Slowly Working out the Problems, Starting with One Mesopotamian. pp49-54

Conclusion: pp55-57



## The *Humash* as a Guide to Develop and Maintain the Optimal Relationship Between God and Human Beings: A Commentary on The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-11

### Unit 1: Genesis 1 and 2- God's Adaptation of Myth to Monotheist Ends:

#### A) The Purpose of Genesis 1: Demythologizing

In the Ancient Near East and likely true of all civilizations, studying the beginning myths of any people can tell us about how the people understood themselves, their world and their God.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of Genesis 1 is to demythologize. This has two functions. First, demythologizing the story emphasizes that this is God's account from God's perspective alone. Secondly, this is God's first step in setting the first essential parameter for relationship with mankind. God is wholly other. Genesis begins with transcendence: God transcends nature.<sup>2</sup>

Genesis considers God to be the source of light, not the sun, moon and the stars. In other Ancient Near East cultures, all worshipped the astral bodies. Genesis 1:16 is a polemic against worshipping heavenly bodies as is Genesis 1:21 a polemic against creation accounts that have sea monsters as creators. In Ancient Near East creation stories, the winds are considered gods.<sup>3</sup> In Genesis, *ruach Elohim* belongs to and is in control of God. In general, features of nature were considered gods in the Ancient Near East such as god of the mountain and god of the ocean.

God is totally other than nature. This total otherness is essential to fulfill the primary goal of the Torah as God's guide to humanity in developing the optimal relationship with the creator. Humanness can only be defined in relationship to others and with God. "It is usually thought that what is new in the Bible is the abstract idea of God. However what is really new is ancient Israel's understanding of what it means to be human, the idea that the human personality only realizes itself in its moral relationship with other personalities, whether God or man."<sup>4</sup> Ancient Israel gains this insight through the Book of Genesis.

#### B) Theogony, Theomacy and Cosmogony.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Joshua J. Mark, *Mythology, Ancient History Encyclopedia*.

<https://www.ancient.eu/mythology/>. Last modified October 31, 2018

2. Job Jindo, class notes BIB 345, The Academy for Jewish Religion, Fall Semester 2019

3. Ira Spor, "Mesopotamian Deities", Department of Near Eastern Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art (April 2009)

4. Yochanan Muffs, *The Personhood of God: Biblical Theology, Human Faith and the Divine Image* (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005)

5. Job Jindo, class notes BIB 345, The Academy for Jewish Religion, Fall Semester 2019

All Ancient Near East creation accounts include these three elements. Theogony is the genealogy of divine origins. Theomacy is a struggle among the gods and cosmogony details the origin of the cosmos. Typically, the Ancient Near East creation accounts include high drama and graphic depictions.

Genesis 1 only includes cosmogony, rendered in efficient and sparse detail. The origin of God is not part of the narrative, God has no personality formed by Godself's personal history nor does God have a professional history with other beings pre-creation. The God of the Hebrew Bible is only known to humans through becoming. "In contrast to pagan myth, biblical legend tells nothing about the personal life of the deity; its subject is always the relationship of God to his creation."<sup>6</sup>

C) The Divine Council: Genesis 1:26

"Let us make man in our likeness and our image." Is the God of Genesis and the Hebrew Bible a singular entity? In other Ancient Near East cultures, multiple gods are the norm.

In Genesis, as elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, there is acknowledgment of other entities in the divine council but God always announces the plan to subordinates and God alone retains the decision making power.<sup>7</sup> Biblical monotheism allows celestial entities as long as God's will always transcends, just as God's will transcends anything in nature.

The multiplicity of these subordinate celestial beings can also be understood as different aspects of God's personality coming to the fore, similar to God's different manifestations to people on earth.<sup>8</sup> (*hashem, elohim, hashem elohim, el elyon, elohay Avraham, Yitzhak and Ya'akov, el olam*)

In the Ancient Near East, El is a generic name for god.<sup>9</sup> The Israelite God requires multiple manifestations despite God's singular otherness. Given that humans are all created in God's image<sup>10</sup> yet no two are exactly alike, necessitates different faces or aspects of God in order for God to be relatable to all, especially since the arch purpose of the Bible is to cultivate relationship between each and every human and the Divine. God *is* transcendent but sometimes engages human beings on a psychic level employing God's many faces to connect with all those made in his image.

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6. Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel: From its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile*, (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1960) p.69

7. See 1 Kings 22:19-22, Isaiah Chapter 6, Job Chapters 1-2

8. Gen. 4:6, 1:1, 2:4, 14:22, Ex. 3:6, Gen. 21:33 and many others

9. Jack Miles, *God: A Biography* (New York, New York.: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1995) p.61

10. Gen. 1:26

D) What is the meaning of being created in God's image?

In Ancient Near East creation stories, human beings are created for the use of and to serve the needs of the gods. Human beings have no value in their own right.<sup>11</sup> The only exception is the king; he is the one person who is considered to be in the image of god, in the sense that he alone acts with god's authority on earth.<sup>12</sup>

The Mesopotamian cognate for "tzelem" (in Biblical Hebrew "image") means steward.<sup>13</sup> A steward is strictly accountable to the true owner, an obligation of humanity that God never wavers on<sup>14</sup>

Israelite theology is the royalization of everyone; all humans are created in God's image. All are responsible as stewards of the planet; it's a celestial responsibility as a caretaker and not a claimer of rights.<sup>15</sup> Being created in the image of God, all are capable and are indeed called upon to form a personal relationship with a transcendent God who nonetheless, leaves an image of Godself within us.

As Genesis 1-11 unfolds, it will become patently obvious that the relationship between God and humans to the land will be the two ultimate barometers of the quality of human existence.<sup>16</sup> In this initial iteration of the dialogical relationship, Genesis 1 and 2 tasks man with "ruling the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky and all the living things that creep on earth"<sup>17</sup> as well as "to give names to all the animals"<sup>18</sup> another sign of dominion. Lastly, man is commanded "to till and to tend" the Garden of Eden.<sup>19</sup> Humans are stewards with specific tasks. How well they perform these tasks will have cosmic significance. The first man is conceived as a farmer and work is part of the divine plan.

E) What is the climax of the creation narratives- the creation of humans, Shabbat or something else?

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11. Joshua J. Mark, *Emuna Elish – The Babylonian Epic of Creation – Full Text Ancient History Encyclopedia*, Tablet VI 5-8

12. Adele Berlin, Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Jewish Study Bible, Second Edition* (New York, New York.:Oxford University Press, 2014)  
Note on Genesis 1:28 (hereafter Jon D. Levenson)

13. Shai Held, "Created in God's Image: *Parashat Bereshit*" ([Hadar.org/torah-resource/created-gods-image](http://Hadar.org/torah-resource/created-gods-image)) "Consensus among Bible scholars is that the image of God is to be God's viceroys and stewards on earth."

14. Lev. 25:23-24. Land must not be sold beyond reclaim and must always be redeemed.

15. Shai Held, "Created in God's Image: *Parashat Bereshit*" ([Hadar.org/torah-resource-created-gods-image](http://Hadar.org/torah-resource-created-gods-image)) "The Torah asserts that ordinary human beings – not just kings, but each and every one of us are God's earthly delegates."

16. See Unit 4A

17. Gen. 1:28

18. Gen. 2:19-20

19. Gen. 2:15

It's hard to make a strong argument that the formation of human beings is the pinnacle of creation, despite the species uniqueness in being made in the image of God. As we'll soon discover, God has grave misgivings about this creation and almost destroys the planet over human wickedness.<sup>20</sup> Even when God relents, God acknowledges that 'the devising of man's mind are evil from his youth.'<sup>21</sup>

Chronologically, Shabbat is at the end of the first creation story. God created the entire universe in six days and God rested on the seventh day. It's God's day outside time and *Shabbat* is not enjoined upon the Israelites until the after the Exodus from Egypt.<sup>22</sup>

In the Ancient Near East, seven is a number indicating completeness and things coming to a conclusion. There is the seven-time mention of "good" or "very good"<sup>23</sup> in Genesis 1. God is mentioned 35 times in the first creation account<sup>24</sup> and the narrative about Shabbat dividing the two creation accounts has exactly 35 words in Hebrew.<sup>25</sup> The Hebrew root *haf weak lamed* meaning all or completion, is mentioned 14 times between Genesis 1 and the mention of *Shabbat*.<sup>26</sup> *Shabbat* would seem to be the culmination of creation due to its extraordinary nature of being outside of time and only for God as well as the clues of the embedded sevens.

Other Ancient Near East creation stories end with the construction of a temple for the creation god.<sup>27</sup> *Shabbat* is not the end of the story here either. Comparing Exodus 39:32, 42-43 (the completion of the Tabernacle) with Genesis 1:21-2:3 finds both employing similar language describing blessing and the completion of work. Both narratives begin on the first day of the first month of the year.<sup>28</sup> "As the Lord commanded Moses." appears seven times in Exodus chapter 40.<sup>29</sup> Given all the above similarities, it is clear that the Creation story culminates neither in the creation of the human race nor *Shabbat*. The creation story is only completed at the end of the Book of

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20. See Unit 4F

21. Gen. 8:21

22. Ex. 16:29

23. Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31

24. Genesis Chapter 1

25. Gen 2:1-3

26. Gen. 1:21(2X), 25, 29(3X), 30(4X), 31, 2:1,3

27. Joshua J. Mark, *Emuna Elish – The Babylonian Epic of Creation – Full Text, Ancient History Encyclopedia*, Tablet VI 50-65

28. Ex. 40:17. While not noted as such in the Torah, Jewish tradition accepts the notion that the world was birthed on day one of the year, even though *Tishrei* is actually the seventh month of the calendar year.

29. Ex. 40:19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 32. Paralleling the seven -time mention of "good" and very "good" combined of Genesis 1. See footnote 23 above for the citations.

Exodus because the presence of God joins human beings on earth by taking up residence in the Tabernacle. Coaxing God to bring God's presence to earth and cohabiting with humans in creation is the end of the beginning. The apex of creation is none other than the beginning of this crucial turning point in the dialogical relationship.

Unit 2: What is the relationship between Genesis 1 and 2 and how do the combined accounts correlate with scientific facts on the origin of the Cosmos?

In the Ancient Near East, different versions of the same stories are sequential events in the same story.<sup>1</sup> Some examples in Genesis include three sister/wife narratives, multiple covenants and the frequently interchanged names of Jacob and Israel

In Genesis 1, humans are created somewhat like God, but the story lacks any real intimacy or relationship between “the man” and his creator. Genesis 1 represents an ideal world from God’s perspective alone. In sharp contrast, Genesis 2 is an earth-centered account. Humans are not enumerated to be like God (a much lower origin of man, dust, is relayed in Genesis 2:7) yet the narrative here is much more intimate. God blows life into the man’s nostrils and recognizes it is “not good” (against the purpose of creation) for man to be alone.<sup>2</sup> Genesis 2 is a more real and relatable creation account from a human perspective. As human beings, we live in the tension between the real and the ideal. This tension creates meaning, allowing for the dialogical relationship to blossom. The second account makes clear that humans are “not an amalgam of perishable body parts but a psychophysical unity that depends on God for life itself.”<sup>3</sup>

The Genesis creation narratives, however, fly in the face of scientific reality. Can a modern reader who believes in creation by a “big bang” accidental, random mixing of gases, still derive meaning and purpose from an engagement with the Book of Genesis? Absolutely. The two systems of meaning are mutually exclusive, each with their own agenda.

The Torah is not interested in scientific facts and the lack of facts is *purposeful*. Science is a factual inquiry to answer the question of “how” and the Torah is an answer to “why”. The purpose of the Torah is to be a guidebook, exploring the meaning of life so as to ultimately develop the optimal relationship between God and human beings. The creation account of Genesis 1 is demythologized leaving humanity with a God that is totally other and ideal, while the God of Genesis 2 is more intimate and real, from a human perspective. The breeding ground of relationship lies in the tension and interplay between the two; a scientific/historical perspective on

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1. Jon D. Levenson, *Jewish Study Bible*, p.7

2. Gen. 2:18. When God declares elements of creation as “good” in Genesis chapter 1, by definition, that aspect of creation is according to God’s plan. God confirms that after creation on the sixth day by surveying all and declaring the entirety of creation As “very good” (Gen. 1:31)

3. Jon D. Levenson, *Jewish Study Bible*, commentary on Gen 2:4b-6

creation would only stifle the possibility of further growth in understanding our relationship with God. Science tells us-“it is what it is, and that’s it.” The Torah purposefully does not include theogony or theomacy narratives inviting us to explore the why of the human condition which like God, can only be discovered in the future through the aspect of becoming and not through the discovery of immutable scientific or historical facts. The lack of facts is purposeful.

History is a scientific analysis of the past. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi notes that no word for history exists in either Biblical or Modern Hebrew.<sup>4</sup> (Modern Hebrew uses the English loan word *historiya*). Instead of an historical accounting, the Hebrew Bible instead urges remembrance 169 times<sup>5</sup> (*zechira*). The oft repeated admonition to remember *crucially* includes the imperative to act and it is a *mutual* obligation incumbent both upon Israelites as well as God.<sup>6</sup> The actual historical acts are irrelevant; only God’s acts framed within successive Jewish responses throughout the generations matter, nothing else. “Israel is told only that it must become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, nowhere is it suggested they become a nation of historians.”<sup>7</sup>

The narrative portions of the Torah have a specific agenda to prompt inquiries into human existence and to ultimately, make meaning about our purpose on the planet. This is the primary goal of Genesis, the only one of the five books of the Torah that is almost exclusively narrative.

An example of facts being unimportant in the Torah is the Cain and Abel narrative. After Cain kills Abel, God judges him to be “more cursed than the ground”<sup>8</sup> (the ground being cursed upon the banishment from Eden) as well as a “restless wanderer on earth.”<sup>9</sup> Yet soon after these curses, the text relays that Cain marries. Who would possible marry such a person? In the same sentence we learn that a son, Enoch, is born.<sup>10</sup> Enoch is the founder of the first city. Since hardly any people were around, for whom was he setting up a city for?

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4. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1982)

5. Ibid, p.5

6. Ex. 29:12, Numb. 10:9-10 Both the breastplate of decision and the trumpets involve acts of remembering with what are clearly reciprocal obligations.

7. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmia, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1982) Foreword

8. Gen. 4:11

9. Gen. 4:12

10. Gen. 4:17

The Cain narrative is clearly not about historical fact but is an invitation to reflect about fratricide, the continuation of life after such a grave offense and the inexorable evolution of cities and human culture. Therefore, the Torah is not concerned with facts but rather with engendering reflection towards the creation of a dialogical relationship by focusing on “the why” through the situational thinking of the narratives.

A key pedagogical device of the Torah is to retell our foundation stories in each and every generation but crucially, from a meta-factual perspective. The purpose of the oft-mentioned biblical command for this kind of instruction<sup>11</sup> is *davka* to inject successive generations into the sweep of Jewish history through narrative. This is the exact strategy employed by the *Haggadah* read on Passover. “In every generation each person must look upon himself as if he left Egypt,” For Yerushalmi “Passover is the great historical festival of the Jewish people and the *Haggadah* its book of remembrance and redemption. Here the memory of the nation is *annually* renewed and replenished and the collective hope sustained.”<sup>13</sup> Crucially, Moses, God’s handpicked choice as liberator, is completely absent from the *Haggadah* narrative since his inclusion would impede each generation’s ability to see themselves in the story. With Moses’ absent from the story, the focus is now exclusively on God as the unilateral protagonist and each Jew’s relationship to that God in every successive generation.

Like the *Haggadah*, The Torah is not interested in the Exodus per se but rather putting ourselves into a living history. Every generation and every person is retrojected into this history, bringing their unique selves into a potential relationship with God, specifically through narrative. The only formal prayer in the five books, the farmer’s prayer upon bringing first fruits to the Temple, follows this format.<sup>14</sup> Personal acts in the here and now are retrojected through the prayer into Israelite history, bringing new meaning and purpose in each successive generation.

On weekdays, a Jew prays three times a day “You graciously endow mortals with intelligence, teaching wisdom and understanding. Grant us knowledge, wisdom and discernment.”<sup>15</sup> God provides the narratives in his guidebook as portals, to cultivate wisdom in human beings. It’s the job of

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11. Ex. 10:2, 13:1, Deut. 11:19 as examples

12. Sidney B. Hoenig, *Passover Haggadah* (New York, New York: Hebrew Publishing Press, 1959)

13. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Haggadah and History: A Panorama in Facsimile of Five Centuries of the Printed Haggadah* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Washington Press, 1975) p.15

14. Deut. 26:1-10

15. Jules Harlow, *Siddur Sim Shalom* (New York, New York: The Rabbinical Assembly, 1989) p.110



those created in God's image to read the guidebook with discernment, to see ourselves in the narratives and to focus on the why of human existence rather than a scientific inquiry of exactly how we got here.

Unit 3: Acquisition of The Knowledge of Good and Bad: The beginning of the unfolding relationship between God and Man.

A) What is the Knowledge of Good and Bad?

The beginning of humankind's relationship with God commences with God's first command in the Torah, to be fruitful and multiply<sup>1</sup> "Immediately thereafter" The Lord God took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden to till it and tend to it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying: "Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat; but as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die."<sup>2</sup>

On its face, the knowledge of good and bad seems like another merism, here meaning the totality of knowledge. The root *Dalet Ayin Tav* in Biblical Hebrew, however, has two specific meanings. One is that this root suggests not only intellectual comprehension but also an experiential component. (as it does in the liberation narratives of Exodus chapters 1-10)<sup>3</sup> The experiential aspect of acquiring knowledge is key to human development and moral choice. After eating of the fruit of the tree, both pleasant and painful experiences ensue and thereby, the man and the woman are awakened to the consequences of acquiring knowledge.

The other meaning of this root is sexual relations<sup>4</sup> and the Garden narrative is rich in allusions to sexual relations. The Garden of Eden, where all is eternally fertile, is a word play on the flow of subterranean waters that welled up to create the perpetual garden in the first place, the "*aid*". The creation of the first woman from the rib of the man prompts the editorial comment "Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh."<sup>6</sup> It is literally against the purpose of creation for humans to be alone: The Lord God said it is not good (*lo tov*) for a man to be alone."<sup>7</sup> Finally the story in the Garden begins "The two of them were naked, the man and his wife yet felt no shame."<sup>8</sup> Both the man and the woman were innocent and ignorant. Upon eating the forbidden fruit, "Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they perceived (*D-A-T*) that they were naked; and they sewed together fig leaves and made themselves loincloths."<sup>9</sup> It's only with the acquisition of the knowledge of good and bad that the shame of nudity ensues. Sexual urges and temptations undergird the narrative. It

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1. Gen. 1:28-29

2. Gen. 2:15-17

3. Ex. 7:17, 8:18, 9:14,10:2. All four citations include the subject verb D-A-T within a complete phrase that means "in order" that the subject party will know that it is Y-H-V-H who is causing severe experiential manifestations through the plagues. ( In order, first upon *Pharaoh*, then the Egyptians, followed by the entire world and finally, upon the Israelites.

4. Gen. 4:1

5. Gen. 2:6

6. Gen. 2:25

7. Gen. 2:18

8. Gen. 2:25

9. Gen. 3:7

is the acquisition of this knowledge of one's desires, not the desires in and of themselves, which generates shame leading ultimately to exile and banishment from the idyllic garden.

B) The Role of the Snake: Unleashing Unlimited Scenarios and Bringing the Consequences of Knowledge to Light:

“Now the serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild beasts the Lord God had made.”<sup>10</sup> The Hebrew word for shrewdest is *arum*, formed from the exact same root (*Ayin-Resh-Mem*) as naked. It is indeed the shrewdness of the snake's question that ultimately provokes the guilt response in the man and the woman. “Did God really say: You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?”<sup>11</sup> The question is tricky since it doesn't readily admit to a yes or no answer. In fact, it is only the man who heard God's command. The woman closely paraphrases the experience of the man but adds the prohibition of touching the tree. The snake here becomes a metaphor for the unleashing of unlimited scenarios by the mere act of a properly placed tricky question.

The snake is also shrewd because of an accurate awareness of consequences. “And the serpent said to the woman, “You are not going to die, God knows that as soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like divine beings who know good and bad.”<sup>12</sup> The snake's prognostication was on the mark; they didn't die even though God said they would! In addition, in Genesis 3:7, the man and woman's eyes were opened to knowledge upon eating the fruit and immediately after banishment from the Garden, God acknowledges that humans “have become like one of us, knowing good and bad.”<sup>13</sup>

Lastly, the serpent is shrewd because of an acute understanding that humans have a natural tendency to rebel. By coaxing the woman to believe she will become like God, the snake is playing on the inexorable human tendency to attempt to rebel against the limits of our existence. We crave autonomy and also want to overcome our creaturely status as well as our alienation. In Genesis 3:6, Eve undergoes a process of rationalization similar to which she just succumbed which leads to an act of disobedience.<sup>14</sup> Not only that, now it is the woman who independently decides what is “good” (*tov*) in creation and worthy of eating. “When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight (aesthetically pleasing, *ta'ava*, also means lusting and sexual abomination) to the eyes

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10. Gen. 3:1

11. Ibid

12. Gen. 3:4-5 I am indebted to Job Jindo for insights about the shrewdness of the snake. Class notes BIB 345, The Academy for Jewish Religion, Fall Semester 2019

13. Gen. 3:22

14. Jon D. Levenson, *Jewish Study Bible*, comments on Gen.3:6

and that the tree was and beautiful in form (or to contemplate), she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate.”<sup>15</sup>

C) What is the Exact Content of the Knowledge? A Battle of Free Wills and the Need for Self Transcendence:

*D-A-T* ultimately boils down to exercising our ability to make autonomous choices by our own progression of right and wrong decisions and not by God making decisions for us. Before this point in human evolution, only God had decisions and judgments. Humans are now independent and the risk is now no less that the possible eclipse of God. On the other hand, the magical garden of youthful innocence (i.e. the ideal world) is lost forever and the real world of adulthood and painful realities now holds for the human race.

Human independence is key to understanding Biblical monotheism. Only one creature can defy the will of God and it's never other gods, it's man and man alone. Humans don't actually constrain God but their tendencies to overreach often vex God and therefore, changes in the relationship between humans and God are ever evolving.

A major drama in the beginning chapters of the Book of Genesis is that the improper exercise of human free will clashes with and leads to defiance of the Divine will, leading to punishment, exile and ultimately destruction. Human custodians made in the image of God are intended to tend and till the earth...until their nature to rebel kicks in. Humans must cultivate a reverence/awe for God<sup>16</sup> which allows humans to ultimately transcend their own earthly perspective and to be more like God, whose concerns are transitive (for others) rather than reflexive. The antidote to improper exercises of human free will is to try to imitate God, having as much transitive concerns as possible. Since we as a species need to cultivate self -transcendence, the Bible, our guidebook, contains a gallery of episodes that are lessons in self -transcendence.<sup>17</sup>

When we are able to transcend ourselves, we no longer see others from an exclusively instrumental lens to achieve our own goals. Rather, we appreciate the inherent beauty and value of the other, whether human or Divine. Real love is seeking the

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15. Gen. 3:6. The parenthesis is my additions.

16. Jack Miles, *God: A Biography* (New York, New York: Alfred a. Knopf Inc., 1995) p44 “At this point in the Bible, God has not yet asked for reverence, much less worship.” Interestingly, the first mention of *yirah* (awe/fear) in the Torah is in Gen. 15:1 with God telling Abram not to fear, God will fulfill the promises as yet unfilled. God follows this by declaring a unilateral covenant. *Yirah* consciousness evolves slowly. Sarah is the first to express that emotion but only when called out by God for laughing at overhearing the annunciation of Isaac's birth. (Gen. 18:15) The next citation is the residents of *Gerar* and *Abimelech* in fear of God about the king almost sleeping with Sarah (Gen .20:8). When confronted by the king, Abraham explains he tried to pawn Sarah as his sister since “I thought, surely there is no fear of God in this place.”(Gen. 21:11). It is only after almost killing Isaac that God acknowledges to Abraham “For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son” (Gen. 22:12). *Yirah*, an essential corrective for humans to develop God consciousness evolves slowly.

17. I am indebted to Job Jindo for the idea of the guidebook as a gallery of episodes in transcendence. Class notes BIB 345, The Academy for Jewish Religion, Fall Semester 2019

uniqueness of the other stripped of any ulterior or instrumental motives. That's the meaning behind "it is not good for man to be alone."<sup>18</sup> It's only through genuine, non-instrumental relationships that human beings can begin to develop a sense of the transcendent.

God helps us balance our urge to transcend alongside our need to be independent by a pedagogical technique of asking the right questions. When the man was hiding from God in the garden, God asks him "where are you?"<sup>19</sup> When Cain kills Abel, God asks him "Where is your brother Abel?"<sup>20</sup> In both cases, God is asking for much more than location and crucially, God is not telling them what to do. It's all part of the pedagogical process. These conversation starters are intended to have the violators fuss up to their mistakes. God accepts human free will, understanding that humans must learn how to independently transcend their difficulties. The relationship would have no meaning without the responsibility inherent in choice. When Abel questions God "Am I my brother's keeper?"<sup>21</sup> God doesn't answer the question. God knows that the response must not be provided; the relationship with God depends on the answer coming from within.

D) Moral choices, Making Mistakes and Mastering Urges: The Relationship Between Chapters 3 and 4:

Humans are endowed with the ability of discernment and thereby to make moral choices as well as to cultivate the ability to transcend our reflexive concerns. Therefore, it's not enough to KNOW (*D-A-T*) what is right; we must embark on the long and difficult path to cultivate traits that lead to us ending up doing the right thing.

Fallibility is part of human nature and therefore, does not define us. Who we are after we fail and process our mistakes is what ultimately decides our nature as an individual and our potential for relationship with the Divine.<sup>22</sup>

Both chapters 3 and 4 are stories of expulsion because of humans blurring the boundaries between humanity and God. In the Garden of Eden, men's acquisition of the knowledge to discern good and bad has God worried that man has become "almost like us"<sup>23</sup> and may "also eat from the tree of life and live forever."<sup>24</sup> Henceforth, humans are forever barred from re-entering the garden.

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18. Gen. 2:18

19. Gen. 3:9

20. Gen. 4:9

21. Ibid

22. I am indebted to Job Jindo for the insight that human fallibility being a given, we are defined by our failures and mistakes and for how we respond in kind. Class notes BIB345, The Academy for Jewish Religion, Fall Semester 2019

23. Gen. 3:22

24. Ibid

The story of Cain and Abel is also a story of shedding blood, another blurring of boundaries. The shedding of blood is labeled by God as an encroachment upon Divine territory. “Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground! Therefore, you shall be more cursed than the ground...you shall be a ceaseless wanderer on earth.”<sup>25</sup>

Cain doesn’t see his brother; he’s nothing to him. Hence the response to God: am I my brother’s keeper?”<sup>26</sup> This very sense of autonomy and lack of any transitive concern leads Cain to not seeing Abel as his brother but rather as the other. Abel’s very name in biblical Hebrew means vapor, nothingness or futility<sup>27</sup>

God’s answer to Cain concerning his rejected sacrifice acknowledges that the arbitrariness of life can be dispiriting but we must cultivate the correct predisposition to control our urges. “Why are you distressed and why is your face fallen? Surely, if you do right, there is uplift. But if you do not do right, sin couches at the door; Its urge is toward you, yet you can be its master.”<sup>28</sup> We are called upon by God to become no less than masters of ourselves.

Life will occasionally not turn out as expected and we must be equipped to overcome. It’s not that Cain has nothing to be aggrieved about. He initiated the offering (i.e. the dialogical relationship) as is proper of the first born who in the Ancient Near East, is considered metaphysically superior.<sup>29</sup> This existential challenge of younger overcoming the older, leading to the elder’s exile and banishment will recur throughout Genesis.<sup>30</sup> Finally, God never told either Cain or Abel what would constitute an acceptable offering. Focusing on fairness or a sense of expected reward in life are impediments to mastering our urges and cultivating mostly transitive concerns, instead of being derailed by our urges and desires.<sup>31</sup>

In Christianity and in later Jewish thought, the snake in the garden was considered to be a demon or the devil. While this is definitively not the Biblical worldview (the serpent never speaks again and is merely a tool in God’s hands), it *is* the Bible’s perspective that even celestial forces and beings can entice us into sin and yet, humans are still responsible not to be tempted by these “divine beings.”<sup>32</sup> Humans are called

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25. Gen. 4:12-13

26. Gen. 4:9

27. Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses (volume 1): A Translation with Commentary* (New York, New York, W.W. Norton and Company, 2004) Comment on Gen 4:2. Also see Eccl 1:2, 1:14

28. Gen. 4:6-7

29. Laui Fachaii, “Primogeniture in the Old Testament. Towards a Theological-Ethical Understanding of Patriarchy in Ancient Israel”, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa (2007)

30. Gen. 21:10-14, Gen 28:6-9, Gen. 37:18-28

31. I am indebted to Job Jindo for the insight that focusing on fairness and reward impedes cultivation of transitive concerns. Class notes BIB 345, The Academy for Jewish Religion, Fall Semester 2019

32. Gen. 6:1-4, Job 1:6-12,22, 2:1-10

upon to master their urges and to transcend them; this is essential to being in proper relationship with God.

Yet in both the narratives of Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel, God's anger is not the last word in the Divine/human relationship. God clothed Adam and Eve and provides a protective sign to Cain against anyone who would do him harm. Humans are destined to be fallible, God may end up punishing but also extends a lifeline to humankind to be in relationship, doing what God can to improve the arc of the relationship without infringing on human free will.

Unit 4: Humanity is Left to Exercise Unrestrained Free Will Without Divine Guidance: A Prescription For Disaster

A) Why Doesn't Cain Suffer the Consequences? The Connection Between DAM, ADAM and ADAMA.

Cain is a murderer; post flood, God will decree this crime to be a capital offense.<sup>1</sup> Yet in the current narrative, God only metes out punishment most similar to Adam and Eve's lesser indiscretions in the Garden. Cain too is cursed from the ground<sup>2</sup> and is sentenced to a lifetime of exile, just like his parents.<sup>3</sup>

When the law against human bloodshed is ultimately decreed, the two stated rationales for the death penalty directly touch on the cornerstones of God's relationship to humanity as described in Genesis 1. Human beings are made in God's image<sup>4</sup> (i.e. as stewards of the land) and the first commandment is to multiply and increase<sup>5</sup>, the exact opposite of extinguishing life. "Whoever sheds the blood of man, shall his blood be shed, *for* in His image did God make man"<sup>6</sup> The text is quite clear; bloodshed is prohibited specifically due to man being made in God's image. The next sentence reiterates the first command to multiply and increase and specifically reframes it in the context of shedding blood. "Be fertile, *then* (literally: as for you) and increase"<sup>7</sup>

If the soon to be promulgated prohibition against murder is specifically tied to both humans being made in God's image as well as the first command to be fruitful and multiply, the very purpose of human beings existence on the planet, why does God protect Cain from being murdered instead of meting out the punishment appropriate for the crime? God's perspective on murder is clear and Cain seems to be getting away with the crime!

Cain pleads to God. "Since you have banished me this day from the soil and I must *avoid your presence* and become a restless wanderer on earth, anyone who meets me may *kill* me."<sup>8</sup> Yet here, instead of God legislating against the crime and implementing capital punishment, God protects Cain both with a

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1. Gen. 9:6-7

2. Gen. 3:17-18, 4:11-12

3. Gen. 3:23-24, 4:13

4. Gen. 1:26

5. Gen .1:28

6. Gen. 9:6

7. Gen. 9:7

8. Gen. 4:14



special mark as well as with a promise of sevenfold retribution against any attacker, “lest anyone who met him should *kill* him.”<sup>9</sup>

We learn from the expulsion from Eden that the ground is cursed as punishment for encroaching on the Divine realm.<sup>10</sup> The ability of humans to discern knowledge of good and bad was not in God’s contemplation<sup>11</sup>, it was supposed to remain exclusively in God’s sphere. Yet humans were created with the free will to do as they please and therefore, God needed to adjust his relationship with human beings accordingly. Since humans have now acquired the Knowledge of Good and Bad, they are condemned to live a life of toil on earth.

From the current narrative, it’s quite clear that murder is another boundary violation that distances man from God, but also that it is an even more serious violation than just exercising free will against God’s wishes. God detests bloodshed; it elicits a visceral response:” What have you done? Hark, your brother’s blood *cries* out *to Me* from the ground.”<sup>12</sup> The shedding of blood makes Cain “cursed from the ground.”<sup>13</sup>

In Chapter 3, God needed to recalculate the nature of His relationship with man after the acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil; he will no longer be a tiller and tender of an idyllic Garden<sup>14</sup> where all is provided for but rather is expelled from the Garden and is now fated to a life time of toil and trouble. God’s relationship with man forever more will be framed by this reality.

The incident with Cain leads to another course correction. After the murder, the status of the dialogical relationship is altered; God decides to back off at this point so as to allow for the drama of the three interconnected spheres of God’s most vital concerns in reference to human beings to unfold unimpeded and uninterrupted. The spheres encompass what is in God’s realm alone (blood), the human sphere alone (free will) and where the spheres intersect (the earth), i.e. God’s litmus test for humanity.<sup>15</sup> The intimate connection of

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9. Gen. 4:15

10. Gen. 3:17

11. Gen. 3:22 Eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Bad could not have been in God’s contemplation since God hurriedly banishes Adam and Eve from the Garden protected by an eternal fiery sword guarding re-entry, since God is worried they will eat from the Tree of Life and become exactly like God. “Now that the man has become like one of us, knowing good and bad, what if he should stretch his hand and take also from the Tree of Life, and live forever!”

12. Gen. 4:10

13. Gen. 4:11

14. Gen. 2:15-16

15. I am indebted to Job Jindo for the interconnected spheres of *dam/adam/adama* and there use as a litmus test for the dialogical relationship. Class notes BIB 345, Fall Semester, The Academy for Jewish Religion, 2019.

the spheres is made crystal clear by their Hebrew symbols: “*Dam/ Adam/ Adama*” All three are inextricably related.

The relationship of humans to the land reflects the quality of human existence. That is, the ground is cursed and thereby, degraded. As the land is polluted by blood, the intensity of contamination correlates with an increasingly distant connection with the Divine. Boundary violations of the Divine realm kill any chance of relationship with the Transcendent; blood is exclusively in the Divine sphere, it is the boundary violation par excellence of the dialogical relationship. God adjusts to humans possessing the knowledge of “Good and Bad” but the shedding of blood is a bright red marker that cannot be crossed.<sup>16</sup>

Humans have been given the free will to respect this inviolable blood boundary and therefore, it is incumbent upon them to restore the cosmic harmony that reigned in the Garden between *Dam/Adam and Adama*. In the interim, God needs to back off to see how this cosmic trial, initially conceived to play out seamlessly in the Garden, will actually unfold on earth. It’s up to humanity to determine the outcome. God will not communicate again with human beings until informing Noah that he is intent on scrapping the whole project of working things out with humanity on planet earth.<sup>17</sup>

Critically, when Cain learns of his punishment his reaction is “I must avoid Your Presence”<sup>18</sup> (literally I must hide my face from you) even though God never said that!

Cain, like his parents, avoids God’s presence when erring<sup>19</sup>, destroying any chance of relationship with the Divine before it can even begin. Throughout the Bible, this idiom refers to immanent tragedy for the Israelites when God hides His face.<sup>20</sup> Hiding of the face, the absence of relationship, is a deadly proposition for humankind, no matter which member of the relationship is turning away. Here though, God does not hide God’s face, God wants humanity to learn the crucial lesson of not shedding blood and therefore, despite Cain turning away, responds with a mark upon Cain for all humanity to see “lest anyone who met him should kill him”<sup>21</sup> It’s much more important for God at this point in the relationship that the drama of *DAM/ADAM* and *ADAMA* to unfold than to punish Cain for the fratricide.

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16. See Units 4C and 4F

17. Gen. 6:13

18. Gen. 4:14

19. Gen. 3:8

20. Deut. 31:18, Ps. 27:9, Ps. 30:8

21. Gen. 4:15

B) The Growth of Culture and Cities: Further Estrangement from God (Genesis 4:16-26)

“Cain left the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod.”<sup>22</sup> In the Bible, the term “*milifnei adonai*” indicates more than a directional turning away, it literally means in the process of communing with God.<sup>23</sup> Having received a mark and a promise of Divine protection, Cain “wanders away” from God (the literal meaning of the root *Nun-weak-Dalet* (in Gen. 4:12,14,16) and never looks back.

“Cain knew his wife and she conceived and bore Enoch. And he founded a city and named the city after his son Enoch”<sup>24</sup>

Why was Cain’s first act to build a city thereby becoming the founder of urban culture? On a practical level, Cain is now cursed from the ground and must find alternatives to survive. In addition, since Cain is no longer looking to God, the only antidote to endless wandering is to cluster people together in one place.

The act of naming the city after his son also signifies a major shift away from relationship with God. In the creation narrative of Genesis 1, God arrogates to Godself naming the natural phenomenon called into being by the Divine. Adam is ceded the task of naming all the animals.<sup>25</sup> It is a partnership with the Divine as His steward. In Biblical Hebrew, naming includes dominion.<sup>26</sup> “And the Lord God formed out of the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky and brought them to the man to see what he would call them.”<sup>27</sup>

When Cain is born, Eve exclaims: “I have gained a male child with the help of the Lord.”<sup>28</sup> While the verb “gained” does contain the etymology of the name Cain, Eve does not name either of her first two children. The birth of the first human being engenders a proclamation not of the newly discovered wonder of the ability to procreate but of deference to God. “Eve

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22. Gen. 4:16

23. Gen. 18:22, Lev. 9:24, Numb. 16:7

24. Gen. 4:17

25. Gen. 2:19

26. Aviva Gottlieb Zorenberg, *The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on the Book of Genesis* (New York, New York: Three Leaves Press, 1996) p8 “Man is to rule, to dominate all categories of created reality, even those that he cannot physically control—that is, creatures of the sea and air, who do not share his habitat. He is to evolve strategies to overcome physical barriers and make himself master of nature.” Gen. 1:28 and Gen. 1:29 read together clearly illustrate that naming includes dominion. Also see Ps. 8:9

27. Gen. 2:19

28. Gen. 4:1

says, in effect “ I, *Ishah* was produced from *Ish* and now I *Ishah* have in turn produced a man”<sup>29</sup>

In sharp contrast to his mother’s deference to God, Cain names the first city after his son.<sup>30</sup> All the glory and dominion of human creation is for people, none is for God. His son Enoch’s name is derived from a root meaning initiation, dedication and education.<sup>31</sup> The name Enoch strongly implies self-sufficiency in the process of creation.

Genesis 4:18 relays the genealogy of Cain; *Lemech* is number five in the family line. He is noted as having two wives, the first known polygamist. This is another textual clue that signifies further estrangement from God. The Divine’s plan included “making a fitting helper”<sup>32</sup> for man (i.e in the singular) and this singular helper was fashioned from Adam in the most intimate manner possible.

One of the children, *Zillah*, is singled out as the one “who forged all implements of copper and iron.”<sup>33</sup> God thought creation of all on earth as complete and “very good.”<sup>34</sup> Human beings have now evolved to create materials by altering substances that were deemed perfect and complete upon creation. These human implements of copper and iron are specifically used for and will lead to the exponential evolution of human capacity for bloodshed.

After the brief digression to describe the growth of cities and culture, a poem recited to his wives by *Lemech* drives home the point of this pericope: The growth of cities and advancements in technology lead to an increase in human violence, bloodshed and consequent estrangement from God.

“I have slain a man for wounding me, And a lad for bruising me. If Cain is avenged sevenfold, then *Lemech* is seventy-seven fold.”<sup>35</sup>

The progression from Cain to *Lemech* is most notable. Cain seemed to get away with his crime but was at least branded and punished by God to wander. *Lemech* suffers no consequences whatsoever nor does God respond in any way. *The Lord* promised Cain: “I promise, if anyone kills Cain, sevenfold vengeance shall be taken upon him.”<sup>36</sup> *Lemech* murders and has the audacity

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29. David L. Leibler, *Etz Hayyim Torah and Commentary* (New York, New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2001)

Commentary on Gen. 4:1, “ a male child”

30. Gen. 4:17

31. David L. Leibler, *Etz Hayyim Torah and Commentary* (New York, New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2001)

Commentary on Gen. 4:17 ‘Enoch’

32. Gen. 2:18

33. Gen. 4:22

34. Gen. 1:31

35. Gen. 4:23-24

36. Gen. 4:15

to declare himself seventy-sevenfold avenged!<sup>37</sup> In this case, *Lemech* the murderer, not God, is the avenger and the progression of 7's is a known Biblical idiom of completeness and mastery<sup>38</sup>

Another feature of Biblical Narrative that here highlights the evolution of human wickedness is the parallelism characteristic in poetic sections. When *Lemech* exclaims. "I have slain a man for wounding me and a lad for bruising me"<sup>39</sup>, the text is clearly communicating the sense that *just as* I killed an adult for merely wounding me, I also killed a child just for bruising me<sup>40</sup>! The exercise of unrestrained free will by humans over five generations has led to the increasing end of wickedness, with no end in sight.

Adam and Eve are still alive and sense the need for a do-over. "Adam knew his wife again and she bore a son and named him Seth, meaning "God has provided me with another offspring in place of Abel, for Cain had killed him."<sup>41</sup>

Eve does name the child this time, indicating a need on her part for an elevated response to the evolution of wickedness *yet* she is meticulous to credit God as the provider. Eve's express wish for the child is to replace her deceased son "for (i.e. because) Cain had killed him."<sup>42</sup> "The etymology of the name Seth comes from the root meaning to place, put or set."<sup>43</sup> The Hebrew makes clear that Seth is a replacement for *Hevel*, since Cain murdered him. The birth of Seth as a replacement suggests that another course correction is in the offing for humanity.

This section ends enigmatically "It was then that men began to invoke the Lord (*Hashem*) by name."<sup>44</sup> How could this pericope, clearly devoted to increasing estrangement in the Human-Divine relationship, logically be the beginning point of proper God worship?

"They cannot have just begun to invoke the Lord, who was known to Adam, Cain and Abel; moreover, they were already now on the downward path since (as we learn in chapter 6), Noah was the only righteous person."<sup>45</sup>

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37. Gen. 4:24

38. See Unit 1D

39. Gen. 4:23

40. Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses (Volume 1): A Translation with Commentary* (New York, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2004) Notes on Gen. 4:23-24

41. Gen. 4:25

42. Ibid

43. David L. Leibler, *Etz Hayyim Torah and Commentary* (New York, New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2001) Commentary on Gen. 4:25 "Seth"

44. Gen. 4:26

45. Michael Carasik, *The Commentators' Bible: Genesis. The Rubin JPS Miqra'ot Gedolot* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Jewish Publication Society, 2018) Gersonides on Gen. 4:26 "It was then that men began to invoke the LORD by name"

The word “*huchal*”, previously translated as began, also means to desecrate or to blaspheme.<sup>46</sup> Indeed humankind is now on a downward path. Chapter 4 begins with a sincere attempt by Cain and Able to offer unsolicited thanks to God; seven generations later, the chapter ends describing widespread blasphemy, profaning the holy name.

C) The Genealogy of Chapter 5: Hints of the End of the *Dam/Adam/Adamah* Framework for the Dialogical Relationship. A Change in Ownership of the Tzelem

In the Hebrew Bible, genealogies serve the function of marking off a new era or narrative from the prior one.<sup>47</sup> Chapters 3 and 4 describe boundary violations by humans as leading first to banishment from the idyllic Garden and in only seven short generations outside the Garden, the spread of unrestrained human wickedness.

After the flood in Chapter 9, God’s guidebook will ultimately repurpose man’s job as steward (*tzelem*) in relation to blood boundary violations and the command to be fruitful and multiply, forming a brand new paradigm for the dialogical relationship to continue.<sup>48</sup>

There is a subtle but important change at the beginning of the genealogy of chapter five that hints at the upcoming shift in the parameters of God’s relationship with man. Chapter 4 begins with sexual intercourse “Now the man knew his wife Eve”<sup>49</sup> yet it omits any mention of Divine-human resemblance. In Genesis 1:26, God said “Let us make man in our image (*tzalmenu*) and our likeness (*kidmuteynu*)” but when referring to the creation of man in the next sentence the text relays “ And God created man in his image”<sup>50</sup>, with no mention of creation in His likeness.

Chapter 5 begins “ When God created man, He made him in His likeness.”<sup>51</sup> (*b’dmut Elohim*) What happened to the *tzelem*, the aspect of stewardship, which defines man’s relationship to God and to the land? Two verses later, the Guidebook informs us that the control of *tzelem* has been ceded to human beings! “When Adam had lived 130 years, he begot a son in his likeness after his image.”<sup>52</sup> (i.e. Adam’s!) This shift in the meaning and ownership of *tzelem*

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46. Ibid *Rashi* on Gen.. 4:26 “*Huchal* “comes from the word *hol* which means profane. Then it became profaned to call by the name of the Lord.”

47. Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses (Volume 1): A Translation with Commentary* (New York, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2004) Commentary on Gen. 5:1

48. See Unit 6B

49. Gen. 4:1

50. Gen. 1:27

51. Gen. 5:1

52. Gen. 5:3

and its implication for the dialogical relationship will only come to fruition after the flood.<sup>53</sup>

Yet before the new paradigm for relationship post-flood kicks in, the genealogies here impart new information. God wants a do-over with Seth as indicated by Cain and Able being removed from the genealogy of Adam.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, Cain's line doesn't survive the flood and the Israelite people will emerge from the lineage of Seth, the designated replacement for Abel by Eve.<sup>55</sup> This new, paired down lineage concludes with the birth of Noah, ten generations later.

A careful look comparing the genealogy of Cain and Seth<sup>56</sup> yields the conclusion that despite the shift to Seth as progenitor of the line, nothing else has really changed on the earth. Firstly, the names of the descendants in the two genealogies are almost exactly the same. (*Cain/Kenan, Enoch/Enoch, Irad/Jared, Mehujael/Mehalalel, Methusael/Methuselah, Lamech/Lamech*). Secondly, Cain's *Lamech*, who in chapter 4 doubled down on Cain's wickedness from seven fold to seventy-seven fold, yields in the genealogy to Seth's *Lamech* who gives birth to Noah at the end of Chapter 5. The text relays he died at 777 years old, the last of the antediluvians. Seth has replaced Cain in the genealogy but this textual clue informs us that nothing has really changed; those like Lamech are still not punished for their crimes and human wickedness continues to spread exponentially and unabated.

D) Enoch as a Last Gasp Alternative Model of Relationship between Humans and the Divine: Walking with God.

The Genealogy of Chapter 5 is highly formulaic. A lives B years and gives birth to C. A lived D years after the birth of C. A lived a total of E years, then he died.

The formulaic pattern is broken with Enoch. "After the birth of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years, and he begot sons and daughters. All the days of Enoch came to 365 years. Enoch walked with God then he was no more, for God took him."<sup>57</sup> The break in the formula includes two repetitions of walking with God and ultimately being no more, because God took him. What are these glaring variances in the genealogy formula trying to tell us? They point to a last gasp effort by God to be in relation to humans, despite God's hands off approach and the facts of unmitigated wickedness on the ground.

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53. See Unit 6B

54. Gen. 5:3

55. Gen. 4:25

56. Gen. 4:17-18, 25-26

57. Gen. 5:22-24

The reflexive form (*hitpael*) of the verb to walk is first found in the Garden narrative. “They heard the sound of the Lord God moving about in the Garden.”<sup>58</sup> The sound is God’s voice, that’s why Adam and Eve immediately go into hiding.

This is a special verb construct. Only three times in the entire *Tanach* is this reflexive form of this verb used in reference to specific individuals: All three are in Genesis, towards the beginning of the evolution of the dialogical relationship with mankind; they are Enoch, Noah and Abraham. God is desperate to be with Enoch as God has now been out of any relationship with mankind for many generations. Since God is still in non-intervention mode on earth, God simply takes Enoch up to Heaven.

Very soon, God will choose Noah to save humanity. The text relays: “Noah was a righteous man, he was blameless in his age; Noah walked with God.”<sup>59</sup> God does choose Noah for a mission to save humanity but here, the Hebrew makes clear that it was not a case of Noah walking with God but rather God leading/walking Noah around<sup>60</sup>, directing him how to save a remnant of humanity in a corrupt age. Noah was righteous, but only relative to his generation.

Abram’s walking with God will be the full expression of the highest level of God-walking which leads to God’s self-limitation and a radical new phase in the dialogical relationship.<sup>61</sup> God tells Abram. “Up walk about the land, through its length and breadth, for I give it to you.”<sup>62</sup> Abram, if you walk with me by walking the land, I will fulfill my promises of a particular parcel of land and multiple offspring. God also reveals a new aspect of his personality to his favorite God walker: “I am *El Shaddai*, you walk in front of me and be blameless.”<sup>63</sup> From then on, the partnership blossoms with Abram, and he soon receives a name change (adding God’s name to his) and enters into the covenant of circumcision.

#### E) Noah’s Name and its Relationship to His Mission.

“When *Lemech* had lived 182 years, he begot a son. And he named him Noah, saying, “This one will provide us relief (*yenaḥmenu*) from our work

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58. Gen. 3:8

59. Gen. 6:9

60. Ibid. It is all a matter of prepositions and particles. In reference to Enoch, the word *et* is attached to God’s name meaning Enoch walked with God. In reference to Noah, *et* is linked to Noah’s name, yielding the conclusion that Noah walked with God but was led around by Him.

61. Michael Carasik, *The Commentators’ Bible: Genesis. The Rubin JPS. Miqra’ot Gedolot* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Jewish Publication Society, 2018) *Rashi* on Gen. 6:9 “Noah walked with Him because he needed something to support him. Abraham...was able to walk (*lifnei*) Him, on his own.” Hence, the prepositions let us rank the three God walkers accordingly.

62. Gen. 13:17

63. Gen. 17:1



and from the toil of our hands (*itzavon yadeynu*), out of the very soil which the Lord placed under a curse.”<sup>64</sup> Noah’s name means to rest which is phonetically similar to relief from the hard labor.

Most importantly, the language of God’s punishment attendant to Adam and the cause of the banishment from the Garden are specifically echoed in the folk etymology of Noah’s name.<sup>65</sup> Noah is to be the new Adam, reversing the consequences of sinning in the Garden. Not only is the language echoed but the exact verb form of toil (*itsavon*) is found only three times in the Bible, in reference to Eve, Adam and Noah.<sup>66</sup>

Since the world is soon to be flooded into oblivion, it’s impossible to conclude that the *Dam/Adam/Adamah* system of dialogical relationship is perpetuated by Noah’s birth, despite the etymological word play. It is noteworthy that upon leaving the ark, Noah’s is described as “the tiller of the soil, (literally man of the earth) (he) was the first to plant a vineyard.”<sup>67</sup> Only in the sense of “wine provides a poor man respite from his drudgery”<sup>68</sup> is Noah a savior.<sup>69</sup> Noah, and humankind will forever remain reliant on the earth but the current system of Divine-Human partnership is now irretrievably broken.

#### F) The “Divine Beings” Seeking Human Partners- The Final Straw Leading to the Flood: Genesis 6:1-13

“When men began to increase on earth and daughters were born to them, the divine beings saw how beautiful the daughters of men were and took wives from among those that pleased them.”<sup>70</sup> This is yet another blurring of boundaries between humans and God and the narrative that immediately precedes God’s decision to flood the earth. What is the meaning of this enigmatic short story and why is it the final straw leading to the flood? What is the exact nature of this boundary violation?

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64. Gen. 5:29

65. Gen. 3:17 “Cursed be the ground because of you, by toil shall you eat of it.” Curse, ground and toil are all echoed in the etymology of Noah’s name in Gen 5:29

66. Gen. 3:16 “your pangs in childbirth” in reference to Eve. Gen. 3:17 “by toil shall you eat of it.” in reference to Adam, Gen. 5:29 “the toil of our hands” in reference to Noah

67. Gen. 9:20

68. Prov. 31:6-7

69. Michael Carasik, *The Commentators’ Bible: Genesis. The Rubin JPS Miqra’ot Gedolot* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Jewish Publication Society, 2018) *Rashi* on Gen 5:29 “Up to the time of Noah, no one had tools for plowing; he provided them. The earth would bring forth thorns and thistles even when they planted wheat, on account of the curse in Gen. 3:18. But Noah “put a stop” to all that” (an alternate meaning of the root *Nun-Het-Mem*) For more word play on this root, including “put a stop to” see Ex. 13:17. The point here is Noah is not a savior from the curse. Indeed, the world is about to be destroyed.

70. Gen. 6:1-2

In Mesopotamian deluge stories, it is overpopulation or the arbitrary whims of the gods, which leads to destruction.<sup>71</sup> In the Hebrew Bible, it is the proliferation of evil, not of humankind in general, that multiplies and fills the earth.<sup>72</sup>

One hint that this narrative is about unqualified evil is the language. The word for increase in Genesis 6:1 is from the same root as multiply in the command “be fruitful and multiply.”<sup>73</sup> Ten generations have already passed<sup>74</sup>, so men have been increasing on earth for a while. The multiplication here therefore, must be of a different nature and quality. The word for beautiful is “*toivot*” the same language employed in Genesis 1 meaning in consonance with creation<sup>75</sup> yet the normal meaning of this leitmotif clearly doesn’t apply in the present narrative. The irregular meanings of these key words are signaling that something is horribly wrong and wicked here.

Reading between the lines, *Rashi* has an explanation.<sup>76</sup> The divine beings are sons of princes and judges, the other definition of the word *elohim* in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>77</sup> “Beautiful” points to a woman who was beautified for her wedding night. The great ruler would go in and have sex with her first.<sup>78</sup> In addition, *Rashi* comments on the phrase “those that pleased them”: “Any who pleased them, including women who were already married, and even men and beasts.”<sup>79</sup>

As previously discussed, sexual urges and temptations undergirds the Garden of Eden narrative.<sup>80</sup> Eating of the tree of knowledge of good and bad merely opened mankind’s eyes to the shame of nudity. Here, the actions of the princes indicate that this act of “knowing” by the elite of society has now reached the level of trampling on monogamy and even extends to bestiality. Society has devolved into barbarity lacking any of the natural divisions

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71. Robert Alter, *The five Books of Moses (Volume 1): A Translation with Commentary* (New York, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2004) Commentary on Gen. 6:5

72. Gen. 6:5

73. In Gen. 6:1 the Biblical Hebrew word for increase is *larov* and *revu* is the word for multiply in the oft-repeated command to be fruitful and multiply. They derive from the same root. See also Gen. 6:5 where man’s great wickedness uses the word *raba*, also formed from the same root.

74. As per the genealogy of Genesis chapter five.

75. Gen. 1:4,10,12,18,21,25,31

76. Michael Carasik, *The Commentators’ Bible: Genesis. The Rubin JPS Miqra’ot Gedolot* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Jewish Publication Society, 2018) *Rashi* on Gen. 6:2 “The Divine Beings”

77. Ibid See also Kimhi on Gen. 6:2 “meaning here not “God” but “the judges” that is, the magistrates, the great leaders.”

78. Ibid *Rashi* on Gen. 6:2 “How beautiful the daughters of man were”

79. Ibid. *Rashi* on Gen. 6:2 “those that pleased them”

80. See Unit 3A

instituted by God in creation.<sup>81</sup> Human immorality will be the cause of the ensuing cataclysm.

“The Lord saw how great was man’s wickedness on earth and how every plan devised by his mind was nothing but evil all the time.”<sup>82</sup> In chapter 1, God saw seven times that what He made was good.<sup>83</sup> Here, God concludes that man is wicked (“*ra*” i.e. bad) and the output of the mind of mankind is evil all day long. “The Lord regretted that He had made man on earth and His heart was saddened.”<sup>83</sup>(literally “sad towards his heart”). In the Hebrew Bible, the heart is a combination of mind and spirit.<sup>84</sup> God does some internal calculations and His regret leads to the flooding of the earth, save Noah and the occupants of the Ark.

*Rashi* already defined “corrupt” as the transgressions of sexual sins and idolatry and concludes in his commentary on the phrase that “the Divine decree sealed against them only because of robbery.”<sup>85</sup> Aviva Zorenberg notes that the act of *ius primae noctis* (the king’s right to first encounter with the wife to be) “Is not an act of love but an act of robbery.”<sup>86</sup> Picking up on *Rashi*, she describes sexual sin and idolatry as “generous sins” meaning “human beings often experience and express a yearning to transcend self, to relate to the other. It is no etymological coincidence that incest and other sexual taboos are called *chesed*.”<sup>87</sup> For Zorenberg, *Rashi*’s robbery “is a sexuality of cruelty, not of erotic relationship. It is a pursuit of ecstasy which necessary excludes attention to other people.”<sup>88</sup> A world of inattention caused by human behavior of cruelty toward others so great that it “robs” their psyche, must itself be de-constituted. Cruelty is defined by not paying attention to the needs of others, to relationship. The world is no longer fit for

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81. The Genesis 1 creation narrative includes a lot of divisions (Biblical Hebrew Root *Bet-Dalet-Lamed*) see Gen. 1:4,1:6-7, 1:14-18 but even more often mentions species of the same kind (Gen. 1:11-12, 21, 24-25). Man clearly falls into the category of same kind. Multiple divisions of the same kind are against God’s plan and here, that category has completely disintegrated.

82. Gen. 6:5

83. See footnote 75, above.

84. Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses (Volume 1): A Translation with Commentary* (New York, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2004) Commentary on Gen. 6:5 See also Ezek. 36:26 “and I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit into you. I will remove the heart of stone from your body and give you a heart of flesh.”

85. Michael Carasik, *The Commentators’ Bible: Genesis. The Rubin JPS Miqra’ot Gedolot* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Jewish Publication Society, 2018) *Rashi* on Gen. 6:13

86. Avivah Gottlieb Zorenberg, *The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis* (New York, New York: Three Leaves Press, 1996) p 52

87. Ibid. p51. See also Lev. 20:17 for another example of hesed meaning a sexual taboo.

88. Ibid p53

relationship whether between God and man or man and his fellow creatures on earth.

Unit 5: The Undoing and Redoing of Creation: The Ark as a Crucible of Kindness and the Triumph of God’s Mercy over God’s Judgment.

A) Noah’s relationship with God and the Mission

“Make yourself an ark (*tevat*) of gopher wood.<sup>1</sup> This word which means ark, is found only here and in the narrative of baby Moses being floated down the Nile.<sup>2</sup> Like Moses at the Crossing of the Reed Sea, Noah will participate in a salvation via navigation through waters that should drown. “The ark represents tender mercies and protective grace with which God envelops the righteous even in the harshest circumstances.”<sup>3</sup> “For my part, I am about to bring the flood...but I will establish my covenant with you.”<sup>4</sup> This is the first mention of covenant in the Bible. While it’s terms will not be spelled out until after the flood, it’s clear from the current context that it is a unilateral covenant by God, since nothing is asked of Noah in return.

There is a textual clue that Noah’s participation in the mission involves more than just ark building. Right before the flood begins the text relays: “Thus they that entered comprised male and female of all flesh, as God had commanded. And the Lord shut him in.”<sup>5</sup> (*vayisgor*) Why doesn’t the text just say that Noah shut the door? The language here echoes the creation of Adam where God puts Adam into a deep sleep, takes one of his ribs and closed up the flesh (*vayisgor*) at that spot.<sup>6</sup> In contradistinction to Genesis 2, where God is creating Adam’s sexual partner, here the text intimates that God is precluding sexual activity on the ark as the world outside is being destroyed for loveless, instrumental sexual immorality.<sup>7</sup> It is now Noah’s job to be a caretaker on the ark, as a role model for sexual abstinence and in the process, also as a role model for not being self-centered, thereby cultivating transitive concerns. Putting oneself in the position of someone else is the foundation of self-transcendence. True love means seeking the uniqueness in relationship; that’s why it’s “not good for man to be alone.”<sup>8</sup> Perhaps once outside the ark, human society can return to earth to start over again with an ethos of kindness and concern for others.

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1. Gen. 6:14

2. Moses’ *teva* was a wicker basket, yet like the ark, it was caulked with bitumen and pitch.

3. Jon D. Levenson, *Jewish Study Bible* on Gen. 6:14-16

4. Gen. 6:17-18

5. Gen. 7:16

6. Gen. 2:21

7. Michael Carasik, *The Commentators’ Bible: Genesis. The Rubin JPS Miqra’ot Gedolot* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Jewish Publication Society, 2018) *Rashi* on Gen. 8:16-17. Sex was forbidden on board both for humans and for animals.

8. Gen. 2:18

## B) The Undoing and Redoing of Creation

“For in seven days’ time, I will make it rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights and I will blot out from the earth all existence I created.”<sup>9</sup> Creation occurred in six days and only finished when all was complete and God deemed it to be “very good.”<sup>10</sup> Day seven was God’s realm of time, in the Divine sphere, outside of time.<sup>11</sup> In the flood narrative, seven day periods recur: first to initiate the destruction and then to reclaim the earth as a place worthy of habitation.<sup>12</sup> God acts with sevens (i.e. God’s sphere of time) to ponder whether the initial acts of Creation will be reconstituted.

The agent of destruction is water; returning the earth to its primordial form, a watery undifferentiated mass<sup>13</sup> “All the fountains of the great deep (*tehom*) burst forth and the floodgates of the sky broke open. The rain fell on the earth for forty days and forty nights.”<sup>14</sup> The forty day period is most significant, the flood is God’s *mikveh* (ritual purification bath) to cleanse and purify the evil which has overtaken the planet.<sup>15</sup> Forty day periods in the Bible indicate key turning points in the relationship with God, both for good and for bad. Moses communes with God to receive the Ten Commandments<sup>16</sup> and Moses ascends the mountain for forty days and nights to receive the second tablets after the sin of the Golden Calf.<sup>17</sup> The spies reconnoiter the land for forty days<sup>18</sup> and in retribution, the people are punished to die over a forty year

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9. Gen. 7:4

10. Gen. 1:31

11. Michael Carasik, *The Commentators’ Bible: Genesis. The Rubin JPS Miqra’ot Gedolot* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Jewish Publication Society, 2018) *Rashbam* on Gen. 2:3 “and declared it holy.” “He declared it holy and had us rest on it in witness to the fact He himself first created everything then rested.” Sabbath observance is not enjoined upon the Israelites until after the Exodus from Egypt. (Ex. 16:29)

12. Initiating the destruction, Gen. 7:4, rehabilitating the earth Gen. 8:10, 8:12

13. David L. Leiber, *Etz Hayyim Torah and Commentary* (New York, New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2001). Comment on Gen. 1:2 “the deep”

“The Hebrew word for the deep refers to the subterranean waters... to the ancients, the formless nature of water seemed to represent the state of affairs before chaos was transformed to order.” The waters are separated by God above and below the expanse in Gen. 1:7

14. Gen. 7:11-12

15. David L. Leiber, *Etz Hayyim Torah and Commentary* (New York, New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2001) “The number 40, a symbolic number in the Bible is often connected with purification and cleansing of sin.” Comment on Gen. 7:4 “forty days”

16. Ex. 24:18

17. Ex. 34:28

18. Numb. 13:25

period.<sup>19</sup> Most significantly, all these narratives of forty involve communion with God on high or the invocation of God's thirteen attributes to or by Moses.<sup>20</sup> Periods of forty occasion God to scrutinize the dialogical relationship and when God does, huge paradigm shifts are in the offing.

The animals are loaded onto the ark in the inverse order of their creation.<sup>21</sup> The text emphasizes that all animals of every kind were loaded onto the ark, paralleling the language of Genesis 1.<sup>22</sup>

After forty days of rain, the waters increased (*vayirbu*) so that it rose above the earth<sup>23</sup>. At the time of Creation, animals and mankind were commanded to “increase and be fertile” (*peru urevu*) upon the land.<sup>24</sup> The proliferation of an “increase” in rain is now destroying the tableau upon which increase of animal life was to be realized. Creation as well as the purposes of creation is hanging in the balance.<sup>25</sup>

When God decides to end the flood, the order of creation is mimicked anew: “God caused a wind to blow across the earth...the fountains of the deep and the floodgates of the sky were stopped up and the rain from the sky was held back.”<sup>26</sup> The spirit of God (*Ruach Elohim*) has returned to the earth to recreate.<sup>27</sup>

### C) Why God Changed His Mind: The Triumph of Mercy over Judgment.

Immediately before the flood, God concludes that “every plan devised by man’s mind was nothing but evil all the time.”<sup>28</sup> After causing the flood to recede, God decides to nevermore destroy the planet and muses again: “the devising of man’s mind are evil from his youth.”<sup>29</sup> Why did God change his mind if the source of the problem, human wickedness obtains forever due to man’s nature?

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19 Numb. 14:34 “You shall bear your punishment for forty years, corresponding to the number of days – forty days – that you scouted the land, a year for each day.”

20. In Ex. 34:6-7, the Lord reveals His thirteen attributes to Moses. The attributes reveal God’s dueling aspects of mercy and judgment. That drama is played out in the flood (see Unit 6C). In Numb. 14:18, Moses invokes the thirteen attributes to gain pardon for the Israelites.

21. Gen. 7:8

22. Gen. 7:14. “every kind” (*l'minehu*) is repeated four times in this verse. The phrase is used ten times in the Genesis 1 creation narrative. (See Unit 1, footnote 26.)

23. Gen. 7:17

24. Gen. 1:22, 1:28

25. See units 1D and 1E – human stewardship of the planet as well as the future of the dialogical relationship.

26. Gen. 8:1-2. The wind of God sweeping over the undifferentiated waters, Gen. 1:2

27. In Gen. 1:2, the wind of God is sweeping over the undifferentiated waters as an immediate prelude to creation.

28. Gen. 6:5

29. Gen. 8:21

“God *remembered* (*vayizkor*) Noah and all the beasts...and God caused a wind to blow across the earth”<sup>30</sup> renewing creation. Obviously, God had not forgotten; God was in the active process of undoing creation. Rather, “to remember” in Biblical Hebrew most often references Israel and/or God as the subject.<sup>31</sup> Here, God is “remembering” in the sense that God decides to rescue, allowing God’s aspect of mercy to triumph over God’s aspect of judgment.<sup>32</sup> God will soon covenant with all flesh to never again destroy the earth.<sup>33</sup>

*Rashi* expounds on God’s remembering. “God (*Elohim*) alludes to the divine aspect of Justice, which can be tipped towards mercy by the prayers of the righteous. So too the wickedness of the wicked can tip the aspect of mercy towards Justice.”<sup>34</sup> As occurred immediately preceding the flood: “the Lord (Y-H-V-H) “saw how great man’s wickedness was on earth” and the Lord resolves to “blot out from the earth all I created.”<sup>35</sup> God sometimes engages on a psychic level displaying many different moods or faces. God Godself is transcendent but also immanent and not separated from the world seeking to maintain relationship with those created in His Image.

Human nature remains unchanged but the action of even one righteous person (Noah) can “remind” God of the ultimate purpose of creation, for God to be in relationship with human beings. God begins to cause the flood to recede on the first day of the first month.<sup>36</sup> This foreshadows the actual completion of the first stage of Creation<sup>37</sup> when God fills the *Mishkan* to house God’s glory on the planet.<sup>38</sup> The beginning of the dialogical relationship on Earth, the building of the *Mishkan*, is also completed on the first day of the first month. As the relationship matures, the modality of “remembering” will mature and become a regular feature of the dialogical relationship. It becomes a mutual obligation of remembrance incumbent upon both God and the Israelites.<sup>39</sup>

In the flood narrative there is an attempt to imitate God’s merciful intent when Noah offers an un-commanded sacrifice, a very risky business as we saw with Cain and Abel in Chapter 4.<sup>40</sup> Noah senses the need to act immediately due to dangerous exigent

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30. Gen. 8:1

31. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: The Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1982) p 5

32. See Jon D. Levenson, *Jewish Study Bible* on Gen. 7:24-8:22. “It recalls other incidents in the Torah where God (“*Elohim*”) remembers and rescues.”

33. Gen. 9:15-16. Note that God will “remember” the covenant when the bow is in the clouds.

34. Michael Carasik, *The Commentators’ Bible: Genesis. The Rubin JPS Miqra’ot Gedolot* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Jewish Publication Society, 2018) Rashi on Gen. 8:1 “God remembered Noah.”

35. Gen. 6:5-7

36. Gen. 8:13

37. See unit 1E.

38. Ex. 40:34

39. In Ex. 28:12 – The ephod is described, a means of communication between Aaron and God. In Numb. 10:9-10 trumpets are to be blasted before wartime and scared occasions. Both involve mutual reminders for God and for the Israelites.

40. See unit 3D.



circumstances, just as Aaron will later do in the Book of Numbers to check a plague engulfing the camp, using the very same un-commanded actions, which lead earlier to the death of his two sons.<sup>41</sup> When there is no time to “remember”, humans may intervene un-commanded and live to tell the tale but only if they are motivated by mercy and are thereby imitating their Creator by being merciful.

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41. Numb. 17:8-15, Lev. 10:1-2

## Unit 6: God's Acts of Self-Limitation and Self- Adjustment Salvage the Dialogical Relationship

### A) God's subtle shift in expectations about Procreation and God's huge act of self-limitation

God's initial command to all animal life upon exiting the ark seems like a repeat of the first creation narrative: "be fertile and increase upon the earth."<sup>1</sup> Yet the text here conveys a subtle shift in God's expectation of increase. The animals entered the ark "by kind" but exited in a different manner: "everything that stirs on earth came out of the ark by families."<sup>2</sup> For *Rashi*, by families implies "they agreed not to interbreed."<sup>3</sup> *Ibn Ezra* remarks: "each family came out separately, not mixed with the others."<sup>4</sup> This new emphasis on family is in response to one critical aspect that led to the devolution of human wickedness: the wanton intermingling of species.<sup>5</sup> God's new preference for family or tribe is echoed in the post flood genealogy in Chapter 10. "These are the descendants of Shem according to their clans (*l'mishpechotam*) and languages."<sup>6</sup>

"The Lord smelled the pleasing odor (of the sacrifice) and the Lord said to Himself. *Never* again will I doom the earth because of man *since* the devising of man's mind are evil from his youth."<sup>7</sup> If the relationship with mankind is to continue, God must recalibrate its parameters. Both pre and post flood, God's internal calculus<sup>8</sup> is that man is bad. Note well that God had never actually declared mankind to be good. In Genesis 1, humans were only part of all of creation that God in his opinion declared was "very good."<sup>9</sup>

What God had not fully reckoned with up until this point is mankind's *yetzer*, that is, his earthly nature. Genesis 1, creation from God's perspective<sup>9</sup> lists mankind's God like qualities as *tzelem* and *demut*<sup>10</sup> (image and likeness), with no mention of mankind's nature, the *yetzer*. From God's perspective on

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1 Gen. 8:17

2. See Gen. 7:14 for entering" by kind", Gen. 8:19 for exiting by families with no mention of "by kind".

3. Michael Carasik, *The Commentators' Bible: Genesis. The Rubin Miqra'ot Gedolot* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Jewish Publication Society, 2018) *Rashi* on Gen. 8:19 "by families"

4. *Ibid.* *Ibn Ezra* on Gen. 8:17 "by families".

5. See Unit 4F

6. Gen. 10:31. Also see Gen. 10:5,32

7. Gen. 8:21

8. Both deliberations occur in God's heart, an internal calculation. See Gen. 6:6 and Gen. 8:21

9. See Unit 2

10. Gen. 1:26

creation, man's job was to be God's steward on earth ruling animal life on the planet.<sup>11</sup>

Genesis 2, a creation story from mankind's perspective, twice mentions the verb *Y-TZ-R*, to form. "God formed man from the dust of the earth"<sup>12</sup> and "the Lord God formed out of the earth all the wild beasts."<sup>13</sup> It is none other than mankind's constitutional formation (the *yetzer*, the nature) which God now comes to terms with, that it is bad, both pre and post flood. The only change in God's perspective on human nature is that post flood, God calls man's nature bad "*m'nurav*", literally from his youth.<sup>14</sup> *Rashi* notes, however "The Hebrew noun is spelled in a way that permits it also to be read "from his birth."<sup>15</sup> (i.e. from mankind's initial formation)

Going forward, God will factor in that man's *yetzer* is irretrievably bad. Any new paradigm of the dialogical relationship must account for this inescapable conclusion.

God insists we maintain our free will and this free will includes being guided by our nature. Our evil nature might sometime lead us astray but it is indispensible for any love relationship to flourish. It's not so much that we are tempted to sin by our nature but we are tempted to sin when there is no possibility of love.<sup>16</sup>

God realizes why the old system fell apart. God occupies the world of *beriyah*, of creation, the language of Genesis 1. Man lives in the world of *yetzer*, and is imbued with a deep earthiness (*gashmiyut*). Man's ideal is when he finds a woman to cling to and they "become one flesh"<sup>17</sup> that is, in relationship, they become one. The parable is to a husband who cheats on his wife.<sup>18</sup> Her initial reaction is to lash out but when anger subsides, she eventually examines her contribution to the problem. To enable relationship with the one God, God needs to adjust His part of the problem in creating the relationship and not just lash out. God must factor in man's earthy nature and account both for the evil devising of his nature as well as his intense nature to become one. The pathway to relationship both with fellow humans and with God is love. God confirms the

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11. Gen. 1:27-28

12. Gen. 2:7

13. Gen. 2:19

14. Gen. 8:21

15. Michael Carasik, *The commentators' Bible: Genesis. The Rubin Miqra'ot Gedolot* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Jewish Publication Society, 2018) *Rashi* on Gen. 8:21 "from his youth"

16. See Unit 4F

17. Gen. 2:25

18. I am indebted to my mentor Rabbi Jeffrey Segelman for the parable of the cheating husband.

paradigm shift: God promises to never again doom the earth since man's nature is evil from birth.<sup>19</sup>

Without demanding any reciprocal action on the part of mankind, God makes a unilateral covenant to Godself to regulate the cycles of nature. From now on, they will never cease.<sup>20</sup> (*lo yishbotu*)

Genesis 1 ends with all of creation deemed “very good” and is capped off by *Shabbat*, God's eternal time, which is outside earthly time. Genesis 8 ends with God's promise to unceasingly (no *Shabbat*) sustain the natural order 24/7, 365 days a year. Forevermore, God will now regulate earthly time to preserve the possibility of relationship with man. The story of the deluge ends with never ceasing. The overt mythological era has been left behind and post-flood, the dialogical relationship transitions into a new phase.

#### B) God's Self Adjustment Creates a New Paradigm: A Unilateral Covenant and Taking *Adama* out of the Calculus

Since man's *yetzer* is irretrievably bad from birth, God needs a new paradigm to maintain the dialogical relationship. “Never again will I doom (*l'kallel*, literally curse) the earth (*adama*) on account of man (*Adam*)...nor will I ever destroy every living being.”<sup>21</sup> Cursing the ground as a litmus test for the degree of human wickedness on earth, especially murder, ends here.

The first set of parameter changes in the dialogical relationship have as their subject man's relationship with animals. In Genesis 1, man is commanded in his job as steward (*tzelem*) to “rule all the living things”<sup>22</sup> on earth. God now commands the surviving remnant of humanity to instill “the fear and dread of you amongst the animals.”<sup>23</sup> The following verse also signals a major shift in the relationship between humans and the animal kingdom. “Every creature that lives shall be yours to eat.”<sup>24</sup> God's original plan was for humans to be vegetarians.<sup>25</sup> Why is man's dominion of animals strengthened, even to the extent of being granted a new permission to kill them for food?

God here is providing outlets for mankind's violent impulses by changing the nature of their relationship with the animal kingdom. God is calculating that a sharper distinction between animals and humans will curb the evil *yetzer* of man.

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19. Gen. 8:21

20. Gen. 8:22. Never “ceasing” (*yishbotu*) is derived from the same root as *Shabbat*.

21. Gen. 8:21

22. Gen. 1:28

23. Gen. 9:2

24. Gen. 9:3

25. Gen. 1:29

The final straw for God before bringing the flood was the total breakdown of boundaries in relationships between humans and animals as well as mankind acting like animals in relationships between themselves.<sup>26</sup> Given that these boundary violations will inevitably ensue by dint of man's evil nature, the original ideal of stewardship (*tzelem*) is no longer viable. God needs to re-establish boundaries to attempt to reign in man's *yetzer*.

"Originally, God expected people to be vegetarians and not kill living creatures for their food. But this ideal became corrupted into the notion that there are no qualitative differences between humans and animals, leading some people to the conclusion that they could behave like animals. God then compromised the vegetarian ideal, permitting the eating of meat but strenuously forbidding the shedding of human blood, as a way of emphasizing the distinction between humans and animals."<sup>27</sup>

"You must not however, eat flesh with its life blood in it."<sup>28</sup> God makes crystal clear that even animal blood belongs to the Divine sphere and while the consumption of meat is now permitted, consuming animal blood is still a boundary violation.

God has already eternally precluded cursing the ground (the *adama* leg of the *dam/adam/adamah* triangle<sup>29</sup>) on account of man's deeds on earth.<sup>30</sup> In its place, God commands a new paradigm for the dialogical relationship, it is the new paradigm of *dam* and *adam*. It's a partnership to protect the sacredness of human blood. "But for your own life blood, I will require a reckoning...of man too will I require a reckoning of human life."<sup>31</sup> In Hebrew, the root of the word reckoning is *D-R-Sh* which always indicates an intense seeking or probing.<sup>32</sup>

In exquisite poetic verse, God confirms the new parameters for relationship that leaves behind the *adama* part of the equation, leaving *dam* and *adam* remaining in chiasmic structure in the first couplet. That which populates the center of a chiasm, accentuates the focal point of the poem or the narrative.

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26. See Unit 4F

27 David L. Leiber, *Etz Hayyim Torah and Commentary* (New York, New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2001) Commentary on Gen. 9:2 "The fear and dread of you."

28. Gen. 9:4

29. For the *dam/adam/adama* paradigm of relationship see Unit 4A, for its demise see Units 4E and 4F

30. Gen. 8:21 "Never again will I doom the earth (*adama*) because of man."

31. Gen. 9:5

32. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Heavenly Torah: as refracted Through the Generations*. Edited and Translated by Gordon Tucker with Leonard Levin. (New York, New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, Inc., 2006) In Ezra 7:10 "Ezra dedicated himself to seek out the meaning of the Torah." Heschel notes about this verse: "Previously in the *Tanakh*, the root *drsh* was used for seeking out God...now it is used for the teaching of God, the Torah." Also see Lev. 10:16, Deut. 13:15. Both citations have as their subject intense "seekings" in order to divine God's intent on very important matters of holiness.

A- shed  
 B- blood  
 C- of man (*Ha'adam*)  
 C'-by man (*B'adam*)  
 B'- blood  
 A'-be shed.

As the chiasm demonstrates, it is now man's responsibility to protect against the boundary violation par excellence of the Divine sphere.<sup>33</sup> This is the new partnership with man!

This is a radical response by God to the problem of human wickedness. The story of the first murder, Cain and Abel, inaugurated a period where God backed off to see how the drama would unfold.<sup>34</sup> From now on, men must develop laws addressing bloodshed and regulating their own conduct.<sup>35</sup> This is analogous to giving a teenager more responsibilities and fewer punishments. They may not deserve it, but it's the only way they will ever grow up and learn to become responsible for their own actions.<sup>36</sup>

The poem concludes with God's rationale for humankind's new responsibility to protect the sanctity of human blood: "For in his image (*tzelem*), did God make man."<sup>37</sup> The concept of *tzelem*, (stewardship) is now expanded by God beyond managing the animal kingdom and the natural world to include enforcing legislation against murder. The idea of humans being made in God's image was a revolutionary concept. Unlike surrounding cultures, where only the king was made in the image of God, this was nothing less than the royalization of the entire species<sup>38</sup>! Substituting an alternate definition of *b'tzelem* ("having as much transitive concerns as possible") yields: "For man to have as much transitive concerns as possible, did God make man." To be in God's image or to be God's steward necessitates caring about the life of everyone else and *davka*, not mostly about ourselves. To cultivate these transitive concerns, God now makes human beings responsible for something that up until now, was in God's sphere alone. Humans will cultivate God consciousness (transitive concerns) by expanding their role as responsible stewards to also include protecting human blood, which is owned by the Divine Other, God.

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33. Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses (Volume 1): A Translation with Commentary* (New York, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2004) Commentary on Gen. 9:6

34. See Unit 4A

35. Ex. 21:12-14 The Torah legislates against homicide and specifies places of temporary refuge for cases of potential manslaughter until the case can be adjudicated. See Numb. 35:11-24 for formal cities of refuge and further detail on the requirements for asylum.

36. I am indebted to my mentor Rabbi Jeffrey Segelman for this analogy.

37. Gen. 9:6

38. See Unit 1D

### C) A Unilateral Covenant Memorialized by a Special Sign

Verses in the Hebrew Bible that start “As for you” (*v’ata*), followed later by “as for me” (*v’ani*) when referring to God’s relationship with man, usually indicates mutual obligation or acts.<sup>39</sup> In Genesis 9:7, the “as for you” part is to be fruitful and multiply, already several times commanded by God. It’s nothing new. The “as for me” part is brand new. “I now establish my covenant with you and your offspring to come...all that have come out of the ark, every living thing on earth.”<sup>40</sup> Nothing new is being asked of man and the covenant is not with man alone, it is God’s unilateral covenant with all living creatures.

God memorializes the covenant with a sign (*ot brit*). “I have set My bow in the clouds, and it shall serve as a sign of the covenant (*ot brit*) between me and the earth.”<sup>41</sup> In the Ancient Near east, the bow was a common weapon of the gods.<sup>42</sup> Here, God turns a potential weapon into the sign of an everlasting covenant to never destroy.<sup>43</sup> *Ramban* comments: “the rainbow was deliberately made not with the legs of its arc upward, so that it would seem to be shooting from heaven aiming at earth; rather He made it the opposite way, to show that it was not shooting from heaven. Earthly fighters do the same thing, reversing their bows when wishing to make an offer of peace to their antagonists.”<sup>44</sup>

In Genesis, signs (*otot*) are regulators. The moon, sun and stars are signs to regulate the “set times.”<sup>45</sup> God put a sign on Cain to regulate against anyone killing him.<sup>46</sup> Here, the rainbow is a sign to God to regulate God’s own behavior; it is a covenant with Himself. “I will remember (*v’zacharti*) My covenant...When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember (*lizkor*) the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures.”<sup>47</sup> In Genesis 8:1, God remembers Noah and allows His aspect of mercy to triumph over God’s aspect of Justice.<sup>48</sup> Here, God is taking no chances; there will be frequent “rainbow reminders” to God to forever uphold the everlasting unilateral covenant by maintaining the cycles of nature and never again destroying the earth.<sup>49</sup>

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39. For an example, see Gen. 6:17, 21

40. Gen. 9:9-10

41. Gen. 9:13

42. Joana Toryaanuri, “Weapons of the Storm God in Ancient Near East and Biblical Traditions”, *Studia Orientalia* 112 (2012)

“Divine weapons were used for specific functions such as witnessing oaths and rendering judgments.”

43. Gen. 9:16

44. Michael Carasik, *The Commentators’ Bible: Genesis. The Rubin JPS Miqra’ot Gedolot*. (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Jewish Publication Society, 2018) *Ramban* on Gen. 9:12 “This is the sign I set for the covenant”

45. Gen. 1:14

46. Gen. 4:15

47. Gen. 9:15-16

48. See Unit 5C

49. Gen. 8:21, 9:15

The Hebrew Bible is replete with mentions of covenantal relationships. (*britot*) Yet only twice in the Hebrew Bible is it accompanied by an “*ot brit*”, a sign memorializing the covenant. These two are God’s rainbow and the everlasting covenant with Abraham memorialized by circumcision. “You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin and that shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you.”<sup>50</sup> Both covenants are eternal.<sup>51</sup> (“*brit olam*”) At the current stage of the dialogical relationship, such signs of eternal covenants and oaths are unilateral in nature.

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50. Gen. 17:11

51. Gen. 9:16, 17:7,11, 19



Unit 7: God's Management of Human Foibles Post-Flood and Foreshadowing of Israel as the New Paradigm for Building the Dialogical Relationship

A) Noah Gets Drunk- Sexual Sin Defines the Archetypes of Israel, her Enemies and her Allies.

“The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were *Shem, Ham* and *Japheth-Ham* being the father of *Canaan*. These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the whole world branched out.”<sup>1</sup>

Up until this point in the Hebrew Bible, all mentions of those entering or exiting the ark include only Noah, his wife, their three sons, and their son's wives.<sup>2</sup> “The world branched out from Noah's sons<sup>3</sup> as is catalogued and attested to in the genealogy that follows in Chapter 10.<sup>4</sup> Notable here is the inclusion of *Canaan* among those exiting the ark<sup>5</sup> the only one of four of *Ham's* sons and the only grandson of Noah mentioned.<sup>6</sup> The inclusion of *Canaan* sticks out in the introduction to the story as well as in the narrative that follows; Noah ends up cursing this particular grandson,<sup>7</sup> even though it was his father, *Ham*, who “saw his father's nakedness.”<sup>8</sup> This is a story that includes two paradigmatic Genesis sins: sexual transgression and technological advance<sup>9</sup> but now will also include “For the first time in Genesis, the horizon of the story is the national story of Israel and the subservient status of *Canaan* to *Shem*.”<sup>10</sup>

“Noah, the tiller of the soil (*ish ha'adama*) was the first to plant a vineyard.”<sup>11</sup> Upon his birth, we learned that Noah was to “provide relief from our work and the toil of our hands, out of the very soil which the Lord placed under a curse.”<sup>12</sup> God has recently removed the element of cursing the ground (the *adama* leg of the defunct triad) but apparently Noah still provided some form of relief through

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1. Gen. 9:19-20

2. Gen. 6:18, 7:7, 7:13, 7:18

3. Gen. 9:19

4. Gen. 10:1,32

5. Gen. 9:18

6. Gen. 10:6 for the other grandsons of Noah form *Ham*

7. Gen. 9:25

8. Gen. 9:22

9. See Units 4B, 4F and 7B

10. Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses (Volume 1): A Translation with a Commentary* (New York, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2004) Commentary on Gen. 9:20-27

11. Gen. 9:20

12. Gen. 5:29

technological innovation by being the first to practice viticulture and viniculture.<sup>13</sup> This narrative then is partly about technological advances, which Genesis views as distancing man from relationship with the Divine.<sup>14</sup> As mentioned in Unit 5E, Noah does not save the land from being cursed yet provides relief in the sense that “ wine provides a poor man respite from his drudgery.”<sup>15</sup> As we will now discover, not only does wine not provide respite from drudgery for Noah, drinking wine ultimately leads Noah to curse his grandson; that he and his offspring will be slaves in their own land; “the lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers.”<sup>16</sup> What happened here that warrants such a consequential curse?

This is story of sexual apostasy transmitted in terse form that takes a bit of unpacking, employing Hebrew grammar and syntax to decipher the exact nature of the cursed act.

“He drank of the wine and became drunk, and he uncovered himself within his tent. *Ham* the father of *Canaan*, saw his father’s nakedness and told his two brothers outside.”<sup>17</sup> Whatever actually occurred, the text is clear that it all happened by consecutive acts in rapid succession as attested to in Biblical Hebrew grammar by 13 Vav Consecutives (*Vav hahipuch*) in this pericope.<sup>18</sup> All happens in rapid succession and all the actions in the narrative are related.

“He uncovered (*Vayitgal*) himself within the tent.”<sup>19</sup> Uncovering in the Hebrew Bible is the common root Gimel-Aleph-Lamed often meaning “uncovering” in relation to a sexual act.<sup>20</sup> The verb as conjugated here is in the *hitpael*. (reflexive conjugation) Therefore, the plain sense of this phrase is that Noah was naked uncovering himself inside his tent in preparation for sex. Modesty within tents becomes a later paradigm for Israelite sexual mores: In the Book of Numbers, the Israelites are on the verge of entering the Promised Land. They have defeated all their enemies and *Balak*, the king of Moab, understands they cannot be defeated militarily because God is on their side. He hires *Billam*

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13. Michael Carasik, *The Commentators bible: Genesis. The Rubin JPS Miqra 'ot Gedolot* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Jewish Publication Society, 2018) *Ibn Ezra* on Gen. 9:20 commenting on “Noah was the first to plant a vineyard.” The text literally calls him a man of the soil, implying that he understood farming, which requires great technical knowledge. The verb *vayahel* is geminate. He began.” Gen. 9:21 is the first mention of wine, leading to the assumption (along with the verb form) that Noah invented viticulture.

14. Gen. 4:17-22, 10:8-12, 11:1-9

15. Prov. 31:6-7

16. Gen. 9:25

17. Gen. 9:21-22

18. J. Weingreen, *A practical Grammar for Classic Hebrew* (Oxford University Press, 1939) p91

19. Gen. 9:21

20. See Lev. 18:6-19 for a listing of forbidden sexual acts. Each prohibition uses the subject root meaning “uncovering the nakedness”.

in a vain attempt to curse Israel. His curses come out only as blessings including “How fair are your tents, O Jacob, Your dwellings O Israel.”<sup>21</sup> They are “fair” because the arrangement of the tents of 2 million people were positioned so as not to “uncover” anything going on in an adjoining tent.<sup>22</sup> Modesty is a cardinal value of the Israelites causing *Billam* to abandon his attempt to curse the people and in the alternate, he attempts to lure them into sexual apostasy.<sup>23</sup>

What *Ham* saw is described as “his father’s nakedness.”<sup>24</sup> Why would it be of any consequence at all that his son saw his father naked, let alone leading to a curse of being the lowest of slaves<sup>25</sup>?

“If a man lies with his father’s wife, it is the nakedness of his father that he has uncovered.”<sup>26</sup> (*ervat aviv gila*) In Biblical Hebrew, the enigmatic phrase in Genesis 9:22 means a son is sleeping with his mother. It is incest (!) and violates two Israelite norms, bodily modesty and honoring one’s parents.<sup>27a</sup> Why did Ham immediately “tell his two brothers outside?”<sup>27b</sup> In the Ancient Near East, sleeping with the wife of one’s father was a figurative attempt to castrate the father; a rebellion to usurp the father’s lead position in the family.<sup>28</sup> Later in Genesis, Reuben lays with his father Jacob’s concubine in a similar attempt that fails.<sup>29</sup>

In the current narrative, the un-covering is followed by the other two sons walking backward. The text relays in meticulous detail how they are able to cover up their mother, thereby not seeing “the nakedness of their father.”<sup>30</sup>(i.e. their mother) “Noah woke up from his wine and learned (*vayeda*) what his younger son had done to him.”<sup>31</sup> The verb *Y-D-A* once again here means knowledge in the sense of a sexual act. We’ve previously encountered sexual indiscretions of polygamy<sup>32</sup> and wanton sexual perversion filling the earth.<sup>33</sup>

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21. Numb. 24:5

22. Adin Steinsaltz, *Masechet Baba Batra Talmud Bavli* (Jerusalem, Israel: Israel Institute for Talmudic Publications, 1991) BT BB 60a Sexual modesty is still a cardinal Jewish virtue. Numb. 24:5 is the basis for the *ma tovu* prayer recited daily upon entering the synagogue.

23. Numb. 31:16

24. Gen. 9:22

25. Gen. 9:25

26. Lev. 20:11

27a. Both norms are included in each of the two renditions of the ten commandments. See Ex. 20:12 and Deut. 5:16

27b. Gen. 9:22

28. See 2 Sam. 16:21-22 *Absalom* attempts to usurp David. See also 1Kings 2:20-22 Sleeping with *Abishag* (king David’s companion) would bolster *Adonijah*’s claim to the throne over Solomon.

29. Gen. 35:22

30. Gen. 9:23

31. Gen. 9:24

32. Gen. 4:19

33. Gen. 6:1-4

Here now is a new low, sleeping with one's mother. Noah proceeds to curse *Canaan* because of the incident.

It is irrelevant that Noah was drunk and his son took advantage of his inebriated state. Since no less than the very purpose of creation is to foster a world of relationship, mankind needs to respect God's paradigms for relationship. "Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh."<sup>34</sup> The purpose of creation is now being undermined in a new and different manner. A person can only become one by leaving their mother and father and marrying.<sup>35</sup> God wants those made in his image to be "one" like God but not by breaking up the paradigm of one he has outlined for human beings. This is another boundary violation stemming from the oft-repeated and unqualified charge to be fruitful and multiply. In the next iteration of the framework for the dialogical relationship,<sup>36</sup> God will address this issue head on.

The next two verses are in poetic form, highlighting the main takeaway from the narrative.

He said:           Cursed be *Canaan*  
                           The lowest of slaves  
                           Shall he be to his brothers  
 And he said:    Blessed by the Lord  
                           The God of *Shem*  
                           Let *Canaan* be a slave to them<sup>37</sup>

This narrative foreshadows *Canaan* as the archetypal enemy of *Shem*, the progenitor of Israel. The long list of sexual prohibitions for Israelites is read in temple on Yom Kippur afternoon. The list ends "do not defile yourselves in any of those ways, for it is by such that the nations that I am casting out before you (in the land of *Canaan*) defiled themselves."<sup>38</sup> *Canaan* is forever more contrasted to Israel. Israel is chaste, *Canaanites* practice sexual apostasy and "thus the land became defiled...and the land spewed out its inhabitants."<sup>39</sup> In the early chapters of Genesis, man is cursed from the ground for boundary violations.<sup>40</sup> For the *Canaanites*, it is their ongoing sexual perversion that will ultimately cause the land to spew them out in favor of the Israelites. They will become the lowest of

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34. Gen. 2:24

35. Ibid

36. See Unit 7C. The Tower of Babel narrative recounts other boundary violations related to improper modalities of becoming "one". A major paradigm shift in the dialogical relationship ensues. See Unit 8.

37. Gen. 9:25-26

38. Lev. 18:24

39. Lev. 18:25. In Deut. 7:2, the Israelites are commanded to doom the inhabitants of *Canaan* to destruction and are specifically enjoined not to marry them.

40. Gen. 3:17, 4:11

slaves to their brothers,<sup>41</sup> and ultimately to the Israelites as foreshadowed in this pericope that ends Genesis 9.

The last two verses in the Chapter relay genealogical facts about Noah after the flood.<sup>42</sup> These verses return to the precise literary formula of the genealogy in Chapter 5 indicating that they are bookends and the Noah story is now formally complete. The genealogy to follow in Chapter 10 divides the tale of the flood and its aftermath and the next narrative, the Tower of Babel.

- B) The 70 Nations: The criteria for classification of the nations and the emphasis on *Eber*; both signal a heightened foreshadowing of potential major changes in the dialogical relationship.

The genealogy concludes: “These are the grouping of Noah’s descendants... and from these, nations branched out over the earth after the flood.<sup>43</sup>” *Peru urevu* (be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth) has come true! Chapter 10 enumerates seventy nations (plus one for Nimrod) that have now, if not filled the earth, have branched out over its entirety.

The descendants of Noah’s three sons are listed as follows: *Japheth* encompasses the Isles of the Mediterranean<sup>44</sup> *Ham*’s descendants spread out over a vast swath of territory from northeastern Africa through Gaza, Philistia and *Canaan* and stretching far east to Babylon and Assyria<sup>45</sup> and *Shem*’s genealogy, unlike that of his two brothers, focuses mostly on the descendants and not the nations that result.<sup>46</sup> Their territory is described as “settlements.”<sup>47</sup> They are presumptively semi-nomadic tribes covering a large area in what are parts of modern day Saudi Arabia Iran and Iraq.<sup>48</sup>

Given the geographic divisions, it is most interesting to note that *Canaan* should logically fall under the *Shemite* list, because of both geographic and linguistic affiliation. The genealogy notes that each of the three separate groups shares a linguistic affiliation.<sup>49</sup>

The ordering principles behind these three lists seems to hinge both on the lifestyle of each group and their political relevance to the future Israelites.

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41. Gen. 9:25

42. Gen. 9:29-30

43. Gen. 10:32

44. Gen. 10:2-5

45. Gen. 10:6-20

46. Gen 10:21-31

47. Gen. 10:30

48. Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses (Volume 1): A Translation with Commentary* (New York, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2004) “An impressive proportion of these names have analogies in inscriptions and tablets in other ancient Near East cities.” Introductory note to Genesis chapter 10.

49. Gen.10:5,20,31

*Japheth* are seafarers and political allies. Noah blesses *Japheth* “May God enlarge *Japheth*, And let him dwell in the tents of *Shem*: And let *Canaan* be a slave to them,”<sup>50</sup> just as they are destined to be slaves to the descendants of *Shem*.<sup>51</sup>

*Ham* are city dwellers and future enemies of the Israelites: Egypt, *Canaan* and the Philistines are chief among this list. Also included are *Gerar*, Sodom and Gomorrah, places that are prominent in the story of Abraham.<sup>52</sup> Tellingly, *Canaan*’s lineage is immediately followed a description of the boundaries of the land of *Canaan*.<sup>53</sup> This is important since soon enough, Abraham will be promised this land.<sup>54</sup>

*Shem*’s line becomes semi-nomadic peoples, `presumptively shepherds. The first verse of *Shem*’s list foreshadows the Israelite future. “Sons were also born to *Shem*, ancestors of *all the descendants of Eber*.”<sup>55</sup> Yet *Eber* is four generations removed from *Shem*<sup>56</sup>! The ancestors of *Eber* are highlighted since “Abraham the Hebrew”<sup>57</sup> (“*ivri*”) will descend from this line. Even after the Israelites grow into a nation in Egypt<sup>58</sup>, they retain the Hebrew connection. Moses tells *Pharaoh* “The God of the Hebrews has manifested Himself to us”<sup>59</sup> The root of *Eber*’s name (literally across) gets much wordplay in the story of Jacob in Genesis 32. Jacob repeatedly crosses the river, wrestles with the Angel and after this struggle he is named Israel, the successor name for this branch of the Hebrew tribe.

*Eber* is apparently a latecomer to the scene: “Two sons were born to *Eber*: the name of the first was *Peleg*, for in his day the earth was divided. (*nifligah*)”<sup>60</sup> This is referring to the Tower of Babel, the immediately following narrative in chapter 11. The tower story ends “and from there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.”<sup>61</sup>

The problem of technological advances creating distance between humans and God continues as an ongoing issue. Nimrod (not surprisingly found in the *Ham* list of enemies) is another archetype inventor. “He was the first (*hechel*) man of might on

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50. Gen. 9:27

51. Gen. 9:26

52. *Gerar* is the locus of events in chapter 20 of Genesis. Sodom and Gomorrah are places of consequence in the narratives of chapters 13, 18 and 19 of Genesis.

53. Gen. 10:19

54. Michael Carsik, *The Commentators’ Bible: Genesis. The Rubin JPS Miqra’ot Gedolot* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Jewish Publication Society, 2018) *Ramban* on Gen. 10:15 “The nations listed (in verses 10:15-18) are the ten that were given to Abraham.”

55. Gen. 9:21

56. Gen. 9:24

57. Gen. 14:13

58. Ex. 1:9 The tribe turns into a nation. (*am bnei yisrael*)

59. Ex. 5:3

60. Gen. 10:25

61. Gen. 11:9

the earth.”<sup>62</sup> Noah is described with a word from the same root, indicating he was an innovator in grape growing and wine making.<sup>63</sup> Nimrod was “a mighty hunter by Grace of the Lord.”<sup>64</sup> Apparently, his prodigious hunting skills led directly to becoming an emperor of a vast kingdom in Mesopotamia, including Babylonia and Assyria.<sup>65</sup> Humans have evolved; killing skills now leads to political power and earthly rulers. “Nimrod began to display his might by conquering one or more nations and making himself their king. Before him, no man had ruled over an entire people.”<sup>66</sup>

The oft repeated command to be fruitful and multiply and to fill the earth has finally come to full fruition<sup>67</sup> but problems with sexual immorality, increasing bloodshed and ever evolving advances in technology persist in plaguing man’s relationship with God. In the meantime, God has laid the building blocks in chapter ten should another course correction become necessary.

### C) The Tower of Babel - Boundary Violations Leads God to Re-scatter Humans Across the Globe.

At the end of chapter 10, it seemed as if God’s oft-repeated commandment to mankind since the sixth day of creation (be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth) had finally been brought to fruition: “and from these, the nations branched out over the earth after the flood.”<sup>68</sup> Yet chapter 11 begins: “Everyone on earth had the same language and the same words.”<sup>69</sup> According to the builders, one of two reasons for the construction of a city and a tower is “else we shall be scattered all over the world.”<sup>70</sup> God’s conception of being fruitful and multiply not only hinges on branching out over the earth but also being divided by “land, language, clan and nation.”<sup>71</sup> God is clearly displeased with human perversion of His version of *peru urevu*. “If as one people with one language for all, this

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62. Gen. 10:8

63. Gen. 9:20 *vayachel* and *hechel* are derived from the same root.

64. Gen. 10:9

65. Gen 10:10

66. Michael Carasik, *The Commentators’ Bible: Genesis. The Rubin JPS Miqra’ot Gedolot* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Jewish Publication Society, 2018) *Kimhi* on Gen. 10:8 “who was the first man of might on earth”

67. Gen. 10:32

68. Ibid.

69. Gen. 11:1

70. Gen. 11:4

71. Gen. 10:5,20,31

is how they have begun to act, then nothing will be out of their reach.<sup>72</sup> God's concern here echoes Genesis 3:22, where God is worried that men will eat of the tree of life and live forever, prompting immediate banishment from the Garden. Here too, banishment is the corrective. "Thus the Lord scattered them from there over the face of the earth."<sup>73</sup> The question remains: what exactly was the extraordinary boundary violation that will soon prompt God to re-order relationships with human beings from addressing the world writ large to concentrating on building the dialogical relationship anew, starting over with one family from Mesopotamia?

The sins of the generation of the dispersion run far deeper than violating God's conception of "be fruitful and multiply." This is another story of technological advance and the evolution of culture leading mankind away from relationship with God.<sup>74</sup> Besides the ability to build a sky-high tower, there are many other textual clues that highlight this story as one focused on technology. In Genesis 11:6, the word began (*hachilam*) as in "they began to act" is the same verb used in Gen. 9:20 and 10:8 to identify Noah and Nimrod as archetypes of cultural advances, which here, is the building of the city and the tower. Also "Bricks served them as stone and bitumen served as mortar"<sup>75</sup> signals technological progression from the building blocks available to the semi-nomadic peoples, where stones and mortar were used.

Wordplay strongly indicates that Babylon specifically, the most advanced civilization of this era, is the object of derision.

The answer to the technological prowess and actions of the city dwellers is to "confound their speech:" (*navela, balal*) The two words for confound both rhyme with Babel.<sup>76</sup> Confusing speech and re-scattering humankind "over the face of the whole earth"<sup>77</sup> is God's corrective to the culmination of human activity after the flood (*mabool*), which also rhymes with Babel. Finally, a *bava* (in Aramaic) is a gate. The builders were trying

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72. Gen. 11:6

73. Gen. 11:8

74 See Units 4B, 7A and 7B

75. Gen. 11:3

76. Gen. 11:7 *navela* Gen. 11:9 *balal*

77. Gen 11:9



to build a tower “with its top in the sky.”<sup>78</sup> Humans here are trying to build a gateway into God’s realm, another boundary violation. God does not like this version of a stairway to heaven; it is built from the bottom up, by human beings. Later in Genesis, Jacob’s ladder has angels initiating the action from the top down<sup>79</sup> and that incident helps the dialogical relationship to move forward. When we are at the bottom, looking heavenward for guidance, this is the gateway to heaven and to relationship with God.<sup>80</sup>

The boundary violations go much deeper than not fulfilling God’s conception of human dispersion and the dangers of human culture, specifically that of Babylon. Specifically, the Babylonians desire to build the city and the tower “to make a name (*shem*) for ourselves<sup>81</sup>” is antithetical to God’s conception of oneness. God strenuously objects: “If as one people with one language for all, this is how they have begun to act, then nothing will be out of their reach.”<sup>82</sup> From God’s perspective, this is the polar opposite of His conception of “oneness” for mankind. Man is to cling to his wife “so that they become one flesh.”<sup>83</sup> *Ham* sleeping with his mother was another perversion in how humans attempt to become one.<sup>84</sup>

For human beings, oneness is achieved through marriage, an exclusive relationship. The oneness of God is an existential reality that all humans must recognize at their peril. *Ramban* notes: “Our sages describe this as a rebellion against the Holy One...one who understands the expression “to make a name for ourselves” will understand that the entire episode is about this evil scheme.”<sup>85</sup>

Throughout the Hebrew Bible, God’s “*shem*” is a distillation of God’s essence, and when in proper relationship with God, Humans can channel this distilled oneness to effectuate blessings by the Divine. God divulges to the priests the three formulaic

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78. Gen. 11:4

79. Gen. 28:12 “A stairway was set on the ground and its top reached the sky and angels of God were going up and down on it.”

80. I am grateful to Job Jindo for this teaching. BIB 345 The Academy for Jewish Religion. Fall Semester 2019

81. Gen. 11:4

82. Gen. 11:6

83. Gen. 2:25

84. Gen. 9:21-22

85. Michael Carasik, *The Commentators’ Bible: Genesis. The Rubin JPS Miqra’ot Gedolot* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Jewish Publication Society, 2018) *Ramban* on Gen. 11:2 “As they migrated from the east”

blessings they are to recite to the Israelites.<sup>86</sup> Crucially, upon completion of the blessing formula, God adds “Thus they (the priests) shall link (literally place) my name (*shem*) with the people of Israel, and I will bless them.<sup>87</sup>” The proper respect for and use of God’s *shem* is similar to “remembrances” that are also conduits for the God-Human partnership.<sup>88</sup>

*Shem* is also the name of Noah’s son from whom the lineage of the Hebrews emerges. His lineage is promised God will “bless you and I (God) will make your name great.”<sup>89</sup> When people try to make a name for themselves, instead of praising God’s essence, (name) they are doomed to disaster. The descendants of *Shem* will come to respect God’s ownership of His name (*shem*) and will leave it to God, as it is in God’s sphere alone.

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86. Numb. 6:24-26

87. Numb. 6:27

88. See Unit 5C

89. Gen. 12:2

Unit 8: An Entirely New Paradigm for Creating an Optimal Dialogical Relationship.  
Slowly Working out the Problems, Starting with One Mesopotamian.

Immediately following the dispersal, the Torah relates the genealogy of *Shem*, right up until Abram's father.<sup>1</sup> It is an unadorned genealogy; a straight recitation of the devolution of the lineage of *Shem*. It is uninterrupted by narrative (as were the genealogies in Chapters 5 and 10); nor does it contain the mention of any women, as did the genealogy in Chapter 4.

Genesis 11:27-30 begins a new genealogy, as indicated by the repetition of the phrase "this is the line of" (*eleh toledot*) that began the prior genealogy in Genesis 11:10. This new genealogy describes the tenth generation from *Shem*, which includes Abram and his brothers *Nahor* and *Haran*.<sup>2</sup> His father *Terah*, who gives birth at seventy, has three sons, just as Noah did.<sup>3</sup> A father of children who is a young man is the first hint in the text that a new beginning may be in the offing. *Terah* is a much younger man when he becomes a father than any of his predecessors. Another breakage with the old pattern immediately follows: the death of a young person. "*Haran* died in the lifetime of his father."<sup>4</sup> The Torah seems to be relaying that the expected parameters of time and lifespan are in the process of undergoing radical change.

Abram takes *Sarai* as his wife and his brother *Nahor* marries *Milcah*.<sup>5</sup> The immediately following events signals a major shift in the dialogical relationship. "Now *Sarai* was barren (*akara*), she had no child."<sup>6</sup> Biblical Hebrew loves repetition, especially whenever emphasizing a prominent theme or a shift in the dialogical relationship.<sup>7</sup> The repetition here signals that God is now, for the first time, assuming responsibility for fertility! (at least in this family) Up until this point, fertility and increase were solely in

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1 Gen. 11:10-26

2. Gen. 11:26-27

3. Ibid.

4. Gen. 11:28

5. Gen. 11:29

6. Gen. 11:30

7. Some examples. Gen. 2:17 *mot tamut* meaning you shall surely die if you eat from the Tree of Knowledge. Gen. 9:25 *Canaan* is cursed to become an *eved avadim*. In Gen. 11:30 the sentence stands complete without the second clause. The duplication is to highlight the shift in emphasis in the dialogical relationship from the unqualified command to be "fruitful and multiply" to God assuming responsibility, at least in this family, to regulate fertility.

the unfettered control of humankind. The root *ayin-kuf-resh*, from which the word barren is derived, means to uproot. Abram and *Sarai* are endangered of being uprooted from the genealogy, God has uprooted exclusive human dominion over fertility and very soon Abram will be told by God to uproot himself from his native land to “a land that I will show you”<sup>8</sup> and only once he does that will God allow him multiple progeny.<sup>9</sup> In effect, God tells Abram that there will be no next generation without God’s assent. In addition, all of a sudden, mothers matter! Previously, wives were hardly mentioned in the genealogies. Here, and throughout the end of Genesis, barrenness and motherhood are intimately tied into the survival of each successive generation.<sup>10</sup>

Discontinuity replaces automatic continuity and how to create continuity from discontinuity will remain a major theme throughout the rest of Genesis. God has altered a major paradigm of the dialogical relationship. As part of reframing the relationship, human beings and particularly Abram’s family will struggle with procreation. The universalistic approach to forming relationships with human beings found in Genesis 1-11 will now be replaced with a plan to build a community of God fearers through one man that slowly evolves into a clan. Until this clan can grow into a nation of God fearers, God gives up on the plan to develop relationship with mankind writ large. As noted by Peter Gabriel: “When things get so big I don’t trust them at all. If you want some control, you’ve got to keep it small.”<sup>11</sup>

After the incident of the Tower of Babel, God decides that a radical new paradigm is in order.<sup>12</sup> In Babylonia the builders were intent on making a name for themselves. In response, God promises to make Avram’s name great.<sup>13</sup> The builders of the tower were concerned they would be scattered all over the earth. In response, God summons Avram

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8 8. Gen. 12:1

9. Gen. 12:2

10. See Gen. 21:2. Sarah doesn’t give birth until her 90’s and in Gen. 16:2 her barrenness leads her to surrogacy as a younger woman. Rebecca in Gen. 25:22 is in danger of miscarrying and Rachel needs God to “remember” to open her womb in Gen. 30:22. Joseph, her son eventually will ensure the family’s survival (see Gen. 50:20).

11. Peter Gabriel, D.I.Y., *The Peter Gabriel album/Scratch* (Charisma Records, 1978)

12. Jon D. Levenson, *Jewish Study Bible*. In his commentary on Gen. 11:8-9 he outlines the new paradigm that is the subject of this paragraph.

13. Gen. 11:4, 12:2

from Mesopotamia for a land all his own.<sup>14</sup> The builders were cursed with the inability to understand each other. In response, God not only blesses Abram but also those who bless him.<sup>15</sup> In each instance, God responds to the problems of human civilization as accentuated by the Tower narrative, by taking control of procreation and land grants. In addition, God chooses Abram and his progeny as a conduit of blessing for all humankind<sup>16</sup> replacing the heretofore hands off policy that resulted in unchecked wickedness. If humans learn to respect God's name as opposed to making a name for themselves, blessings will ensue. As was true after the banishment from the Garden and the dispersion from the tower, anger, scattering or banishment is not God's final answer.<sup>17</sup> God is not giving up on the relationship with human beings. Like Adam and Eve, it will be *Avram's* job to begin to restore the cosmic harmony lost upon banishment from the Garden.<sup>20</sup> In Genesis 1-11 the Bible highlights the potential problems of humankind. Technological innovation can be positive but if not accompanied by respecting the appropriate boundaries of God's sphere, both civilization and the structure of the universe are in peril. After the flood, God has unilaterally promised to not destroy the earth yet the relationship with those made in his image remains in grave peril.

The question remains: Why is *Avram* chosen for the multi-generational task of bringing God's presence down to earth<sup>21</sup> and ultimately to teach the entire world how to be in relationship with the Divine? (i.e. the subject of the rest of the Torah) As we've already seen<sup>22</sup>, the tribe of *Eber* is a latecomer onto the scene and therefore, there is no metaphysical uniqueness to the election of this tribe of Hebrews. In the Ancient Near East, firstborns were considered to be metaphysically superior, another assumption that

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14. Gen. 11:4, 12:1

15 Gen. 11:7-9, 12:3

16. Gen. 12:3

17. See Unit 3D

18.no citation ; number was accidentally skipped in sequence

19. no citation ; number was accidentally skipped in sequence

20. See Unit 3D

21. Unit 1D

22. Unit 7B

will be consistently upended throughout the Book of Genesis. The election of Israel is marked by its ordinariness.

According to Jewish tradition, Abram possessed all the knowledge of the era, particularly astrology.<sup>23</sup> When Abram is told, without any roadmap, to walk the length and breadth of the land<sup>24</sup> it is no random wandering. His first stop is by an oracle tree<sup>25</sup>, the second stop is near Beth El (literally the house of God) and after the command to sojourn the land, he visits another set of oracle trees.<sup>26</sup> Abram knows how to find the sacred sites.

But Abram still does not know one crucial fact that will be the main subject of his entire *lech lecha* journey. (*lech lecha*-go forth, brackets the Abraham narrative<sup>27</sup>) Abraham's walk with God<sup>28</sup> can be summed up thusly: GO OUTSIDE OF YOURSELF AND WHAT YOU THINK YOU ALREADY KNOW. *Avram* has a barren wife and is left with a barren land after his nephew chooses to settle in a well-watered plain: "like the Garden of the Lord."<sup>29</sup> The discipline to be undaunted by barrenness indeed does require a cognitive breakthrough. Moshe Weinfeld notes that the number of years from the birth of Shem's son to Abram's migration to Canaan is 365 years.<sup>30</sup> Fellow God walker Enoch<sup>31</sup> lived 365 years and was taken straight to heaven to commune with God. In contrast, *Avram*, the last of the God walkers, will have a lot of work to do on earth to maintain humanity's relationship with the Lord.

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23. Aryeh Kaplan, *Sefer Yetzirah, The Book of Creation: In Theory and Practice* (San Francisco, California: Red Wheel/Weiser LLC, 1997) p225. Abraham was successful in participating in creation (soul building) even before the *lech lecha* journey begins. See Gen. 12:5 "the persons (*midrash* "souls") they had acquired in *Haran*"

24. David L. Leiber, *Etz Hayyim Torah and Commentary* (New York, New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2001) Note on Gen. 12:6 "the teberinth of *Moreh*" "Some extraordinary tree. The Hebrew word *moreh* means "teacher", oracle giver. The subject verse of the footnote is Gen. 13: 18 where the "teberinths of *Mamre*" are mentioned. The Hebrew *mamre* and *moreh* are phonetically similar and the Etz Hayyim Comment refers the reader back to the commentary on 12:6. Presumptively they too are oracle trees.

25. Gen. 12:6

26. Gen. 13:18

27. Gen. 12:1, 22:1

28. See Unit 4D

29. Gen. 13:10

30. Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses (Volume 1): A Translation with Commentary* (New York, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2004) Comment on Gen. 11:10-26

31. See Unit 4D

Even *Avram* gets impatient after repeated promises of multiple progeny and complains to God: “O Lord God, what can you give me, seeing that I shall die childless.”<sup>32</sup> God told him “Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.”<sup>33</sup> *Rashi* expounds: “He told him: Get out of the astrological fate that you read in the stars-that you would not produce a son. *Abram* will not have a son but Abraham will have one. *Sarai* will not give birth, but Sarah will. I am renaming you, and your fates will change as a result.”<sup>34</sup> God can see what we can’t see and Avram begins to understand the limits of his knowledge. This is a corrective to mankind’s behavior in Genesis 1-11 which is motivated by unvarnished reliance on human prowess that precludes “seeing” God correctly. As noted by Martin Buber<sup>35</sup>, seeing as a revelation is a major leitmotif in the Abraham narratives appearing seven times in a chiasmic structure.

12:1 The land I will let you see

12:7 God lets Abram see Himself

13:14 See (the land) from where you are

15:5 Look to Heaven

17:1 God allows Himself to be seen by Abram

18:1 God lets Abraham see Himself

22:4 Abraham saw the place from afar.

The root of the verb to see is R-A-H, it is the root that is used in all but one of the citations. The subject verse in the middle of the chiasm, Genesis 15:5 uses the verb H-B-T, which describes an intense scrutiny as in gazing intently. *Rashi* comments “He took him outside the vault of heaven and elevated him above the stars...the Hebrew verb means to look down from above.”<sup>36</sup>

For mankind to develop a sense of the transcendent, (looking at things from above, from God’s perspective) the needed cognitive breakthrough is to understand the limits of

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32. Gen. 15:2

33. Gen. 15:5

34. Michael Carasik, *The Commentators’ Bible: Genesis. The Rubin JPS Miqra’ot Gedolot* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Jewish Publication Society, 2018) *Rashi* on Gen. 15:5 “He took him outside”

35. Martin Buber, *On the Bible: Eighteen Studies* (Syracuse, New York: First Syracuse University Press, 2000) p29-44

36. Michael Carasik, *The Commentators’ Bible: Genesis. The Rubin JPS Miqra’ot Gedolot* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Jewish Publication Society, 2018) *Rashi* on Gen. 15:5 “Look toward heaven”

human understanding. It is ultimately impossible to be in relationship with our Creator without the humility of knowing that human beings cannot know everything God knows and that unchecked technology, the limits of human understanding, without knowledge of God, will only lead to endless boundary violations and to our doom.



## CONCLUSION

God repeatedly changes the parameters of relationship with those made in his image in a dogged attempt to foster a relationship of love. Genesis 1-11 catalogues the beginning of the relationship and exposes the deficits of mankind as well as suggesting appropriate correctives. The primary corrective is maximizing transitive concerns as an antidote to evil by attempting to imitate God. It's not easy for humankind. Adam and Eve failed their test and ate from the tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in the idyllic Garden where all was provided. God replaced the criteria for that relationship with a completely hands off policy (but for a leading question to Cain) and employed the *dam/adam/adamah* litmus test to discover if humans could live within the parameters outlined by God after the banishment. Humankind failed the test as wickedness multiplied exponentially. The whole project of creation with the dialogical relationship at its foundation was nearly eradicated by God in the flood, only to be saved when God allowed His mercy to overcome His judgment. God concludes that man's *yetzer* will never change, God adjusts to the reality of man's nature by unilaterally covenanting to nevermore interrupt the cycles of nature nor ever again to destroy the earth. After the flood, God initiates a third modality for the dialogical relationship. God not only transfers policing bloodshed to human beings (what used to be in God's sphere alone) but also takes cursing the ground out of the equation. God also increases mankind's dominion over animals in an unsuccessful attempt to give an appropriate outlet to man's violent tendencies. *Ham*, Nimrod and the builders of the Tower of Babel convince God that continuing to try to work out the relationship with humanity writ large is impossible, given the evil inclination of man, since the wickedness only continues to get worst. Post- flood, *Ham* crosses a new sexual taboo, Nimrod innovates, for the first time parlaying bloodshed into political power and the story of the Tower in Babylon is all about people making a name for themselves, independent of any need for God. Unchecked hubris is literally breaking boundaries both physically<sup>1</sup> (touching the sky) and cognitively, by humankind feeling they have no need for God.

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1. Gen. 11:4

God's new paradigm for relationship will prove to be a long and winding road, with even more iterations in the relationship than occurred in Genesis 1-11; yet ultimately, it will be successful. God starts by reclaiming the power of procreation and alters His cardinal modality of *peru urevu* to help build the desired relationships with human beings. Humankind's nature, left unchecked, has proven to be ruinous. God decides the only way to develop the needed corrective to human nature is to start with one man and one tribe. With patience, God can nurture this tribe along to eventually understand that there are limitations to human knowledge and comprehension and ultimately they will begin to "see" God as real, that is, to see what literally can't be seen. God consciousness grows and evolves throughout the five books. In the balance of the Book of Genesis, the narratives become continuously longer and more self-contained. The climax is in the Joseph cycle, which reads like a novella in intricate detail. As the narratives throughout the Guidebook in Genesis mount in complexity another major change occurs as well. God increasingly withdraws from the picture. By the end of Genesis, the story of Joseph is a narrative about Providence, and God no longer speaks to human beings. As God consciousness grows and evolves beginning with the Book of Exodus, the Hebrew clan eventually becomes the nation of Israel<sup>2</sup>. The promise of numerous offspring is fulfilled.<sup>3</sup> God decides to re-engage in a spectacular display of strength and control of nature via the plagues. *First Pharaoh*, then Egypt, then the whole world and finally all of Israel come to "know" God.<sup>4</sup> A forty year trek in the desert ensues with many permutations in the relationship<sup>5</sup> (as in Genesis 1-11) allowing Israel opportunities to hone their God consciousness. However, this generation of slaves is not equipped to merit the reward of God's second promise to Abraham, the land of *Canaan*. The successor generation is finally ready and able to take up residence in their Promised Land because finally, a love relationship has blossomed in the dialogical relationship. God proclaims his love for

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2. Ex. 1:7

3. Ex. 1:9 The nation is described as *rav*, numerous. It is formed by the same root as *revu* in the phrase be fruitful and multiply.

4. Ex. 7:17, 8:18, 10:2 The root of the verb used in Genesis to indicate intimate relationships between human beings as well as in reference to the Tree of Knowledge, (*Dalet – ayin – Tav*) is used twenty times in the plague narratives in the beginning chapters of The Book of Exodus so that first Pharaoh, then all of Egypt and the whole world (including lastly the Israelites) intimately know that Y-H-V-H is God. See Unit 3 footnote 3.

5. Unfortunately, well beyond the scope of this M.A.

Israel and has instructed them on the topics of love and reverence for God; the people assent.<sup>6</sup> Once ensconced in the land, the Israelites can begin to fulfill God's destiny as outlined in Genesis 12:3: "all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you." That is, God consciousness, first attained by the Israelites will now spread from them, slowly, throughout the world.

The Bible is God's Guidebook, first for the Israelites to digest and then to be disseminated throughout the world, to maintain and grow the dialogical relationship. The narratives in Genesis allow each reader to "see" themselves in the stories by both seeing the foibles of our ancestors on clear display as well as the twists and turns in their relationship with the Divine. In every generation, each reader gains valuable insight in their personalized quest to be in relationship with God by reading and re-reading the Guide, one *Tzelem* at a time.

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6. See Deut. 6:4-5 God commands the Israelites to understand it is God who is one and to love God "with all your heart and all your soul and all your might." God describes His love for Israel. In Deut. 7:8 The Lord "favored (Biblical Hebrew *me'ahavat*, It literally means "out of love") you and kept the oath He made to your fathers." The love relationship between God and those made in his image is finally coming to fruition on the verge of entering the long ago Promised Land.

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