

THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIETY  
AND THE TIMES  
ON OUR BIBLICAL COMMENTATORS

BERESHEET: CHAPTERS ONE AND TWO

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of  
Requirements for Ordination

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Graduate Rabbinic Program  
New York, New York

January 20, 2004

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The Influence of Society and the Times on Our Biblical Commentators  
Beresheet: Chapters One and Two

Michael Pincus

The Torah is surrounded by a wealth of commentary that has been gathered through the ages. The goal of this paper is to look at four biblical commentaries on the first two chapters of the book of Genesis and see how they reflect the world in which they were written. Four medieval biblical commentators, Rashi, ibn Ezra, Ramban and Sforno, were selected. They span four different worlds over five centuries and are four of the most prominent names in today's *mirkra'ot gedolot*. They were influenced by their feelings of security and fear, their wealth and their family, and their interactions with Muslim and Christian scholars.

This thesis is divided into four chapters, one for each commentator studied in depth. Each chapter is complete with an annotated copy of their commentary and a biography that includes an analysis and examples of how each exegete's life influenced his writing. The commentator's primary sources were used as well as many of the limited number of secondary resources on this subject.

If we can learn from this study how our teachers of the past were willing to speak in the language of their time, to challenge long held conclusions, and to cull ancient teachings for their contemporary problems, perhaps we too can inspire and continue in their sacred endeavor. For truth is contemporary and timeless, relative and universal, and perhaps, both simple and incomprehensible.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Torah is the heart of Judaism, the bedrock of its existence. From this sacred scroll the Jewish people have formed a scaffolding of exegesis capturing the seventy faces of Torah.<sup>1</sup> Within these black ink markings, (and some would say the white spaces found in between),<sup>2</sup> are recorded cosmic stories, ageless challenges, enduring questions, and glimpses of the Divine. It is this belief, if there is one, which is the defining characteristic of the three thousand year old Jewish enterprise.

No pericope better captures these larger-than-life topics than the bible's creation story found in the first two chapters of *Beresheet*. It is both the simplest of stories that we teach to our youngest children, and the most complicated story that challenges our greatest thinkers. It tells how God created the heavens and the earth, human beings, and the Sabbath, and inspires us to questions the origins of space, time, and our purpose of existence.

Yet the story remains bare without its scaffolding of exegesis. "Judaism is an exegetical religious culture par excellence, and the *Miqra*, the Hebrew Scriptures, is its foundation document and principal text."<sup>3</sup> Exegesis is described as the "one indigenous science which Israel has created and developed, after having produced during the first long period of its history, the actual subject of this science, the Bible itself."<sup>4</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel offers the analogy that if the Bible were a seed and God was the sun, we would be the soil. He suggests that inherit within this system, "every generation is

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<sup>1</sup> *Bamidbar Rabba* 13:15

<sup>2</sup> Palestinian Talmud, *Shekalim* 6:1.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Fishbane, "Jewish Biblical Exegesis: Presuppositions and Principles", *Scripture in the Jewish and Christian Traditions: Authority, Interpretation, Relevance*, Ed. Frederick Greenspahn. (Abingdon: University of Denver, 1982) 92.

<sup>4</sup> Wilhelm Bacher, Kaufmann Kohler, J. Frederic McCurdy, "Bible Exegesis", *Jewish Encyclopedia*.

<<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=1029&letter=B&search=bible%20exegesis>>

expected to bring forth new understanding and new realizations.”<sup>5</sup> Already attested within the Bible itself, interpretation is an attempt to harmonize and understand “authoritative scriptural pronouncements in the light of changed circumstances.”<sup>6</sup> Exegesis has always been the lens through which we have read the text. For more than two thousand years the text has been searched for its simple and midrashic meaning, its spiritual and moral insight, its legal applicability, and its philosophical theologies and mystical theosophies.<sup>7</sup> Without exegesis, the text would become unintelligible and archaic. Having a fixed reference and rubric has enabled a people scattered across the world to have an ongoing conversation. As poetically summed up by Heschel, “Judaism is based upon a minimum of revelation and a maximum of interpretation, upon the will of God and upon the understanding of Israel.”<sup>8</sup>

Knowing the person who gave the interpretation has always been a value in Judaism. Teachings are given *b'shem omro* “in the name of”.<sup>9</sup> Jewish tradition frowns upon one who would present a teaching without attributing its source. Nearly every book of commentary that one picks up contains at least a few pages that tell a bit about the commentator. And many of the later commentators included introductions to their works that captured their purpose and motivations. Perhaps this is what Giddul meant when he said, “Whoever says a tradition in the name of the one who said it should imagine that the person who said it is standing before him.”<sup>10</sup> In order to understand a teacher's lesson,

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<sup>5</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Between God and Man*, Ed. by Fritz A. Rothschild (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1959) 248.

<sup>6</sup> Greenspahn, 91.

<sup>7</sup> Fishbane, 92.

<sup>8</sup> Heschel, 248.

<sup>9</sup> *Pirke Avot* 6:3

<sup>10</sup> *Yerushalmi*, Shabbat 1:2

one must grasp as much as possible a sense of the teacher's life and personality.<sup>11</sup>

Knowing the priorities and circumstances of an author can lead to a greater understanding of the text's original intention.

However, for the historian, what is perhaps more significant, is that without intending it, a commentary can reveal a glimpse of the historical, economic, political, and social factors that were in play at the time the text was written. In many ways, a commentary on a text becomes a Rorschach test, a blank slate, upon which an author shares his thoughts. "It is self-evident, on the one-hand that every expression of Judaism confesses the primacy of the Scripture's authority and, on the other, that it also say pretty much whatever it wants about scripture... So the role of Scripture in the communities of Judaism is to validate what people want to say anyway."<sup>12</sup>

Exegesis is a "cultural product".<sup>13</sup> This is as true of the Mishna and Talmud, the midrashim of Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Akiba, as it is the medieval (and modern) commentators of the Torah. The biblical commentaries then, can be viewed as scaffolding to the text; as independent creations built over the text that are filled with its own set of beliefs, viewpoints, and purposes.

While each is an independent literary achievement, it exists only in its relation to the Biblical text and the commentaries that preceded it. Each new commentator addresses those who have preceded him. Rashi quotes rabbinic tradition. Ibn Ezra quotes Saadiah Gaon and Rashi. The Ramban quotes ibn Ezra and Rashi. And Sforno quotes heavily

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<sup>11</sup> Rabbi Charles Chavel, *Ramban: His Life and Teachings*, (New York: Philip Feldheim Inc, 1960).

<sup>12</sup> Jacob Neusner, "Scripture and Mishnah: Authority and Selectivity", *Scripture in the Jewish and Christian Traditions: Authority, Interpretation, Relevance*, Ed. Frederick Greenspahn (Abingdon: University of Denver, 1982). 65.

<sup>13</sup> Fishbane, 99.

from the Rambam. They will agree with their colleagues on some issues and dispute their colleagues on others, thereby creating a dialogue across time.

This paper offers an introduction, to this dialogue across time – a glimpse at the scaffolding that surrounds the first two chapters of Beresheet. Four medieval biblical commentators, Rashi, ibn Ezra, Ramban and Sforno, were selected. They span four different worlds over five centuries and are four of the most prominent names in today's *mirkra 'ot gedolot*. They were influenced by their feelings of security and fear, their wealth and their family, their interactions with Muslim or Christian scholars, and by what filled the sections of, if there had been, the *New York Times* such as metro, business, entertainment, and style.

Rashi, a wine producer, *rosh yeshiva*, and talmudic and biblical exegete, lived in northern France during the eleventh century. He lived in a Christian world, spoke its language, wore its clothing, and breathed in its cultural milieu. The Christian world in his day was focused on the investiture controversy, the first crusade, and their own biblical commentary. Rashi's commentary, filled with rabbinic wisdom and written in a concise and elegant style, was written for his students. They would grasp the subtle problems that his explanations alluded to and use his commentary as a guide for an oral tradition that threatened to be lost.<sup>14</sup>

Ibn Ezra was born in the northwestern Iberian Kingdom of Navarre, in the middle of the eleventh century. He came from a community ravaged by the Christian Reconquest and moved to the Christian world of Italy and France that was facing papal challenges and bracing for the Second Crusade. A world that was also experiencing a resurgence in

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<sup>14</sup> Barry Holtz W., *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts*, (New York: Summit Books, 1984) 228.

Karaite activity. Spending his later years on the road, traveling from place to place, he taught Ashkenazic Jewry the best of what Sephardic scholars had developed. Well taught in the Judeo-Muslim culture that emphasized the sciences, Arabic and Hebrew linguistics, and philosophy he opened new doors for Ashkenazic Jewry. He employed the skills from his Muslim neighbors, particularly their attention on grammar, as a way to better understand the sacred texts. While most of ibn Ezra's books were written for his students as a source of income, his torah commentary, written after surviving a serious illness, was a Sephardi's record of a tradition that he feared was vanishing.

Spanish Jewry in the thirteenth century was experiencing a crisis in faith. Many were wrestling with how rationalism and faith could co-exist, following the debate surrounding Rambam's *Moreh Nevukhim*. Some were filled with messianic fervor, believing that redemption was imminent as the Jewish calendar turned five thousand. Others, confronted with continual Christian humiliation and persecution, questioned the efficacy of their faith. Ramban, a physician, halakhist, and biblical commentator, was able to address the community's insecurity with its past and its uncertainty of the future. Living at the intellectual crossroads of Catalonia, Provence, and Champagne, Ramban was able to master philosophy, Kabbalah, and Talmud. His commentary, filled with philosophical treatise, Kabbalistic teachings, rabbinic wisdom, and a personal faith in God as the Creator, was able to inspire a people waiting for the dawning of redemption.

Sforno was a product of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century Italian Jewry. He lived in a relatively free and open society during the Italian Renaissance that enabled him to enjoy a university education and contacts with royalty. Rome was caught up in the classic revivals of art and literature, the Humanistic movement, and the

scientific discoveries of the day, and the Jewish community wasn't far behind. In Sforno eyes, the Jews had grown comfortable in Italy and had grown to believe that wealth could protect them from the ravages of anti-Semitism that surrounded them. He was concerned that too many members of his community viewed the Torah as illogical and redundant and had been swayed by the arguments of Christianity. His commentary, like that of Rashi, ibn Ezra, and Ramban, reflects both his personal concerns and the political, philosophical, and scientific influences of his community.

The Torah opens with the words בראשית ברא אלהים. Every major Jewish thinker who has commented on the Bible, it seems, has written on these three opening words. As they translate and interpret they delve into the fields of linguistics, philosophy, history, science, and mysticism to both answer the questions posed by the text as well as use the words upon which to frame their own perception of the world. What does the text say? Why is it here? What can it tell us about the world in which we live in and about God the creator? In the questions they ask and the answers they provide, each of the major commentators, Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Ramban, and Sforno reflects the agenda in their minds and the world and time in which they wrote and lived. They leave behind an inheritance rich with intimidating questions and profound answers that continue to influence both how we study our sacred text and perceive our existence. It is a window into how four of the greatest faces of Torah were formed and influenced.

**RABBI SOLOMON BEN ISAAC (SHELOMO YITZHAKI)**

Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac, better known as Rashi,<sup>15</sup> lived in the latter half of the eleventh century<sup>16</sup> in Northern France. The commentaries that he recorded on the Bible and the Talmud earned him the title "*Rabbeinu shel yisrael*",<sup>17</sup> "Teacher of Israel", and *Parshandata*, – "the expounder of the law". Of all the commentators being explored, more has been written about Rashi's life and its impact on his commentary than on any of the other commentators. Rashi grew up and lived most of his life in a peaceful environment studying with some of the greatest minds of his day and being exposed to the wide range of ideas in the broader world in the years leading up to the First Crusade. Yet ultimately, even with Rashi, the historian is confronted with limited authoritative information, and must rely upon legends and suppositions to form a picture of this giant's past.<sup>18</sup>

Aside from the time spent studying in Mayence and Worms and his legendary travels<sup>19</sup>, Rashi was born and lived most of his life in Troyes. Troyes was the capital of

<sup>15</sup> An acrostic of his name, although he signed his own name as Shlomo Yitzhaki or just with the two letter abbreviation Shai. His students refer to him as Rabbenu or Hamoreh.

<sup>16</sup> While there is no disagreement that Rashi died on Thursday July 13, 1105, corresponding to the 29 Tammuz 4865, there remains an open question as to the date of his birth. There are some who place his birth at 1030 or 1028, but the accepted tradition holds that Rashi was born in 1040 the same year of Rabbenu Gershom ben Judah's death. Hence the *midrash* on Ecclesiastes 1:5 "The sun rises and the sun goes down" to read, "the sun goes down but the sun also rises," meaning that when the world is never void of a great leader. The lack of early information *terminus a quo* and the abundance of detail of Rashi's death *terminus ad quem* suggests the growth of his significance in his own life time. "The loss of a great man full of years may have had an impact on his entire generation, but the birth of an infant, no matter what his potential for future generations, was important only to the child's immediate family; hence, dates of birth as a rule were not widely known as dates of death." Ezra Shereshevsky, *Rashi, The Man and His World* (New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1982) 20.

<sup>17</sup> Using the first letters of Rashi's name: ך and ך, ך in *Rabbeinu shel yisrael*

<sup>18</sup> Salo W. Baron, "Rashi and the Community of Troyes", *Rashi Anniversary Volume*. (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1941) 47-72.

<sup>19</sup> Tradition has Rashi, at the age of thirty-three, traveling to Spain, Italy, Greece, Egypt, Eretz Yisrael, and Babylonia. In many of these stories Rashi is portrayed as a sage who wanders anonymously posing as a poor student to disseminate his *kuntresim* and discover the value of his writings. While it is unclear if there is any historic truth to these travels, (for example it is said that he went to learn in the yeshiva of Rabbi Zerachiah Halevi, the Razah, in Lunel, which cannot be true since Halevi was born

the northern province of Champagne in north-eastern France not far from the border of present day Germany. The city, ninety miles southeast of Paris, was the meeting point of two main trade routes that connected Italy, France and Germany and then led on to the North Sea. Its location and its semi-annual fairs attracted merchants from across the land, turning Troyes into a cosmopolitan center.<sup>20</sup>

It was at these fairs that Rashi was supposedly exposed to the different cultures and ideas of travelers from all over the world. It was an opportunity for Christians, Muslims, and Jews to share their perspectives, exchange ideas, and learn from each other. It is believed that it was here that Rashi's intellectual horizon was broadened and enabled him to offer new interpretations of biblical and talmudic passages.<sup>21</sup>

While this theory can be found in most books about Rashi's life, Salo Baron disagrees. He questions why if these fairs were so significant does Rashi only make a single reference to a fair, and that being a fair that occurred in Cologne. Further, Baron points out that while there were indeed fairs in Troyes as far back as 427, there is no reference to a fair after that date until 1114, nine years after Rashi's death. In his opinion, historic references give the impression of Troyes as a "rural community living on viticulture and farming, with very little craftsmanship and commerce."<sup>22</sup> Baron concludes that "while the participation of Jews in the Troyes fairs in the second half of the twelfth century appears very likely, it is more than questionable whether there were any large

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twenty years after Rashi passed away), the stories reveal a glimpse of the individual's significance and the Jewish world of his day.

Chaim Pearl, *Rashi*. (New York: Grove Press, 1988). 13.

<sup>20</sup> F. Bourquelot *Etudes sur les foires de Champagne* Vol. 5 as quoted in Shereshevsky, 60.

<sup>21</sup> Pearl, 9.

<sup>22</sup> Baron, 50.

fairs at all in Troyes before 1105, and if so, whether Jews took any significant part in them."<sup>23</sup>

The Jewish community of Troyes in the eleventh century comprised one hundred to two hundred people in a general population of not more than ten thousand.<sup>24</sup> It was a sizeable community for its time and location and had at least two synagogues, one dating back to the trade routes of Rome. The Jewish community was cohesive, led as most communities of its type, by a few ancient established families from whom came both rabbinic sages and leaders of the community and "to whom the other families willingly submitted".<sup>25</sup> Religious study continued to be respected in Rashi's day, as demonstrated in a hymn about the sages of Torah written by R. Simeon the Great<sup>26</sup>:

Rulers o'er its treasures who advance by its light,  
Doing its work, indeed the very dusty spade work,  
Not enjoying its honour or crown,  
Nor using it as tool or diadem  
But wishing to study, preserve, and teach,  
They keep sleep away from their eyes,  
And teach wisdom according to the Torah.

Knowledge of Torah, leading by example, and focus on study were the expected qualities of individuals such as Rashi who were leaders of the community. This was a close-knit community, which would finance the rescuing of captives, educate its young, and provide the basic social services. Baron writes, "We may visualize this tiny

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<sup>23</sup> Baron, 53.

<sup>24</sup> In 1188 Troyes had a population not more than 10,000, a century earlier it would have been sizably smaller Baron, 59.

<sup>25</sup> Yaacov Dovid Shulman, *Rashi: The Story of Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki*. (New York: CIS Publishers. 1993) 47.

<sup>26</sup> Herman Hailperin, *Rashi and the Christian Scholars* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1963), 178.

settlement as consisting of persons living in close quarters around their synagogue and constantly marrying among themselves...<sup>27</sup>

Rashi similarly, was born into a wealthy family that was familiar with the written word. Rashi's mother came from a scholarly family, her brother being the famous liturgical writer Simeon ben Isaac.<sup>28</sup> Little is known of Rashi's father. Some say that his father died a martyr's death in his childhood.<sup>29</sup> Another legend suggests that he was a dealer of precious stones, who after refusing to hand over a special jewel to the church, was rewarded by God with a son, Rashi, after ten years being childless. Other than these legends nothing else is known. It is believed that Rashi was married when he was seventeen or eighteen, had two daughters, Miriam and Jochabed who married students of their father.

Rashi received his early education in Worms from Isaac Halevi. He then went on to Mainz, the great center of Talmud study, to continue learning with Isaac ben Judah and Jacob ben Yakar, disciples of Rebbeinu Gershom ben Judah.<sup>30</sup> Jacob ben Yakar had a profound influence on Rashi. Frequently, Rashi refers to him as "my wise old teacher."<sup>31</sup> Rashi writes, "Indeed I grow from a great tree, Rabbi Jacob ben Rabbi Yakar; and although I never actually heard this from him, at all events my heart and outlook and understanding come from him."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Baron, 60.

<sup>28</sup> Shabbat 85a Rashi Commentary

<sup>29</sup> Since the Parma manuscript of Rashi's Torah commentary adds the appellation "the holy one" to Rashi's father Isaac's name, it is assumed that he died *kidush hashem*. Leopold Zunz, *Toledot Rashi* as quoted in Shereshevsky, 21.

<sup>30</sup> Pearl, 12.

<sup>31</sup> Rashi on Gittin 82a, Shabbat 80b, Eruvin 6a

<sup>32</sup> Elfenbein *Teshuvot Rashi*, New York, 1943, 57.

In 1070, Rashi returned to Troyes and founded his own yeshivah. It is believed that it was there that he wrote his commentaries<sup>33</sup>; the Bible first, going in the order of the books, and then working on his Talmud commentary, consolidating interpretations and homilies from the Midrash and Talmud and adding his brief comments into a single accessible volume. As the owner of a vineyard, Rashi and his family would cultivate the grapes. Attending vineyards allow for a great deal of free time, which would be spent teaching a few pupils, mostly members of his own family, and discussing with them the fine points in Bible and Talmud and, perhaps with their assistance, compiling and revising his bulky commentaries.<sup>34</sup>

It was a period of social, political and economic stability and the Jews enjoyed comparative tranquility and prosperity.<sup>35</sup> History books note the cropping up of towns throughout Western Europe as successful farmers marketed their produce for local wares.<sup>36</sup> Troyes, similarly during Rashi's lifetime, witnessed a period of transformation as it grew and took on a legal-social form with certain rights and individual jurisdiction.<sup>37</sup> Its inhabitants made their living from money lending, agriculture, working in vineyards, keeping sheep, dyeing of cloth, trading, and working in local tanneries<sup>38</sup>.

Rashi also records positive interactions between Jewish merchants and their Christian counterparts at the fairs of Cologne. Similarly, written documents of period

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<sup>33</sup> Shereshevsky, 59.

<sup>34</sup> Baron, 60.

<sup>35</sup> Shereshevsky, 57.

<sup>36</sup> Judah Gribetz, *The Timetables of Jewish History: A Chronology of the Most Important People and Events in Jewish History* (New York: Simon Schuster, 1993).

<sup>37</sup> Bernard D. Weinryb, "Rashi against the Background of His Epoch". *Rashi Anniversary Volume*. (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1941). 44.

<sup>38</sup> While some say that it is because of these local tanneries in Troyes, with their lower prices compared with other communities on writing materials, that enabled Rashi to record such volumes, Baron disagrees. Without any evidence prior to 1189 of any existing tanneries in Troyes, and the possession of only a single *machzor* in the synagogues (the assumption is that if writing materials were plentiful there would have been more) suggests to Baron that this was not the case. Baron, 51.

note that Christians, such as Anno Archbishop of Cologne<sup>39</sup> (1056-1175), borrowed money from Jews. Emperor Henry IV (1050-1106) exempted the Jews and other citizens of Worms from paying tolls in “recognition of their loyalty to him on the eve of the investiture controversy.”<sup>40</sup> And in nearby Speyer, Bishop Ruediger (1084) regarded the Jews as an important factor in the affluence and prestige of the city.

The Jews of Speyer were free to engage in commerce anywhere including the harbor area. Jews were even permitted to employ Christian servants and wet nurses. They were allowed to sell to Christians any meat that was found forbidden to Jews under their dietary laws. They were allowed to defend themselves against physical attack and to fortify their quarter of the city which was surrounded by a protective wall.<sup>41</sup> There were even Christians and Jews who shared ownership of ovens for baking.<sup>42</sup>

“Given the close proximity in which Jews and Christians lived in Rashi’s Troyes, it may well be surmised that Rashi himself engaged in discussions with members of the Christian clergy”. There was an expectation that Christians would be familiar with Jewish laws and customs.<sup>43</sup> “The everyday life of the Jews was not so very different from that of their Christian neighbors...they wore similar attire and enjoyed much the same niceties of life.” Attesting to the Jews’ acculturation, French seems to have been the daily spoken language, and Rashi in his writings often translates difficult Hebrew terms into French,

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<sup>39</sup> “Archbishop of Cologne” *Wikipedia Encyclopedia*

<[http://www.4reference.net/encyclopedias/wikipedia/Archbishop\\_of\\_Cologne.html](http://www.4reference.net/encyclopedias/wikipedia/Archbishop_of_Cologne.html)>

<sup>40</sup> Baron, 57.

<sup>41</sup> Shereshevsky, 106.

<sup>42</sup> Norman Roth, ed. *Medieval Jewish Civilization* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>43</sup> “Sefer HaOrah II, par. 112: ‘[An incident involving a Gentile who made the [unintentional] mistake of removing the stopper from a barrel [of wine] because he was not familiar with things Jewish...’ This statement seems to imply that, as a rule, Gentiles in the area where Rashi lived *were* familiar with Jewish customs...” Shereshevsky, 68.

which he refers to as "our language" or as the "language of these people." In fact, Rashi seems in his commentaries and *responsa* to be concerned with assimilation.<sup>44</sup>

And yet despite the relative tranquility, in the distance Rashi could not but hear the drums of anti-Semitism, the attacks against Jews in distant communities, which would continually beat closer and closer to home. In 1049, Peter Damiani, a fervent church reformer from Northern Italy, wrote two tracts degrading Judaism. These documents and others by subsequent clerics would provide a rationale for Christians to attack Jews during the Crusades. In Christian circles, the idea that the New Testament's image of a loving God supercedes the severe God of the Old Testament was taking hold.

That same year, a dispute between the Jewish and Karaite community of Thessalonica, Greece over the dates of the festival calendar is settled only after an additional tax is placed on the Jewish community which is seen as punishment for tolerating heresy. A year later, the Jews of Basra on the Persian Gulf flee from fearful of their lives. In 1064, while Rashi was studying in Mainz, thousands of pilgrims were joining the bishops of Mainz, Bamberg, Regensburg, and Utrecht to prepare for the trip to Jerusalem.<sup>45</sup> By 1071, a year after Rashi founded his yeshiva in Troyes, the Jewish community of Jerusalem is disbanded when it is overrun by the Seljuk Turks.

On November 27, 1095, at Clermont, 200 miles from Rashi's town of Troyes, Pope Urban II called for a military expedition to recapture Jerusalem and the Holy Land from the Muslims. His speech, repeated subsequently at many locations in France, electrified the French nobility and common people, and his message spread into Germany and Italy as well. There are several accounts of the Pope's words, all recollected some

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<sup>44</sup> Shereshevsky, 120.

<sup>45</sup> Weinryb, 42.

time after the event. They all stress the theme of "penitential war": a denunciation of the audience for its sins and a summons to repent through the recapture of the Holy City and the Holy Land. Here is one account of his message<sup>46</sup>:

Let hatred therefore depart from among you, let your quarrels end, let wars cease, and let all dissensions and controversies slumber. Enter upon the road to the Holy Sepulcher, wrest that land from the wicked race [Muslims], and subject it to yourselves. That land which, as the Scripture says, "floweth with milk and honey" was given by God into the power of the children of Israel. [The Church considered itself the "true" Israel.] Jerusalem is the center of the earth; the land is fruitful above all others, like another paradise of delights. This spot the Redeemer of mankind has made illustrious by His advent, has beautified by His sojourn, has consecrated by His passion, has redeemed by His death, has glorified by His burial.

In the May of 1096, members of the First Crusade attacked and killed Jews in communities such as Speyer, Worms, Mainz and Cologne. In Ratisbon, the Jews were forced to convert. Many choose rather to inflict their own death and die as martyrs. It was a grim turning point in the history of European Jewry and ended their peaceful relations with their neighbors. By the time that the massacres of the Crusades ended, twelve thousand Jews had either been murdered or had committed suicide rather than being forced to convert to Christianity. Among the dead were hundreds of scholars, many whom Rashi had known, martyred and their books destroyed. A generation of Jewish learning had been lost.<sup>47</sup>

A story is told about a visit that Godfrey of Bouillon, one of the leaders of the First Crusade who ultimately was named Ruler of Jerusalem, paid to Rashi prior to his embarking for Jerusalem. Godfrey asked Rashi if he would be successful on his mission. Rashi replied that he would be initially victorious, but that his forces would eventually be

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<sup>46</sup> Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The First Crusades 1095-1131* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 49-64.

<sup>47</sup> Shereshevsky, 57-58.

decimated and he would return with only three horses. When Godfrey heard Rashi's answer he responded to him that if he returned with even a single horse more he would destroy the Jewish community of Troyes. Godfrey returned with four of his horses remaining, which he guarded with his life. As he passed through the city wall of Troyes, a stone dislodged from the wall and struck one of the horses dead. Rashi's words had come true.<sup>48</sup>

The Christian world of the eleventh century itself was in the midst of change. Between the conflict of investiture (between Church and State) and the First Crusade in 1096, there was great activity in the Church in the field of exegesis. Christian Bible exegesis is seen as beginning in the middle of the eleventh century.<sup>49</sup> Christian theologians, confronting both a challenge to its authority and seeking to promote the Crusades, turned to the commentaries of Augustine and Jerome as well as the production of new ones to legitimize their claims.<sup>50</sup> As Christians delved into the Bible seeking meaning and proof, verbal polemics on the Bible grew. It is generally accepted that Rashi was aware of the interpretations of his Christian colleagues and that his commentaries were in many ways a reaction to these interpretations.<sup>51</sup>

Rashi's commentary stands in contrast to the Christian commentaries being produced around him. One of the defining characteristics of Rashi's commentary is his desire for the "*pshat*" or "literal meaning" whenever possible. Preferring the literary, grammatical, philologic, and historical process over the spiritual, allegoric, moral, and

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<sup>48</sup> Weinryb, 40.

<sup>49</sup> Shereshevsky, 61.

<sup>50</sup> Max Manitius, *Geschichte der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters*, vol III as quoted in Weinryb, 39.

<sup>51</sup> Shereshevsky, 119.

mystic interpretation, he writes, "A verse cannot escape its simple meaning, its natural acceptance. As Liber explains,<sup>52</sup>

As a rule, when the Midrash does no violence to the text, Rashi adopts its interpretation; and when there are several Midrashic interpretations, he chooses the one that accords best with the simple sense; but he is especially apt to fall back upon the Midrash when the passage does not offer any difficulties. On the contrary, if the text cannot be brought into harmony with the Midrash, Rashi frankly declares that the Midrashic interpretation is irreconcilable with the natural meaning or with the laws of grammar. He also rejects the Midrashic interpretation if it does not conform to the context. 'A passage,' He said, 'should be explained, not detached from its setting, but according to the context.'

This, desire for the literal meaning of the text stands in sharp contrast with the method employed by the Christian theologians. "Throughout the medieval ages they adhered chiefly to a spiritual, allegoric, moral, and mystic interpretation."<sup>53</sup> Christian scholars sought to midrashicly and homiletically interpret the Hebrew Bible as referring to Jesus and Christendom. Seeking legitimacy, they would interpret the text as confirmation of their theological beliefs. The eleventh century biblical commentators in the tradition of Origen (185-253) saw the text as a shell containing within a timeless message. So for example, Genesis 2:10-14, which speaks of the four rivers flowing out of the Garden of Eden, are interpreted by the Church as symbolizing four distinct "senses" of Scripture: the 'literal' sense; the 'allegorical' sense, which revealed tenets of faith; the 'moral' sense, which was intended to guide the deeds of men; and finally the 'mystical' sense', which dealt with the world to come.<sup>54</sup>

Therefore, part of the concern of Rashi was to refute Christological exegesis, and for that he had to show that the text taken literally would not bear the construction

<sup>52</sup> Maurice Liber, *Rashi*. Trans. Adele Szold. (Philadelphia: JPS, 1938). 111-112.

<sup>53</sup> Liber, 109.

<sup>54</sup> Shereshevsky, 61-65.

Christians put upon it.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, the absence of mysticism in his commentaries, as compared to other publications of the time driven by the apocalyptic feelings that came with the crusades, are a refutation and defense of the biblical text.

An apparent exception to Rashi's preference for *pshat* can be found in the very opening verse of his biblical commentary. While providing a *pshat* answer to explain that the text does not teach the order of creation, Rashi begins by offering a midrash from Tanchuma that is a direct rebuttal in the greatest conflict of his day, ownership of Eretz Yisrael. Rashi's comment on *Beresheet* refutes this Christian claim to the Holy Land. At a time when both Christians and Muslims rooted their claims to the Holy Land in their most venerated "prophets"--Jesus and Muhammad--Rashi offers his Jewish readers a counterclaim rooted in the very creation of the world. It is couched in the best style of the time, for in an age that sought the answer to every question in the sacred texts, a scriptural citation was the ultimate authority and no citation could be better than the very first word in the Bible.

The Crusades had the Muslims and Christians staking claims at *Eretz Yisrael*. Therefore, in his very first comment, using midrash, he tries to prove that the Holy Land does not belong to either the Christians or to the Muslims. And says rather, "The land belongs to the Lord, blessed is He; He created and gave it to whom He pleased. When He willed He gave it to them, and when He willed He took it from them and gave it to us."

During the 11<sup>th</sup> century legends were created with the idea of establishing the "rights" of the Christians in Palestine...This question of the right to Palestine was bound up with one of the leading questions in the controversy between Christianity and Judaism. There prevailed in the Christian Church the theory that Jesus had made the Christians the Chosen People in place of the Jews, who were then cast off. The right of the Jews to inherit the land was terminated and transferred to the

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<sup>55</sup> Hailperin, 318 n.312.

Christians, who became their heirs in accordance with the spiritual promise. The Jews could not accept this conception for two reasons. It concerned the question of the inheritance of Palestine, but it was also connected with the very foundations of Judaism – the belief that the Jews are the Chosen People and the hope of redemption from the Diaspora.<sup>56</sup>

Another example of how the current events of the time seeped into Rashi's commentary can be seen in Genesis 1:16 and then again later in Numbers the story of Korach. In Genesis, Rashi writes, "it is impossible for two kings to rule with the same crown." In the story of Korach, Rashi suggests that Korach is saying, "If you have taken royalty for yourself, then at least you should not have chosen the priesthood for your brother." Both of these reflect the investiture struggle between church and state that dominated European politics in the eleventh century.

Rashi's commentary on creation is a product of the eleventh century. Imitating his Christian contemporaries, Rashi's commentary applies grammar, uses vernacular old French, relies on Masoretic cantillation signs, and deals little with philosophy. Yet, in reaction to the Christian use of midrash and allegory, Rashi resorts to *pshat* to illustrate his points. The result is a masterpiece that has set the benchmark for biblical exegesis in both communities.

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<sup>56</sup> Weinryb, 41-42.

## רש"י בראשית פרק א

## (א) בראשית ברא אלהים את השמים ואת הארץ :

בראשית - (Why begin here? What is the purpose of this text?)<sup>i</sup>

Rabbi Yitzchak said<sup>57</sup>, [If the purpose of the Torah is to teach God's laws, then] "It is not necessary to begin the Torah [this way] rather [the Torah should have started with] 'This month shall be for you....'<sup>58</sup>, this is the first mitzvah that was commanded to Israel. Then what is the point of opening with Beresheet? Because [as it says,] 'The power of his works he told to his people to give them the inheritance of nations.'<sup>59</sup> That if the nations of the world would say to Israel they are robbers, that they conquered the land of the seven nations by force they [Israel] could respond that all the earth is the Holy One's, He created it and gave it to whomever he saw fit. It was his desire to give it to them and it was His will to take it from them and give it to us."

בראשית ברא - (How do we explain the apparent contradictions?)<sup>ii</sup>

This verse does not mean what it appears to say, rather it needs to be expounded, like our Rabbis expounded,<sup>60</sup> may their memory be for blessing. "[The world was created] for the sake of the Torah which is called 'the beginning of His way,'-ראשית דרכו.<sup>61</sup> And because [the world was created] for the sake of Israel who is called 'the beginning of His harvest.' ראשית תבואתו<sup>62</sup>

But if you approach it literally, then interpret it as, "At the beginning of the creation of sky and earth, when the world was formless and void, and darkness covered the deep, God said, "Let there be light."

This verse does not teach the order of creation -- that these were [created] first. For if it came to teach this, it would have been written, "At first God created the heavens..." For in the Bible, the word ראשית never appears unless it is attached to a following word, like in "At the beginning of Jehoiakhim's reign,"<sup>63</sup> [or] "The beginning of his reign,"<sup>64</sup> [or] "The first of your corn crop."<sup>65</sup> Here, too, you must interpret "In the beginning God created..." as if [it were written] "At the beginning of the creation." בראשית ברא-.

<sup>57</sup> Tanchuma (Buber) Beresheet 11

<sup>58</sup> Exodus 12:2 החדש הזה לכם ראש חדשים ראשון הוא לכם לחדשי השנה :

<sup>59</sup> Psalms 111:6 כח מעשיו הגיד לעמו לתת לחם נחלת גוים :

<sup>60</sup> Beresheet Rabbah 1:6 בראשית רבה פרשה א: ו-א

ר' יהודה בר סימון פתח (דניאל ב) והוא גלי עמיקותא ומסתרתא, הוא גלי עמיקותא וזו גיהנם שטאמר (משלי ט) ולא ידע כי רפאים שם, ואומר (ישעיה ט) העמיק הרחיב, ומסתרתא זו גן עדן, שטאמר (שם/ישעיהו ד) למחסה ולמסתור מורם וממטר, ואומר (תהלים לא) תסתירם בסתר פניך, ד"א הוא גלי עמיקותא ומסתרתא, אלו מעשיהם של רשעים, שטא (ישעיה כט) הוי המעמיקים מה', ומסתרתא אלו מעשיהם של רשעים, שטאמר (שם/ישעיהו כ"ט) לסתיר עצה, ידע מה בחשוכא, אלו מעשיהם של רשעים שטאמר (שם/ישעיהו כ"ט) והיה במחשך מעשיהם, ונחורא עמיה שרא, אלו מעשיהם של צדיקים, ודתיב (משלי ד) ואורח צדיקים כאור נונה, ואומר (תהלים צז) אור זרוע לצדיק וגו', אייר אבא סדונגיא ונחורא עמיה שרא זו מלך המשיח שטאמר (ישעיה ס) קומי אורי וגו', בפסיקתא, אייר יהודה בר סימון מתחלת ברייתו של עולם הוא גלי עמיקותא ומסתרתא, בראשית ברא אלהים וגו', ולא פירש, והיכן פירש להלן (שם/ישעיהו מ) הניחא כדוק שמים, ואת הארץ ולא פירש, והיכן פירש להלן (איוב לו) כי לשלל יאמר הוא ארץ בצקת עפר למצוק וגו', ויאמר אלהים יהי אור, ולא פירש, והיכן פירש (תהלים קד) עטה אור כשלמה.

<sup>61</sup> Proverbs 8:22 יי קנני ראשית דרכו קדם מפעליו מאז :

<sup>62</sup> Jeremiah 2:3 קדש ישראל לידוד ראשית תבואתה כל אכליו יאשמו רעה תבא אליהם נאם ידוד :

<sup>63</sup> Jeremiah 26:1 בראשית ממלכות יהויקים בן יאשיהו מלך יהודה היה הדבר הזה מאת ידוד לאמר :

<sup>64</sup> Genesis 10:10 ותהי ראשית ממלכתו בבל וארך ואכד וכלנה בארץ שנער :

<sup>65</sup> Deuteronomy 18:4 וזה דבר הרצח אשר ינוס שמה וחי אשר יכה את רעהו בבלי דעת והוא לא שנה לו מתמל שלשם :

Similarly, this is like [the book of] Hosea, [where the text is written] "When God began his speech to Hosea he said...<sup>66</sup>, If you would say that [the verse] comes to teach us that these [i.e., heaven and earth] were created first, and its interpretation is that at the beginning of everything He created these; and that there are [other] such verses that are elliptical through missing a word, such as, "For [it] did not shut the doors of my womb,"<sup>67</sup> not explaining who it is that closes [the womb]; Or like "[It] will remove the army of Damascus,"<sup>68</sup> not explaining who it is that takes it away; Or "does [it] plow with oxen?"<sup>69</sup> and not explaining, "Does man plow with oxen?" And, "He relates the end from the beginning,"<sup>70</sup> without stating explicitly, "He relates from the beginning of something, the end of something."

If this is so, you must wonder, because [as it happens] water preceded [the heavens and the earth,] for it is written, "The spirit of God hovered above the surface of the water," But the Torah had not yet revealed that the creation of the water took place, thus teaching that the waters preceded the earth. And further [proof of the above is that] since the heavens were created from fire and water<sup>71</sup>, you are therefore forced [to admit] that Scripture does not teach anything about the temporal order of creation.

**ברא אלהים - (Why is the name of God here Elohim?)<sup>iii</sup>**

It does not say, "Adonay created", because at first He thought to create it with the attribute of justice. [Then] he saw that the world could not exist [without mercy] so the attribute of mercy God put before and joined it with the attribute of justice. Therefore it is written, "On the day when Adonay Elohim made heaven and earth,"<sup>72</sup>

**(ב) והארץ היתה תהו ובהו וחשך על פני תהום ורוח אלהים מרחפת על פני המים :**

**תהו ובהו - (What does this mean?)**

Language of wonder and astonishment. That a person would be awed and astonished by its void. In old French is *estourdison*.

**בהו - (What does this word mean?)**

Means desolation and void.

**על פני תהום - (What does על פני mean?)<sup>iv</sup>**

On the surface of the waters that are on the earth.

**רוח אלהים מרחפת. - (Does the word רוח follow its usual meaning of wind here?)<sup>v</sup>**

[This refers to the] Throne of Glory which was standing in mid-air, hovering over the waters at the command of the spirit/voice of the Holy One Blessed be He just as a dove hovers over its nest. *Acoveter* in Old French.

<sup>66</sup> Hosea 1:2 תחלת דבר ידוד בהושע פ ויאמר ידוד אל הושע לך קח לך אשת זנונים וילדי זנונים כי זנה תזנה הארץ מאחרי ידוד :

<sup>67</sup> Job 3:10 כי לא סגר דלתי בטני ויסתר עמל מעיני :

<sup>68</sup> Isaiah 8:4 כי בטרם ידע הנער קרא אבי ואמי ישא את חיל דמשק ואת שלל שמרון לפני מלך אשור :

<sup>69</sup> Amos 6:12 הירצון בסלע סוסים אם יחרוש בבקרים כי הפכתם לראש משפט ופרי צדקה ללענה :

<sup>70</sup> Isaiah 46:10 מגיד מראשית אחרית ומקדם אשר לא נעשו אמר עצתי תקום וכל חפצי אעשה :

<sup>71</sup> Chagigah 12a

מאי שמים? אמר רבי יוסי בר חנינא : ששם מים. במתניתא תנא : אש ומים. מלמד שהביאן הקדוש ברוך הוא וטרפן זה בזח, ועשה מהן רקיע.

<sup>72</sup> Genesis 2:4 אלה תולדות חשמים והארץ בהבראם ביום עשות ידוד אלהים ארץ ושמים :

**(ד) וירא אלהים את האור כי טוב ויבדל אלהים בין האור ובין החשך :**

**וירא אלהים את האור כי טוב ויבדל - (What is the light divided?)**

Here too we need an Aggadic explanation.<sup>73</sup> He saw that that it was not fitting that the wicked should have the use of it and therefore set it apart for the righteous who will come in the future. But according to its pshat meaning [the verse can mean] this: He saw that it was good and that it was not fitting that it [the light] and darkness would be used together in confusion, and [therefore] established that one would be bounded by the day and the other be bounded by the night.

**(ה) ויקרא אלהים לאור יום ולחשך קרא לילה ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום אחד :**

**יום אחד - (What is the meaning of the different structure used for "day one"?)**

According to the language structure of this parsha it should have been written - first day - יום ראשון like it is written for the remaining days, second, third, fourth. Why then is it written one - אחד? This is because the Holy One Blessed be He was alone in His world. for the angels were not created until the second day. This is the explanation in Beresheet Rabbah.

**(ו) ויאמר אלהים יהי רקיע בתוך המים ויהי מבדיל בין מים למים :**

**יהי רקיע - (Logical Problem - Was heaven created on the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> day?)**

Let the canopy be strengthened. That even though the heavens were created on the first day they were, nevertheless, still fluid and were solidified on the second day by the roaring command of the Holy One Blessed be He, when He said, "Let there be a canopy!" And this is why it is written, "The pillars of the heavens wavered" the entire first day, and on the second "They were astonished by His roaring command."<sup>74</sup> [This is analogous] to a person who is startled and bolts upright from the sudden roar of one who terrifies him.

**בתוך המים - (Does the word בתוך here mean amongst or in the middle?)**

In the middle of the waters. Because the separation between the upper waters and the canopy is the same as between the canopy and the water that is on the earth. You may learn from this that they [the heavens] are suspended [in space] by command of the King.

**(ז) ויעש אלהים את הרקיע ויבדל בין המים אשר מתחת לרקיע ובין המים אשר מעל לרקיע ויהי כן :**

**ויעש אלהים את הרקיע - (Again, were not the heavens created on the first day?)**

He fixed it in its position and [that is considered] its creation. [This is] similar [to the verse,] "And she made [fixed] her nails."<sup>75</sup>

**מעל לרקיע - (Why is there a "מ" before the word? Why doesn't it say it was good?)**

It does not say on/over/above the canopy, but rather from above the canopy. This is because they [the waters] are suspended in space. And why doesn't it say "That it was

<sup>73</sup> Chagigah 12a

כדברי אלעזר. דאמר רבי אלעזר: אור שברא הקדוש ברוך הוא ביום ראשון - אדם צופה בו מסוף העולם ועד סופו, כיון שנסתכל הקדוש ברוך הוא בדור המבול ובדור הפלגה וראה שמעשיהם מקולקלים - עמד וגזר מהן, שנאמר + אויב לייח + וימנע מרשעים אורם. ולמי גזר - לצדיקים לעתיד לבא שנאמר וירא אלהים את האור כי טוב, ואין טוב אלא צדיק, שנאמר + ישעיהו ג' + אמרו צדיק כי טוב. כיון שראה אור שגזר לצדיקים שמח, שנאמר + משלי י"ג + אור צדיקים ישמח.

<sup>74</sup> Job 26:11 עמודי שמים ירופפו ויתמחו מגערתו

<sup>75</sup> Deuteronomy 21:12 והבאתה אל תוך ביתך וגלחתה את ראשה ועשתה את צפרניה

good" on the second day? Because the work involving the water was not completed until the third day, although it was begun on the second day. Anything not completed is not perfect or good. But on the third day, when the work involving the waters was completed, and God began another work which He completed, [the phrase] "That it was good" is repeated twice, one for the completion of the work of day two, and one for the completion of the work of that [third] day.

**(ח) ויקרא אלהים לרקיע שמים ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום שני : פ**

**ויקרא אלהים לרקיע שמים - (Why call another name?)**

[It is a contraction] meaning "carrying of water", - שא-מים also "there is water", - אש ומים "fire and water". He blended them with one another and made the heavens from them.

**(ט) ויאמר אלהים יקוו המים מתחת השמים אל מקום אחד ותראה היבשה ויהי כן :**

**יקוו המים - (If they were just created why are they gathered?)**

They [the waters] were [at first] spread over the face of the entire earth and He gathered them into the ocean which is the greatest of all seas.

**(י) ויקרא אלהים ליבשה ארץ ולמקוה המים קרא ימים וירא אלהים כי טוב :**

**קרא ימים - (Why is the word sea plural?)**

Is there not but one sea? But [the reason for the use of the plural is] [because] there is a difference between the taste of a fish that comes up from the sea at Acco and the taste of a fish that comes up from the sea at Spain.

**(יא) ויאמר אלהים תדשא הארץ דשא עשב מזריע זרע עץ פרי עשה פרי למינו אשר זרעו בו על הארץ ויהי כן :**

**תדשא הארץ דשא עשב - (What is the difference between עשב and דשא?)**

דשא is not synonymous with עשב, nor is דשא synonymous with עשב. And according to Scriptural grammar it would be incorrect to say תעשיב הארץ because there are various species of דשא, each individual [specie] being referred to as "that particular עשב." And it would be incorrect for the speaker to say: "that particular דשא," because the term דשא refers to the [overall plant] covering of the earth when it is full of plant growth.

**תדשא הארץ - (What does this phrase mean?)**

[would be defined thus:] Let it [the earth] be full and covered with a covering of individual plants. In Old French דשא is referred to as *herbediz* [plant-life], [i.e.,] all intermingled [collectively], whereas each individual root is called עשב.

**מזריע זרע - (Why is this verb in the hiphil - or causative form?)**

[Meaning:] that its seed is grown within it so that it can be replanted elsewhere.

**עץ פרי - Usually adjective is before noun, why here different?**

This implies that the taste of the tree should be the same as the taste of the fruit. However, it [the earth] did not do this, but rather: "The earth sprouted forth... a tree producing a fruit," but the tree itself was not a fruit. Therefore, when Adam was cursed for his sin, it, [the earth] too, was punished for its sin and was [also] cursed.

**אשר זרעו בו - (What does it mean *within it*?)**

These are the kernels of every fruit from which the tree grows when they are planted.

**(יב) ותוצא הארץ דשא עשב מזריע זרע למינהו ועץ עשה פרי אשר זרעו בו למינהו וירא אלהים כי טוב :**

**ותוצא הארץ - (Why doesn't it say of every kind of vegetation like it does for tree?)**

Though of its own kind was not said when vegetation was commanded to appear [nevertheless,] they heard that the trees were thus commanded and applied it to themselves [a fortiori] as is explained in an Aggadah in tractate Chulin.<sup>76</sup>

**(יד) ויאמר אלהים יהי מארת ברקיע השמים להבדיל בין היום ובין הלילה והיו לאתת ולמועדים ולימים ושנים :**

**יהי מארת - (How was there light if it was only created on the 4th day?)**

They [the luminaries] were created from the first day and on the fourth [day] He commanded them to be suspended in the canopy. Similarly, all products of heaven and earth were created on the first day and each one was firmly fixed [in its place] on the day that it was commanded. This is the intent of the scripture: "[that which was created] with the heavens" -- to include their products "[and that which was created] with the earth" -- to include its products.

**יהי מארת - (Why does the word מארת not have a vav?)**

The letter *vav* is omitted in the word מארת because it [the fourth day] is a cursed day when children are susceptible to disease. This is what is referred to, "On the fourth day they fasted so that disease not befall children."

**להבדיל בין היום ובין הלילה - (What about the comment in verse 4?)**

After the primal light was stored away. But during the seven days of creation the original light and darkness served together by day and by night.

**והיו לאתת - <sup>vii</sup> (What signs?)**

When there is an eclipse of the luminaries it is a bad sign for the world, as it is said: "Do not fear the signs from the heavens,"<sup>77</sup> I.e., when you do the will of the Holy One Blessed be He, you need not worry about retribution.

**ולמועדים - (What holidays is this referring to?)**

[This is said] concerning the future. For Israel will be commanded concerning the holidays, which are reckoned by the new moon.

**ולימים - (How does the moon mark days?)**

The sun serving half the day and the moon serving [the other] half, make up a complete day.

**ושנים - <sup>viii</sup> (How does the sun mark the years?)**

<sup>76</sup> Chulin 60a

חזינא ליה! אול אוקמיה להדי יומא בתקופת תמוז, א"ל: איסתכל ביה! א"ל: לא מצינא, א"ל: יומא, דחד משמשי דקיימי קמי דקודשא בריך הוא אמרת לא מצינא לאיסתכלא ביה, שכינה לא כל שכן! אמר ליה קיסר לרבי יהושע בן חנניה: בעינא דאיצבית ליה נהמא לאלהיכו! אמר ליה: לא מצית, אמאי? נפיש - חילוותיה, א"ל: איברא! אמר ליה: פוק צבית לגידא דרביתא, דרויחא עלמא; טרת שיתא ירחי קייטא - אתא זיקא כנשיה לימא, טרת שיתא ירחי דסיתא - אתא מיטרא טבעיה בימא.

<sup>77</sup> Jeremiah 10:2 כה אמר ידוד אל דרך הגוים אל תלמדו ומאתות השמים אל תחתו כי יחתו הגוים מהמה:

After 365 days they complete their cycle in the twelve constellations that attend them, which makes one year, (alt. version, i.e., 365 days). Whereupon they begin the next cycle revolving in the same cycle as the first.

**(טו) והיו למאורת ברקיע השמים להאיר על הארץ ויהי כן :**

**והיו למאורת - (This seems redundant, unless, it serves as a calendar and as light).**  
They [i.e., the luminaries] serve another purpose, that they provide light for the world.

**(טז) ויעש אלהים את שני המארת הגדלים את המאור הגדל לממשלת היום ואת המאור הקטן לממשלת הלילה ואת הכוכבים :**

**המארת הגדלים - ... "Seems contradictory two great lights but one greater than other"**  
They were created equal but then, the moon was diminished because it objected by saying: "It is impossible for two kings to rule with the same crown."

**ואת הכוכבים - Why there are stars?**

Because He diminished the moon He increased her hosts to placate her.<sup>78</sup>

**(כ) ויאמר אלהים ישרצו המים שרץ נפש חיה ועוף יעופף על הארץ על פני רקיע השמים :**

**נפש חיה - (What does this mean?)<sup>x</sup>**

That is a living soul.

**שרץ - (What does this word mean?)**

Any living thing that is not much higher than the ground is called שרץ; among winged creatures: e.g., flies, among crawling creatures: e.g., ants, beetles and worms, among [larger] creatures: e.g., rat, mouse, lizard and the like, and so, too, [among] the fish.

**(כא) ויברא אלהים את התניננס הגדלים ואת כל נפש החיה הרמשת אשר שרצו המים למינהם ואת כל עוף כנף למינהו וירא אלהים כי טוב :**

**התניננס - <sup>ל</sup>(Why are these specifically mentioned?)**

The great fish of the sea. According to the Aggadah<sup>79</sup> this refers to the Leviathan and its mate which He created, male and female; whereupon He killed the female and preserved it for the righteous in the World-to-Come. For if they were permitted to propagate the world could not exist in their presence.

**נפש החיה - (Again, meaning is unclear)**

That is a living soul.

**(כב) ויברך אתם אלהים לאמר פרו ורבו ומלאו את המים בימים והעוף**

<sup>78</sup> Genesis Rabah 6:4

ואת הכוכבים א"ר אחא משל למלך שהיו לו שני אפטרופין אחד שולט בעיר, ואחד שולט במדינה, אמר המלך הואיל ומיעט עצמו זה להיות שולט בעיר, גוזר אני עליו בשעה שהוא יוצא ותהא כל אוכלסא יוצאה עמו, ובשעה שיהא נכנס תהא בולי ודימוס נכנסה עמו, כך אמר הקב"ה הואיל והלבנה הזו מיעטה עצמה להיות שולטת בלילה, גוזר אני עליה, בשעה שהיא יוצאת שיהו הכוכבים יוצאין עמה, בשעה שהיא נכנסת ירו הכוכבים נכנסים עמה, ודכוותה (בראשית י) ושם אחיו יקטן, אמר רבי אחא למה נקרא שמו יקטן, שהיה מקטין את עסקיו, מה זכה להעמיד שלש עשרה משפחות גדולות, ומה אם יקטן על ידי שהיה מקטין את עסקיו כך, גדול שהוא מקטין את עסקיו על אחת כמה וכמה, ודכוותה (שם בראשית/ מ) וישלח ישראל את ימינו וישת על ראש אפרים ותהא הצעיר, אמר רבי חונייא וכי מן התולדות אין אנו יודעים שהוא הצעיר, אלא מה הוא הצעיר שהיה מצעיר את עסקיו מה זכה לבכורה, ומה אם הצעיר על ידי שהיה מצעיר את עסקיו זכה לבכורה הגדול שהוא מצעיר את עסקיו על אחת כמה וכמה, אתמהא.

<sup>79</sup> Bava Batra 74b

**ירב בארץ :****ויברך אתם - Why of all things are these blessed?<sup>xii</sup>**

Because they are [constantly] decimated, captured and eaten they required a blessing. The animals also needed to be blessed, but since the serpent was destined to be cursed they were, therefore, not blessed so that he [the serpent] not be included in their blessing.

**פרו - (What does this mean?)**

פרו is derived from פרי - fruit, meaning: produce fruit.

**ורבו - (Why have both words? This seems superfluous)**

Had only פרו - be fruitful been said then one would give birth to one and no more.

Therefore, "and multiply" was said so that one could give birth to many.

**(כד) ויאמר אלהים תוצא הארץ נפש חיה למינה בהמה ורמש וחיתו  
ארץ למינה ויהי כן :**

**תוצא הארץ - (Logic – In v. 14 there was light, how come it talks about this now?)<sup>xiii</sup>**

That is what I have already explained that everything was actually created from the first day and required only to be brought forth.

**נפש חיה - (Again, meaning is unclear)**

[I.e., a soul] which is alive.

**ורמש - (What does this word refer to?)**

This refers to creeping things that are low and creep upon the ground and seem to be dragging because their movement is not discernible. The words רמש and שרץ [are translated] in our language [O.F.] *conmovres*.

**(כה) ויעש אלהים את חית הארץ למינה ואת הבהמה למינה ואת כל רמש  
האד מה למינהו וירא אלהים כי טוב :**

**ויעש - (The old chicken and the egg question; what came first?)**

He made them in their complete form.

**(כו) ויאמר אלהים נעשה אדם בצלמנו כדמותנו וירדו בדגת הים ובעוף  
השמים ובבהמה ובכל הארץ ובכל הרמש הרמש על הארץ :**

**נעשה אדם - (Why is it in the plural?)<sup>xiv</sup>**

From here we learn about the Holy One Blessed be He's humility. Since man was [created] in the image of the angels/his image they were jealous of him. Therefore, [God] consulted with them. Similarly, when He judges kings, He consults His heavenly court.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Genesis Rabah 8:3-4; Yalkut , Beresheet 13.

ג ויאמר אלהים נעשה אדם, במי נמלך, רבי יחושע בשם ר' לוי אמר במלאכת השמים והארץ נמלך, משל למלך שהיו לו ב' סנקלטים, ולא היה עושה דבר חוץ מדעתו, רבי שמואל בר נחמן אמר במעשה כל יום ויום נמלך, משל למלך שהיה לו סנקטדרון, ולא היה עושה דבר חוץ מדעתו, ר' אמי אמר בלבו נמלך, משל למלך שבנה פלטין ע"י ארדכל ראה אותה ולא ערבה לו, על מי יש לו להתרעם לא על ארדכל, אתמהא, הוי ויתעצב אל לבו, אייר אסי משל למלך שעשה לו סחורה ע"י סרסור והפסיד, על מי יש לו להתרעם לא על הסרסור, אתמהא, הוי ויתעצב אל לבו.

ד אייר ברכיה בשעה שבה הקב"ה לבראת את האדם הראשון ראה צדיקים ורשעים יוצאים ממנו, אמר אם אני בורא אותם רשעים יוצאים ממנו, ואם לא אברא אותם היאך צדיקים יוצאים ממנו, מה עשה הקב"ה הפליג דרכו של רשעים מכנגד פניו, ושיתף בו מדת רחמים וברא החייד (תהלים א) כי יודע הי דרך צדיקים ודרך רשעים תאבד, איבדה מכנגד פניו ושיתף בו מדת רחמים וברא, ר' חנינא לא אמר כן, אלא בשעה שבה לבראת את אדם הראשון נמלך במלאכי השרת ואמר לחן נעשה אדם בצלמנו כדמותנו, אמרו לו אדם זה מה טיבו, אמר לחן צדיקים עומדים ממנו, הדא הוא דכתיב כי יודע הי דרך צדיקים כי הודיע הי דרך הצדיקים למלאכי השרת, ודרך רשעים תאבד, איבדה מהם, גילה לחם שהצדיקים עומדים ממנו ולא גילה לחם שהרשעים עומדים הימנו, שאלו גלה להם שהרשעים עומדים הימנו לא היתה מדת חדין נותנת שיברא

We find this with Achav when Micah said to him: "I have seen God sit on His Throne and all the Heavenly counsel standing by Him on His right and on His left."<sup>81</sup> But, can "right" and "left" apply to Him? Rather, [we must take this to mean] some are on the right [pleading] in favor and some on the left to accuse. Thus, [we find it said], "This sentence is decreed by the Watchers; This verdict is commanded by the Holy Ones."<sup>82</sup> By the decree of the angels and by order of the holy ones [i.e., angels]. Here, too, He consulted with His heavenly court and received permission. [God] said to them: "In the heights there is My image. Should there not be below My image? Otherwise there will be jealousy from my works of creation."

### נעשה אדם - (Why is made in the plural?)

Though they did not help in his creation and may give the heretics an opportunity to rebel, [nevertheless,] Scripture does not refrain from teaching courtesy and the attribute of humility. That the greater one consult and ask permission of a smaller one. Had it been written "I will make man," we would not have learned that He consulted with His [heavenly] court, but only with Himself. The response to the heretics is written alongside: "God created man" and it does not say "They created."<sup>83</sup>

### בצלמנו - (Man was created in whose form?)

[I.e.,] in our form.

### כדמותנו - (Why both בצלמנו and כדמותנו?)

To understand and to be creative.

### וירדו בדגת הים - (What does ירד refer to here?)

In this language the meaning can be ruling **ירד** and the meaning can be descending. **ירד** [If he is worthy of] merit, [then] he has dominion over the beasts and cattle. [If he is] not worthy of merit [then] he becomes subjugated to them and the beast has dominion over him.

(כז) ויברא אלהים את האדם בצלמו בצלם אלהים ברא אתו זכר ונקבה  
ברא אתם :

### ויברא אלהים את האדם בצלמו - (This seems to contradict בצלמנו in verse 26)<sup>84</sup>

In the form that was made for him. Everything [else] was created by word, but he was created by hand, as it is said, "You [God] placed Your hand upon me."<sup>84</sup> [Man] was made by a die as a coin that is made by impression that is called [in O.F.] *coin*. Similarly it is written, "The die can be varied as clay / it changes like clay under the seal."<sup>85</sup>

<sup>81</sup> I Kings 22:19 ויאמר לכן שמע דבר ידוד ראיתי את ידוד ישב על כסאו וכל צבא השמים עמד עליו מימינו ומשמאלו:

<sup>82</sup> Daniel 4:14 בגורת עירין פתגמא ומאמר קדישין שאלתא עד דברת די ינדעון חייא די שלית עליא עלאה במלכות אנושא אנושא ולמן די -  
יצא יונתנה ושפל אנשים יקים עליה עלה:

<sup>83</sup> Genesis Rabbah 8:8

ח רבי שמואל בר נחמן בשם רבי יונתן אמר בשעה שהיה משה כותב את התורה היה כותב מעשה כל יום ויום, כיון שהגיע לפסוק הזה שנאמר ויאמר אלהים נעשה אדם בצלמנו כדמותנו אמר לפניו רבון העולם מה אתה נותן פתחון פה למינים, אתמהא, אמר לו כתוב והרצתה לטעות יטעה, אמר לו הקב"ה משה, האדם הזה שבראתי, לא גדולים וקטנים אני מעמיד ממנו שאם יבא הנדול ליטול רשות מן הקטן ממנו והוא אומר מה אני צריך ליטול רשות מן הקטן ממני והן אומרים לו למד מבוראך שהוא ברא את העליונים ואת התחתונים, כיון שבא לבראת את האדם נמלך במלאכי השרת, אי"ר לוי לית הכא מלכו, אלא משל למלך שהיה מטייל בפתח פלטיין שלו, וראה בלורין אי מושלכת, אמר מה נעשה בה, מהן אומרים דימוסיות ומהן אומרים פריבטאות, אמר המלך אינדרטין אני עושה אותה מי מעבך.

<sup>84</sup> Psalms 139:5 אחור וקדם צרתני ותשת עלי כפכה:

<sup>85</sup> Job 38:14 תתהפך כחמר חותם ויתיצבו כמו לבוש:

**בצלם אלהים ברא אתו - (בצלם אלהים - בצלמו)** (Why the incongruity with the text?)  
This teaches you that the form that was established for him [i.e., man] is the form of the image of his Creator.

**זכר ונקבה ברא אתם - (Incongruity in number with the text)<sup>xiii</sup>**  
Later it says, "He took one of his ribs, etc."<sup>86</sup> In Midrash Aggadah it says<sup>87</sup>, He created him with two faces at first, and afterward He divided him. According to the literal meaning, the verse is here to inform you that they were both created on the sixth day. It does not explain how they were created, but it is explained elsewhere.

**(כח) ויברך אתם אלהים ויאמר להם אלהים פרו ורבו ומלאו את הארץ וכבשה ורדו בדגת הים ובעוף השמים ובכל חיה הרמשת על הארץ :**

**וכבשה - (Grammatical - Why is the word written in the complete form?)**  
[It is spelled] without a vav to teach you that the male "subdues" the female, [i.e.,] that she not be a prostitute. And in addition it teach you that man, whose way it is to subdue, is commanded to be fruitful and multiply, but not the woman.<sup>xix</sup>

**(כט) ויאמר אלהים הנה נתתי לכם את כל עשב זרע זרע אשר על פני כל אשר בו פרי עץ זרע לכם יהיה לאכלה : (ל) ולכל חית הארץ ולכל עוף הארץ ואת כל העפרומש על הארץ אשר בו נפש חיה את כל ירק עשב השמים ולכל לאכלה ויהי כן :**

**לכם יהיה לאכלה ולכל חית הארץ - (What connects these two verses?)<sup>xx</sup>**  
What the cattle and animals eat so to will they (humans) eat. And he did not permit man and his wife to kill any creature in order to eat meat, whereas they are all permitted to eat all vegetation equally. When the "sons of Noah" came meat was permitted to them as it is said, "All living creeping things, etc., like vegetation" that I permitted for Adam, "I have given you everything."<sup>88</sup>

**(לא) וירא אלהים את כל אשר עשה והנה טוב מאד ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום הששי :**

**יום הששי ("ה") (Why is this the only day, to begin with the letter "ה")**  
The letter "ה" was added to the word "ששי" (meaning 'on the sixth day') at the end of creation to say, [your creation] is stipulated on the condition that Israel accepts the Five Books of the Torah."

Another explanation for the letter "ה": All of creation was pending until "the sixth day" referring to the sixth day of [the month] Sivan which was intended for the giving of the Torah.

<sup>86</sup> ויפל ידוד אלהים תרדמה על האדם וישן ויקח אחת מצלעותיו ויסגר בשר תחתה - Genesis 2:21

<sup>87</sup> Eruvin 18a

היינו דכתיב (בראשית ה') זכר ונקבה בראם, אלא למאן דאמר זכר - מאי זכר ונקבה בראם? - לכדרכי אבהו. דרבי אבהו נר בשר תחתה, אלא למאן דאמררמי: כתיב זכר ונקבה בראם, וכתיב (בראשית א') (כ) בצלם אלהים ברא אתו - בתחלה עלתה במחשבה לבראות שנים ולבסוף לא נברא אלא אחד. בשלמא למאן דאמר פרצוף - היינו דכתיב (בראשית ב') ויס

<sup>88</sup> כל רמש אשר הוא חי לכם יהיה לאכלה כירק עשב נתתי לכם את כל: Genesis 9:3

## רש"י בראשית פרק ב

**(א) ויכלו השמים והארץ וכל צבאם : (ב) ויכל אלהים ביום השביעי מלאכתו אשר עשה וישבת ביום השביעי מכל מלאכתו אשר עשה :**

**ויכל אלהים ביום השביעי - (Did God work on the seventh day?)**

R. Shimon said, [man who is] flesh and blood who cannot know his times and moments must add from the profane to the holy.<sup>89</sup> The Holy One Blessed be He, [however] who knows His times and moments can enter into it by a hairbreadth, and it appears as if He concluded [His work] on that very day [Shabbat]. Another explanation: What was the world missing? Rest. With the coming of Shabbat came rest, [i.e.,] the work was completed and finished.

**(ג) ויברך אלהים את יום השביעי ויקדש אותו כי בו שבת מכל מלאכתו אשר ברא אלהים לעשות**

**ויברך אלהים את יום השביעי ויקדש - (Why does it say blessed and sanctified?)**

He blessed it with the manna. During all the days of the week there was an *omer* [of manna] that descended for them per person but on the sixth day there was a double portion. He sanctified it through the manna for it did not fall at all on Shabbat.<sup>90</sup> This verse is written with reference to the future.

**אשר ברא אלהים לעשות : (Why the repetition and word choice?)**

The work which was worthy to have been done on Shabbat He doubled and did on Friday, as is explained in Beresheet Rabbah.

**(ד) אלה תולדות השמים והארץ בהבראם ביום עשות יי אלהים ארץ ושמים :**

**אלה - (Meaning - What does this refer to?)**

["This" refers to] those mentioned above.

**בהבראם ביום עשות יי - (Why does בהבראם have the letter ה in it?)**

This teaches you that they were all created on the first day. Another explanation of בהבראם. He created them with the letter "ה", as it is said, "In God יה, the Lord is the rock of the worlds."<sup>91</sup> Which can also be read "with these two letters of the Name of God, He created two worlds. Here it teaches you that this world was create with the letter "ה" .

(This hints that just as the letter "ה" is open at the bottom, so to is the world open to those who return through repentance. And the World to Come was created with the letter "י" which is the smallest letter which hints that the wicked will descend below and behold

<sup>89</sup> Beresheet Rabbah 10:9

ט רבי שאלה לרבי ישמעאל ב"ר יוסי אייל שמעתי מאביד, מהו ויכל אלהים ביום השביעי, אתמהא, אלא כזה שחזא מכה בקורטס על גבי הסדן, הגביה מבעד יום והורידה משתחשך, אר"ש בן יוחאי בשר ודם שאינו יודע לא עתו ולא רגעי ולא שעותיו, הוא מוסיף מחול על הקודש, אבל הקב"ה שחזא יודע רגעי ועתיו ושעותיו, נכנס בו כחוט השערה, גויבא ורבנן, גויבא אמר משל למלך שעשה לו חופה תצירה וכיירה, ומה היתה חסרה כלה שתכנס לתוכה, כך מה היה העולם חסר שבת...

<sup>90</sup> Beresheet Rabbah 11:1

ויברך אלהים את יום השביעי וי', רבי ישמעאל אומר ברכו במן קדשו במן ברכו במן שכל ימות השבת היה יורד עומר, בערב שבת שני עומרים, וקדשו במן שלא ירד בו כל עיקר, רבי נתן אומר ברכו במן, וקדשו בברכה, רבי יצחק אומר ברכו במן, וקדשו במקושש וברכו בעטיפה, רב הונא אומר צריך לחולין,

<sup>91</sup> Joshua 26:4 בטחו ביי עדי עד כי ביה ידוד צור עולמים :

the grave like [the letter] "ה" which is closed on all sides and open [only] at the bottom, for them to descend there.

**(ה) וכל שיח השדה טרם יהיה בארץ וכל עשב השדה טרם יצמח כי לא המטיר יי אלהים על הארץ ואדם אין לעבד את האדמה :**

**טרם יהיה בארץ (What does the word טרם mean here?)**

Every time the word "טרם" appears in the Bible it means 'not yet.' It does not mean 'before' and the word cannot be made into a verb such as the word הקדים. This verse proves this. And another proof: is the verse, "For you do not yet fear."<sup>92</sup> This verse, too should be explained thus: [No tree] was as yet upon the earth when the creation of the world was completed on the sixth day before man was created.

**וכל עשב השדה טרם יצמח - (Doesn't this contradict the order in Genesis One?)**

[And all vegetation] did not yet sprout. [The fact that] on the third day it is written: "Let the earth sprout forth" [should be interpreted:] they did not protrude but they remained at the surface of the ground until the sixth day.

**כי לא המטיר (What is the connection here, why say it didn't rain?)**

And what was the reason that he did not cause it to rain? Because "There was [yet] no man to work the earth," and there was no one to recognize the goodness of the rain. When man came and recognized their need for the world he prayed for it and it descended and the trees and vegetation sprouted

**יי אלהים - (Why are both names used here?)**

The Lord is His name. Elohim refers to God as Ruler and Judge over everything. This is the plain explanation everywhere. The Lord is Elohim.

**(ו) ואד יעלה מן הארץ והשקה את כל פני האדמה :**

**ואד יעלה - (What is the point of the mist?)**

It was for the purpose of creating man that He brought up [the waters of] the deep and moistened the clouds in order to soak the earth and to create man, like the kneader [of dough] who adds water [to the flour] and then proceeds to knead the dough. Here, too, He [first] "moistened" [the earth] and afterwards "created" [man].

**(ז) וייצר יי אלהים את האדם עפר מן האדמה ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים ויהי האדם לנפש חיה :**

**וייצר - (Why with two yuds?)**

Two creations. Creation of this world and one creation for when the dead will be resurrected. Whereas animals which will not be judged, two *yuds* are not written [in the word].

**עפר מן האדמה - (Why was man made from the dust of the earth?)**

God gathered his dust from all four corners of the earth so that wherever [man] may die it [the earth] will receive him for burial. Another explanation: God took his dust from the

<sup>92</sup> ואתה ועבדך ידעתי כי טרם תיראון מפני יי אלהים : - Exodus 9:30

place of which it is said, "Make an altar of earth for Me."<sup>93</sup> Would that it be an atonement for him so that he may survive.

**ויפח באפיו - (Meaning)**

He made him from earthy matter and of heavenly matter. His body from earthy matter and his soul from heavenly matter. Because on the first day heaven and earth were created. On the second day He created a canopy for the heavens. On the third day the land appeared on earth. On the fourth day He created luminaries for the heavens. On the fifth day the water swarmed [to produce creatures] for the earth. It was [therefore] necessary that on the sixth day to create [something] from heavenly *and* earthly matter. If this were not so there would be jealousy in creation for these would outnumber those by one day's creation.

**לנפש חיה - (What is a living soul? What makes man different?)**

Animals and beasts are also called living souls. But, the one of man is the most alive for he additionally was given intelligence and speech.

**(ח) ויטע יי אלהים גן בעדן מקדם וישם שם את האדם אשר יצר :**

**מקדם - (Is this two stories?)<sup>93</sup>**

East of Eden was where He planted the Garden. Should you ask, [why say this when] it has already been written: "And He created man, etc."<sup>94</sup> [The answer is based on that which] I saw in the Baraita of R. Eliezer the son of R. Yosi Hagalily. "The Torah is expounded through thirty-two principles and one of them is, 'A general statement followed by an action are the specifics of the first [statement].'" [Therefore when it says,] "He created man" this is the general statement leaving where he was created obscure and what was done obscure. It then repeats and clarifies: "God formed man, etc." and caused the Garden of Eden to sprout for his benefit "and placed him in the Garden of Eden" and put him into a deep sleep. The one who hears this may think that this is a different act, but, in reality, it is the details of the first. Similarly, concerning the animals. He again<sup>95</sup> writes: "God created from the earth all animals of the field" in order to explain [the verse] "And He brought them to the man so that he may name them" and to teach concerning the birds that they were created from the swamp.

**(ט) ויצמח יי אלהים מן האדמה כל עץ נחמד למראה וטוב למאכל ועץ החיים בתוך הגן ועץ הדעת טוב ורע :**

**ויצמח - Meaning?**

In the matter of the garden it is written and said.

**(Why the superfluous detail that it was in the middle of the garden?) - בתוך הגן**

In the center of the Garden.

**(י) ונהר יצא מעדן להשקות את הגן ומשם יפרד והיה לארבעה ראשים :**

<sup>93</sup> Exodus 20:20-

מזבח אדמה תעשה לי וזבחת עליו את עלתיך ואת שלמיך את צאנך ואת בקרך בכל המקום אשר אזכיר את שמי אבוא אליך וברכ

<sup>94</sup> Genesis 1:27 ויברא אלהים את האדם בצלמו בצלם אלהים ברא אתו זכר ונקבה ברא אתם

<sup>95</sup> Genesis 1:25 ויעש אלהים את חית הארץ למינה ואת הבהמה למינה ואת כל רמש האדמה למינה וירא אלהים כי טוב:

**(יא) שם האחד פישון הוא הסבב את כל ארץ החוילה אשר שם הזהב :**

**פישון - (Why is it called this?)**

This is the Nile, the river of Egypt. It is named because its waters are bountiful and rise to irrigate the land it is called Pishon [from the same root as the word **ופשו** which connotes abundance] As in, "His riders increased."<sup>96</sup> Another interpretation: [It is called] Pishon because it causes flax **פשתן** to grow as it is said concerning Egypt, "And the flax workers shall be shamed."<sup>97</sup>

**(יב) וזהב הארץ שהוא טוב שם הבדלח ואבן השהם :  
(יג) ושם הנהר השני גיחון הוא הסובב את כל ארץ כוש :**

**גיחון - (Why is it called this?)**

It is so called this because it flows and roars and its roar is very great as like: "If [an ox] gores," for he gores and goes on to roar."<sup>98</sup>

**(יד) ושם הנהר השלישי חדקל הוא ההלך קדמת אשור והנהר הרביעי  
הוא פרת :**

**חדקל - (Why is it called this?)**

It is so called this because its waters are pungent and light.

**פרת - (Why is it called this?)**

It is so called this because its waters increase abundantly and are healthy to man.

**כוש...אשור - (How can they can be called by these names?)**

They did not exist yet, but the Bible writes based on [the fact that they will be so called in] the future.

**קדמת אשור - Meaning?**

[Means] on the eastern side of *Ashur*.

**הוא פרת - Distinction?**

It is the most important of all [the rivers] because it is remembered with the Land of Israel. – where?

**(טו) ויקח יי אלהים את האדם וינחהו בגן עדן לעבדה ולשמרה :**

**ויקח - (What's the tone here?)**

He "took" him with kind words and persuaded him to enter.

**(טז) ויצו יי אלהים על האדם לאמר מכל עץ הגן אכל תאכל :  
(יז) ומעץ הדעת טוב ורע לא תאכל ממנו כי ביום אכלך ממנו מות תמות :  
(יח) ויאמר יי אלהים לא טוב היות האדם לבדו אעשה לו עזר כנגדו :**

<sup>96</sup> Chabakuk 1:8 וקלו מנמרים סוסיו וחדו מזאבי ערב ופשו פרשיו ופרשיו מרחוק יבאו כנשר חש לאכול :

<sup>97</sup> Isaiah 19:9 ירוח סיגראו תוקירש סיתשפ ידבע ושבו :

<sup>98</sup> Exodus 21:28 וכי יגח שור את איש או את אשה ומת סקול יסקל חשור ולא יאכל את בשרו ובעל חשור נקי :

**לא טוב היות האדם לבדו אעשה לו עזר** - <sup>xxxiv</sup>(What is the purpose of the "ה" in אדם?)  
That they [the heretics] would not say that there are two dominions, The Holy One Blessed be He, alone in the Heavens without a partner and this one [man], below without a partner.

**עזר כנגדו** - (Are not these words contradictory?)

If he is meritorious then [she is] a helper, if he is not meritorious then [she is] against him; to fight him.

**(יט) ויצר יי אלהים מן האדמה כל חית השדה ואת כל עוף השמים ויבא אל האדם לראות מה יקרא לו וכל אשר יקרא לו האדם נפש חיה הוא שמו:**

**ויצר מן האדמה** - (Why the use of יצר?)

The word "creating" is the same as the word "making" which was said above: "And G-d made the animals of the earth, etc."<sup>99</sup> However, here it comes to explain that the birds were created from the swamps. Since above it stated that they were created from water and here it states that they were created from the earth. Also, it teaches you here, on the day they were created He brought them to man to call them by name. According to Aggadah, the word יצירה means to dominate or control as [in the verse:] "When you will besiege a city,"<sup>100</sup> [meaning] that He subjugated them under the hand of man.

**וכל אשר יקרא לו האדם נפש חיה הוא שמו:** (Meaning?)

You must transpose [the words] and explain it: All living souls that were called by Adam by a name will have that name forever.

**(כ) ויקרא האדם שמות לכל הבהמה ולעוף השמים ולכל חית השדה ולאדם לא מצא עזר כנגדו: (כא) ויפל יי אלהים תרדמה על האדם ויישן ויקח אחת מצלעותיו ויסגר בשר תחתנה:**

**ולאדם לא מצא עזר...ויפל יי אלהים תרדמה** - (Why does one follow the other?)

When He brought them [the animals] before him He brought all types the male kind and the female [Adam] said: They all have a mate but I have no mate; and immediately [it says]: "And G-d put [Adam]..."

**מצלעותיו** - (Meaning?)

[Has the literal meaning] from his sides as [in the verse] "The sides of the Tabernacle."<sup>101</sup> This [coincides with] what we said: that they were [first] created with two faces.<sup>102</sup>

**ויסגר** - (Meaning?)

The place of the cut.

**ויישן ויקח** - (Connection?)

So that he not see the piece of flesh from which she was created and be repulsive to him.

**(כב) ויבן יי אלהים את הצלע אשר לקח מן האדם לאשה ויבאה אל האדם:**

<sup>99</sup> יעש אלהים את חית הארץ למינה ואת הבהמה למינה ואת כל רמש האדמה למינה וירא אלהים כי טוב: Genesis 1:25

<sup>100</sup> כי תצור אל עיר ימים רבים להלחם עליה לתפסה לא תשחית את עצה לנזח עליו גרזן כי ממנו תאכל ואתו לא תכרת כי: Deuteronomy 20:19  
האדם עץ השדה לבא מפניו במצור:

<sup>101</sup> ולצלע המשכן השנית לפאת צפון עשרים קרש: Exodus 26:20

<sup>102</sup> ויברא אלהים את האדם בצלמו בצלם אלהים ברא אתו זכר ונקבה ברא אתם: Genesis 1:27

**ויבן - (Meaning?)**

Like a building, broad at the bottom and narrow at the top so that she can carry the child.  
[Just] as a wheat silo which is broad at the bottom and narrow at the top so that its weight not be a strain on its walls.

**לקח מן האדם לאשה - (What's the purpose here of the lamed?)**

So that it should become a woman as in: "And Gidon made it to an ephod,"<sup>103</sup> [meaning] so that it should become an ephod.

**(כג) ויאמר האדם זאת הפעם עצם מעצמי ובשר מבשרי לזאת יקרא אשה  
כי מאיש לקחה זאת :**

**זאת הפעם - (Why does the text say this here?)**

This teaches that Adam attempted to find [a mate] amongst all the animals and beasts and he was not satisfied with them until he discovered Eve.

**לזאת יקרא אשה כי מאיש לקחה זאת: (Finding a connection between these words)**

In the language [both **אשה** and **איש**] have the same root. From this [we derive] that the world was created with the Holy Tongue.

**(כד) על כן יעזב איש את אביו ואת אמו ודבק באשתו והיו לבשר אחד :**

**על כן יעזב איש - (Explains the text)**

The Divine Spirit is saying this prohibiting to the "sons of Noah" forbidden marital relations.

**לבשר אחד - (Explains the text)**

The child is formed by both [parents] thereby becoming unified as "one flesh."

**(כה) ויהיו שניהם ערומים האדם ואשתו ולא יתבששו :**

**ולא יתבששו - (Explains the text)**

They did not know the ways of modesty to distinguish between good and evil. Although he [Adam] was given the wisdom to call [all the creatures] by name, he was not imbued with the evil inclination until he ate from the tree and the evil inclination entered him and he was able to distinguish good and evil.

<sup>103</sup> יעש אותו גדעון לאפוד ויצג אותו בעירו בעפרה וזנו כל ישראל אחריו שם ויהי לגדעון ולביתו למוקש Judges 8:27

## NOTES

<sup>i</sup> In modern society the notion is that once a gift is given, it belongs to the receiver, and the giver loses all rights to the item. This can be seen in the derogatory name "*Indian giver*" that the giver is called should he or she take the item back. This seems to differ in Rashi's world. There the giver of a gift retains control of the gift and can take it back at any time of their choosing, or at least if the giver is the Almighty.

Rashi's opening comment may reflect a subtle refutation of the Christian claim to the Holy Land as described above. At a time when both Christians and Muslims rooted their claims to the Holy Land in their most venerated "prophets"--Jesus and Muhammad--Rashi offers his Jewish readers a counterclaim rooted in the very creation of the world. It is couched in the best style of the time, for in an age that sought the answer to every question in the sacred texts, a scriptural citation was the ultimate authority and no citation could be better than the very first word in the Bible.

<sup>ii</sup> Rashi is saying that verse one should read "At the beginning of the creation..." where the word creation is implied just as in the numerous examples that follow demonstrate that often words are left out of verses. By insisting that this word be implied, Rashi is trying to convince the reader that this story is not about the order of creation. It is interesting to note the number of times and various ways that he goes about trying to convince the reader that this story is about the order of creation suggesting both that this was the prevailing view at the time and that there was a reason to change it.

<sup>iii</sup> Modern biblical scholars addressing Rashi's unasked question will use the two different names given for God as evidence of two separate authors of two creation stories (Priestly source chapter one Elohim). Others will point out that Elohim is a name for a universalistic God while YHVH is the name of a particularistic God. Rashi instead here focuses on the idea of God as a God of mercy and God of justice.

<sup>iv</sup> Is Rashi simply suggesting that פני על refers to פני חמים later in the verse clearing up a potential confusion? (Davis,3) Or, is the intent of this comment directed towards those who read the text literally, believing that God's face hovered?

<sup>v</sup> Should רוח אלהים be translated as in Genesis 41:38 : ויאמר פרעה אל עבדיו הנמצא כזה איש אשר רוח אלהים בו : as spirit of God or as Heavenly throne of God as Rashi would have us understand the text? Sarna's JPS commentary points out that the root רחפ appears as hovering (Deut 32:11) where an eagle hovers over its young, : כנשר יעיר קנו על גוזליו ירחף יפרש כנפיו יקחהו ישאהו על אברתו : a meaning it also holds in Ugaritic. The other time the root appears (Jeremiah 23:9) it refers to bones trembling or shaking. Rashi choosing a less anthropomorphic idea perhaps refers it to the imagery found elsewhere in the Bible (Psalm 47:9) of throne of glory.  
מלך אלהים על גוים אלהים יושב על כסא קדש :

<sup>vi</sup> Can it be a response against dualism or trinity?

<sup>vii</sup> A sign is an "occurrence or incident regarded as fore-shadowing a favorable or unfavorable issue in a certain conjuncture... Astrology, was practiced by Jews throughout the Middle Ages, both as a professional art and as a science. Coming from the East, they were looked upon as heirs and successors of the Chaldeans, and, probably for this reason, were regarded by the Occidental world as skilful masters of the art of Astrology; their supposed power over destiny filling the multitudes with awe and fear. Despite its prohibition by Judaism, this superstition was so deep-rooted that, it was practiced and tolerated from Biblical times to the present time. See Kaufmann Kohler, "Astrology" Jewish Encyclopedia

<<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=61&letter=O&search=signs>>

<sup>viii</sup> It is interesting to note that Rashi here is referring to the Gregorian calendar and not the Jewish lunar calendar; another example of how the Jews of France (and by this time the whole world) had accepted the calendar system of the outside community. In addition, Rashi's comment here, while seemingly obvious to the modern reader, reflects the high esteem of the stars ability to reckon times and seasons.

<sup>ix</sup> In the eleventh century a struggle concerning investiture broke out when there was a disagreement as to the powers of the pope and the Holy Roman emperor in installing German bishops; "The right of a temporal prince to give spiritual power was claimed only by the extremists of the imperial party, but there was wide debate over canonical election, royal assent, and papal assent." In 1075, Pope Gregory VII forbade lay investiture which led to the excommunication of Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV. The struggle would continue through the ascension of Pope Paschal II and Holy Roman Emperor Henry V. See "Investiture" *Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition* <<http://encyclopedia.com/html/i1/investit.asp>>.

Rashi's comment seems a direct response to this political struggle. "It is impossible for two kings to rule with same crown." In this struggle for power, one was certain to win and the other to lose.

<sup>x</sup> The word חיה has two meanings; animal and alive. Rashi clarifies that here the word's meaning is alive and not the soul of an animal.

<sup>xi</sup> הַתַּיִם often translated as serpent appears numerous times in the Bible (Isaiah 27:1. Psalm 74:14, 104:26, Job 3:8, and 40:25). Using the language of Beresheet, God commands Moses, in Exodus 7:9, to tell Aaron, "יְהִי לַחֲנִיךְ" "let it become a serpent". The Midrash states that it alludes to a pair of particularly great sea creatures, the Leviathan and its mate. According to a midrash, the leviathan was created on the fifth day (Yalk. Gen. 12). Originally God produced a male and a female leviathan, but lest in multiplying the species should destroy the world, He slew the female, reserving her flesh for the banquet that will be given to the righteous on the advent of the Messiah (B. B. 74a). The leviathan is prominent in the haggadic literature in connection with the advent of the Messiah. See Emil Hirsch, Kaufmann Kohler, Solomon Schechter, and Isaac

Broyde "Leviathan and Bethemoth" *Jewish Encyclopedia*,  
<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=275&letter=L&search=leviathan>

<sup>xii</sup> The serpent in Genesis 3:14 is cursed. In the Hebrew Bible the serpent is portrayed as a poisonous character (Genesis 49:17, Proverbs 30:18, Jeremiah 8:17). In the Christian Bible the word takes on the meaning of a malicious enemy (Luke 10:19) and through the Genesis stories as the embodiment of sin itself. How then to explain that God blessed all things? (Easton's Bible Dictionary) Rashi, sensitive to how the serpent is perceived in his community confirms that the serpent indeed is not blessed.

<sup>xiii</sup> This will more emphasized in the commentaries of Ramban and Ibn Ezra, but Rashi here is discussing the neo-Platonic view that creation was from something, some mass that over the course of creation took form. As Dr. Martin Cohen explains, Rashi was living in the age when universities were just beginning to emerge. The notion of logic and validation through text were primary tools of academics.

<sup>xiv</sup> From the Christian perspective, the plurality of the word is an affirmation of the trinity. To contradict this conclusion, Rashi here is suggesting that God is one, but that God had in the creation of humanity the assistance of angels.

<sup>xv</sup> JPS Commentary points out that this phrase seems to have been a common pairing. A 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE Assyrian-Aramaic bilingual inscription on a statue at Tell Fekheriyeh in Syria also contains these two terms.

<sup>xvi</sup> This is in reference to the philosophic notions of form and body.

<sup>xvii</sup> The Medieval World was grappling with the question of the nature of human sexuality. Perhaps in part due to Pope Boniface IX resignation in order to marry in 1045 and Pope Gregory VII edict in 1074 demanding that anyone to be ordained must first pledge celibacy: 'priests [must] first escape from the clutches of their wives.'

<sup>xviii</sup> What does this say about Rashi's impressions of the nature of women? He had five daughters.

<sup>xix</sup> Rashi lives in world where meat, while not a staple in their lives, is a constant. Why dredge up the fact that the ideal is to be a vegetarian?

<sup>xx</sup> If God finished the work on the 7th day, did He work on that day?

<sup>xxi</sup> Why the need to make this comment, already explained from chapter one. Why the need to say that everyone knows it as this. If that were really true than Rashi probably wouldn't have said it.

<sup>xxii</sup> There must have been already people in the audience who questioned the repetition in the Genesis story.

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<sup>xxiii</sup> The text does not say that "It is not good *for* man" which would be the case if it said לאדם, but rather, it says it not good that man, with a hay that it is not good for creation. Rashi comment about the two dominions seems to hint at an idea in his environment.

**RABBI ABRAHAM IBN EZRA**

Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra was born in Tudela, in the north western Spanish province of Navarre, in the middle of the eleventh century.<sup>104</sup> The product of a highly educated community that found itself in an insecure and precarious position, ibn Ezra distinguished himself by his reputation as a creative, well learned, and provocative author. Steeped in the Judeo-Muslim culture in which he grew up, he ventured forth into an unfamiliar world enriching the communities he met with his knowledge and experience. Familiar with almost every field of study known in his time, religious and secular alike, ibn Ezra, late in life, wrote a commentary on the Torah that incorporated his knowledge of mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, and language. Intended for an Ashkenazic world that knew little of the treasures of Sephardi Spain, ibn Ezra was able to pass on his teachings ensuring that they would survive in a world that seemed to him to be collapsing. His commentary, along with the introductions he provides, while outlining his unique approach to Torah, offers a priceless window into the influences that shaped his commentary.

The little that is known about ibn Ezra's early life is gleaned from his writings and the traditions recorded by his students. His father's name was Meir and their family was probably a branch of the ibn Ezra family to which Moses ibn Ezra belonged<sup>105</sup>. Moses ibn Ezra mentions Abraham by his Arabic name, Abu Ishak (Ibrahim) ibn al-Majid ibn Ezra, which reflects the native tongue that he would have spoken. Tradition has Abraham ibn Ezra marrying the daughter of his friend, Judah Halevi, also from Tudela

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<sup>104</sup> Books on Ibn Ezra offer a varied range of dates of birth and death. Nahum Sarna suggests (1092-1167), Isaac Husik (1055-1167), H. Graetz (1088-1167) and the most recently published Irene Lancaster (1089-1164).

<sup>105</sup> Spanish philosopher, linguist, and poet; born at Granada about 1070 and died after 1138 Jewish Encyclopedia

and only a few years his senior, after completing a poem that the master poet had been struggling with.<sup>106</sup> He had four children, all of them dying early with the exception of their son Isaac who converted to Islam and left Spain.<sup>107</sup> It seems that by the time ibn Ezra turned fifty, there was no close family to speak of, and little to keep him in Spain.

Ibn Ezra was properly educated in the curriculum standard for a wealthy Spanish Jew. In addition to studying the Jewish sources including Torah, Talmud, and Hebrew poetry, he also learned Arabic poetry, linguistics, science and philosophy. From a young age, ibn Ezra earned his living as a poet by providing original works to the patrons who commissioned him. Before long, ibn Ezra had earned a reputation for himself as a *mutakallim*, religious philosopher, and as a prolific poet. He liked to call himself "*ha-shar*", "the poet". In one of his poems of lamentation he wrote, "Once in my youth I used to compose songs with which I decorated the Hebrew scholars as with a necklace." His younger contemporary, Abraham ibn Daud, describes ibn Ezra as one who "strengthened the hands of Israel with songs and with words of comfort."<sup>108</sup>

Those around ibn Ezra needed the words of comfort. The world that ibn Ezra knew was a rapidly changing one. In 1090, around the time ibn Ezra was born, Granada was captured by ibn Tashufin, king of the Almoravides, and the Jewish community was destroyed. Joseph ibn Ezra and his son Judah, relatives of Abraham ibn Ezra, ended up in Toledo, where Judah rose to a high station, only to leave because of the disturbing conditions prevailing throughout Castile. In March of 1115, when ibn Ezra was twenty-

<sup>106</sup> Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain: Vol. I From the Age of Reconquest to the Fourteenth Century*. Trans by Louis Schoffman. (Skokie: Varda Books, 2001). pg 102

<sup>107</sup> Isaac's conversion was a severe blow to his father; and the latter expressed his grief in two moving poems ("Diwan," Nos. 203 and 205; Rosin, *l.c.* pp. 84 *et seq.*). Jewish Encyclopedia

<sup>108</sup> Irene Lancaster, *Deconstructing the Bible: Abraham ibn Ezra's introduction to the Torah*. (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).

six years old, Tudela, ibn Ezra's birthplace, which had been in the hands of the Moors, was conquered by the Christians as part of the Christian Reconquest. As a result, the Jewish inhabitants found themselves in a politically volatile situation. While a few Jews were able to take advantage of this situation, most tried their best just to remove themselves as far as possible from the conflict.<sup>109</sup> A pact from 1115 reveals that many Jews fled the cities during sieges and at the time of capitulation. Once they had gained control, the Christian rulers would often expel the Jews from the city and either destroy the synagogue or convert them into churches.<sup>110</sup>

Caught in the middle of this struggle between Christianity and Islam, Spanish Jewry's dormant messianic hopes were re-awakened. "For the first time since the initial stages of the contest between the two great powers in the seventh century there was revived interest in the ancient apocalyptic teachings".<sup>111</sup> This messianic fervor can be seen in early twelfth century Cordova where crowds of people gathered to determine and hasten the arrival of the Messiah. Using astrological computations and interpretation of dreams they believed that ibn Aryeh was the long awaited Messiah.<sup>112</sup>

The increase in messianic activity was a reflection of the deteriorating situation faced by the Jewish community. Spain's Jews faced destruction by the plundering Christian conquerors and the incoming streams of Jewish refugees fleeing the swords of the Almoravides. Israel was caught between "Edom and Ishmael", and no one knew

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<sup>109</sup> While later Arab historians write of large numbers of Jews fighting side by side with the Christians in the major decisive battles, it seems rather that active Jewish participation in the conflict was limited to the defense of their own homes and neighborhoods. On the whole they did not join either side, Baer, 35.

<sup>110</sup> Baer, 51-52.

<sup>111</sup> Baer, 55.

<sup>112</sup> Richard Gottheil and Wilhelm Bacher, "Ibn Ezra, Abraham ben Meir" Jewish Encyclopedia, 1906 ed. <<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=11&letter=I&search=ibn%20Ezra>>

when the end would come.<sup>113</sup> Moses ibn Ezra, a contemporary of ibn Ezra reflects the situation well when he writes<sup>114</sup>:

I grieved not for the wealth that was plundered, I cared not that it had vanished and gone, I lamented not opulence come to an end, I felt not ill over servants deserting . . . I can only scoff at the works of fate and laugh at its pranks. Throughout my life I have known success; but my wealth took flight like a soaring eagle, all the toil of my hands took wing, and God's mighty hand thereby became manifest. But the tears flow from my eyes as I seek to overcome my grief over my loneliness in my native land, without a companion at my side. I am like a stranger sojourning therein, and I see no man about me of my family and kin. I remain in Granada, a city of declining bustle and splendor, like a stranger in the land, like a sparrow strayed from its nest, like a bird banished and driven; and amongst this generation, wayward and corrupt, there is no refuge for me; there remains no one to remember me and inquire after my welfare.

With this feeling of impending destruction, ibn Ezra wrote about his strong desire to safeguard his cultural knowledge and inspiring him "to take upon himself the role of planting her [Judeo-Spanish] heritage on the living soil of the Jewish communities in Christian Europe."<sup>115</sup> In 1140 he left Spain for Rome, embarking on a twenty-three year journey of literary creativity and loneliness through Christian Europe. He was fifty years old, impoverished and unhappy. Some say that it was marital difficulties, betrayal, or fear of an Almohad invasion that ultimately inspired him to embark on this journey. He writes, "at fifty, one takes note of one's days of futility, grieves that the days of mourning approach, scorns the precious things of this world, fearful that one's time has come."<sup>116</sup> Perhaps, he saw it as a new beginning.

<sup>113</sup> Gottheil, *Ibn Ezra: Abraham ben Meir*

<sup>114</sup> Baer, 37

<sup>115</sup> Lancaster, 3.

<sup>116</sup> Lancaster, 2.

But his departure from Spain did little to alleviate his situation. Ibn Ezra was an unhappy man. His patrons seemed to be unreliable and limited. His works were the products commissioned by wealthy patrons for the benefit of their sons, and failed to bring him personal success. A believer of astrology, he concludes that the moment of his birth happened to coincide with a deviation of the celestial bodies from their fixed paths. As a result no matter how much he struggles, he can never succeed. In one poem he writes, "woe to the poor man, born to ill fortune".<sup>117</sup>

גלגל ומזלות במעמד נטו במהלכם למולדתי: לו יהיו נרות סחורתי – לא יחשך שמש עדי מותי	The heavenly sphere and the constellations strayed from their path when I was born. If my business were in candles, the sun would not set until I died.
איגע להצליח ולא אוכל, כי עותוני כוכבי שמי לו אהיה סוחר בתכריכין – לא יגועון אישים בכל ימי	However I struggle, I cannot succeed, for my stars have ruined me: If I were a dealer in shrouds, no one would die as long as I lived

Always a stranger, a Sefardi (Spaniard) among Ashkenazim, he regarded himself in exile. (In one of his best-known poems ("Nedod Hesir Oni") ibn Ezra characterized the second period of his life, as one of being a perpetual stranger. He is the only example of a wandering scholar who developed an unusually rich literary activity in his roaming existence under the stress of circumstances, and who wrote works of lasting importance. Graetz points out that ibn Ezra never felt called upon to write a biblical commentary while at home. "As long as he remained in Spain he was only known as a clever mathematician and astronomer, not as an exegete. In general, he produced nothing of a

<sup>117</sup> Sama, 2

literary character in his native land, except perhaps some Hebrew poems of a religious or satirical character.”<sup>118</sup>

The Jewish community of Rome that ibn Ezra found was a community of wealth and foreboding. The Second Crusade was imminent, and there was a sense of claustrophobia in the narrow alleyways of the city's Jewish Quarter. Yet, at the same time there was an openness to new perspectives. In the Christian community, just as ibn Ezra was entering Rome, a bold priest, Arnold of Brescia, was asserting that according to the Gospels the popes did not have the authority to rule, but rather they should live as “true servants of the Church, and act with proper humility.” The result was a sincere interest in freedom and reform. Brescia's followers threw off their allegiance to the papacy, and declared their state a republic (1139-1143). The young people and men who gathered in large numbers to hear ibn Ezra, the great traveler speak, were certainly affected by this new openness and freedom.<sup>119</sup>

And while Rome was a highly respected talmudic center, it had not been aware of the advances in Hebrew grammar that had been done in Spain. Ibn Ezra stayed in Rome for five or six years. There, for money he worked as a tutor for the sons of wealthy benefactors. His books were intended for his students and he usually did not keep a copy for himself. For example, it was for his student, Benjamin ben Joab, that he composed his commentary on Job. It was also in Rome that he wrote a commentary on Kohelet and on the Five Megillot. “The reaction of the Jewish scholars in Rome to the grammatical, yet philosophical and scientific, approach of ibn Ezra was one of astonishment.” It was perhaps in Rome more than anywhere, that ibn Ezra gained a sense of the unique

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<sup>118</sup> Graetz, 368.

<sup>119</sup> Graetz, 370.

approach of Spanish Jewry writing, "in Edom there is no room for a sage who dwells in the land of Kedar"<sup>120</sup>

For unknown reasons, in 1145, ibn Ezra left Rome and traveled north to Lucca. It seems that here he was appreciated. In contrast to the hostility he attracted in Rome by the novelty of his approach, he was admired and supported. While Lucca could not compare in stature with the much bigger Jewish center in Rome, it still had forty Jewish families, consisting of some two hundred people and had a rich history as a center of Talmud study.<sup>121</sup>

It was in Lucca that ibn Ezra wrote his first version of commentary on the Torah, calling it "Sefer ha-Yashar". He would write a later version in French which would be longer, although this first composition is regarded as the standard version and is the one that is included in the authoritative *Mikra 'ot Gedolot*. It was written following a severe illness during which he had taken an oath that if he lived, he would "expound the Law given on Mount Sinai." And so, at the age of sixty four, ibn Ezra wrote his masterpiece, the torah commentary.<sup>122</sup>

Only a year later ibn Ezra was again on the move heading north east to Mantua in 1146, and then Verona in 1147. In 1148, he left the Italian states and went to Beziers, Provence in 1155, and then Normandy. He left the continent and went to England in 1158 (and then perhaps back to Provence in 1160). In each place he would write books dedicated to his patrons and students. In his last work, *Safah Berurah*, he wrote that he hope it would be a legacy of Abraham the son of Meir, and will preserve his memory from generation to generation." Finally, according to one tradition, while in England he

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<sup>120</sup> Lancaster, 6.

<sup>121</sup> Lancaster, 6.

<sup>122</sup> Sarna, 3.

was fatally attacked by "anarchic English hordes in a forest north of London dying at an old age of seventy-five."<sup>123</sup>

Ibn Ezra's most enduring legacy was his commentary on the Torah, *Sefer Ha-Yashar*. It begins with an introduction that discusses four historic approaches that have commented on the Torah. Followed by a fifth approach, the best one of course, ibn Ezra's personal approach. In outlining these approaches, ibn Ezra reveals the historic influences that helped influence and determine his own approach.

The first approach is the one associated with the Babylonian Geonim, "the sages of the academies in the Arabic kingdom". From the end of the sixth to the eleventh centuries the Geonim were Judaism's most respected teachers. Ibn Ezra calls them "the great sages who were yeshivah scholars of the Muslim realms". The Geonim's interpretation of the Talmud, their responsa, and their emphasis of *pshat* had a profound impact on later Jewish scholars. Aggadah became seen as a "potential source of trouble that had to be neutralized" as Muslims challenged its methodology with logic. Instead, *pshat* became the method of choice as its definition grew from "simple or plain meaning" to a term for "authoritative".<sup>124</sup> The Geonim also brought Muslim hermeneutics and philosophy into Jewish exegesis. They redefined and upheld the importance of Oral Torah, and lay the foundation for the Spanish study of philology. Ibn Ezra criticizes the Geonim for their wordiness and deviations from the text. Their commentaries, he sees, as

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<sup>123</sup> One tradition holds that after England ibn Ezra traveled to northern Africa and Egypt, Eretz Yisrael, Bagdad and even India although current academic thinking disputes this. Yet others point to evidence that ibn Ezra died in Calahorra-(in northern Spain on the boundary between Navarre and Old Castile), it must be supposed that a longing to see his old Spanish home made him leave Rome and that he died on the way on Spanish soil....as Lancaster points out dying on the road "derekh on the straight path towards God.

<sup>124</sup> Lancaster, 122-125.

diffuse and possessing extraneous matter drawn from the secular science that made them too long.<sup>125</sup>

The commentary of Saadia Gaon (892-942),<sup>126</sup> one of the most famous Geonim, is frequently quoted within the first two chapters of Genesis. Ibn Ezra, with his familiarity with Arabic, was able to read Saadia's commentary and introduce it to Christian Europe. As Judah ibn Tibbon, a contemporary of ibn Ezra wrote, "the exile in France and throughout Christian lands do not know Arabic so that these [Arabic] works were a sealed book to them, inaccessible, unless translated into the sacred tongue... until the sage Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra arrived in their lands and aided them with short compositions."<sup>127</sup>

Ibn Ezra criticized Saadia<sup>128</sup> for translating expressions whose meaning was not known through tradition. Saadia had done so presumably so that the Muslim reader would not think that the Bible contains words which are unintelligible. Saadia, in his commentary, offers four proofs for the doctrine of creation. Three of these show the influence of Aristotelian philosophy. It leads him to believe that the world was not created *ex-nihilo*. Ibn Ezra was heavily influenced by the Geonic exegesis and values. Their respect for knowledge, ibn Ezra subsumed under his term grammar.<sup>129</sup> "Ibn Ezra realized that in order to persuade a contemporary Ashkenazi readership of the superiority of his 'grammatical' path, emphases other than the purely rationalistic and linguistic were to be required."

<sup>125</sup> Sarna, 5.

<sup>126</sup> Gaon of Sura and the founder of scientific activity in Judaism; born in Dilaž, Upper Egypt, 892; died at Sura 942. The name "Saadia," which, so far as is known, he was the first to bear, is apparently an artificial Hebrew equivalent of his Arabic name, "Sa'id."

<sup>127</sup> Sarna, 6.

<sup>128</sup> Genesis 2:11

<sup>129</sup> Lancaster, 141.

The second approach that ibn Ezra identifies is the exegesis of the Karaites. The Karaites who over the course of centuries had settled in Christian Spain had brought with them their large literature of Eastern and Egyptian thought. Their rejection of the Oral Law challenged ibn Ezra's personal struggle with the status of commentary in the Jewish tradition and the relative importance of Oral and Written Torah. The emphasis placed on the Karaite position is perhaps the result of a resurgence in Karaite activity culminating in the 1149 book that challenged once again Rabbinic Judaism. It resulted in the Rabbinic authorities calling in the secular authorities to persecute the Karaites and ended with Jehuda Ibn-Ezra humbling the Karaites so sorely that they were never again able to raise their heads."<sup>130</sup>

Ibn Ezra faults the Karaites for not adhering to the traditional teachings laid down in the Oral Torah, for rejecting the tradition and authority of oral law and for their willingness to arbitrarily interpret the Torah.<sup>131</sup> He felt that the Karaites were wrong in thinking they could understand the Bible without the aid of tradition. In his explicit criticism of this group, ibn Ezra is affirming his allegiance to the establishment at a time when ambiguity was not permissible.<sup>132</sup>

The third approach that ibn Ezra identified is the Christian's path. Ibn Ezra attacks this method for its excessive use of allegories even when perfectly reasonable simple explanations could suffice. The Christian church since Jerome's translation, had resulted in Christian commentaries carrying as much authority as Scripture itself. "Thus

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<sup>130</sup> Graetz, 1164-66.

<sup>131</sup> Sarna, 5.

<sup>132</sup> In truth, it seems that ibn Ezra's view of the Karaites was ambivalent, even admiring and emulating much of their exegetical work. He respected their linguistic skills, but ultimately feared their individualistic approach that promoted anarchy and challenged the sanctity of the text by using rational and common-senses to demonstrate apparent absurdities in Oral Torah. Lancaster, 141.

paralleling the attitude displayed towards the Talmud by the Babylonian Geonim.”<sup>133</sup>

Seeking to resolve inconsistencies, and justify their practices they resorted to metaphor, allegory, and “the spirit of the law”. Ibn Ezra, while not rejecting the mystical approach says that the text can have two meanings at same time, straightforward and mystical. Ibn Ezra accuses the Christian technique of being esoteric, subjective, and allegorical. “The Torah was not given to the unintelligent, the intellect must be the intermediary between man and his God” In his critique against the Christians in his introduction, ibn Ezra is attacking not only Christian exegesis, but Jewish exegetes who threatened to undermine the keeping of the mitzvot by espousing philosophical allegory.<sup>134</sup>

Finally, the fourth approach that ibn Ezra criticizes is the midrashic path espoused by the majority of the Ashkenazi thinkers of his day. While saying that these thinkers must be respected, he then proceeds to ridicule aspects of their midrashic approach that are plainly contradicted by science and common sense. We witness here the great divide that had been created between Sephardi and Ashkenazi thought. Perhaps, aware of his situation, (he is writing this among the Ashkenazi thinkers), he writes that this approach comes closest to truth. Yet he is insistent on applying the sciences that he is learning and challenges the modern compilers of midrashic anthologies who had become too literalistic.

The fifth path that ibn Ezra offers is his own, an approach that he feels is a “direct path to God,” It is a path that demands knowledge of grammar, science, and all contemporary subjects as well as insight into Written and Oral Torah. Elsewhere he writes “understanding the biblical text without being an expert in grammar is like

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<sup>133</sup> Lancaster, 60.

<sup>134</sup> Lancaster, 61-63.

'banging your head against a brick wall':<sup>135</sup> His own system was the plain straightforward meaning of the text, determined by grammatical philological, contextual research. Ibn Ezra here seems to want, in much the same manner as Rashi, to offer a clear simple natural reasonable way but challenges that Rashi had added to the simple sense of the passage the fanciful meaning which ibn Ezra disapproved of.

Delving into Ibn Ezra's commentary and looking at his comments on the opening three words, one is struck by his style. His comments, for the most part, focus on particular words, rather than verses. He points out a grammatical variance, follows with a discussion of how those prior to him have addressed the issue, and then he offer his own opinion that explains the contradictions away using numerous biblical references for support. This method has been called "philosophical grammar". Behind each grammatical error there is hidden a divine lesson. It is characteristically ibn Ezra. He stands out, perhaps greater than his predecessors in his search for meaning between the letters of a word rather than looking at the word in the bigger picture.<sup>136</sup>

Ibn Ezra begins by questioning the superfluous ב in the opening word as Rashi had done. חכמינו אמרו שהביית נוסף כביית בראשונה. After demonstrating that the bet is not used as others had thought it was by using Hebrew grammar, (קמץ גדול), ibn Ezra writes that he believes בראשית is in the construct form and, while not quoting Rashi, offers the same proof text<sup>137</sup> to demonstrate that the text should read, "In the beginning of God's creating of the heavens and the earth, the earth was unformed and desolate."

<sup>135</sup> Lancaster, 9.

<sup>136</sup> This is more in the style of the midrashic school of Akiba than Ishmael.

<sup>137</sup> Hosea 1:2

Ibn Ezra questions the interpretation of ברא as creation *ex nihilo*.

Demonstrating by examples found elsewhere in the text<sup>138</sup>, ibn Ezra then offers alternative meanings found elsewhere in the bible that it means to urge to eat<sup>139</sup> or to cut down.<sup>140</sup> While ibn Ezra leaves it at that saying, "The meaning of *bara* is to cut or to set a boundary. The intelligent person will understand what I am alluding to". Husik explains that,<sup>141</sup> "an eternal matter was endowed with form". Ibn Ezra seems to be a neo-Platonist who describes that creation spoken here was God giving form to what had previously been created. Finally, ibn Ezra pointing out that the name for God used here, Elohim, is plural. Using his knowledge of languages he points out that in Arabic as well as Hebrew there is use of the "royal we".

Ibn Ezra's comments reflect his knowledge of the biblical commentators before him, his focus on the *pshat*, his use of grammar and language to interpret the text, and his "subtle" suggestions at what were in his day radical philosophical ideas.

Ibn Ezra, was a product of his time. His Jewish learning enriched by his exposure to Muslim Spain's linguistic, philosophic, and scientific advances, took on meaning in a foreign land that had not been exposed to such learning. With the Christian Reconquest, and destruction of the Jewish community of Spain feeling imminent, ibn Ezra was able, despite the political upheaval, his troubled family life, the poverty, and the loneliness, to leave a transformative commentary on the Torah that would forever change the way Jews and ultimately all peoples looked at this sacred text.

<sup>138</sup> Genesis 1:27, Isaiah 45:7

<sup>139</sup> I. Samuel 12:17

<sup>140</sup> Joshua 17:15

<sup>141</sup> I. Husik, *History of Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, (New York: Dover Publications, 2002). 207

Graetz describes ibn-Ezra as "an inexorable critic and a slave of the letter of the Law, a rationalist and a mystic, a deeply religious man, and an astrologer. These contradictions did not mark successive stages in his life, but they controlled the whole course of his existence."<sup>142</sup> While saying that his method is grammatical, it is much more than that. Striving to bring in God, it is a religious journey paving away for the kabbalists who follow him. Perhaps he is, as he describes himself, "a dwarf standing on the shoulders of giants".

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<sup>142</sup> Graetz, 367.

## אבן עזרא – בראשית פרק א

## (א) בראשית ברא אלהים את השמים ואת הארץ :

בראשית - (Why is this word written in this form?)<sup>1</sup>

Our sages taught that the letter "ב" (of בראשית, in the beginning) is superfluous. They compare it to the "ב" in the word בראשונה (at the first)<sup>143</sup>. We know the bet in ב-ראשונה to be superfluous for we find [examples where the "ב" is unnecessary such as in] "they shall set forth first (ראשונה)"<sup>144</sup>. However, if this were so the bet (of בראשית) would be vocalized with a long *kamat-* [as in the case of בראשונה]. Other scholars maintain that the word בראש is always in the construct and its meaning in our verse is: "In the beginning of the evening, or of the night, or of the darkness." However, they have overlooked [the example of] "And he chose a first part (ראשית) for himself".<sup>145</sup> Others say that the "ב" of בראשית is a preposition. They explain that Scripture intends to preclude the thought that heaven and earth were preexisting. Hence it states, "In the beginning".

In my opinion, בראשית is in the construct, as in "In the beginning of (בראשית) the reign of Jehoiakim."<sup>146</sup> Don't ask, how can a word in the construct be connected to a verb in the perfect. This presents no problem, for we find that very case in the verse, "When the Lord spoke at first with Hosea,"<sup>147</sup> and in the verse "the city where David encamped."<sup>148</sup> The meaning of בראשית will be explained in our comments on the next verse.

ברא - (What does this word come to teach?)<sup>u</sup>

Most Biblical commentators explain that the word ברא (created) indicates creation *ex nihilo*. [As in] "If the Lord make (יברא) a new thing (בריאה)."<sup>149</sup> However, they have overlooked, "And God created (ויברא) the great sea monsters."<sup>150</sup> And the three times the word created is used in one verse, "And God created (ויברא) man [in His own image, in the image of God He created (ברא) him; male and female He created (ברא) them]."<sup>151</sup> They also failed to consider "I form the light, and create darkness"<sup>152</sup> wherein darkness, which is the opposite of light, an existing entity, is described by the prophet as being created.

This is the precise explanation of the word ברא: "ברא" has two meanings, one of which has been noted above [that is to make]. The second is found in the verse "neither did he eat (ברא) bread with them."<sup>153</sup> However, in the latter case, an "א" has been substituted for a "ה". The reason is that ברא [in I Sam. 12:17] is similar to להברות (to urge

<sup>143</sup> Genesis 13:4<sup>144</sup> Numbers 2:9<sup>145</sup> Deuteronomy 33:21<sup>146</sup> Jeremiah 26:1<sup>147</sup> Hosea 1:2<sup>148</sup> Isaiah 29:1<sup>149</sup> Numbers 16:30<sup>150</sup> Genesis 1:21<sup>151</sup> Genesis 1:27<sup>152</sup> Isaiah 45:7<sup>153</sup> II Samuel 12:17

to eat). "And all the people came to cause David to eat (להברות) bread."<sup>154</sup> The verb להברות appears in the *hifil* [and its root ends with the letter "ה"], for if it ended with an "א", Scripture would have read להבראיכם, as in "to make yourselves fat (להבראיכם) with the first portions of all the offerings of Israel."<sup>155</sup>

We also find ברא conjugated in the *pi'el*, as in "and cut down (ובראת) for thyself (trees)."<sup>156</sup> This is not like the similar word "ברר" in "choose (ברו) you a man for you",<sup>157</sup> but rather like "cut them (וברא) down".<sup>158</sup> The meaning of ברא is to cut or to set a boundary. The intelligent person will understand what I am alluding to.

#### אלהים - (Why is this written in the plural form?)<sup>iii</sup>

[The Name of God] is plural. We know this because we come across the singular form "אלוה".<sup>159</sup> Elohim is employed stylistically. Every language has honorific terminology. In the non-Hebrew tongues when an inferior addresses a superior he employs the plural. In Arabic (in the language of Ishmael) it is customary for a dignitary such as a king to speak in the plural. In Hebrew (Holy language), too, it is considered a sign of dignity to employ the plural when speaking of a superior. Such is the case with the words אדנים (lords) and בעלים (owners). Thus the Bible says, "a cruel lord (אדנים)"<sup>160</sup> and "the owner (בעליו) shall accept it."<sup>161</sup> The terms עליו (upon him), אליו (to him), and אדיו (till him) are similar [in that they all have plural endings yet are used to indicate singulars]. It is for this reason that the verse reads "ברא אלהים" and not "בראו אלהים".

We know from the study of logic that speech is called שפה because it is seen to come from the lips. Similarly man's highest soul is called heart (לב) even though the soul itself is incorporeal while the heart is corporeal. It is referred to in this manner because the heart is its first resting place. Similarly God is called אלהים because His actions are executed via angels who do His will and who are referred to as אלהים. I will explain part of the secret of God's name when I comment on "for My name is in him."<sup>162</sup>

Pay no heed to the opinion of Rabbi Saadiah Gaon who holds that man is superior to the angels. I have already explained to you in *The Book of Foundation* that all of his proofs are wrong. We know that the prophets are the most exalted human beings. Nevertheless, the prophet Joshua fell upon his face and prostrated himself before God's angel and said to him, "What does my lord command his servant?"<sup>163</sup> The same is true of the prophets Zechariah and Daniel. Why should I elaborate when this point is so elementary?

The meaning of "Lord of Hosts (אלהי הצבאות)" is the same as "God of gods (אלהי)".<sup>164</sup> The definition of אלהים (lord) is angels. People engaged in the dispensation of God's justice are also called אלהים. אלהים is an adjective, not a proper noun. It is not found conjugated in the perfect or imperfect.

<sup>154</sup> II Samuel 3:35

<sup>155</sup> I Samuel 2:29

<sup>156</sup> Joshua 17:15

<sup>157</sup> I Samuel 17:8

<sup>158</sup> Ezekiel 23:47

<sup>159</sup> Psalm 114:7

<sup>160</sup> Isaiah 19:4

<sup>161</sup> Exodus 22:10

<sup>162</sup> Exodus 23:2

<sup>163</sup> Joshua 5:14

<sup>164</sup> Deuteronomy 10:17

One should not assume that angels are composed of fire and air because the Bible states, "He makes the winds His messengers, [fiery flames His servants]" (Psalms 104:4). But this is not the literal meaning of this verse, [God doesn't actually make angels out of wind]. David, rather, speaks first of creation, starting with light and saying, "He is wrapped in a robe of light; You spread the heavens like a tent cloth,"<sup>165</sup> which refers to the firmament upon which is water, fire, snow and wind. David next says that the wind serves as God's agent; i.e., it goes wherever God sends it. He speaks in a similar vein of fire as one of God's ministers. David then says, "He established the earth on its foundations,"<sup>166</sup> which refers to dry land. Similarly it is written, "Stormy wind, fulfilling His word."<sup>167</sup>

**(What purpose does this word serve?)<sup>168</sup> - את**

"את" indicates the very thing. It signifies the direct object, as in the heaven (שמים). However, sometimes it is omitted, as in that "God created man."<sup>168</sup> It is also found placed before the subject, as in and when there came a lion, or a bear.<sup>169</sup> However, the latter usage is very rare. Furthermore, את is used in place of with or from.<sup>170</sup>

**(Why is this specific?)<sup>171</sup> - השמים**

The definite article (ה) is placed before heaven (שמים) to indicate that the Bible speaks of the heaven visible to man. Heaven (שמים) is always written in the plural. It is possible that "its authority" in "Do you know the laws of heaven or impose its authority on earth?"<sup>171</sup> refers to "the authority" by each one of the heavenly spheres.

The meaning of שמים (heaven) is high and above, as it is in Arabic, a language akin in form to Hebrew. There is also a "heaven of heavens".<sup>172</sup> The word שמים is never written in the singular. It is like the words millstone (רחים) and noon (צהרים). Those who are well-versed in geometry will understand these secrets.

Saadia Gaon says that the earth may be compared to a point and the heaven to a thread circling it. Since the Bible tells us that heaven and earth were created, we deduce from this that all their contents, such as fire and water, were also created. Others say that the earth includes water and the heaven air. However, in my opinion the heaven and earth spoken of in our verse refer only to the firmament and the dry land. For only one thing was created on each day. Thus light was created on the first day, the firmament on the second, plants on the third, luminaries on the fourth, and living creatures on the fifth and the sixth. This interpretation is borne out by the psalm quoted above (Psalm 104).

It is impossible to maintain that the line circling the dot was created before the dot, or the dot before the circle. Hence our sages say that heaven and earth were created simultaneously.<sup>173</sup> They offer as proof of their viewpoint, "I call unto them, let them stand up together."<sup>174</sup> However, this proof is questionable. The plain meaning of this verse is not so, for how could God address that which was not yet created? How could He

<sup>165</sup> Psalm 104:2

<sup>166</sup> Psalm 104:5

<sup>167</sup> Psalm 148:8

<sup>168</sup> Deuteronomy 4:32

<sup>169</sup> I Samuel 17:34

<sup>170</sup> Exodus 2:21; 9:29

<sup>171</sup> Job 38:33

<sup>172</sup> Psalm 148:4

<sup>173</sup> Hagigah 12a

<sup>174</sup> Isaiah 48:13

call to that which was in a chaotic state? The explanation of this verse is as follows: "When I call them, they stand before Me together as servants ready to do My will". The meaning of this verse is similar to that of "Your word stands fast in heaven."<sup>175</sup> After stating this, the Psalmist makes mention of the earth.<sup>176</sup> He then goes on to say that heaven and earth stand ready to execute any commands that God will direct to them.<sup>177</sup>

(ב) והארץ היתה תהו ובהו וחשך על פני תהום ורוח אלהים מרחפת על פני המים :

**והארץ - (Grammar)**

The word הארץ (the earth) is irregular in that it is always vocalized with a *kamat* beneath both the ה and the א. It is unlike the word האלף (the thousand) in "Thou, O Solomon, shall have the thousand (ha-clef)"<sup>178</sup>, or "and this stone (האבן)".<sup>179</sup>

**תהו - (Meaning)<sup>180</sup>**

Saadia Gaon claims that the word תהו (unformed) is a derivative of "מתהום" (the deep). This explanation is not correct because the "מ" of מתהום is a root letter like the "מ" of "הדום" (footstool).

The Sefer Yetzirah explains תהו (unformed) and בהו (void) as follows: תהו refers to the green line; בהו alludes to the smooth stones. However, the correct meaning of these terms is found in the Aramaic translation of the Pentateuch. We similarly read, "And in the waste (תהו), a howling wilderness,"<sup>180</sup> and go after vain things (תהו),<sup>181</sup> which means worshipping things that have no substance.<sup>59</sup>

**ובהו - (Meaning)**

בהו is a synonym of תהו. The "ו" of תהו and בהו are in place of a "ה". They are like the "ו" of "וישתחו" (and he bowed) and the "ו" of "אחו" (reed-grass) in "They fed in the reed-grass".<sup>182</sup> The meaning of our verses is this: When the creation of the firmament and the dry land took place, the earth was uninhabited because it was covered with water. God created the earth in such a way that by the laws of nature it would be below the waters. Do not reject this interpretation because of the "ו" that is placed before the words "the earth" (והארץ), for its meaning is identical to that of the Arabic *fa*. The "ו" placed before the word mist in "but there went up a mist (וּאֵד) from the earth."<sup>183</sup>

Our verses are to be so interpreted because Moses did not speak of the eternal world, which is the world of the angels; he spoke only of the transient world. How can those who say that the word heaven in the first verse refers to the highest heavens explain the presence of the earth in the same verse? Intelligent people have reputable proof that there is only one earth. As to the Midrash, when it says that there are seven earths it means that the area of the world inhabited by human beings is divided into seven

<sup>175</sup> Psalm 119:89

<sup>176</sup> Psalm 119:90

<sup>177</sup> Psalm 119:91

<sup>178</sup> Canticles 8:12

<sup>179</sup> Genesis 28:22

<sup>180</sup> Deuteronomy 32:10

<sup>181</sup> I Samuel 12:21

<sup>182</sup> Genesis 41:2

<sup>183</sup> Genesis 2:6

sections.<sup>184</sup> The Holy Temple was in the center of the inhabited world.<sup>69</sup> It was not in the center of the earth because we know that it was far from there.

**רוח אלהים - iii (Grammar)**

רוח (wind) is in the construct with אלהים (God) because it was the medium employed by God to dry the Land.<sup>70</sup>

**המים - (Grammar)**

Waters is in the plural. It does not come in a singular form. It belongs to the dual forms. The latter being either masculine or feminine. מים is also found used in the singular in "the water of sprinkling was not dashed against him."<sup>185</sup>

**מרחפת - (Meaning)**

מרחפת (hovered) means "blowing above the waters." Similar to, "As an eagle... hovers (ירחף) over her young."<sup>186</sup>

**(ג) ויאמר אלהים יהי אור ויהי אור:**

**ויאמר - viii (Grammar)**

Saadia Gaon interprets ויאמר אלהים (and God said), as "and God wanted". However, if this were the case the Bible should have stated God wanted (said) light to be. Therefore ויאמר אלהים is to be rendered "and God said." We similarly read, "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made."<sup>187</sup> and "For He commanded, and they were created."<sup>188</sup> The Bible describes creation as coming about by God's word because it wants to teach us that heaven and earth came into being without any labor on God's part. We may compare this to a king assigning certain tasks to his servants.

**אור - (What is this light referring to?)**

The light spoken of in this verse was above the air.

**(ד) וירא אלהים את האור כי טוב ויבדל אלהים בין האור ובין החשך:**

**וירא - ix (Grammar)**

"Saw" is to be understood here as perceived. Compare, "Then I saw that wisdom is superior to folly."<sup>189</sup> The meaning of "divided" is: He divided them by naming one, day and the other, night.

**(ה) ויקרא אלהים לאור יום ולחשך קרא לילה ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום אחד:**

**ויקרא - (Grammar)**

The "ה" of לילה (night) is superfluous, because the word is pen-ultimately accented. It is always a masculine noun.

**ערב - (Meaning)**

<sup>184</sup> Zohar Chadash 1:216

<sup>185</sup> Numbers 19:13

<sup>186</sup> Deuteronomy 32:11

<sup>187</sup> Psalm 33:6

<sup>188</sup> Psalm 148:5

<sup>189</sup> Ecclesiastes 2: 13

It is close in meaning to חשך (darkness). ערב is so called because forms were then intermingled (ערב). The opposite of evening is called בקר (morning) because one can then distinguish between various forms.

**יום אחד - (Meaning)**

One day refers to the movement of the sphere. There is a secret meaning to the Midrashic statement to the effect that the world will exist for six thousand years.<sup>190</sup> Once it is stated that God called the light "day," it is impossible to maintain that the evening, too, is considered part of the day. The correct interpretation of "And there was evening and there was morning, one day" is that evening passed and the morning of the first day also came. If the intention of this verse is to teach that evening and morning make a day, then what is the meaning of, "And there was evening and there was morning, a second day."<sup>191</sup>

**(ו) ויאמר אלהים יהי רקיע בתוך המים ויהי מבדיל בין מים למים :**

**ויאמר - (How was it created?)<sup>192</sup>**

Saadia Gaon says things about the firmament that are not so. The correct interpretation of firmament (רקיע) is something spread out, as in "And they did beat (וירקעו)"<sup>192</sup> and "Then did I beat them (ארקעם)";<sup>193</sup> and, "And spread them out as a tent to dwell in."<sup>194</sup> How precious are the words of he who said that the firmament begins at the point where the sun and the ocean merge. The firmament is the air because when the light shone very strongly upon the earth and a wind dried off from the earth, the flame turned into the firmament. Similarly, the Psalmist states, "You spread the heavens like a tent cloth. He sets the rafter of His lofts in the waters."<sup>195</sup> The Psalmist then makes mention of the clouds and the wind and the establishment of the earth. The latter is above the waters. We thus read, "For He founded it (the earth) upon the ocean,"<sup>196</sup> and "Who spread the earth over the water."<sup>197</sup> Similarly whoever goes to the ocean is said to be going down.<sup>198</sup> The meaning of (He) summons the waters of the sea and pours (וישפכם) them out upon the earth.<sup>199</sup> is that God commands the waters of the sea to give birth to clouds, and, afterward, (וישפכם).

**(ז) ויעש אלהים את הרקיע ויבדל בין המים אשר מתחת לרקיע ובין המים אשר מעל לרקיע ויהי כן :**

**ויעש - (Grammar)**

Dividing one thing from another is expressed by placing the preposition בן (between) before the first object and a "ל" before the second, as in "And let it divide

<sup>190</sup> Sanhedrin 97a

<sup>191</sup> Genesis 1:8

<sup>192</sup> Exodus 39:3

<sup>193</sup> II Samuel 22:43

<sup>194</sup> Isaiah 40:22

<sup>195</sup> Psalm 104:2

<sup>196</sup> Psalm 24:2

<sup>197</sup> Psalm 136:6

<sup>198</sup> Psalm 107:23

<sup>199</sup> Amos 5:8

[between] the waters (בין מים) from the waters (למים)<sup>200</sup> and "between the holy (בין קדש) and the common (לחול)".<sup>201</sup> It may also be expressed by placing the preposition (בין) before each one of the objects, as in our verse "and divided the waters" (בין המים) which were under the firmament from the waters ((ובין המים)) which were above the firmament." And it is found with the word בין repeated and a "ל" before the second object, as in "But your iniquities have separated between you (ביניכם) and your God (להיכם)".<sup>202</sup>

**ויהי כן - (What is the purpose of this phrase?)**

This phrase is connected to the verse which follows it "When it was so, God called the firmament heaven."

**(ח) ויקרא אלהים לרקיע שמים ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום שני : פ**

**ויקרא - (Observation)**

There are five things which God named because there was then no man to name them. They are: light, darkness, heaven, earth and the seas. In addition, God named man.

**(ט) ויאמר אלהים יקוו המים מתחת השמים אל מקום אחד ותראה היבשה ויהי כן**

**ויאמר אלהים - (Understanding the order of creation)<sup>21</sup>**

I believe that this chapter is connected to the one preceding it because the firmament did not come into being until the land dried. Proof of this is Scripture's statement, "On the day that the Lord God made earth and heaven".<sup>203</sup> Thus they were made on the same day. The revelation of something which had previously been hidden (the earth) or the gathering of something which was scattered (the water) into one place is not a creation. The meaning of our verse is: now God had said, "Let the waters under the heaven be gathered". There are hundreds of similar instances in the Torah. I will offer two examples from the portion of Beresheet. The first is, "and placed there the man whom He had formed."<sup>204</sup> After stating this, the Bible goes on to say, "And out of the ground the Lord God..."<sup>205</sup> However, God caused vegetation and trees to sprout before the creation of man.

The second example is when God commanded man not to eat from the tree of knowledge.<sup>206</sup> However, immediately after this it is written, "And the Lord God formed out of the earth."<sup>207</sup> The meaning of formed thus is had formed. According to this interpretation it follows that "And God saw that it was good"<sup>208</sup> is connected to the act of creation which took place on the second day. The account of the creation which took place on the third day thus begins with "And God said: Let the earth put forth grass."<sup>209</sup>

<sup>200</sup> Genesis 1:6

<sup>201</sup> Ezekiel 44:23

<sup>202</sup> Isaiah 59:2

<sup>203</sup> Genesis 2:4

<sup>204</sup> Genesis 2:8

<sup>205</sup> Genesis 2:9

<sup>206</sup> Genesis 2:16

<sup>207</sup> Genesis 2:19

<sup>208</sup> Genesis 1:10

<sup>209</sup> Genesis 1:11

**יקוו - (Meaning)**

The meaning of יקוו is to let them come together. Similar to ונקוו in "and all nations shall be gathered (ונקוו) there".<sup>210</sup> Scripture employs the term seas (ימים) because there is no one name for the sea that surrounds all of the earth.<sup>103</sup>

**(יא) ויאמר אלהים תדשא הארץ דשא עשב מזריע זרע עץ פרי עשה פרי למינו אשר זרעו בו על הארץ ויהי כן :**

**ויאמר אלהים - (What is the purpose of this phrase?)**

It is written [in this verse], "Let the earth sprout," "[Let the waters] swarm",<sup>211</sup> "[Let the earth] bring forth".<sup>212</sup> This teaches that God placed in the earth and in the water the power to bring forth these things at God's command. These are the generations (offspring) of the heaven and the earth.<sup>213</sup>

**תדשא - (Meaning)**

תדשא is like תצמיה (put forth) Where the seed is in each of the fruit and each one produces its own kind.

**(יד) ויאמר אלהים יהי מארת ברקיע השמים להבדיל בין היום ובין הלילה והיו לאתת ולמועדים ולימים ושנים :**

**ויאמר - (Grammar)**

The word יהי (let there be) is short for יהיה. Due to the frequency with which this term is used, it is employed before both the singular and the plural. It is also employed in Scripture with the feminine as in, "If there be (יהיה) a virgin who is engaged to a man."<sup>214</sup>

**לאתת ולמועדים - (Grammar)**

For minutes, and for seasons, i.e., for hours. לאתת may also be interpreted as referring to the eclipse of the moon and the sun and also to shooting stars. For the shooting stars are to be included among the signs produced by the lights of the firmament because they are caused by the stars. This meaning of signs is like signs in "And be not dismayed at the signs of heaven."<sup>215</sup> Anyone who explains the "ל" לאתת (for signs) as superfluous is mistaken.

**והיו לאתת - (Meaning)<sup>216</sup>**

A prominent Spanish sage<sup>216</sup> stated that the firmament is divided into eight parts, seven for the seven spheres of the seven stars and one for the constellations. However, this cannot be so because we know there is no body above the sphere of the constellations. Behold, Scripture explicitly states, "And God set them in the firmament of the heaven", which clearly indicates that there is a heaven above the firmament "The heaven of heavens"<sup>217</sup> and "To Him that rides upon the heaven of heavens, which are of

<sup>210</sup> Jeremiah 3:17

<sup>211</sup> Genesis 1:20

<sup>212</sup> Genesis 1:24

<sup>213</sup> Genesis 2:4

<sup>214</sup> Deuteronomy 22:23

<sup>215</sup> Jeremiah 10:2

<sup>216</sup> Ibn Janah

<sup>217</sup> Nehemiah 9:6

old<sup>218</sup> are similar. Note that the word קדם in the verse quoted above does not mean east but ancient. Indeed, Rabbi Saadiah Gaon, may the righteous be remembered for a blessing, was afraid to comment on this verse. It appears to me that the sun, the moon and other luminaries are called "lights in the firmament" because they are visible there.

(טז) ויעש אלהים את שני המארת הגדלים את המאור הגדל לממשלת היום  
ואת המאור הקטן לממשלת הלילה ואת הכוכבים :

ויעש - (Meaning)

The sun and the moon are called the great lights in contradiction to the stars. Similarly the first three sons of Jesse are called the elders, in contrast to their younger brothers. In reality, Eliab, the first born, was the oldest of them all. As to the Midrash, which states "One was not greater than the other"<sup>219</sup>, there is a secret meaning to it.

לממשלת היום - (Meaning)<sup>218</sup>

The sun rules during the day and not at night because it is not seen. Conversely, the light of the moon and stars are not seen during the day. One may ask, do not the astronomers teach that Jupiter and all the stars, with the exception of Mercury and Venus, are larger than the moon? Why, then, is it written "the great lights"? The answer is that the term great does not refer to size but to light, and the light of the moon is many times greater than their light because of its proximity to the earth. Thus we see that Scripture describes them as lights.

(יז) ויתן אתם אלהים ברקיע השמים להאיר על הארץ:

ויתן - (Meaning)

Do not be surprised that the Torah states, "And God set" for the Torah also says, "I have set My bow in the cloud."<sup>220</sup>

(יח) ולמשל ביום ובלילה ולהבדיל בין האור ובין החשך וירא אלהים כי טוב:

ולמשל - (Meaning)

The day spoken of in the Torah begins at sunrise and lasts until sunset. Night begins when the stars are first visible. Those who say that night begins with the appearance of three stars are correct.<sup>221</sup> Know that evening begins at sunset and lasts for one and a third hours; during which time a light-like appearance is seen in the clouds. Similarly morning dawns before sunrise. When the light of the sun shines during the day and the light of the moon at night, they separate between the light and the dark.

(כ) ויאמר אלהים ישרצו המים שרץ נפש חיה ועוף יעופף על הארץ על פני רקיע השמים :

ויאמר אלהים ישרצו - (Grammar)

<sup>218</sup> Psalm 68:34

<sup>219</sup> Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer Chapt VI

<sup>220</sup> Genesis 9:13

<sup>221</sup> Shabbat 35b

יִשְׂרָצוּ (let it swarm) is a transitive verb, as is שָׂרַץ (swarm) in "And the river shall bring forth swarms of frogs" (וַיִּשְׂרָצוּ).<sup>222</sup>

(Meaning) - יִשְׂרָצוּ

The meaning is that the waters shall produce living beings that will immediately fly.

(Meaning) - יִקְיֶעַ

The verse "And let fowl fly...in the open firmament of heaven" proves my interpretation of the firmament.<sup>227</sup>

(Meaning) - עַל פְּנֵי

Saadia Gaon explains עַל פְּנֵי (in the open) to mean with the face of. Hence, according to the Gaon, the heavens face down.

(Grammar) - יְעוּפֶף

The "פ" of יְעוּפֶף (let fly) is doubled like the "נ" in יָכוֹן (till He establish).<sup>223</sup>

(כא) וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַתַּנִּינִם הַגְּדֹלִים וְאֶת כָּל נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה הַרְמִשָּׁה  
אֲשֶׁר שָׂרָצוּ הַמַּיִם לְמִינֵהֶם וְאֶת כָּל עוֹף כָּנָף לְמִינֵהוּ וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב:

(Meaning) - וַיִּבְרָא...הַרְמִשָּׁה

The meaning of רִמַּשָּׁה (creeps) is walks. Some are of the opinion that the "ש" of רִמַּשָּׁה is in place of a "ס".

(כב) וַיִּבְרָךְ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים לֵאמֹר פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת הַמַּיִם בַּיָּמִים  
וְהָעוֹף יִרְבּוּ בָאָרֶץ:

(Meaning) - וַיִּבְרָךְ

The meaning of "Be fruitful, and multiply" is, "You shall be fruitful and you shall multiply." This is similar to "And die in the mount"<sup>224</sup> because it is not in one's power to determine the time of one's death [nor is it in one's power to conceive].

(כד) וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים תּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה לְמִינָהּ בַּהֵמָה וּרְמֵשׁ וְחַיְתוֹ  
אֶרֶץ לְמִינָהּ וַיְהִי כֵן:

(Meaning) - וַיֹּאמֶר...נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה

It is a general term for what the fire, water and earth gave birth to. It also includes man.

(Meaning)<sup>225</sup> - בַּהֵמָה

Domesticated beasts that are utilized by man for their needs, for riding and for food.

(Meaning) - רְמֵשׁ

Small animals that walk upon the earth.

(Meaning) - וְחַיְתוֹ אֶרֶץ

<sup>222</sup> Exodus 7:28

<sup>223</sup> Isaiah 62:7

<sup>224</sup> Deuteronomy 32:50

Animals that are in the wilderness where there are no human settlements. The "ו" at the end of וחיתו (and beast of) is superfluous. It is like the "ו" of למעינו (into a fountain) in ,into a fountain (למעינו) of waters,<sup>225</sup> and the "ו" in "the son of (בנו) Beor."<sup>226</sup>

(כו) ויאמר אלהים נעשה אדם בצלמנו כדמותנו וירדו בדגת הים ובעוף השמיים ובבהמה ובכל הארץ ובכל הרמש הרמש על הארץ :

נעשה אדם - (Meaning)<sup>227</sup>

Some are of the opinion that נעשה (let us make) is a *nifal* participle and is to be compared to the same word in "Now that which was prepared (נעשה) for one day".<sup>227</sup> They further say that "in our image, after our likeness" are the words of Moses. They also explain the pronominal suffix "his" in "And God created man in His own image"<sup>228</sup> as referring to man, and connect God to *made* rather than to *image*. They read this verse as follows: "For God made man in an image," rather than "for in the image of God made He man."

Now this interpretation is absurd. According to it the first quoted verse should have read, "Let a man be made." Similarly the Bible should have read, "He made him in his image." Furthermore, how can the "his" in "His image" in verse twenty-seven refer to man? If this were the case then man had an image before he was created. Finally, what sense would there be to One who spills the blood of man, for the man his blood shall be spilt because in God's image He made man"?<sup>229</sup> That his blood is spilt because he was created with an image? All living things have an image.

Saadia Gaon explains "in our image, after our likeness" refers to the dominion man exercises on earth. He explains "His image" as the image that God in His wisdom chose for man because He saw that this image was good for man. Saadia Gaon further notes that the Bible connects the image to God (*be-tzelem Elohim*) to stress man's glorified state. Similarly the Bible states, "and are gone forth out of His land".<sup>230</sup> The Bible says this to emphasize the importance of the land of Israel because, in reality, "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof".<sup>231</sup> Saadia Gaon also says that the word נעשה (let us make) has the meaning of the singular even though it is in the plural because it is the plural of majesty. He offers as proof, "and we will give you the other also"<sup>232</sup>, and "we will tell the interpretation before the king",<sup>233</sup> perhaps I can thus defeat them (נכה).<sup>234</sup> However, these witnesses are false witnesses. First of all, "and we will give you (ונתנה)"<sup>235</sup> is a *nifal* and its meaning is "the other will also be given thee." It is like the word נתנה (is given) in "and the city is given (ונתנה)".<sup>236</sup> The *vav conversive* changes נתנה (she was given) to "she will be given (ונתנה)," as is the case with every verb in the perfect

<sup>225</sup> Psalm 114:8

<sup>226</sup> Numbers 24:3

<sup>227</sup> Nehemiah 5:18

<sup>228</sup> Genesis 1:27

<sup>229</sup> Genesis 9:6

<sup>230</sup> Ezekiel 36:20

<sup>231</sup> Psalm 24:1

<sup>232</sup> Genesis 29:27

<sup>233</sup> Daniel 2:36

<sup>234</sup> Numbers 22:6

<sup>235</sup> Genesis 29:27

<sup>236</sup> Jeremiah 32:24

which becomes an imperfect when a *vav conversive* is prefixed to it. Similarly ונכה בו (we may smite them)<sup>237</sup> means, "I and my army will smite them." Further, נכה may be a *piel* infinitive meaning to smite, like נכה (destroy) in "But will not utterly destroy you ( ונקח לא ) (אנקך)."<sup>238</sup> The latter interpretation is supported by the fact that the Bible employs the phrase לא נכו (were not smitten)<sup>239</sup>, and a verb cannot come in the *pual* unless it also comes in the *piel*.

Rabbi Moses Hakohen, the Spaniard, errs in his book. The word נאמר (we will tell)<sup>240</sup> is Aramaic. For if "we will tell" is a plural of majesty, how would Daniel dare to speak in such haughty terms before Nebuchadnezzar who was the "King of Kings"? I will now explain. Note that all the works of creation came into being by God's command for the sake of man. Scripture relates that the earth and water brought forth plants and all living creatures. After all plants and living creatures had been created, God said to the angels, "Let us make man"; i.e., We, rather than the earth and water, will occupy ourselves with his creation. We know that the Torah spoke the language of man,<sup>241</sup> for it was given to humans who speak and hear. Now a human being cannot speak of things above or below him without employing human terminology. Hence Scripture uses such terms as the mouth of the earth,<sup>242</sup> "the hand of the Jordan"<sup>243</sup>, and "the head of the dust of the world."<sup>244</sup>

Far be it from us to believe that God has an image. Scripture clearly refutes such a notion by stating, "To whom then will you liken Me, that I should be equal."<sup>245</sup> It is because man's upper soul is eternal and is compared in its existence to God and because man's soul is incorporeal and fills the body, which is a microcosm, in the same way that God fills the universe that Scripture states, "in our image, after our likeness". May God's name be blessed. He commenced with the macrocosm and concluded with the microcosm. The prophet also says that he saw God's glory appear in human form<sup>246</sup>. God is one. He is the creator of all. He is all. I cannot explain further.

Man was originally created with two faces; man is thus one but also two. "In the image of God" means in the image of the angels. Man was created both male and female. The words "Be fruitful, and multiply" are a blessing not a command, just as they are with regard to the creatures brought forth by the waters. Nevertheless, there is in fact a commandment to be fruitful and multiply transmitted by our sages, of blessed memory, which they attached to this verse in order to remember the commandment.<sup>247</sup>

(כט) ויאמר אלהים הנה נתתי לכם את כל עשב זרע זרע אשר על פני כל הארץ ואת כל העץ אשר בו פרי עץ זרע זרע לכם יהיה לאכלה :

<sup>237</sup> Numbers 22:6

<sup>238</sup> Jeremiah 46:28

<sup>239</sup> Exodus 9:32

<sup>240</sup> Daniel 2:36

<sup>241</sup> Brachot 31b

<sup>242</sup> Numbers 16:30

<sup>243</sup> Numbers 13:29

<sup>244</sup> Proverbs 8:26

<sup>245</sup> Isaiah 40:25

<sup>246</sup> Ezekiel 1:26

<sup>247</sup> Kiddushin 35a

**ויאמר אלהים הנה נתתי לכם - (Meaning)**

God permitted mankind and every living thing to eat all herbs. He also permitted man to eat the fruits of the trees and limited the animals and creeping things to green herbs. At this point in time the consumption of flesh was not permitted. That came after the flood.

**(לא) וירא אלהים את כל אשר עשה והנה טוב מאד ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום הששי :**

**וירא...יום הששי - (Grammar)**

Some say that the word יום (day) is in the construct with sixth, and the meaning of יום הששי (the sixth day) is the day of the sixth sphere. They say the same with regard to יום השביעי (the seventh day). However, they are wrong. Proof of their error is found in the teaching of the astrologers who tell us who the lord of the sixth day is. The meaning of יום הששי, then, is the sixth day from day one. This is also the meaning of the seventh day. We similarly find איש הישראלי (the Israelite man)<sup>248</sup> and many such cases, among them הרקיע השמים,<sup>249</sup> which should be rendered as "the firmament which is heaven."

**אבן עזרא - בראשית פרק ב**

**(א) ויכלו השמים והארץ וכל צבאם :**

**ויכלו - (Grammar)**

ויכלו is a *pual* verb following the paradigm of ויכסו (were covered) in "all the high mountains...were covered".<sup>250</sup> It means: "They were finished." The earth includes the oceans since they form one entity.

**(ב) ויכל אלהים ביום השביעי מלאכתו אשר עשה וישבת ביום השביעי מכל מלאכתו אשר עשה :**

**ויכל אלהים ביום השביעי(?) (What is the purpose of the letter ב?)**

Some say that the days are created, and with the creation of the seventh day, God's work was finished. However, this interpretation is ridiculous. Others say that the "ב" may indicate before, as in "Do not muzzle an ox before it threshes"<sup>251</sup> (בדישו), and "But before the first day (ביום הראשון) you shall remove all leaven shall from your houses."<sup>252</sup> However, why go through all this trouble when finishing work is not work? Saying God finished is equivalent to saying God did no work. This is the meaning of "God finished" and of "and He rested". His work which He had made refers to the work

<sup>248</sup> Leviticus 24:10

<sup>249</sup> Genesis 1:20

<sup>250</sup> Genesis 7:19

<sup>251</sup> Deuteronomy 25:4

<sup>252</sup> Exodus 12:15

that he had done on Friday prior to the onset of the Sabbath. And He rested on the seventh day from all His work pertains to all creations that God brought into being.

**(ג) ויברך אלהים את יום השביעי ויקדש אתו כי בו שבת מכל מלאכתו אשר ברא אלהים לעשות**

**ויברך אלהים - (Meaning)<sup>253</sup>**

A blessing means an increase in well being. And on this day, (Shabbat), there comes about in peoples' bodies a kind of power in their nature, and in their souls, an increase in ones intellectual and reasoning capabilities.

**ויקדש אתו - (Meaning)**

No work was done on the Sabbath, in contrast to the other six days.

**אשר ברא אלהים לעשות - (Meaning)**

Its meaning is: God placed in the root of all the species the power to reproduce themselves. I disagree with the person who explains לעשות (had made) as having the same meaning as עשה (made) and likewise עשה to be in place of ברא (create). Saadiah Gaon explains that the blessing and the holiness spoken of in this verse refer to those who observe the Sabbath, i.e. that they will be blessed and sanctified.

**(ד) אלה תולדות השמים והארץ בהבראם ביום עשות יי אלהים ארץ ושמים :**

**אלה תולדות - (Meaning)**

Meaning what they brought forth.

**בהבראם - (Meaning)**

When the firmament had come to be and the earth became visible.

**ביום עשות יי אלהים - (Meaning)**

עשות means fixing. The proof of this can be seen in "and He hastened to fix it",<sup>253</sup> and in "Whom I have created.. I have formed him.. I have made him."<sup>254</sup>

**(ה) וכל שיח השדה טרם יהיה בארץ וכל עשב השדה טרם יצמח כי לא המטיר יי אלהים על הארץ ואדם אין לעבד את האדמה :**

**שיח - (Meaning)**

שיח (shrub) means a tree: so, too, in "Among the bushes" (השיחים) they shall bray".<sup>255</sup> In my opinion שיח refers to a fruit-bearing tree, because the Bible compares man to a tree. Behold, the Bible employs such terms as tree (שיח), fruit<sup>256</sup>, bough,<sup>257</sup> limb,<sup>258</sup> top of a tree,<sup>259</sup> and branch<sup>260</sup> when speaking of man.

<sup>253</sup> Genesis 18:7

<sup>254</sup> Isaiah 43:7

<sup>255</sup> Job 30:7

<sup>256</sup> Malachi 1:12

<sup>257</sup> Psalm 119:113

<sup>258</sup> Job 18:13

<sup>259</sup> Deuteronomy 26:18

<sup>260</sup> Psalm 94:19

**(ו) ואד יעלה מן הארץ והשקה את כל פני האדמה :**

**אד - (Meaning)**

אד (mist) means smoke or cloud. Similar to this is: "In thee day of their doom" <sup>261</sup> (אידם). A bad day is called a cloudy day and a day of thick darkness. The meaning of our verse is that a mist arose from the earth by means of the luminaries, watered the ground, and caused it to sprout. However, Saadiah Gaon explains as follows: "And no mist yet went up from the earth."

**(ז) וייצר יי אלהים את האדם עפר מן האדמה ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים ויהי האדם לנפש חיה :**

**ויצר - (Grammar)**

And he created by the power of the lights. The verb ויצר (formed) has a "י" as its first radical. It belongs to the simple conjugation like "ויקץ" (And Noah awoke). <sup>262</sup> The meaning of "and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" is that man lives through the nostrils for they bring in other air. The meaning of "and he became a living soul" (נפש חיה) is that he was immediately able to walk, and thus differed from babies subsequently born.

**(ח) ויטע יי אלהים גן בעדן מקדם וישם שם את האדם אשר יצר :**

**ויטע - (Grammar)**

God had previously planted a garden in the eastern section of the world in a place called Eden. He now placed the man there. The "ב" of בעדן (in Eden) the garden of God <sup>263</sup> governs not only Eden but also garden. Its meaning thus is, in Eden, in the garden of God. This is similar to the verse, "Even by the God (מאל) of your father, who shall help you and by the Almighty, who shall bless you," <sup>264</sup> and there are many other such instances.

**האדם - (Meaning)<sup>xvii</sup>**

There is a secret meaning as to why the definite article "ה" has been placed in front of Adam. The definite article is also found prefixed to Menasheh in "the half tribe of Manasseh (שבט המנשה)" <sup>265</sup> and before the word ארונה in "הארונה the Jebusite." <sup>266</sup> It is also possible that the definite article is placed before Adam because the word אדם is derived from the word used for ground (אדמה). Hence the name Adam may be a proper name or an adjective.

**(ט) ויצמח יי אלהים מן האדמה כל עץ נחמד למראה וטוב למאכל ועץ החיים בתוך הגן ועץ הדעת טוב ורע :**

**ויצמח - (Meaning)**

<sup>261</sup> Deuteronomy 32:35

<sup>262</sup> Genesis 9:24

<sup>263</sup> Ezekiel 28:13

<sup>264</sup> Genesis 49:25

<sup>265</sup> Deuteronomy 3:13

<sup>266</sup> II Sam. 24:16

When God made the trees grow from the ground throughout the world he did the same in the Garden of Eden, but there he placed two trees not found anywhere else in the world.

**ועץ הדעת - (What is the purpose of this phrase?)**

In my opinion the phrase "and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" is to be understood as if written, "And the tree of the knowledge, knowledge of good and evil," because the word knowledge has a definite article prefixed to it and thus cannot be in the construct. Such as in "The ark of the covenant"<sup>267</sup> and "even the prophecy of Oded the prophet"<sup>268</sup> among many others.

**(י) ונהר יצא מעדן להשקות את הגן ומשם יפרד והיה לארבעה ראשים :**

**ונהר - (Grammar)**

Before man was created the river watered the garden on all sides. The "א" in the word ראשים (heads) is part of the root and is visible in the word מראשותיכם (headdress).<sup>269</sup>

**(יא) שם האחד פישון הוא הסבב את כל ארץ החוילה אשר שם הזהב :**

**שם האחד - (Meaning)<sup>viii</sup>**

Saadia Gaon identifies Pishon with the Nile. But it is known that the Gihon is close to the land of Israel, for the Bible states, "and you shall lower him down to Gihon"<sup>270</sup>. It (the Gihon) flows from southeast of the land of Israel. The same is true of the Euphrates (Perat), which marks the furthestmost eastern boundary of the land of Israel. The commentaries also tell us that the Tigris (Chiddekel) is the second river, in addition to the Euphrates, that flows through Baghdad. Thus these three rivers (the Gihon, the Euphrates and the Tigris) lie east of the land of Israel. However, the Nile of Egypt comes out of the mountains of the moon, which are far south of the equator. Proof of this can be seen by the fact that its waters swell in the summer. We know that the Garden of Eden is at the equator where day and night are always equal. Fools question this and ask, how is this possible? However, there is positive proof that this is so. Thus according to Saadia one must believe that the Pishon (the Nile) flows from the Garden of Eden, which is in the east, toward the mountain of Frankincense, which is in the southwest, and then flows north. There is, in fact, no proof that the Pishon is the Nile. Indeed, Saadia translates the "land of Havilah" to suit his needs, since he had no tradition. He did the same with families, states, animals, fowl and precious stones.<sup>45</sup> Perhaps these things were revealed to him in a dream. He definitely erred in a number of them as I will point out in their proper place.<sup>46</sup> So we will not rely on his dreams. Perhaps he did so out of respect for the honor of God, for he translated the Torah into Arabic language and script and he did not want the Arabs to think that there are parts of the Bible which we do not understand<sup>xix</sup>. The Bible mentions that there is gold in the land of Havilah in order to glorify the river coming out of the Garden of Eden.

<sup>267</sup> Joshua 3:14

<sup>268</sup> II Chronicles 15:8

<sup>269</sup> Jeremiah 13:18

<sup>270</sup> I Kings 1:33

**(יב) וזהב הארץ הוא טוב שם הבדלת ואבן השמים :**

**זהב - (Meaning)**

Saadia Gaon renders בדולח as small round stones that emerge from the water (pearls?). He compares manna to them. However, the Bible merely says that manna had the color of <sup>271</sup>בדולח. The Gaon also says that שם is a precious clear white stone (onyx?). The fact of the matter is that we do not know the precise meaning of either of these two items.

**(יד) ושם הנהר השלישי חדקל הוא ההלך קדמת אשור והנהר הרביעי  
הוא פרת :**

**קדמת אשור - (Meaning)**

The "ת" of קדמת (toward the east of) is in place of a "ה". The difference between קדמ and קדמת is that the "ה" suffixed to קדמה is in place of the preposition "to" (אל), which is vocalized with a *segol*. Similarly in "and Abram went down into Egypt", מצרימה means "to Egypt".<sup>272</sup> And קדמת אשור thus means "toward the east of Ashur."

Note that from the first verse of the Torah until the word לעשות<sup>273</sup>, Scripture refers to God as אלהים. Afterward, the honored and revered name (the Tetragrammaton) is coupled with it. How precious are the words of the ancients of blessed memory who said that the complete name of God is used over a complete world. Prior to the completion of creation there was no power to receive this name. If God grants me life I will explain the secret of the Tetragrammaton when I comment upon the first Torah portion of the book of Exodus. I will then explain its meaning in the absolute and in the construct.

Note that the location of the ground from which Adam was created was close to the Garden of Eden. I note this because some say that Adam was created out of the ground of the land of Israel.<sup>274</sup> They have overlooked "And it came to pass, as they journeyed east."<sup>275</sup>

**(טו) ויקח יי אלהים את האדם וינחחו בגן עדן לעבדה ולשמרה :**

**בגן - (Grammar)**

גן (garden) can be both masculine and feminine and so are its plural forms גנות/גנים. Now for those who say that "to till it" and "to guard it" refers to the ground, how it is possible to till and watch a larger area from a smaller one? Furthermore, after Adam sinned God expelled him from the garden and commanded him to till the soil. But according to their interpretation he was already tilling the soil while he was living in the Garden of Eden. "To till it" (לעבדה) therefore refers to the garden of whose fruit he ate. It was only after he sinned that he had to eat the grass of the ground, (i.e., bread). "To till it" means to water it. "To guard it" means to guard the garden so that no animals enter therein and befoul it. Some say that לעבדה means to serve God's commandment,<sup>59</sup> but this is not work.

<sup>271</sup> Numbers 11:7

<sup>272</sup> Genesis 12:10

<sup>273</sup> Genesis 2:3

<sup>274</sup> The Kuzari, 2:14

<sup>275</sup> Genesis 11:2

**(טז) ויצו יי אלהים על האדם לאמר מכל עץ הגן אכל תאכל :**

**ויצו יי אלהים על האדם - (Grammar)**

The verb ויצו (command) with the preposition על (upon) means to prohibit as in, "I will also command (אצוה) the clouds (על העבים)."<sup>276</sup>

**(יז) ומעץ הדעת טוב ורע לא תאכל ממנו כי ביום אכלך ממנו מות תמות :**

**לא תאכל<sup>277</sup> (What is the purpose of this phrase?)**

Even though I (God) permitted you to eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden, do not eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. However, once the Bible has stated, "From the Tree of Knowledge you should not eat, what is the purpose of adding "from it" (ממנו)? The answer is that the Bible is elaborating. We find a similar case in "And she opened it, and saw it, even the child".<sup>277</sup> It is also possible that the term ממנו "of it" means even a part of it. You will find the exact grammatical explanation of the term ממנו in the *Sefer Ha-Yisod*.

You should know that Adam was an intelligent being, for God would not direct commands to one who is not intelligent. He just did not know in one aspect [the difference between] good and evil. Do you not see that Adam named every animal and fowl according to their nature? Thus he was extremely intelligent for if Adam was unintelligent, God would not have brought His creatures to him to see what name he would give to each one of them. God also showed Adam the tree of knowledge, for his wife knew that it was in the midst of the garden.

**(יח) ויאמר יי אלהים לא טוב היות האדם לבדו אעשה לו עזר כנגדו :**

**ויאמר...לא טוב - (Meaning)**

"It is not good" means it is not good for the man.

**עזר - (Meaning)**

Helper should be understood in the light of "Two are better than one".<sup>278</sup>

**(יט) ויצר יי אלהים מן האדמה כל חית השדה ואת כל עוף השמים ויבא אל האדם לראות מה יקרא לו וכל אשר יקרא לו האדם נפש חיה הוא שמו :**

**אשר יקרא לו האדם - (Grammar)**

The "ל" [in the word לו] in this verse elliptic. [It should read "...and what ever the man would call to it, to every living creature, that was to be the name of it."] This is similar to "And she opened it, and saw it, even the child."<sup>279</sup> There are many other such instances.

**(כ) ויקרא האדם שמות לכל הבהמה ולעוף השמים ולכל חית השדה ולאדם לא מצא עזר כנגדו :**

<sup>276</sup> Isaiah 5:6

<sup>277</sup> Exodus 2:6

<sup>278</sup> Kohelet 4:9

<sup>279</sup> Exodus 2:6

**לכל הבהמה - (Grammar)**

לכל (to all) is also elliptic for it governs two words. The meaning of our verse is: "And the man gave names to all cattle, and to all the fowl of the air." This is similar to "In that his men become few,"<sup>280</sup> and the verse "I have not learned wisdom."<sup>281</sup>

**ולאדם לא מצא - (Meaning)**

The meaning of "but for Adam he did not find" is that Adam was not able to find a helpmate for himself. This is the way of the Hebrew language. Thus we find Samuel saying, "And the Lord sent Jerubbaal, and Baddan, and Yiftah, and Samuel".<sup>282</sup> It appears farfetched to me that [the phrase] "he did not find a helpmate" refers to God. It states here that birds were created from the ground, while above, from the water, because the birds were created from both earth and water.

**(כא) ויפל יי אלהים תרדמה על האדם ויישן ויקח אחת מצלעתיו ויסגר בשר תחתנה :**

**ויפל - (Grammar)**

ויפל (caused to fall) This is a *hifil*, as is וישב (drove away) in "and Abram drove them away".<sup>283</sup>

**תרדמה - (Meaning)**

תרדמה is a deeper sleep than שינה, and שינה is a deeper sleep than תנומה.<sup>280</sup> The "ת" of תרדמה is not part of its root.

**אחת מצלעתיו - (Grammar)**

Adam had two sides. צלע here is like in "and for the second side (צלע) of the tabernacle."<sup>284</sup> צלע is a feminine noun. It means a side.

**תחתנה - (Grammar)**

תחתנה means "in its place" תחתנה is singular and the "נ" is superfluous, while תחתיה is its plural form. So also תחתני and תחתיה.

**(כב) ויבן יי אלהים את הצלע אשר לקח מן האדם לאשה ויבאה אל האדם :**

**ויבן - (Grammar)**

ויבן (made me) is a *hifil* conjugation (actually it is a *kal* conjugation). We find similar instances with the *kal* conjugation in ויפן (and he turned)<sup>285</sup> and ויקן (and he bought)<sup>286</sup>.

**ויבאה - (Meaning)**

When Adam awoke from his sleep, upon seeing her, he thought that she had been brought to him like the animals. The Bible speaks of Adam's thoughts. This is similar to, "And the men pursued after them."<sup>287</sup> It is also possible that the woman was created outside of the garden and then was brought to Adam. When he looked around he knew

<sup>280</sup> Deuteronomy 33:6

<sup>281</sup> Proverbs 30:3

<sup>282</sup> I Samuel 12:11

<sup>283</sup> Genesis 15:11

<sup>284</sup> Exodus 26:20

<sup>285</sup> Exodus 7:23

<sup>286</sup> Genesis 33:19

<sup>287</sup> Joshua 2:7

that she had been cut from him, for one of his sides with its flesh was missing and he felt that it had been closed with other flesh.

(כג) ויאמר האדם זאת הפעם עצם מעצמי ובשר מבשרי לזאת יקרא אשה כי מאיש לקחה זאת :

(Meaning) - ויאמר

Then Adam said, "This time I have found a help mate in counterpart to me and like me since this being came out of me." The tradition concerning Lilith is a homily<sup>288</sup>. *לזאת* means "because of this", as in "Say of me: (לי) 'He is my brother."<sup>289</sup>

(Grammar) - אשה

The "ש" in the word אשה (woman) receives a *dagesh* in place of the inaudible "י" which is found in the word איש (man). However, it is possible that אשה receives a *dagesh* to distinguish it from אישה (her husband) for at times the *dagesh* in the suffixed pronominal "ה" in אישה is not pronounced. The plural נשים (women) is derived from the words אנרש (man) and אנשים (men).

(Grammar) - יקרא

יקרא (He called) - This refers to the name of the woman.

(Grammar) - לקחה

The *dagesh* is omitted in the "ק" of לקחה (she was taken) in order to make pronunciation easier. It belongs to the *piel* conjugation although the *pual* conjugation does not exist.

(כד) על כן יעזב איש את אביו ואת אמו ודבק באשתו והיו לבשר אחד :

(Meaning) - לבשר אחד

This means they shall live together as if they were one flesh, or let them once again be one flesh. Some say they will be one flesh through the child they will produce. However, this interpretation is farfetched.

(כה) ויהיו שניהם ערומים האדם ואשתו ולא יתבששו :

(Meaning) - ערומים

ערומים (naked) is an adjective as in, "And the clothes of the naked (ערומים) you shall strip."<sup>290</sup> Some say that ערום (prudent) in "A prudent man (ערום) sees the evil and hides himself,"<sup>291</sup> has essentially the same meaning, that the mind of the wise is uncovered (ערום) and open to everything like the eye.

(Grammar) - ולא יתבששו

ולא יתבששו (ashamed) is related to the word בשת (shame). The last letter of the root is doubled. It is like the verb יתבוננו (he will consider).<sup>292</sup> A *kamat* is placed beneath the first shin because the word ends a verse.

<sup>288</sup> Ginsberg Legends of the Jews Vol I p.65

<sup>289</sup> Genesis 20:13

<sup>290</sup> Job 22:6

<sup>291</sup> Proverbs 22:3

<sup>292</sup> Job 11:11

## NOTES

<sup>i</sup> Ibn Ezra begins his Torah commentary by quoting those before him (presumably Rabbi Saadia Gaon and later Ibn Janah) then articulating his own interpretation based heavily on linguistics and source quotes. So for example, with the word נָשָׂא, it seems that ibn Ezra uses this root in the sense of its Arabic equivalent حَمَلَ, which means either 'carry' or 'convey'.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibn Ezra is not explicit in his comments here. His comments here address the very core question of creation. It would seem here that ibn Ezra is suggesting that while form and matter of the intelligible world emanated from God, terrestrial matter was pre-existent and uncreated. Where בָּרָא mean "He limited". Darkness comes about from light, an existent form, not from nothing. This is contrast to what a number of Karaites, such as Yeshua and Ali ben Sulaiman, maintain. They say that darkness is an actual substance citing the same proof-text as evidence. See Linetsky, 5.

<sup>iii</sup> The second person plural is used as formal speech in a number of languages. Ibn Ezra probably here is referring to Italian and French demonstrating his proficiency in multiple languages. Like most philosophers of his day, ibn Ezra adopts Aristotle's "casual model of the universe" in which God moves the intellects (or angels) who, by means of the sphere in turn move the terrestrial regions. See Linetsky, 9

<sup>iv</sup> Ibn Ezra's comment here on the word אָת reflects his emphasis on linguistics and grammar to explicate the text.

<sup>v</sup> The reference here to השמים in Arabic and his quoting of Saadia again demonstrates ibn Ezra's use of Arabic and reliance on resources of his Sephardic background in his exegesis.

<sup>vi</sup> Ibn Ezra is willing to use multiple translations in his commentary.

<sup>vii</sup> Like Rashi, ibn Ezra might be eager writing this in a Christian environment to establish what this text was not about.

<sup>viii</sup> Ibn Ezra, who is often seen as a follower of the Aristotelian model, understands speech to be an anthropomorphic expression for God's decree to the angels. See Linetsky, 24.

<sup>ix</sup> Another example of Maimonidian influence.

<sup>x</sup> Ibn Ezra here seems to be presenting his theory for the formation of the world, probably reflective of his time. Originally, the elements were collected in their natural places, the light from the sun and stars blocked from the Earth by the water surrounding the earth. Then the light was able to seep in after the wind came and was able to warm up the atmosphere and clear away the mists of water. (Linetsky, 28)

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<sup>xi</sup> Interesting that Ibn Ezra here begins his statement with, "I believe". This may be a reflection of his idea expressed in his introduction of the obligation of the commentator to not merely quote past thoughts but to offer new ideas as well. He writes in his introduction, "It is right in my eyes in the sight of the Lord, who is the only One I fear. I shall be no respecter of persons when I explore the Torah text..." Lancaster, 171.

<sup>xii</sup> The Arab astronomers of ibn Ezra's day had also added a ninth sphere. His comments concerning Saadiah are an example of how he believed Saadiah had made up explanations to impress the non-Jewish community.

<sup>xiii</sup> An example of ibn Ezra's knowledge of astronomy; a science well known for the Sephardi Jew.

<sup>xiv</sup> When this text was written, cattle probably referred to animals that were herded. Ibn Ezra, living mostly in cities, sees cattle now as domesticated beasts used for riding and food.

<sup>xv</sup> There is no reference here to the notion of free will or choice that will appear in Italy only a few hundred years later in Sforno. Ibn Ezra is focused on the grammatical inconsistencies and raises a question asked by all the commentators; what makes humanity distinct from all the animals?

<sup>xvi</sup> Interesting definition of what is a blessing. I think Maimonides would agree.

<sup>xvii</sup> This is another example of ibn Ezra hinting at something without being explicit. Adam is a proper noun and a proper noun does not have a definite article placed in front of it. Abravanel interprets ibn Ezra's hint to refer to, the notion that Adam should be understood as a noun "designating the genius of mankind rather than an individual."

<sup>xviii</sup> Ibn Ezra thought that the Gihon was a river, actually it is a spring. It reflects his lack of geographical knowledge of the land of Israel.

<sup>xix</sup> Abraham ibn Ezra writes that Saadia planned his translation of the Bible for Mohammedans as well as for Jews, and that he used Arabic script for this reason. He explains the fact that Saadia translated even those expressions whose meaning was not known through tradition, as being due to a desire that the Mohammedan reader might not think the Bible contains words which are unintelligible.

<sup>xx</sup> Ibn Ezra wrote numerous books such as *Sefer ha Yisod* that were lost.

**RABBI MOSES BEN NAHMAN (NAHMANIDES)**

Rabbi Moses ben Nahman, better known as the Ramban,<sup>293</sup> was perhaps the greatest Jewish mind of the thirteenth century. In his own lifetime he was acclaimed as the foremost halakhist of his day, a Torah scholar, and the “defender of the faith”. He is considered a “genius at the intellectual crossroads,”<sup>294</sup> mastering the Spanish philosophical writings of Rambam, the kabbalistic teachings from Provence by his teachers Azriel and Ezra, and the halakhic and talmudic teachings of Champagne by his teachers Judah ben Yakar and Meir ben Nathan of Trinquetaille. The author of many different works, his most famous, is his commentary on the Torah, which would later determine the contours of the “Rabbinic Bible”, the *mikra 'ot gedolot*.<sup>295</sup> Ramban lived during both periods of great freedom, serenity, and prosperity and periods of fear and despair. As the leader of his community he was confronted by the anti-Jewish stances of the Church and the Jewish community’s own internal struggle of faith following Maimonides teachings. Feeling that redemption was just around the corner,<sup>296</sup> this talmudic scholar and biblical exegete was able to find a “mediating position in this polemical battle which raged around philosophy, and developed a unique and vigorous conception of Judaism that utilized some philosophic ideas in its detail but sought to escape philosophic rationalism.”<sup>297</sup>

<sup>293</sup> This is an acrostic of his name. He was also referred to as Rabbenu Moses Gerondi or Yerondi, after his place of birth, and by his Spanish name, Bonastruc de Porta.

<sup>294</sup> Bernard Septimus, “Open Rebuke and Concealed Love”, *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban): Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983) 12.

<sup>295</sup> An argument is made that had it not been for Ramban’s quoting of Rashi and Ibn Ezra, the printers of the 16<sup>th</sup> century might not have selected this triumvirate. Isadore Twersky, *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban): Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity*, ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983) 4.

<sup>296</sup> Charles B. Chavel Rabbi, *Ramban His Life and Teachings*, (New York: Philipp Feldheim Inc. 1960) 15.

<sup>297</sup> J. Guttman, *Philosophies of Judaism* as quoted in Twersky 7.

There is little information available about Ramban's early life. Born into a prominent rabbinical family, Ramban was a descendent of Yitzhak ben Reuben Albargeloni, the famed poet and talmudic commentator.<sup>298</sup> He was the grandson of Isaac ben Reuben of Barcelona (Simeon ben Zemah Duran), the brother of Benveniste da Porta, the bailie of Barcelona, and the cousin of Jonah Gerondi.<sup>299</sup> Ramban was born in 1194 in Gerona, a fortified city in Catalonia,<sup>300</sup> and lived there until at the age of seventy he set sail for Eretz Yisrael, dying in Acco in 1270.

Jews had been living for centuries in Gerona<sup>301</sup> in the Jewish quarter, *Juderia*.<sup>302</sup> There is little known about the inner life of this Jewish community during Ramban's life. Historian, Yitzhak Baer suggests that while the Jews of northern Spain "enjoyed sound economic conditions, which gave them opportunities to develop their native talents, they possessed neither the high level of secular culture of Andalusian Jewry nor the traditional

<sup>298</sup> Chavel 15.

<sup>299</sup> Joseph Jacobs, Wilhelm Bacher, and Isaac Broyde, "Moses ben Nahman" *Jewish Encyclopedia* <<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=164&letter=G>>

<sup>300</sup> Catalonia (Spanish Cataluña) is an autonomous region in northeastern Spain, comprising the provinces of Barcelona, Gerona, Lérida, and Tarragona. The shape of an inverted triangle, Catalonia is bounded on the north by the Pyrenees Mountains, on the west by the region of Aragón, and on the east by the Mediterranean Sea. Because of its mountain ranges and proximity to France, European influence in Catalonia has contributed to the development of a distinct Catalan culture. In 1137, Catalonia was united with the kingdom of Aragón and later was included in the kingdom of Spain. "Catalonia," *Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia* 2003 ed.

<sup>301</sup> Mention to the presence of Jews in Girona is first made in a document that says that 25 families of Jews settled in the city in the year 888 CE. See "Sephardic Sages: Past and Present" <<http://www.sephardicsages.org/girona.html>>.

<sup>302</sup> The quarter was situated at the outermost end of the fortifications on the right bank of the River Onyar, which intersected the city. The quarter included a rather long lane called Carre de S. Lorenzo, or Calle de la Forsa, north of which was the real Calle Judaica; From this opened a narrow street which led to the synagogue and extended to the Carre de S. Lorenzo. The Calle Judaica with the market-place formed the center of the Juderia. At the end of the Calle de la Forsa stood the Jewish assembly-hall or communal house. The Jewish cemetery, as in Barcelona, was on the Monjuich, a hill near the city, called "Monte Judaico" in the old records. See Richard Gottheil and Meyer Kayserling "Girona" *Jewish Encyclopedia* <<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=164&letter=G>>.

learning cultivated in the talmudical academies of France". He points out that in Moses ibn Ezra writings those in the north were referred to as the "barbarians" of the north.<sup>303</sup>

Aside from this characterization, the Jewish population consisted of two strata, a small but influential aristocracy, high in the favor of the court, and the general populace. While the masses went on with their way, the elite were valued by the Christian nobility as envoys to the Arab world and as their primary financiers. They served as tax collectors, went on diplomatic missions to the Arabs, served as physicians and leaders in the community, and in return were removed from the jurisdiction of local administrative and judicial authorities. Their status was of the highest nobility in the realm, and their signatures on state documents, alongside the signatures of the king and other dignitaries testify to their high rank.<sup>304</sup>

For most of Ramban's life, the Jews of Gerona lived under the reign of King James I,<sup>305</sup> who treated the Jews, for the most part, benevolently when not influenced by the Church. For example, King James's Edict of Valencia of March 6, 1239 validated the privileges of the Jewish courts of Aragon to try all cases except capital offenses and forbid any harassment of Jews except for financial debts. In 1247, King James invited Jews to come and settle in Catalonia, Valencia, or Majorca guaranteeing them automatic citizenship.

Yet, anti-Jewish pronouncements and violent like book burnings instigated by the Church caused great alarm to the Jewish community. In 1250, a blood libel, the first in Spain, was spread throughout Saragossa. In Gerona, the seat of a fanatical bishop, Pedro

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<sup>303</sup> Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, Vol. 1. 90-92.

<sup>304</sup> Baer, 90-92.

<sup>305</sup> James I (of Aragón), (1208-1276) was often called The Conqueror. Son of King Pedro II, he was born in Montpellier, France and succeeded his father as king of Aragón in 1213 until his death in 1276. See "James I" *Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia*, 2003.

de Castellnou, was bent on convincing the Jewish community that Christianity was the answer. Medieval Europe continued to use the Jewish community as a pawn in their continued power struggle between crown and church. In thirteenth century Gerona, the Church had a heavy hand in the daily lives of the Jewish community. There were constant reminders of how precarious the Jewish community's situation was. For example, each week, the entire Jewish community was forced to hear a sermon in their synagogue by the church about why the Jews were wrong and how the Messiah had already arrived.

In 1263, Ramban was ordered by King James of Aragon to engage in a religious disputation with the Jewish apostate, Pablo Christiani, under the supervision of Raymond of Pennaforte, chief agent of the Inquisition.<sup>306</sup> The debate started on July 20, 1263 and would last for four days in Barcelona, the capital of the Kingdom. Before the King, court, and Church officials, Ramban and Christiani debated whether the Messiah had indeed arrived and whether the Hebrew prophets had predicted a Messiah of divine or human birth. It ended with King James awarding Ramban three hundred coins and his expulsion from the Kingdom of Aragon. Ramban, forced to leave his home then set sail for Eretz Yisrael knowing he would never be safe on Christian land again.<sup>307</sup>

It is unclear what Ramban took away from these experiences. During the debates, when Christiani had sought to prove the tenants of Christianity using *aggadic* and biblical *testimonia*, Ramban argued that *aggadah* does not have authority. However, this seems to contradict his later torah commentary.<sup>308</sup> The church's polemics, insults and humiliations, culminating in this debate challenged the community's faith. In response,

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<sup>306</sup> Raymond da Penaforte had established an academy in Barcelona where priests could learn Hebrew and Jewish texts to better prepare for their missionizing efforts. See Shulman, 158.

<sup>307</sup> Chavel 55-56.

<sup>308</sup> Septimus concludes that in this case Ramban was arguing under polemical pressure, even sometimes against his own profound beliefs. See Septimus, 15.

Ramban wrote two works, *Shaar Hagemul* and a commentary on Job, as possible answers to the existential questions of suffering and life's purpose. They reflect how profoundly the community's faith was being challenged.

Aside from the forty year period when the Moors occupied Gerona, Gerona had always had a closer connection with northeastern Christian Europe than with the Arab world. Septimus argues that, "Nahmanides' Gerona, at the beginning of the thirteenth century, was as remote from Arabic influence and as close to the Jewish cultures of northern Europe as any community in Spain had ever been."<sup>309</sup> Despite his occasional mention of individual Arabic terms, Ramban was not fluent in Arabic, having to read even the basic Andalusian<sup>310</sup> works such as the *Guide to the Perplexed* in translation. This seems to have been the case for all of Catalonia, in the generation following Ramban. R. Solomon ibn Adret could not find anyone in Barcelona to translate Maimonides' commentary on the Mishnah from Arabic into Hebrew and had to assign the task to scholars in Aragon.<sup>311</sup> Still, reading about Ramban's academic strengths, one sees a high corroboration between this Jewish son from a prominent family's skills and what was popular in Moorish culture.

From a young age Ramban was schooled extensively in philosophy and the sciences. He learned medicine and was able to earn his living as a physician. His medical advice relied upon the emerging "sciences", astrology, and spirits which reflects the Moors impact on Spain. Medical texts generally were generally written in Arabic and while it is possible that he learned this trade in one of the few medical schools in France and Italy, there is no record of Ramban ever attending medical school and he probably

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<sup>309</sup> Septimus, 12.

<sup>310</sup> Located in the south of present day Spain.

<sup>311</sup> Septimus, 12. n4

learned from locals. "Medicine", writes Ramban, "is a dangerous profession. That which heals one person kills another. That is why our sages said that 'the best of doctors goes to Gehinnom... but if one conducts oneself properly, one brings himself merit, for medicine is in general practiced by thieves – and he has avoided being like them.'"<sup>312</sup>

In addition to his science and philosophic background that was highly prized in the Arab world, Ramban also wrote poetry and *pyutim*, in the style of his Spanish compatriots. The high regard for language that he shows in his Hebrew poetry is also reflective of the value of linguistics and grammar that can be found across the spectrum of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish medieval writers.

Perhaps it was his unique ability to comprehend a varied field of study, his geographic proximity the various schools of thought, or perhaps it was what was called for that moment, but Ramban's uniqueness stems from his education being firmly rooted in the three great centers of learning of his time – Spain, Provence, and northern France. For a long time, there was little interaction between the Spanish and French-German schools. For example, Rabbeynu Yitzchak Alfasi of northern Africa and Spain and Rashi of France, two contemporaries never knew of one another. With communication difficult and most scholars not traveling extensively, there was little exposure to learning occurring in other lands. Ibn Ezra's trip in the mid-twelfth century to southern and northern France was the exception of the day.<sup>313</sup>

It is starting with Ramban that a new period begins in which the three great streams of Jewish learning are united. From Ramban quill will combine the writings of the Rambam from Spain, the thinkers of the Provence, Rabbeynu Jonathan of Lunel and

<sup>312</sup> Torat HaAdam as quoted in Yaacov Dovid Shulman, *The Ramban: The Story of Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman*, (New York: CIS Publishers, 1993) 43.

<sup>313</sup> Chavel, p. 16.

Rabbi Abraham ben David (Ravad) of Posquieres, critics of Rambam's work, and the rabbis of northern France and Germany who had centered their work around Rashi and the Tosafot.<sup>314</sup>

Ramban was not far beyond the age of puberty when his name began to be counted among the Talmudical authorities of his time.<sup>315</sup> From a young age, Ramban was trained in the halakhic and talmudic teachings of the Champagne by his teachers Judah ben Yakar and Meir ben Nathan of Trinquetaille.<sup>316</sup> From them he gained an impassioned love of the sacred text, a critical eye for analysis in the conceptual-dialectical method of Talmud study,<sup>317</sup> and an "unbounded respect for the earlier authorities". He was even willing to challenge Rambam's conclusions in order to protect the word of the ancient teachers of Judaism.<sup>318</sup> By the age of sixteen, Ramban began his literary career by coming to the defense of Alfasi's halakhic work against the criticism of Rabbi Zekharya Halevi and Ravad.<sup>319</sup>

From his teachers, Rabbi Ezra ben Solomon<sup>320</sup> and his younger colleague Azriel,<sup>321</sup> Ramban was introduced to the world of kabbalah. They had been the best

<sup>314</sup> Chavel, p. 16.

<sup>315</sup> Jewish Encyclopedia, Ramban

<sup>316</sup> French Talmudist and Biblical commentator; flourished in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. See Herman Rosenthal and M. Seligsohn, "Nathan ben Meir of Trinquetaille" *Jewish Encyclopedia* <<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=113&letter=N&search=Meir%20ben%20Nathan>>.

<sup>317</sup> Twersky, 2.

<sup>318</sup> Chavel, 22.

<sup>319</sup> Chavel, 20.

<sup>320</sup> Chavel, 16.

<sup>321</sup> Azriel (Ezra) ben Menahem (Ben Solomon) was the founder of the speculative kabbalah. Called "The Saint", he was born in Gerona in 1160 and died in 1238. Attracted by the mystical studies that had begun to spread in Spain, Azriel went early to southern France, and became there a pupil of the celebrated kabbalist Isaac the Blind, the son of Abraham of Posquieres. Later he left France and traveled all over Spain, teaching kabbalah. He endeavored to win the philosophers over to his mystic views, but did not succeed, as he himself confesses in the introduction to his commentary upon the Ten Sefirot. "For," says he, "the philosophers believe in nothing that can not be demonstrated logically." He came back disappointed to Gerona, and there founded a school in which Nahmanides received Azriel's kabbalistic instruction. See Kaufmann Kohler and Isaac Broyde "Azriel ben Menahem", *Jewish Encyclopedia*.

<<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=2224&letter=A&search=Azriel>>.

students of Rabbi Isaac the Blind and were responsible for the largest body of kabbalistic works that predate the "discovery" of the Zohar by Rabbi Moshe de Leon. It was said, "these two mystics, and their disciples, laid the foundation for all future kabbalistic speculation; for example, much of the terminology and basic ideas that prevailed in the kabbalah for the next seven hundred years were formulated in Girona."<sup>322</sup> Ramban may have been influenced by his two teachers who believed in the Neo-platonic conception of God as the "*Ein Sof*" "the endless one", their thoughts about creation, and the *sfirot* as can be seen in his commentary.<sup>323</sup> Ramban, Rabbis Solomon, and Azriel were among the first to commit the formerly oral kabbalistic teachings to writing. However, this was not universally accepted as a positive development by other kabbalists. Their teacher, Rabbi Isaac the Blind, for example, wrote them an angry letter demanding that kabbalistic teachings be kept secret and protected from the public forum. Gratz, commenting on Ramban as a kabbalist writes with clear bias;<sup>324</sup>

The labors of Azriel and Ezra in behalf of the secret science might have had but poor results, if Nahmani had not ranged himself under their banner. At first blush, it is indeed hard to conceive how this clear, keen-witted, subtle thinker, who, in the province of the Talmud, had the ability to shed light upon every obscurity, could be induced to join the votaries of the Kabbala, and permit himself to be blinded by the false light of the Bahir. But on deeper examination of his way of thinking, this phenomenon ceases to be a paradox. Nahmani belonged to that numerous class of men who can form a correct judgment on single objects, but are unable to comprehend a great whole. Maimuni's philosophical line of argument repelled him on account of its prosaic nature; the Kabbala, on the other hand, attracted him because his belief in miracles and respect for authority found nourishment therein. When he, a pious rabbi and deep Talmudist, had acknowledged the truth of the Kabbala, its authority became established; where Nahmani believed unconditionally, those less gifted dared not doubt.

<sup>322</sup> <http://www.sephardicsages.org/girona.html>

<sup>323</sup> Kohler, "Azriel ben Menahem"

<sup>324</sup> Gratz, 557.

Ramban's third great exposure was to Andalusian medieval philosophy which relied heavily upon Greek Aristotelian and Platonic thought that the Moors had brought back to Europe. Maimonides, (1135-1204), the Andalusian's greatest Jewish philosopher, strove to reconcile the "new" knowledge of the sciences and Greek thought with Judaism. As Jews were learning secular subjects such as astronomy, mathematics, music and philosophy they wrestled with how to comprehend their Torah learning. Some couldn't accept their elders advice to just have faith in the sages. They started questioning the importance of Torah and focused their attention on books of science that seemed to so logically defend their positions.

In 1230, Ibn Tibbon's translation of Maimonides' *Moreh Nevuhim* "Guide for the Perplexed" from Arabic into Hebrew became available to the populace and provided an answer to these people.<sup>325</sup> In *Moreh Nevuhim*, Maimonides attempts to reconcile science and philosophy with Torah. In so doing, he rejects the literal interpretation of Scripture, seeing it as limiting knowledge, inquiry and understanding. In Ramban's view, there is no conflict between truths reached by reason and those taught by religion. He teaches that God is incorporeal – having no body – no part or nature of the physical body. All passages of the Bible then in which God is referred to in a corporeal sense must be interpreted not literally, but as having an allegorical and inner meaning.<sup>326</sup> Greatly influenced by Aristotle's philosophy, he strove for a Judaism that was more "rational and philosophical" and less based on faith and tradition. He questioned the very tenet of the orthodox that "all that is worth knowing can be found in the scriptures" and that all of

<sup>325</sup> Ramban had used an earlier less perfect translation made by Yehudah Al-Charizi since he too could not understand Arabic.

<sup>326</sup> Chavel, 32. More information on this can be found in Daniel J. Silver and Bernard Martin's *History of Judaism from Abraham to Maimonides* Basic Books; June 1974.

Torah is an allegory. Five years later in France, visitors of Spain reported that masses of people had abandoned wearing Tefillin and fastening Mezzozot on their doorposts.<sup>327</sup>

While even during Rambam's own lifetime there was opposition to his writings, it was only after his death as copies of his writings became more accessible that real controversy surfaced over his philosophical work. "In Spain where Jews enjoyed political and civil liberties and shared in the prosperity and culture of the land, philosophy had of course been known for a great time" and was well received. Here, with prosperity and security, Dr. Kravitz explains, the people could afford to take on an intellectual view of their beliefs. However, in France, where anti-Semitism was running high and the only thing that kept the people going was their Torah study, to be told that their greatest possession was a meaningless allegory, was too much. In Provence, the followers of Maimonides called Maimunists and those who opposed called anti-Maimunists clashed. In the city of Montpellier, Rabbi Shlomo min Hahar along with his two pupils Rabbi Yonah ben Abraham of Gerona (Ramban's uncle) and David ben Shau'ul urged for the ban on the Guide. In reaction a ban was issued against these three men in all cities of Provence. Northern France responded by issuing an official ban against the study of the Guide. The communities of Provence rose in protest, led by Rabbi David Kimchi a Maimunist, he urged a counterban against all who dared question the writing of Rambam... Maimunists and anti-Maimunists were in a tug of war.<sup>328</sup>

In two letters, Ramban reacted to this, appealing for reason to heal the rift that was threatening to split the Jewish community in two. Here again we see Ramban writing a defense for peace. His words calmed the storms. While not agreeing with all that the

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<sup>327</sup> Chavel, 33.

<sup>328</sup> Chavel, 34.

Rambam had written, his letters argued that the all the works of Rambam were acceptable. Ramban contrasts the conditions in Spain and those in France;

You [leaders of the French communities] have been taught reliance upon tradition from infancy; you have always been planted firmly in the house of the Lord. But because of this, will you not recognize that it is he (namely Rambam) who has brought back the dwellers in the far ends of the earth to the fortress [of the Torah]? Were it not for his words and the teachings of his books by which they live, they would have long ago faltered on the path [of truth]. Is it for you, O masters of the Talmud, that he has toiled? What he did was to prepare a haven of refuge where one might flee for protection from the storms of the Greek philosophers, to save them from Aristotle and Galenus. Have you heard of their teachings? His books were not intended for you, O our masters!<sup>329</sup>

Looking upon the Maimonists as heretics, Solomon ben Abraham of Montpellier went and asked the Dominican and Franciscan inquisitors who were busy against the enemies of the Catholic Church, to proceed against Jewish heretics also. In 1233, they burned in the public squares of France works of Rambam.<sup>330</sup> And then to the chagrin of all Jews, forty days later the friars of the Inquisition searched Jewish homes for copies of the Talmud and burnt them upon the same heap. Many Jews saw the Talmud burning as a sign from God – a form of punishment meted out for the sacrilege done to “the holy books of Rambam”.<sup>331</sup>

Much of Ramban's commentary can be seen as a reaction to Maimonidian theology that had swept through Spain and Europe. For example Baer writes, “the attack against rationalism in the name of faith is typical of all the cabalistic works produced during this period. It is most pronounced in Nahmanides' commentary to the Pentateuch.

<sup>329</sup> Chavel, 37.

<sup>330</sup> Richard Gottheil and William Popper, “Confiscation of Hebrew Books” *Jewish Encyclopedia* <<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=719&letter=C&search=burning%20Talmud>>

<sup>331</sup> Chavel, 40.

His vigorous opposition to the allegorical interpretations of the Torah is expressed on every page of this work....<sup>332</sup>

In addition to Ramban living in a geographic crossroads, Ramban also lived at a historic crossroads. The year 1240 marked the 5000<sup>th</sup> year in the Jewish calendar. This was the year, believed by many, to have been the year that the Messiah would come. Many of the catastrophes and political events that occurred in the years preceding this date and immediately following were seen through the lenses of an imminent redemption. When the year came and went without the arrival of the Messiah some started to despair. Ramban held that according to his calculation, Israel's redemption was to begin in the year 5118 (1358) and culminate in 5163 (1403). People could take comfort in thinking that while the Messiah had not arrived yet, and wouldn't arrive in their lifetime, at least it would arrive in the time of their grandchildren.

Perhaps it was the messianic fervor that inspired Ramban to choose Eretz Yisrael as the place to go when he was expelled from Gerona. Or perhaps it was the reports of other Rabbis making Aliyah such as Jonathan Cohen of Lunel who was amongst three hundred rabbis who in 1211 left England and France and went to the Holy Land from escaping their own persecution.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Ellul 5727, (September 8, 1267) Ramban arrived at the gates of Jerusalem and recited a prayer.<sup>333</sup> He found there a land devastated and devoid of life after years of invasions. In a letter to his son from Jerusalem he writes, "... many are its forsaken places, and great the wastes. The heart of the matter is: the more

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<sup>332</sup> Septimus, 14

<sup>333</sup> Chavel, 14.

sacred the place the greater the devastation it has suffered. Jerusalem is more desolate than all [the country], Judea more than Galilee... only two Jews... brothers.”<sup>334</sup>

Ramban would spend the last three years of his life there, finishing up his commentary of the Torah, his last and greatest work. Filled with the memories of his friends and family left behind in Christian Gerona, thinking of the imminence of the Messiah, and finding himself in the promised land Ramban's torah commentary is considered one of the greatest sacred works of Israel's literature.<sup>335</sup> His commentary reflects a willingness to use *midrashic* and *aggadic* sources “in service of *pshat*” in order to convey his message. It demonstrates a willingness to quote narrative and scriptural explanations so that a plain authoritative reading is possible. His comments interact with those of Rashi and Ibn Ezra holding them in high regard, and yet at the same time willing to challenge their ideas and conclusions. In his introduction he writes, “I will take as my guiding lights the maps of the pure Menorah – the Commentary of Rabbi Shelomo, ‘the beautiful crown and glorious diadem.’ The right of the firstborn belongs to him. His words will I meditate, and in their love will I continually be ravished... And for the words of Rabbi Avraham ben Ezra I will have ‘open rebuke and hidden love.’”<sup>336</sup>

Often implicitly and occasionally explicitly, his comments reveal the kaballah that he had learned from his teachers; teachings that before had never been recorded down. Ramban's commentary reflects his Spanish world, a milieu that respected reason, logic, and rationality.

Unlike Rashi and Ibn Ezra, Ramban argues that it was essential that the Torah begin with creation because creation is the root of our faith. If a person does not believe

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<sup>334</sup> Chavel, 63.

<sup>335</sup> Chavel, 44.

<sup>336</sup> Chavel, 44.

in creation, but believes that the world is eternal as some people thought in his day, he was denying an essential Jewish belief. Ramban explains these opening words in a kabbalistic way, suggesting that only through the oral tradition can these words be properly understood. *"It is not possible to tell about the works of the creation to a human"* להגיד כח מעשה בראשית לבשר ודם אי איפש .... *even a hint is dangerous since people might have untrue thoughts.*" אמת כי יסכרו בו סברות אין בהם אמת He only will say that the word בראשית is alluding to the ten ספירות particularly חכמה, the foundation of everything. Then says, *"all these midrashim have one meaning"* ולכן זכה לתורה הכל כוונה אחת להם.

This idea is expressed in Ramban's sermon on Temimah where he explicitly expresses his belief that the very existence of the universe rests with humanities awareness of a God external to the universe who created it out of nothing. He writes:

"Consider it in your heart that the Holy One, blessed be He, has created it in your heart that the Holy One, blessed be He, has created all lower creatures for the benefit and use of man, since we know of no purpose for the creation of all objects who have no recognition of the Creator, except this – that they serve man. Now man has been created for the prime purpose that he recognize his Creator. Should he fail to know his Creator altogether, and what is even worse, should he fail to gain a realization of the fact that certain deeds are pleasing to God and others are displeasing, then man becomes as the unknowing beast, and the whole purpose of Creation is lost. This is what the Sages meant by saying, that if Israel would not have accepted the Torah God would have caused the whole universe to return to a state of void and emptiness. Their true intent was to say that if man shows no desire to acquire a knowledge of God, and the realization that there is a difference between good and bad, the whole purpose of the world is lost."<sup>337</sup>

Deep into his lengthy commentary on these opening words Ramban restates the text, then quotes Rashi and Ibn Ezra and then suggests a better explanation. *"Now hear an explanation of the bible that is correct, clear and simple."* Just as one should always

<sup>337</sup> Ramban's sermon *Torat Hashem Temimah* as quoted in Chavel, 75.

be suspicious when one writes "clearly" at the beginning of a sentence since if it was it wouldn't be necessary to begin the sentence with, Ramban in his simple explanation brings forth philosophy and metaphysics. What seems essential here is that God is the creator. That the heavens are made of one substance and the earth another and that they were created from nothing.

With influence of Franco-German Talmudic culture and Provençal Kabbalah, and philosophic Spain, Ramban is the product of a confluence of divergent traditions that resulted in a remarkable level of creativity that could be found in his commentary. He perceived himself as his people guide, taking them from one era to another, from the millennium of Torah in Exile to the gradual beginnings of Israel's return to the land of his ancestors using every possible tool available to him.<sup>338</sup> The constant in all of this was his absolute faith in the sanctity of his text, his belief of God as the Creator, and the determination that through revelation humanity can be redeemed; ideas that are themselves, a reflection of his world and time.

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<sup>338</sup> Chavel, 15.

## רמבן – בראשית פרק א

## (א) בראשית ברא אלהים את השמים ואת הארץ :

**בראשית ברא אלהים - (Why begin here? What is the purpose of this text?)<sup>1</sup>**

Rabbi Yitzhak said, "[If the purpose of the Torah is to teach God's laws, then] It is not necessary to begin the Torah [this way] rather [the Torah should have started with] 'This month shall be for you....'<sup>339</sup>, for this is the first mitzvah that was commanded to Israel. Then what is the point of opening with Beresheet? Because [as it says,] 'The power of his works' he [God] told to his people [to give them the inheritance of nations]<sup>340</sup> That if the nations of the world would say [to Israel], 'you are robbers, you took [for yourselves] the land of the seven nations by force,' they [Israel] could respond 'that all the earth belong to the Holy One Blessed be He. [He created it] and gave it to whomever he saw fit. It was his desire to give it to them and it was His will to take it from them and give it to us.' This is the tradition<sup>341</sup> that was recorded by our Rabbi Shlomo (Rashi) in his commentaries.

But there are those who question this [and say] that it was really necessary to begin the Torah with ברא אלהים, for it is the source of faith. He who does not believe in this and thinks that the world always existed denies the essential teaching [of Judaism] and has no Torah at all.<sup>ii</sup> The answer [as to why the Torah begins with the story of creation] is that the work of creation is a deep mystery that is not to be understood from the [biblical] verses, nor from knowing his creations, but rather from the traditions as passed down from Moses our teacher [who received it] from the mouth of the Almighty, yet those who know it and understand it are obligated to hide it.<sup>342</sup>

Therefore Rabbi Yitzhak said that it was not necessary to begin the Torah with ברא and tell what was created on the first day and what was created on the remainder of the days, the lengthened [account] of the creation of Adam and Eve with their sins and punishments, the story of the Garden of Eden, and man's expulsion from it because all of this cannot be completely understood from what was written.

Nor was it necessary to tell the story of the generation for the flood and the dispersion for there is no great need for these narratives for the people of the Torah it would have been sufficient without these verses. They would have believed in the general principal mentioned to them in the Ten Commandments: "For in six days God created the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is within them, and rested on the seventh day."<sup>343</sup> And the knowledge [of the creation process] would remain with the few as a teaching of oral Torah of Moses from Mount Sinai.

Rabbi Yitzhak then gave a reason for this: The Torah begins with ברא אלהים and tells about all the matters of creation through the creating of man, how God granted him dominion over the works of his hands and all that was under his foot; and how God chose the Garden of Eden of all places in the world that were created

<sup>339</sup> Exodus 12:2

<sup>340</sup> Psalms 111:6 : כח מעשיו הגיד לעמו לתת להם נחלת גוים (Ramban leaves off the end of the verse, "to give them the inheritance of nations").

<sup>341</sup> Tanchuma (Buber) Beresheet 11.

<sup>342</sup> Chagigah 11b, "The process of Creations may not be expounded before two."

<sup>343</sup> Exodus 20:11

as the place of his [man's] abode until his sin caused his expulsion from there. Then how the people of the generation of the flood were expelled from the world on account of their sin, while the righteous and his children were allowed to escape. And then the sin of their descendants caused them to be scattered to different places and their seed to different lands and how subsequently they took for themselves places for their families, in their nations, as chance permitted.<sup>344iii</sup>

If this is so, it is proper that when a people continue to sin they should lose their place and another people should come to inherit its land, for such has been the rule of God in the world forever. This is true of all the more regarding that which is related in Scripture namely that Canaan was cursed and sold as a slave forever.<sup>345</sup> Therefore it would not be proper for them to inherit the choicest of places of the civilized world. Rather, the servants of God the seed of His beloved One Abraham<sup>346</sup> -should inherit it even as it is written, "And he gave them the lands of the nations, and they took the labor of the peoples in possession; that they might keep His statutes and observe His laws."<sup>347</sup>

That is to say, God expelled those who rebelled against Him and settled there those who served Him so that they know by serving Him they will inherit it, whereas if they sin against Him, the land will vomit them out, just as it vomited out the nations before them.<sup>348</sup>

Explaining the interpretation that I have written are the words of [the Sages] in Beresheet Rabbah:<sup>349</sup> "Rabbi Yehoshua of the city of Siknin, in the name of Rabbi Levi opened [his discourse on this chapter of Creation with the verse]: 'He revealed to His people His powerful works.'<sup>350</sup> Why did the Holy One, blessed be He, reveal to Israel that was created on the first day and what was created on the second day? *It is on* account of the seven nations [who inhabited the land of Canaan], so that they should not taunt Israel and say to them: 'Are you not a nation of robbers?'" [Because if they did then] Israel could then reply to them: "And what about you, is it not money in your hands? Have not the Caphtorim that came forth from Caphtor destroyed them and dwelt in their stead?"<sup>351</sup> The world and the fullness thereof belong to the Holy One, blessed be He. When He willed it, He gave it to you, and when He willed it, He took it from you and gave it to us.' As it is written, "To give them the heritage of the nations, he revealed to His people His powerful works."<sup>352</sup> In order to give them their portion God told them the account of creation.<sup>iv</sup>

There is yet another source for the subject that I have mentioned: the mysteries in the process of creation.<sup>353</sup> It is what our Rabbis of blessed memory have said: "He revealed to His people His powerful works."<sup>354</sup> To declare the power of the process of creation to a mortal being is impossible. Therefore, Scripture closed the matter: [simply

<sup>344</sup> Genesis 10:5

<sup>345</sup> Genesis 9:25

<sup>346</sup> Isaiah 41:8

<sup>347</sup> Psalm 105:44-45

<sup>348</sup> Leviticus 18:28

<sup>349</sup> Leviticus 1:3

<sup>350</sup> Psalm 111:6

<sup>351</sup> Deuteronomy 2:23

<sup>352</sup> Psalm 111:6

<sup>353</sup> Opening of Moreh Nebuchim

<sup>354</sup> Psalm 111:6

writing] "In the beginning God created." Thus elucidating what we have said on this subject.

**בראשית ברא אלהים - (What is the nature of God? / Mysticism as an answer)**

Rashi wrote, "This verse does not mean what it appears to say, rather it needs to be expounded, like our Rabbis expounded,<sup>355</sup> [may their memory be for blessing]. "[The world was created] for the sake of the Torah which is called 'the beginning of His way,'-ראשית דרכו.<sup>356</sup> And because [the world was created] for the sake of Israel who is called 'the beginning of His harvest.' ראשית תבואתו.<sup>357</sup> "

This midrash of our Rabbis is very hidden and secret, because there are many things that [the Rabbis] found that are called ראשית and all of them they gave offered interpretations, and *those with little faith count their numbers*. [Our Rabbis] have said,<sup>358</sup> "On the merit of [fulfilling the commandments associated with] three things has the world been created: for the merit of the Dough-offering, for the merit of the Tithes and for the merit of the First-fruits. בראשית ברא אלהים surely signifies the Dough-offering, as it is said, "The first of your baking."<sup>359</sup> ראשית surely signifies the Tithes, as it is said, "The first of your grain."<sup>360</sup> ראשית surely signifies the First-fruits, as it is said, "The first fruits of thy land."<sup>361</sup> The Rabbis have further said: "For the merit acquired by Moses [the world has been created], as it is said, "And he chose a first part for himself."<sup>362</sup>

Their intent in this [offering these midrashim is to allude to the real reason for the creation text]. The word בראשית hints at the creation of the world by Ten Emanations<sup>363</sup>, and hints in particular to the emanation called Wisdom, which is the foundation of everything, even as it says, "The Eternal has founded the earth by wisdom."<sup>364</sup> This is the Heave-offering, and it is holy; it has no precise measure,<sup>365</sup> thus indicating the little understanding created beings have of it. Now just as a man counts ten measures- this alludes to the Ten Emanations- and sets aside one measure of the ten as a Tithe, so does the wise men contemplate the tenth Emanation and speak about it. The Dough-offering, which is the single commandment pertaining to the dough, alludes to this. Now Israel which is called ראשית as mentioned above, is "the congregation of Israel," which is compared in the Song of Songs to a bride and whom Scripture in turn calls "daughter," "sister," and "mother". The Rabbis have already expressed this in a homiletic interpretation of the verse, "Upon the crown wherewith his mother has crowned him"<sup>366</sup>, and in other places. Similarly, the verse concerning Moses, "And he chose a first part for himself"<sup>367</sup>, which they interpret<sup>368</sup> to mean that Moses our teacher contemplated [God]

<sup>355</sup> Beresheet Rabbah 1:6

<sup>356</sup> Proverbs 8:22

<sup>357</sup> Jeremiah 2:3

<sup>358</sup> Beresheet Rabbah 1:6 or 1:4 in Hebrew

<sup>359</sup> Numbers 15:20

<sup>360</sup> Deuteronomy 18:4

<sup>361</sup> Exodus 23:19

<sup>362</sup> Deuteronomy 33:21

<sup>363</sup> Sefer Yetzira 1:14

<sup>364</sup> Proverbs 3:19

<sup>365</sup> Kiddushin 58b

<sup>366</sup> Song of Songs 3:11

<sup>367</sup> Deuteronomy 33:21

through a lucid speculum and he saw that which is called ראשית (the first) for himself, and therefore he merited the Torah. Thus all the above Midrashim have one meaning. Now it is impossible to discuss this explanation at length in writing, and even an allusion is dangerous since people might have thoughts concerning it which are untrue. But I have mentioned this in order to close the mouths of those wanting in faith and of little wisdom, who scoff at the words of our Rabbis.<sup>vi</sup>

**בראשית ברא אלהים - (Balancing Greek science with the Bible)**

Rashi writes, "But if you approach it literally, then it should be interpreted as, "At the beginning of the creation of sky and earth, when the world was formless and void, and darkness covered the deep, The Holy One Blessed Be He [God] said, "Let there be light." If so, the whole text leads to the creation of light."<sup>vii</sup>

Rabbi Abraham [Ibn Ezra] explained it in an identical way. However, he established that the letter "ו" in the word והארץ (and the earth) does not serve as a [connecting letter as it normally does and which would mean "and" but it serves rather as the word "when"] There are many such examples in the Bible. The meaning then [according to Ibn Ezra would be] at the beginning of the creation of heaven and dry land, there was no habitable place on earth; rather it was unformed and void and covered with water, and God said, "Let there be light". According to [Ibn Ezra's] opinion, nothing was created on the first day except light.<sup>viii</sup>

The difficulty for our teacher, Rabbi Shlomo (Rashi),<sup>369</sup> which had led him to the above interpretation, was that, "if [the Bible] came intending to teach the order in which the acts of creation took place, it should have said what came first. It should have written בראשונה [instead of ראשית], since wherever the word ראשית occurs in the Bible it is in the construct state. But here in the verse, "I foretell the end from the beginning..."<sup>370</sup> [the word מראשית is not in the construct state]. And if one will connect it with the missing word, thing - דבר [thus making the verse read: "Declare the end of a thing from the beginning of a thing;"] here too it could be connected to a missing word. Further, there is also the verse "And he chose ראשית"<sup>371</sup> (which can be translated as "a first part for himself" where the word ראשית is not used in the construct state). And Rashi raised other objections.

Now listen to the correct and clear explanation of the verse in its simplicity.<sup>ix</sup> The Holy One, blessed be He, created all things from absolute non-existence. Now we have no expression in the sacred language for bringing forth something from nothing other than the word "ברא". Everything that exists under the sun or above was not made from non-existence at the outset. Instead God brought forth from total and absolute nothing a very thin substance devoid of corporeality about having a power of potency, fit to assume form and to proceed from potentiality into reality. This was the primary matter created by God; it is called by the Greeks *hylē* (matter). After the *hylē*, God did not create anything, but He formed and made things with it. And from this *hylē* God brought everything into existence and clothed the forms and put them into a finished condition. Know that the heavens and all that is in them consist of one substance, and the earth and everything that is in it consist of one substance. The Holy One, blessed be He, created these two

<sup>368</sup> Yebamoth 49b

<sup>369</sup> Rashi comments on Genesis 1:5

<sup>370</sup> Isaiah 46:10

<sup>371</sup> Deuteronomy 33:21

substances from nothing; they alone were created, and everything else was constructed from them.<sup>x</sup>

This substance, which the Greeks called *hylē*, is called in the sacred language, "תורה". The word is derived from the expression of the Sages<sup>372</sup> "בתורה" (when the wicked thinks to himself) of his doings in the past." If a person wants to decide a name for it [this primordial matter], he may think to himself, change his mind and call it by another name since it has taken on no form to which the name should be attached. The form which this substance finally takes on is called in the sacred language, "בהו", which is the composite word made up of the two words הוא בו (in it there is substance). [This may be compared to the verse]. "You are not able "עשה" (to perform it)".<sup>373</sup> In this case [the word "עשה"] is missing a "ו" and an "א" and is a composite of two words: עשו הוא. It is this which the Bible writes, "He shall measure it with a line of תורה (chaos) and the stones of בהו (emptiness)."<sup>374</sup> The "תורה" in Hebrew, or *hylē*, in Greek is the line by which the craftsman delineates the plan of his structure and that which he hopes to make. This is derived from the expression "קה" "hope to God."<sup>375</sup> The stones are forms in the building. Similarly it is written, "He accounts them as less than nothing."<sup>376</sup> Just as "תורה" come after nothingness and there is nothing yet in it, so have the Rabbis said in Sefer Yetzirah<sup>377</sup> He created substance from תורה and made that which was nothing something."

Rabbi Berachyah in Midrash of Rabbi Nechunya ben Hakanah<sup>378</sup> asked, "Why is it written 'and the earth was תורה (without form) ובהו (and void)'? What is the meaning of the word היתה 'was'? It had already been without form. And what is 'without form'? It is a thing which astonishes people. It was then turned into בהו. And what is בהו? It is a thing that has substances, as it is written: בו הוא [a composite of the two words in it there is substance]."

### (ג) ויאמר אלהים יהי אור ויהי אור:

#### (Explaining the nature of God) - ויאמר אלהים

The word אלהים means "the Master of all powers," for the root of the word is אל, meaning power, and the word אלהים is a composite consisting of the words "אל" "הם" as if the word אל is in a construct state, and הם, [literally] "they", hints to all other forces. Thus אלהים means "the Force of all forces." A secret will yet be disclosed in connection with this.

If so, the simple explanation of the verse is the correct one. The verse "In the beginning<sup>379</sup> God created the heavens" means God brought forth their matter from nothing. The "earth" means that He brought forth its matter from nothing. And the [meaning of the word] earth, includes all four elements,<sup>379</sup> [not merely the land,] as in the verse; "The heavens and the earth were finished, and [so were] all their array,"<sup>380</sup> which includes the

<sup>372</sup> Kiddushin 40b

<sup>373</sup> Exodus 18:18

<sup>374</sup> Isaiah 34:11

<sup>375</sup> Psalm 27:14

<sup>376</sup> Isaiah 40:17

<sup>377</sup> Sefer Yetzirah 2:6

<sup>378</sup> Sefer Habahir Book of Bright Light Vol 2.

<sup>379</sup> Fire, wind, water, and earth

<sup>380</sup> Genesis 2:1

entire lower sphere, and [in the verse from Psalms] "Praise the Lord, O You who are on earth, all sea monsters and ocean depths..."<sup>381</sup> and as in many other verses.

Now with this creation, which was like a very small point having no substance, everything in the heavens and the earth were created. The word **אֵת** [in the phrase **אֵת הָאָרֶץ** **הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ**] is like the essence of a thing. The Sages have always explained that this was included, since it is derived from the expression, "The morning came and so did the night."<sup>382</sup> And so did our Rabbis say<sup>383</sup>: [The word] **אֵת** includes the sun, moon, stars, and constellations. And [the words] **וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ** includes the trees, herbs, and the Garden of Eden. These include all created things which are physical.

Now after having said that with one command God created at first the heavens and the earth and all their hosts, [the Bible] returns and explains that the earth after this creation was **"תוהו"**, that is, matter without substance. It became **"בהו"** when He clothed it with form. Then it [the Bible] explains that in this form was included the form of the four elements: fire, water, earth. And air. The word **הָאָרֶץ** the earth includes these four elements. [In this verse] the element of fire is called "darkness", because the elemental fire is dark. Were it red, it would redden the night for us. The element of water with which the dust was kneaded is here called "deep." This is why the waters of the oceans are called "the deeps" as it is written, "The deeps covered them"; "The deeps froze"<sup>384</sup>, "the deep was round about me."<sup>385</sup> The bottom of the ocean is also referred to as "deep"; "He sent His blast against the Sea of Reeds; it became dry; He led them through the deep as through a wilderness."<sup>386</sup> "Who led them through the deeps so that they did not stumble-as a horse in a desert..."<sup>387</sup> And the element air is here called "spirit."<sup>xii</sup>

Now it is already known that the four elements fill up the whole space with matter.<sup>xiii</sup> That which stands still is the sphere of the earth. The waters surround the earth, the air surrounds the waters, and the fire surrounds the air. [The Bible] states that the earth took on form, and the fire above surrounded the intermingled waters and dust, and the wind blew and rose in the darkness and hovered over the waters. It appears to me that this point, [which God created out of absolute nothing] which took shape and became **בהו** is what the sages called "the rock of foundation" from which the world was founded.<sup>388</sup>

Here is the lesson of these verses; in the beginning God created the heavens from nothing, and God created the earth from nothing. The earth, when created was **תוהו**, and then **בהו**, and in these there was darkness [fire as explained above], water, dust, and the wind blowing upon the water. Thus everything was created and made. The reason why wind is attached to the name of God [as it says, and the spirit of God] is that it is the least substantial of all elements and is above them, hovering upon the face of the waters only by the command of the Holy One Blessed be He. If you search [for information] on the creation of the angels those without bodies, it will not be found in the Torah. The explanation [from the sages] is that they were created on the second day, that you would

<sup>381</sup> Psalm 148:7

<sup>382</sup> Isaiah 21:12

<sup>383</sup> Beresheet Rabbah 1:19

<sup>384</sup> Exodus 15:8

<sup>385</sup> Jonah 2:6

<sup>386</sup> Psalm 106:9

<sup>387</sup> Isaiah 63:13

<sup>388</sup> Yoma 54b

not say that they assisted in the creation of the world.<sup>389</sup> But if you will merit and understand the secret of the word בראשית and why the Bible does not begin by saying, אלהים ברא בראשית (God created in the beginning), you will know that, in the way of truth, [it is written in] the bible about the lower creations and hints about the higher ones and that the word בראשית hints at wisdom, which is the head of all beginnings, as I have mentioned. This is why they translated in the Jerusalem Targum [בראשית] as wisdom, and the word is adorned in the Torah with a crown on the letter ב.<sup>xiv</sup>

**ויאמר אלהים יהי אור - (Creation a product of will and thought)<sup>xv</sup>**

The word "אמירה" means here "will", as in [the verse] "Whatever you want, I will do it for you."<sup>390</sup> [Which means] "What do you want and desire?" Similarly, [it is written] "take her and go, and let her be a wife to your master's son, as the Lord has spoken."<sup>391</sup> [Which means] as he willed. For such is the Will before him. Or, it may be [that the word "saying" here means thinking, as in the verses, "you say to yourself"<sup>392</sup> "And the clans of Judah will say to themselves..."<sup>393</sup> The matter is to state that the creation was not done without toil. And this also our Rabbis called "thought". They have said, "The thought [concerning what was to be created on a particular day] was during the day, the deed itself was at sunset,"<sup>394</sup> This teaches that creation was thought out, that there is a reason for everything created, that creation was not simply a product of Will alone.<sup>xvi</sup>

The word הויה teaches a deed for the present time, just as "...that you are to be their king..."<sup>395</sup> Therefore, it is written, when God created the substance of the heavens, He said that from that substance there should come forth a shining matter called "light".

**ויהי אור - (Discrepancy in text: When was light created)**

[The verse] does not say ויהי כן (and it was so), as it is said on other days, because the light did not remain in this state all the time, as did the other creations. On this, the Rabbis have a midrash with a big secret. Know that the term "day" as mentioned in the story of creation was, in the case of the creation of heaven and earth, a real day, composed of hours and seconds, and there were six days like the six days of the workweek, as is the plain meaning of the verse.

In the profounder sense, the days from come from the Most High, for every Divine Saying<sup>xvii</sup> which an existence is called "day." These were six, for "Yours, Lord, are greatness, might..."<sup>396</sup> The Sayings, however are ten because regarding the first three Emanations, the term "day" does not apply at all. The explanation of the order of the verses in terms of this profound interpretation are sublime and hidden, our knowledge of it less than that of a drop from the vast ocean.

**(ד) וירא אלהים את האור כי טוב ויבדל אלהים בין האור ובין החשך :**

**וירא אלהים את האור כי טוב - (God doesn't change God's mind)<sup>xviii</sup>**

<sup>389</sup> Beresheet Rabbah 3:11

<sup>390</sup> I Samuel 20:4

<sup>391</sup> Genesis 24:51

<sup>392</sup> Isaiah 47:8

<sup>393</sup> Zechariah 12:5

<sup>394</sup> Beresheet Rabbah 12:14

<sup>395</sup> Nehemiah 6:6

<sup>396</sup> I Chronicles 29:11

Our teacher Shlomo (Rashi) wrote, "Here too we need an Aggadic explanation.<sup>397</sup> He saw that that it was not fitting<sup>398</sup> that the wicked should have the use of it and therefore set it apart for the righteous who will come in the future. But according to its pshat meaning [the verse can mean] this: He saw that it was good and that it was not fitting that it [the light] and darkness would be used together in confusion, and [therefore] established that one would be bounded by the day and the other be bounded by the night."<sup>399</sup>

And Rabbi Abraham (Ibn Ezra) said, "The word 'וירא' (and He saw)<sup>399</sup> has the same meaning here as in 'וראיתי אני' (and I saw), which refers to the thought in the heart. 'ויבדל' (and He divided) refers to His giving them different names."<sup>400</sup>

But neither of these two words [of Rashi or Ibn Ezra] are correct, for if they were, it would appear that the Queen (God) had new counsel, as if to say that after God said, "Let there be light," and there was light, and God saw that it was good" and then divided between it and darkness (as if God wouldn't know beforehand the result) just as a human being who does not know the nature of something until it comes into existence.<sup>401</sup>

Rather, the order [followed] in the process of creation is that the bringing forth of things into actual existence is called אמירה (saying) such as "And God said, 'Let there be light'", "And God said, 'Let there be a firmament'"<sup>400</sup>, "And God said, 'Let the earth put forth grass.'<sup>401</sup> And establishing something is called ראייה (seeing) as in, "And I saw in Ecclesiastes, and similarly, "And the woman saw that the tree was good for food." And this can also be found in the language of [the Rabbis]. "I see the words of Admon."<sup>402</sup> And also in "The king said to Zadok, the priest, "Do you see? Return to the city in peace."<sup>403</sup> The use of the word "seeing" then indicates that their continuing existence is at His Will, and if that Will should for a second depart from them, they will turn into nothing. Now just as Scripture says in connection with the work of each day, "And God saw that it was good", and on the sixth day when everything was completed it says, "And God saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good,"<sup>404</sup> so to does it say on the first day when light came into existence, "And God saw that it was good", meaning God desired its existence forever.

The verse adds "the light" because had it just said that "And God saw that it was good", it (the judgment that it was good) would have referred to the creation of the heaven and the earth, and at that time God had not yet decreed for them permanence, as they did not remain as they were. Instead, from the substance created on the first day, the firmament was made on the second day, and on the third the waters and the dust were separated and the dry land – which God called "earth" – was formed. He then decreed for them permanence, and said concerning them, "And God saw that it was good."<sup>405</sup>

(What is the "light" and "darkness"?)- ויבדל אלהים בין האור ובין החשך-

<sup>397</sup> Chagigah 12a

<sup>398</sup> The Rashi text doesn't use the word ראי instead it has the word כדא.

<sup>399</sup> Daniel 10:7

<sup>400</sup> Gen 1:6

<sup>401</sup> Gen 1:11

<sup>402</sup> Ketubot 109a

<sup>403</sup> II Samuel 15:27

<sup>404</sup> Genesis 1:31

<sup>405</sup> Genesis 1:10

This is not "the darkness" mentioned in the first verse which, as explained above, refers to the element of fire; rather, the "darkness" mentioned here means the absence of light, since God gave a length of time to the light and decreed that it be absent afterwards until it returns.

A few commentators<sup>406</sup> have said that this light was created in front of the Holy One Blessed be He, that is to say, in the west, and He immediately caused it to disappear for the period of the night, and afterwards it gave light for the period of the day. This is the reason for the verse, "And there was evening and there was morning," since the night came first and afterwards the day, and both of them came after the existence of the light. And this is not correct at all, for in this way they might add a short day to the six days of creation:

But it is possible, however, to say that the light<sup>xxii</sup> was created in front of Him, blessed be He, but did not extend over the [four] elements mentioned [in the second verse, as explained above] and then He divided between it and the darkness by assigning to each a certain period. Light now remained before Him for the length of night, and then in the morning, He caused the light to shine upon the elements. In this way night preceded day.

It is further possible that we should say that when the heavens and the earth came forth from nothing into existence, as mentioned in the first verse, time came into being, for although our time consisting of minutes and hours is measured in light and darkness, yet from the moment some substance came into existence time was already part of it. If so, after the heavens and the earth were created they so remained for the length of a night without light. Then He said, "Let there be light", and there was light, and He decreed that it remain the same period as the first, and that after that it be absent from the elements. Thus, "there was evening and there was morning."

**(ה) ויקרא אלהים לאור יום ולחשך קרא לילה ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום אחד :**

**(What does it mean that God called?) - ויקרא אלהים לאור יום**

The verse states that time was created, and God made the length of the day and the length of the night. The purpose of the word ויקרא (and he called) is to [indicate that] since Adam later gave names [to all the animals] it states that those things which were made before his existence were given names by god. This is the opinion of Rabbi Abraham [ibn Ezra].<sup>407</sup>

The correct interpretation [of the word] ויקרא is that calling a name here indicates the division which bounded them when they assumed their form. Thus did the Rabbi say<sup>408</sup>, "God said to the light, 'The day shall be your boundary,' and to the darkness, He said, 'The night shall be your boundary.'"

**(The measurement of a day) - יהי ערב ויהי בקר**

There was evening and there was morning of one day. The beginning of the night is called ערב, [which also means mingling] because shapes of things appear confused in it, and the beginning of the day is called בקר [which also means examining] because then a man can distinguish between various forms. This coincides with the explanation of

<sup>406</sup> Reference here is to Yehuda Halevi, Al Khazari 2:20

<sup>407</sup> In Verse 8

<sup>408</sup> Beresheet Rabbah 3:7

Rabbi Abraham [ibn Ezra]. By way of the simple explanation of Scripture, it could not have said, "the first day" because the second had not yet been made, "the first" precedes a "second" in number or degree, but both exist, where as, "one" does not connote the existence of a second.

Some scholars<sup>409</sup> explain that [one day is a] hint at the rotation of the sphere upon the face of the whole earth in twenty-four hours, as at every moment it is morning in some different place and night in the opposite place.<sup>xxiii</sup> If so the verse alludes to that which will take place in the firmament after the luminaries will be placed in the firmament of the heavens.

**(ו) ויאמר אלהים יהי רקיע בתוך המים ויהי מבדיל בין מים למים :**

**יהי רקיע - (Explaining the firmament)**

God said now that the substance which had come into being first- that which He created from nothing – should be a firmament, stretched as a tent in the midst of the waters, separating between waters and waters. It is possible that this is what [the Rabbis] intended by their saying<sup>410</sup>, "Rav said, 'The Heavens were in a fluid form on the first day, and on the second day they solidified.' Rav therefore said, that 'Let there be a firmament' means let the firmament become strong." Rabbi Yehuda, the son of Rabbi Simon said, 'Let the רקיע (firmament) become like a plate, just as you say in the verse, "And they did beat וירקעו into thin plates."<sup>411</sup>

**בתוך המים - (Creation is occurring continually)**

[This means] in the middle of the waters, between the higher waters and the lower waters. For there is the same distance between the firmament and the waters upon the earth as between the higher waters and the firmament. Thus you may infer that the upper waters are suspended in space by the command of God. Thus it is explained in Beresheet Rabbah<sup>412</sup> and in Rashi's commentary. This is part of the process of creation [which those who know it are obliged to conceal]; so do not expect me to write anything about it, as the subject is one of the mysteries of the Torah, and the verses in their plain meaning do not require such an interpretation since Scripture itself did not go into it at length, and to give the interpretation is forbidden even to those who know it, and so much the more to us.<sup>xxiv</sup>

**(ז) ויעש אלהים את הרקיע ויבדל בין המים אשר מתחת לרקיע ובין המים אשר מעל לרקיע ויהי כן :**

**ויעש אלהים את הרקיע - (Meaning)**

The word עשייה (doing) in all places means "adjusting something to its required proportion".

**ויהי כן - (Why is this here?)**

It is written first, "And there was light" and afterwards, "and God said, 'Let there be light'", in order to explain that after the command of God, it [the light] came forth into actuality and was as decreed it to be. But here, after the command, "Let there be a

<sup>409</sup> Rambam, Moreh Nebuchim II, 30.

<sup>410</sup> Beresheet Rabbah 4:1

<sup>411</sup> Exodus 39:3

<sup>412</sup> Beresheet Rabbah 4:2

firmament," it is written, "And God made the firmament and divided it..." Why then is it added here "And it was so" if not to tell us that it was to be ever so; for all times. But Rabbi Abraham [ibn Ezra] explained that the expression "and it was so" is attached to the verse which follows, meaning *when* it was so, God called the firmament heaven. This is not correct.

In Beresheet Rabbah,<sup>413</sup> the Rabbis said [concerning the words], "And God made the firmament." That this is one of the verses which Ben Zoma found difficult: "And God made, etc... But was not [the world created] by command, as it is written, "By word of the Eternal were the heavens made?"<sup>414</sup> Now Ben Zoma's difficulty was not only on account of the word ויעש (and He made), since on the fourth, fifth, and sixth day, ויעש is also written. Rather, his difficulty was, as I have said, is that on the other days, immediately after God's command, it is written, "and it was so", indicating that it came into being immediately after the command, but here on the second day, after it says "And God said" – ויעש, "and He made" is written! This was his difficulty. Maybe Ben Zoma had some secret interpretation which he did not want to reveal. This is the explanation of the cause of his difficulty.

**(ח) ויקרא אלהים לרקיע שמים ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום שני :**

**ויקרא אלהים לרקיע שמים - (Creation from nothing and something)**

On the second day He gave them this name when He clothed them with the form of the firmament for on the first day the heavens were still in the process of creation, but the name was not attached to them until they took on this form. The meaning of this name [שמים – heavens] is as if it had the *nikud* of a *segol* under the letter ש as in the word שלמה "For why should I be as one that covers herself?"<sup>415</sup> As if He said that they [the heavens] are waters which have congealed and stretched like a tent in the midst of the upper and lower waters. By this name He has made known the secret of their creation.

In the Gemara<sup>416</sup>, the Rabbis have said, "What is the meaning of the word שמים? It means שם מים. If so, there is one מ missing here in the word שמים on account of the adjoining of two similar letters, just as in the word ירובעל [which stands for ירב בו הבעל – "let Baal contend with him"]".<sup>417</sup> [The word שמים is as if it] said, שם מים, as if to say this is the name given to the waters when they took on a new form. This is the plain meaning of the verses in accordance with the way of Rashi's writing, and it conforms with the opinion of Rav which we have mentioned.<sup>418</sup> Thus the names "heaven" and "earth" mentioned in the first verse point to the names by which they would be called in the future, as it would be impossible to make them known in any other manner.

It is, however, more correct in accordance with the plain meaning of the verses that we say that the heavens mentioned in the first verse refer to the upper heavens, which are not part of the lower spheres but are above the מרכבה (the Divine Chariot), just as it is stated, "And over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness of a firmament, like the color of the transparent ice, stretched forth over their heads above."<sup>419</sup> [It is on

<sup>413</sup> Beresheet Rabbah 4:7

<sup>414</sup> Psalm 33:6

<sup>415</sup> Song of Songs 1:7

<sup>416</sup> Chagiga 12a

<sup>417</sup> Judges 6:32

<sup>418</sup> In verse 6

<sup>419</sup> Ezekiel 1:22.

account of these higher heavens] that the Holy One, blessed be He, is called "He who rides through the heavens".<sup>420</sup> The Bible, however, did not relate anything concerning their creation, just as it did not mention the creation of the angels, the living chariots, and all separate intelligences without a body, just concerning the heavens, it mentioned only in a general way that they were created, meaning that they came forth from nothing.

He said on the second day that there should be a firmament in the midst of the waters, meaning that from the waters, the creation of which had already been mentioned, there should come forth an extended substance separating them [into two distinct waters]. These spherical bodies He also called "heavens" by the name of the first upper heavens. This is why they are called in this parsha "the firmament of the heaven"<sup>421</sup> [rather than "heavens"] "And God set them in the firmament of the heaven" in order to explain that they are not the heavens mentioned by that name in the first verse but merely the firmaments *called* "heavens."

This likewise is the opinion of our Rabbis mentioned in Beresheet Rabbah,<sup>422</sup> who state, "All Rabbis say it in the name of Rabbi Chananyah the son of Rabbi Pinchas, and Rabbi Yaakov the son of Rabbi Avin says it in the name of Rabbi Shmuel the son of Rabbi Nachman: "At that moment the Holy One Blessed be He said, 'Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters' — the middle drop of water congealed, and the lower heavens and the highest heaven of heavens were formed." This saying of the Rabbis refers to the plain spherical bodies in which there are the lower heavens and the upper ones, called "the heavens of heavens," as it is written: "Praise Him, sun and moon; praise Him, all stars of light. Praise Him, highest of heavens, and you waters that are above the heavens."<sup>423</sup> But the heavens mentioned here in the first verse, in which is the Throne of the Holy One, Blessed be He, as it is written, "The heaven is My throne"<sup>424</sup>, are the ones mentioned in the beginning of that Psalm, "Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise Him on high. Praise Him, all His angels."<sup>425</sup>

This interpretation is correct as far as the plain meaning of what is written. But there is yet a sublime and hidden secret in the name "the heaven" and in the name "the throne" for there is a heaven to the heavens, and a throne to the throne. Based on this, the Sages said, "In order that a man may first take upon himself the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven,"<sup>426</sup> and "the fear of Heaven."<sup>427</sup> The Bible likewise says, "Know that the heavens are sovereign".<sup>428</sup> The Sages also have a remarkable Midrash<sup>429</sup> on the verse, "hear in heaven."<sup>430</sup> The worthy one will see all this alluded to in the first verse.

Thus the verses have explained that the first created things were from nothing, and the rest were derived from the first created substance. See no objection to this explanation from the saying of Rabbi Eliezer the Great,<sup>431</sup> who states, "From where were the heavens created? From the light of the garment of the Holy One, blessed be He." [This would apparently indicate that the heavens were not created from nothing but from

<sup>420</sup> Deuteronomy 33:26

<sup>421</sup> Genesis 1:17

<sup>422</sup> Beresheet Rabbah 4:2

<sup>423</sup> Psalms 148:3-4

<sup>424</sup> Isaiah 66:1

<sup>425</sup> Psalms 148:1-2

<sup>426</sup> Berachoth 13 a.

<sup>427</sup> Berachoth 7a.

<sup>428</sup> Daniel 4:23

<sup>429</sup> Sefer Habahir, 100, and found in Zohar 2, p.271

<sup>430</sup> I Kings 8:32

<sup>431</sup> Found in Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer, 3.

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another preceding substance.] This opinion is also found in Beresheet Rabbah.<sup>432</sup> Since the Sages wanted to elevate the first substance to the utmost and make it ethereal, they did not find it feasible that the heavens, which are moving corporeal bodies possessing matter and form, were created from nothing. Instead, they said "the light of the garment" was created first, and from it came forth the real substance of the heavens. And to the earth He gave another substance, not as minute as the first [substance from which the heavens were formed], and that is "the snow under the Throne of Glory," for the Throne of Glory was first created, and from it came forth "the snow" under it, and from it [the "snow"] was formed the substance of the earth, which was third in the order of creation.<sup>xxv</sup>

**(ט) ויאמר אלהים יקוו המים מתחת השמים אל מקום אחד ותראה היבשה ויהי כן :**

**יקוו המים מתחת השמים - (Clearing up an ambiguity in the text)**

The deep, which is water and sand, was like turbid waters, and He decreed concerning the waters that they be gathered together in one place, surrounded on all sides, and He further decreed concerning the sands that they rise up until they be seen above the waters and that they become dry, so that there be a stretch of dry land suitable for settlement thereon. And so it is written: "Who spread the earth over the water".<sup>433</sup> Or perhaps God's decree was that the earth be spherical, partly visible and mostly submerged in the waters, as the Greeks imagine in their proofs, apparent or real.

Thus there were two decrees, that is, two matters done by the Will of God that are contrary to their natural inclination. For in view of the heaviness of earth [which would cause it to sink] and the lightness of the waters [which would cause them to rise], it would have been natural that the pillar of the earth be in the center and that the waters should cover it, thus surrounding it from all sides.<sup>xxvi</sup> Therefore, He said, "Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together", that is to a lower place, and then He said, "And let the dry land appear". He gave them names as they assumed these forms, for at the beginning their collective name was "the deep."

**(י) ויקרא אלהים ליבשה ארץ ולמקוה המים קרא ימים וירא אלהים כי טוב :**

**ויקרא אלהים ליבשה ארץ - (What is the purpose of our existence?)<sup>xxvii</sup>**

The verse states that the proper name for it would be יבשה (dry land) for as the waters are separated from the sand it becomes dry. However, He called it ארץ (earth) as the name which included the four elements created on the first day. The reason for this is that they were all created for the sake of the earth in order that there be a habitation for man, since among the lower creatures no one but man recognizes his Creator. And the gathering together of the waters God called ימים (seas). As if [the word ימים, (seas) combines the two words] ים and מים (sea of waters), for the bottom of the ocean is called ים, as it is written, "As the waters cover the sea",<sup>434</sup> and likewise, "And he took down the sea from off the brazen oxen."<sup>435</sup> It is called "sea" because there was a large gathering of water in it.

<sup>432</sup> Beresheet Rabbah 12i.

<sup>433</sup> Psalms 136:6.

<sup>434</sup> Isaiah 11:9

<sup>435</sup> II Kings 16:17

**(Clearing up an ambiguity in the text) - וירא אלהים כי טוב**

This means that their continued existence was by His Will, and the purport is that when He clothed them with this form He desired them to be so and their existence was thus established as I have explained.<sup>436</sup> This conforms to what our Rabbis have said,<sup>437</sup> "Why does it not say, in reference to the work of the second day, that it was good? Because the work associated with the waters was not completed until the third day. Therefore on the third day, [the words כי טוב - that it was good] are repeated twice, once in reference to the completion of the work associated with the waters, and once in reference to [the completion of the other work of] that day."

**(יא) ויאמר אלהים תדשא הארץ דשא עשב מזריע זרע עץ פרי עשה פרי למינו אשר זרעו בו על הארץ ויהי כן :**

**(What is meant by this?) - ויאמר אלהים תדשא הארץ דשא**

He decreed that there be among the products of the earth a force which grows and bears seed so that the species should exist forever. It is possible that the name "earth" mentioned in the first verse already contains a hint that a force which causes things to grow should spring up from the earth, and it was from this force that the foundations of all vegetations according to their kinds emanated. From them sprang the grass and trees in the Garden of Eden, and from them came those in the world. This is what the Rabbis have said:<sup>438</sup> "On the third day He created three creations: trees, grass, and the Garden of Eden." They have also said:<sup>439</sup> "There is not a single blade of grass below [that does not have] a constellation in heaven that smites it and says to it, 'Grow.' It is this which the Bible says, "Do you know the laws of heaven – or impose its authority on earth?"<sup>440</sup> [עצמו being derived from the root] שוטף (executive officer). And He said that all this vegetation should be "after its kind". This is [the basis] of the prohibition of sowing mixed kinds of seeds,<sup>441</sup> since he who sows them works contrary to the power of the work of creation. I will yet explain this with the help of God.

Rabbeinu Shlomo [Rashi] wrote: דשא עשב (grass, herb). דשא does not mean the same as עשב and עשב does not mean the same as דשא, for by דשא is meant that which forms the covering of the ground when it is filled with vegetation, and it is not linguistically correct to say 'this or that דשא'. Each by itself is called this or that עשב. "

This interpretation of Rashi is not correct. For if it were so, the word דשא could have no plural, and yet we find the Sages saying<sup>442</sup>, "If a person grafted together two kinds of דשאים, what should the law be?" And the Rabbi himself<sup>xxviii</sup> mentions דשאים. Rather, דשא is the young growing plant, and עשב is the mature product which produces seeds. This is why Scripture says, 'תדשא הארץ' (let the earth put forth) 'דשה' (young plants), and it would not be correct usage to say "תעש" [for the word עשב applies to mature products which produce seeds]. And every young thing that grows from the earth is called דשה, even trees. Therefore 'תדשא הארץ' in the verse extends also to the

<sup>436</sup> In Verse 4

<sup>437</sup> Beresheet Rabbah 4:8.

<sup>438</sup> Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer, Chapter 3. (The source is not definite.)

<sup>439</sup> Beresheet Rabbah 10:7.

<sup>440</sup> Job 38:33.

<sup>441</sup> Leviticus 19:19

<sup>442</sup> Chullin 60a

expression עץ פרי (the fruit-tree). [This interpretation is necessary] since He did not say, "Let the earth put forth דשה עשב and "let it bring forth" the fruit-tree." The word דשה thus has the same meaning as צמיחה (growing). Similarly we find: "For the pasture of the wilderness are clothed with grass, the trees have borne their fruit."<sup>443</sup>

I wonder why the Bible did not mention the creation of fruitless trees, and how is it that He commanded only concerning fruit-trees? Perhaps this is what induced our Rabbis to say,<sup>444</sup> "Even the presently barren trees at first bore fruit." If so, we must say that since the curse [which was visited upon Adam for his sin] — "Cursed be the ground for thy sake"<sup>445</sup> — barren trees came into existence. But it is possible that the explanation of the verse before us is as follows: "Let the earth bring forth growing things, and herbs which yield seed and trees which bear fruit." Thus He decreed at first the creation of barren herbs and barren trees in general, and then He specified herbs which yield seed and trees which bear fruit. From what He said later on, "bearing fruit with the seed in it" we may derive that all trees were to grow from their seed although it is the custom with some trees are propagated by planting a branch.

(יב) ותוצא הארץ דשא עשב מזריע זרע למינהו ועץ עשה פרי אשר זרעו בו למינהו וירא אלהים כי טוב :

(Why is it good?) - וירא אלהים כי טוב

This affirms the existence of the various kinds forever. There was no special day assigned for this command for vegetation alone, since it is not a unique work. The earth, whether it brings forth anything or is salt land, is one.

(יד) ויאמר אלהים יהי מארת ברקיע השמים להבדיל בין היום ובין הלילה והיו לאתת ולמועדים ולימים ושנים :

(What is meant by this?) - יהי מארת

Now the light was created on the first day, illuminating the elements, but when on the second day the firmament was made, it intercepted the light and prevented it from illuminating the lower elements. Thus, when the earth was created on the third day there was darkness on it and not light. And now on the fourth day the Holy One, blessed be He, desired that there be in the firmament luminaries, the light of which would reach the earth. This is the meaning of the words, "in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth"<sup>446</sup>, for there was already light above the firmament which did not illuminate the earth.

The meaning of the words, יהי מאורות (Let there be lights), is as follows: He decreed on the first day that from the substance of the heavens there should come forth a light for the period of the day, and now He decreed that it become corporeal and that a luminous body come forth from it which would give light during the day with a great illumination, and that another body of lesser light [should come into existence] to illumine at night, and He suspended both in the firmament of the heavens in order that they illumine below as well.

<sup>443</sup> Joel 2:22.

<sup>444</sup> Beresheet Rabbah 5:9.

<sup>445</sup> Genesis 3:17

<sup>446</sup> Genesis 1: 17

It is possible that just as He endowed the earth with the power of growth in certain places thereof, so He placed in the firmament certain areas that are prepared and ready to receive the light, and these bodies which receive the light reflect it, just as window-panes and onyx stones. This is why He called them מאורות and not אורים. [אורים would imply that they have their own light, מאורות on the other hand implies that they reflect the light which they receive], even though they are called אורים, in the Psalm.<sup>447</sup>

(Light) - להבדיל בין היום ובין הלילה -

Rashi wrote: "This took place after the primeval light was concealed for the righteous, but during the six days of creation the [primeval] light and darkness functioned, one by day and one by night."<sup>448</sup>

Now I do not see that this is the opinion of our Rabbis who mention concealment in connection with the primeval light. In their opinion, rather, the primeval light functioned for three days, and on the fourth an emanation took place from which was formed these two luminaries, just as the Rabbis have said,<sup>448</sup> "The sphere of the sun is an offshoot of the upper light." For since this world was not deserving of being served by this primeval light without an intermediary, He concealed it for the righteous in the World to Come, and He made use of this offshoot of the upper light from the fourth day on. Thus the Rabbis said in Beresheet Rabbah:<sup>449</sup> "It was taught: The light which was created during the six days of creation could not give light at daytime because it would then dim the sphere of the sun; at night it could not give light, since it was created to light only at daytime. So where is it? It was concealed. And where is it? It is prepared for the righteous in the hereafter, as it is said, "And the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and as the light of the seven days."<sup>450</sup> "Seven?" I wonder! Were they not three? It is like a man who says thus: 'I am keeping this for the seven days of my wedding feast.' "That is to say, it is common parlance that one say: "I am keeping and guarding this meat for the seven days of my wedding festivity." It is not that this would suffice him for all seven days, only that he will use it during that time. In the same way the Rabbis explained the expression seven days, meaning as the light which functioned during some of those days.

In Beresheet Rabbah<sup>451</sup> the Rabbis also said: "And He separated the light."<sup>452</sup> Rabbi Yehudah the son of Rabbi Simon said, 'He separated it for Himself.' And the Rabbis say, 'He separated it for the righteous in the hereafter.'" Now if you could know the intent of the Rabbis in their saying in the Blessing of the Moon,<sup>453</sup> "A crown of glory to those borne by Him from the birth," you would know the secret of the primeval light, the conserving thereof, and the matter of separation mentioned [in the words of Rabbi Yehudah the son of Rabbi Simon] — i.e., "He separated it for Himself" — as well as the secret of "the two kings making use of one crown,"<sup>454</sup> as will indeed be the case at the

<sup>447</sup> Psalms 136:7

<sup>448</sup> Beresheet Rabbah 17:7.

<sup>449</sup> Genesis 3:6.

<sup>450</sup> Isaiah 30:26

<sup>451</sup> Genesis 3:7

<sup>452</sup> Genesis 1:4

<sup>453</sup> Sanhedrin 42a

<sup>454</sup> Chullin 60b, and mentioned in Rashi.

end when "the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun after the light of the sun shall be sevenfold."<sup>455</sup>

(Meaning) - והיו לאתת

These are the changes which they will bring forth, making signs and wonders "in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke."<sup>456</sup> This is similar in meaning to the expression, "And be not dismayed at the signs of heaven."<sup>457</sup>

(Meaning) - ולמועדים

This means seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter.<sup>458</sup>

(Meaning) - ולימים

This means the length of day and the length of night.

(What is a year?) - ושנים

The luminaries are to complete their orbit and then traverse again the same course they followed, thus making the solar year consist of 365 days and the lunar year consist of [lunar cycles, each approximately] 30 days.

(טו) והיו למאורת ברקיע השמים להאיר על הארץ ויהי כן :

(Why add "on the earth"? ) - והיו למאורת ברקיע השמים להאיר על הארץ

He added here that their light should reach the earth since it is possible for the light to be seen in the heavens and perform all mentioned functions without lighting upon the earth. Hence He said that it "be for lights in the firmament of the heaven", directed toward the earth and shining upon it.

(טז) ויעש אלהים את שני המארת הגדלים את המאור הגדל לממשלת היום ואת המאור הקטן לממשלת הלילה ואת הכוכבים :  
(יז) ויתן אתם אלהים ברקיע השמים להאיר על הארץ :

(What does this refer to?) - ויעש אותם אלהים

This teaches us that these lights were not made from the body of the firmament, rather, they were bodies set into it.

(יח) ולמשל ביום ובלילה ולהבדיל בין האור ובין החשך וירא אלהים כי טוב :

(What does it mean by authority?) - ולמשל ביום ובלילה

The matter of authority is a different matter from the function of light which God mentioned, since it includes that which He stated at first, "And they shall be for signs, and seasons."<sup>459</sup> Their authority over the earth comprises the changes which they cause in it and the power of bringing about the existence and deterioration of all things in the lower world since the sun, by its rule during the day, causes the sprouting, the propagation and the growth of all the warm and dry things, while the moon by its rule increases the springs and the oceans, and all liquid and cold things. Therefore God said in

<sup>455</sup> Isaiah 30:26

<sup>456</sup> Joel 3:3

<sup>457</sup> Jeremiah 10:2

<sup>458</sup> Genesis 8:22

<sup>459</sup> Genesis 1:14

a general way, "And to rule over the day and over the night," because theirs is the dominion over things in the lower world.

It is possible that the authority given to them contains also a power of emanation for they are the leaders of things in the lower world, and with their power, every ruling power in nature holds sway. Thus the constellation which comes up by day rules during it as it is written, "[these, the sun, moon and stars Adonai] allotted to all peoples everywhere under heaven".<sup>460</sup> And this is what the Bible means when it says, "He counted the number of the stars; to each He gave its name."<sup>461</sup> Likewise, "He called them each by name".<sup>462</sup> For the calling of names signifies the differentiation in their respective powers, giving to this one the power of justice and righteousness, and to that one the power of blood and the sword, and similarly all other powers, as is known in astrology. And all is done by the power of the Most High and in accordance with His Will. Therefore it says, "Great is our Lord, and full in power",<sup>463</sup> for He is greatest of all and mightiest in power over them. And similarly it says, Because of His great might and vast power.<sup>464</sup> In accord with the secret I have hinted to you, the matter of authority is completely true.

(Meaning) - ולהבדיל בין האור ובין החשך

Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra said: "By the coming forth of the sun at daytime and the light of the moon at night, they shall divide the light from the darkness." In my opinion, the light mentioned here refers to the day, and the darkness is the night for such are their names, as it says, "And God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night."

Now in connection with all the works of creation, Scripture mentions the Divine command and then tells of the deed. And here too He commanded, "And they shall be for lights,"<sup>465</sup> and then it relates, "And God set them."<sup>466</sup> He further said, "And to rule over the day and over the night"<sup>467</sup>, meaning that one is to rule by day and the other by night, the authority being that which He commanded when He said, "And they shall be for signs, and for seasons". And now He related that the authority of the two is not alike but instead consists of dividing the darkness from the light. The greater luminary will rule by day and light will be everywhere, even where the sun does not reach, and the smaller luminary will rule by night, and there will be darkness except that the moon will lighten its darkness. This then is the command He gave in order to divide the day from the night, as it says, "And God divided the light from the darkness."

(כ) ויאמר אלהים ישרצו המים שרץ נפש חיה ועוף יעופף על הארץ על פני רקיע השמים :

(What does this refer to?) - ישרצו המים שרץ

Rashi wrote: "Every living creature that does not rise above the ground is called שרץ, [species] of winged creatures such as flies; of abominable creatures such as ants and

<sup>460</sup> Deuteronomy 4:19.

<sup>461</sup> Psalms 147:4

<sup>462</sup> Isaiah 40:26

<sup>463</sup> Psalms 147:5.

<sup>464</sup> Isaiah 40:26

<sup>465</sup> Genesis 1:15.

<sup>466</sup> Genesis 1:17.

<sup>467</sup> Genesis 1:18.

worms; of larger creatures such as the mole and the mouse and others of the same kind, and all fishes." But what will the Rabbi say of the verse, "Be fertile, then, and increase; abound on the earth and increase on it."<sup>468</sup> which was said to Noah and his sons? Likewise, the verse stating, "which the waters brought forth in swarms"<sup>469</sup> should, according to Rashi, be read: "Which swarmed in the waters," (where instead of המים we have במים). Again there are many winged creatures that do not rise in height above the ground even as much as the mole and mouse, and the bat has very small legs, so why should it not be called "שרץ העוף" (a winged swarming thing)?

Onkelos' opinion is that the term שריצה (swarming) has an implication of movement. Thus he says of both שרץ and ברמש "ריחשא דרחיש" (moving things that move).<sup>xxx</sup> He has a nice explanation. שרצים are so called because of their constant movement. It is possible that it is a composite word: שרץ, שהוא רץ (that which runs). "רמש" is so called because it creeps upon the earth and is never quiet or at rest. Know that every winged creature that has four legs is called "שרץ העוף" (a winged creeping thing<sup>470</sup>) because it leans on its legs and moves like שרצים, and a winged creature which is not so is called עוף כנף (winged fowl) because its main method of movement is flying. The meaning of the verse, "ושרצו" and let them swarm on the earth and be fruitful and multiply on earth."<sup>471</sup> is thus: that they may walk<sup>xxxii</sup> upon the entire earth, and be fruitful and multiply upon it. "Abound on the earth and increase on it."<sup>472</sup> Means move about the entire earth and multiply." This is the reason for the repetition of the word ורבו (and multiply) in the verse.<sup>xxxiii</sup> This being so, we will explain the expression, which the waters 'שרצו,' as meaning "which the waters have moved and brought forth." Similarly, the expression, "the river will swarm with frogs"<sup>473</sup> [means that the river moved and brought forth frogs]. Also, "but the Israelites were fertile and prolific; they multiplied and increased very greatly."<sup>474</sup> means that they were fruitful and they multiplied and moved about because of their multitude until the land was filled with them.

Onkelos, however, interpreted the verse, בשרצו בארץ, as having reference to propagation. He thus translates it as "propagate in the land", since he understood the word שרצו—a verb—as being borrowed from the noun שרצים (reptiles). [The verse, according to Onkelos, thus states:] "And you, be ye fruitful and multiply, as the prolific creatures in the earth, and multiply therein." Similarly, "And the children of Israel were fruitful 'פרו ושרצו'" means they brought forth progeny abundantly as the prolific creatures.

#### (Explaining an ambiguity in the text) - ועוף יעופף על הארץ -

On this [fifth] day the command of creation was given to the waters, and on the sixth day it was given to the earth. If so, the expression, "and let fowl fly above the earth", must be interpreted as being connected with [the beginning of the verse which has the following meaning]: "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures and with fowl that will fly." And the verse stating, "And the Lord God formed out of the earth every beast of the field and every bird of the sky,"<sup>475</sup> [which seems to indicate that the

<sup>468</sup> Genesis 9:7.

<sup>469</sup> Genesis 1:21.

<sup>470</sup> "Creeping," according to Rashi, would be "swarming."

<sup>471</sup> Genesis 8:17

<sup>472</sup> Genesis 9:7

<sup>473</sup> Exodus 7:28.

<sup>474</sup> Exodus 1:7

<sup>475</sup> Genesis 2:19

fowl were created from the ground, not from the water, must be understood] as if it said: "And the Eternal God formed out of the earth every beast of the field, and He also formed every fowl of the air out of the water." There are many verses like this. So also is the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer the Great in his Chapters,<sup>476</sup> where he says: "On the fifth day he caused all winged fowl to swarm from the waters."

However, in the Gemara,<sup>477</sup> the Sages differ on this point. Some, agreeing with the previously mentioned interpretation, say that all winged fowl were created from the waters, and others say that they were created from both — in their words, "they were created from the swamps." If so, since the fowl sprang from the waters, and the swamps are at the bottom of the ocean, this is why the command concerning their creation took place on the fifth day.

Similarly God said, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures", since both the body and soul of fish come from the waters by word of God Who brought upon them a spirit from the elements, unlike man, in whom He separated the body from his soul, as it is said, "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life."<sup>478</sup> On the third day of creation when the plants came into being, He mentioned nothing at all concerning a soul because the power of growth which resides in plants is not a "soul;" only in moving beings is it a "soul."

And in the opinion of the Greeks, who say that just as in moving beings the power of growth is only through the soul, so also in the case of plants is the power of growth through a soul. The difference between them will be that the one [the moving being] is a נפש חיה (a living soul), that is, a soul in which there is life, for there is a soul which has no life and that is the soul of plants. Our Rabbis have mentioned "desire" in connection with date trees.<sup>479</sup> Perhaps this is a force in growth, but it cannot be called "a soul."

**(כא) ויברא אלהים את התנינים הגדלים ואת כל נפש החיה הרמשת  
אשר שרצו המים למיניהם ואת כל עוף כנף למיניהו וירא אלהים כי טוב:**

**ויברא אלהים את התנינים הגדלים - (ויהי כן?)**

Because of the great size of these creatures, some consisting of many Persian miles — the Greeks in their books even relate that they knew some of them to be 500 Persian miles long, and our Rabbi likewise spoke of them in magnifying terms<sup>480</sup> — on account of that, the Bible explicitly ascribes their creation to God for He brought them forth from nothing from the beginning, as I have explained the expression ויברא (creation). Similarly, Scripture does so in the case of on account of his exaltedness, thus informing us that man, with his mind and reason, also came forth from nothing. I wonder why it does not say "and it was so" on this day? Perhaps it would not have been possible to mention "And He created" after saying, "and it was so," since it refers to the preceding.

<sup>476</sup> Beginning of Chapter 9.

<sup>477</sup> Chullin 27b.

<sup>478</sup> Genesis 2:7.

<sup>479</sup> Beresheet Rabbah 44:1.

<sup>480</sup> Baba Bathra 73b.

Our Rabbis have said <sup>481</sup> that the great sea-monsters are the Leviathan and its mate which He created male and female. He then slew the female and preserved it in salt for the benefit of the righteous in the hereafter. It is possible that on account of this it would not have been appropriate to say concerning their creation, "and it was so," since they did not continue to exist [in the form in which they were created].

**(כב) ויברך אתם אלהים לאמר פרו ורבו ומלאו את המים בימים והעוף ירב בארץ :**

**ויברך אתם - Why of all things are these blessed?**

He decreed the blessing on them and said of them that they should be fruitful and multiply, meaning that they should bring forth abundantly, that one creature should bring forth many like itself. The purport of the blessing is procreation, even as it says, "And I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations."<sup>482</sup> In connection with plants also, the term "blessing" applies: "Then I will command My blessing upon you in the sixth year."<sup>483</sup> However, it does not say so on the third day [when the plants and trees were created] because all created living beings were only a single pair, male and female, according to their kind, and therefore they were in need of a blessing to bring forth abundantly but in the case of plants, they sprang up over the face of the entire earth in great abundance, just as they exist today. Nor did He mention a blessing on the sixth day for cattle and beasts because in the decree of abundancy which He decreed for the moving souls in the waters there were included the moving souls on the earth, as all living souls that do not speak are in the same class of creation. And our Rabbis have said <sup>484</sup> that they [the fish and fowl] were in need of a blessing because people hunt them and eat them.

**ומלאו את המים בימים - (Why say both מים and בימים?)**

He blessed them that in their abundancy they would fill the seas, the streams and the pools. Or it may be that their "filling" is to be in the seas only for in the streams they are few.

**והעוף ירב בארץ - (What is the connection with the preceding phrase?)**

Although the fowl were created out of the waters, their blessing — that they be fruitful and multiply — was to be on the earth for there is no fowl that lays its eggs in the waters and has them grow there. Even those fowl which abide always in the waters and derive their food from them lay their eggs on the earth, and there they are born.

**(כד) ויאמר אלהים תוצא הארץ נפש חיה למינה בהמה ורמש וחיתו ארץ למינה ויהי כן :**

**בהמה - (Meaning)**

These are the species that eat grass, whether domestic animals or those of the wilderness.

**וחיתו ארץ - (Meaning)**

Those which eat flesh are called חית (beasts), and they all seek and seize prey.

<sup>481</sup> Baba Bathra 74b.

<sup>482</sup> Genesis 17:16.

<sup>483</sup> Leviticus 25:21.

<sup>484</sup> Beresheet Rabbah 11:2, and quoted in Rashi

**ורמש - (Meaning)**

Rashi wrote: "These are creeping swarms that creep low upon the earth, appearing as though they are dragged along." Now in this chapter we find: "And over every animal הרומש (that creeps) upon the earth,"<sup>485</sup> and it is further written, "And all flesh הרומש (that moved) upon the earth perished, both fowl and cattle, and beasts, and every swarming thing that swarms upon the earth."<sup>486</sup> Also, "when all the beasts of the forest תרמוש (stir)."<sup>487</sup> But the meaning of רמישה is as if it were written with the letter "ס", as in the רגל תרמסנה (the foot shall tread it down),<sup>488</sup> and other related expressions. God therefore says of beasts and cattle, "רמש על הארץ" "that tread on the earth,"<sup>489</sup> and of creeping things that drag along, רמש האדמה (that creep upon the ground),<sup>490</sup> because they tread on the ground with their entire body.

**(כו) ויאמר אלהים נעשה אדם בצלמנו כדמותנו וירדו בדגת הים ובעוף השמים ובבהמה ובכל הארץ ובכל הרמש הרמש על הארץ :**

**ויאמר אלהים נעשה אדם - (Why is this mentioned separately?)**

There was a special command dedicated to the making of man because of his great superiority since his nature is unlike that of beasts and cattle which were created with the preceding command.

The correct explanation of נעשה (us make) [which is in the plural form when it should have been in the singular] is as follows: It has been shown to you that God created something from nothing only on the first day, and afterwards He formed and made things from those created elements.<sup>491</sup> Thus when He gave the waters the power of bringing forth "a living soul",<sup>492</sup> the command concerning them was, "Let the waters swarm". The command concerning cattle was "Let the earth bring forth".<sup>493</sup> But in the case of man God said, "Let us make", that is, I and the aforementioned earth, let us make man, the earth to bring forth the body from its elements as it did with cattle and beasts, as it is written, "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground",<sup>494</sup> and He, blessed be He, to give the spirit from His mouth, the Supreme One, as it is written, "And He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life."

**ויאמר בצלמנו כדמותנו - (The distinction between כדמותנו and בצלמנו)**

And God said, "In our image, and after our likeness", as man will then be similar to both. In the capacity of his body, he will be similar to the earth from which he was taken, and in spirit he will be similar to the higher beings, because it [the spirit] is not a body and will not die. In the second verse, He says, "In the image of God He created him",<sup>495</sup> in order to relate the distinction by which man is distinguished from the rest of

<sup>485</sup> Verse 28. Here Rashi's interpretation could not apply to animal.

<sup>486</sup> Genesis 7:21.

<sup>487</sup> Psalms 104:20.

<sup>488</sup> Isaiah 26:6.

<sup>489</sup> Genesis 1:26.

<sup>490</sup> Genesis 1:25.

<sup>491</sup> Fire, wind, water, and earth

<sup>492</sup> Genesis 1:20.

<sup>493</sup> Genesis 1:24

<sup>494</sup> Genesis 2:7.

<sup>495</sup> Genesis 1:27.

created beings. The explanation of this verse I have found ascribed to Rabbi Joseph the Kimchite, and is the most acceptable of all interpretations that have been advanced concerning it.

The meaning of צלם is as the word תאר (appearance), as in 'תעטרהו' "(And the appearance) of his visage was distorted",<sup>496</sup> similarly, "Man walks about as a mere shadow" (צלם as a mere appearance)<sup>497</sup> When You are aroused You despise their image,<sup>498</sup> And the meaning of the word דמות is similarity in form and deed, as things that are akin in a certain matter are called similar to each other. Thus man is similar both to the lower and higher beings in appearance and honor, as it is written, "And You have crowned him with glory and honor",<sup>499</sup> meaning that the goal before him is wisdom, knowledge, and skill of deed.<sup>500</sup> In real likeness his body thus compares to the earth while his soul is similar to the higher beings.

**וירצו בדגת הים - (What is the connection with the preceding phrase?)**

On account of his [man's] being male and female, he said, "And let 'them' have dominion over the fish of the sea", in the plural.

In Beresheet Rabbah<sup>501</sup>, the Rabbis have said about: "Let the earth bring forth a living soul after its kind". Rabbi Elazar said, "A living soul — this has reference to the spirit of the first man." Now it is impossible that Rabbi Elazar should say that the expression, 'Let the earth bring forth', be explained as having reference to the soul of the first man at all. Instead, his intent is to say what I have mentioned, that the formation of man as regarding his spirit, namely, the soul which is in the blood, that was done from the earth, just as in the command of formation of the beasts and cattle. For the souls of all moving things were made at one time, and afterwards He created bodies for them. First God made the bodies of the cattle and the beasts, and then the body of man into whom He imparted this soul [which resides in the blood, and is akin to that of the cattle and beasts], and afterwards, God breathed into him a higher soul. For it is concerning this separate soul that a special command was devoted by God Who gave it, as it is written, "And He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life."<sup>502</sup>

The way of truth in this verse [as to why Scripture begins with "man" in the singular — "let us make man" — and then uses the plural, "let 'them' have dominion"] will be known to him who understands the following verse [verse 27, where the same change appears. It begins by stating, "in the image of God He created 'him'", and then uses the plural: male and female He created 'them'.]

It is possible that Rabbi Elazar meant to explain the expression "Let the earth bring forth" as meaning "the earth of eternal life," that it bring forth a living soul after its kind that will exist forever. Similarly, [we explain that when the Bible] said, "male and female He created them", it is because man's creation at first was male and female, and His soul was included in both of them. However, in the formation, man was formed first, and then He built the woman from the rib of man, as the Bible tells later. Therefore the

<sup>496</sup> Daniel 3:19

<sup>497</sup> Psalm 39:7.

<sup>498</sup> Psalm 73:20.

<sup>499</sup> Psalm 8:6.

<sup>500</sup> Ecclesiastes 2:21; 4:4.

<sup>501</sup> Genesis 7:7.

<sup>502</sup> Genesis 1:24

Bible mentioned here the term "creation," and in the chapter below it mentioned "formation." The person learned [in the mysteries of the Torah] will understand.

**(Meaning) - וירדו**

The meaning of "let them have dominion" is that they shall rule vigorously over the fish, the fowl, the cattle, and all creeping things "the cattle" here includes the beast.

**(Meaning) - הארץ**

And He said, "And over all the earth", to indicate that they are to rule over the earth itself, to uproot and to pull down, to dig and to hew out copper and iron. The term "רדייה" applies to the rule of the master over his servant.

**(כח) ויברך אתם אלהים ויאמר להם אלהים פרו ורבו ומלאו את הארץ וכבשה ורדו בדגת הים ובעוף השמים ובכל חיה הרמשת על הארץ :**

**ויברך אתם אלהים - (What does it mean to bless?)**

This is an actual blessing [unlike Verse 22 where the blessing of the fish and fowl consisted of bestowing upon them the power of procreation]. Therefore, it is written here, "And God blessed them, and God said unto them." But above in Verse 22 it is written, "And God blessed them, saying," [the word "saying" indicating] that the blessing is the command of procreation, that He gave them the power of bringing forth offspring, and no other command with which they are to be blessed. [But in the case of man, in addition to the power of being fruitful, he was also blessed that he have dominion over the earth, hence the Bible continues, "and God said to them".]

**ומלאו את הארץ - (What is the connection with the preceding phrase?)**

This is a blessing that they fill the earth because of their numbers. In my opinion, He blessed them that they fill the whole earth, and that the nations should disperse according to their families and should populate the far ends of the world because of their numbers and not be concentrated in one place, as was the thought of the men of the generation of the dispersion.

**וכבשה - (Meaning)**

He gave them power and dominion over the earth to do as they wish with the cattle, the reptiles, and all that crawl in the dust, and to build, "and to pluck up that which is planted",<sup>503</sup> and from its hills to dig copper, and other similar things. This is included in what He said "and over all the earth".<sup>504</sup>

**ורדו בדגת הים - (Meaning)**

He said that they should also have dominion over the fish that are concealed from them, "And over the fowl of the heaven" which are not on the ground, and also over every wild animal. He thus mentioned them in the order of their creation: first the fish and fowl, and afterwards the animals. So likewise the Bible says, "You have made him master over Your handiwork, laying the world at his feet, sheep and oxen, all of them, and wild beasts too; the birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea, whatever travels the paths of the seas."<sup>505</sup> Our Rabbis, however, have made a distinction between כבישה (subduing) and רדייה (having dominion).<sup>506</sup>

<sup>503</sup> Ecclesiastes 3:2.

<sup>504</sup> Genesis 1:26

<sup>505</sup> Psalms 8:7-9

<sup>506</sup> Beresheet Rabbah 8:12

(כט) ויאמר אלהים הנה נתתי לכם את כל עשב זרע זרע אשר על פני כל הארץ ואת כל העצא אשר בו פרי עץ זרע לכם יהיה לאכלה:

**הנה נתתי לכם את כל עשב זרע - (Contradictions and Vegetarians)**

He did not permit Adam and his wife to kill any creature and eat its meat, but all alike were to eat herbs. But when the era of the Sons of Noah came, He permitted them to eat meat, as it is said, "Every creature that lives shall be yours to eat; as with the green grasses, I give you all these."<sup>507</sup> even as the green herb that I permitted to the first man, so do I permit you everything. This is the language of Rashi. And so did the Rabbi (Rashi) explain it in Tractate Sanhedrin:<sup>508</sup> "And to all the animals on land... [I give to you] all the green plants for food."<sup>509</sup>

But if so, then we must explain the expression, "every green herb for food",<sup>510</sup> to mean "and every green herb." But this is not so. Rather, He gave to man and his wife every herb yielding seed and all fruit of the trees [as mentioned in Verse 29], and to the beasts of the earth and the fowl of the heaven He gave all green herb [as mentioned in Verse 30] but neither the fruit of the tree nor the seeds. The food of all of them was thus not the same. However, meat was not permitted to them until the time of the "Sons of Noah," as is the opinion of our Rabbis. And this is the plain meaning of the verse.

The reason for this [prohibition of eating meat] was that creatures possessing a moving soul have a certain superiority as regards their soul, resembling in a way those who possess the rational soul: they have the power of choice affecting their welfare and their food, and they flee from pain and death. And the Bible says: "Who knows if a man's life breath does rise upward and if a beast's breath does sink down into the earth?"<sup>511</sup>

But when they sinned, and "all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth",<sup>512</sup> and it was decreed that they die in the flood, and for the sake of Noah He saved some of them to preserve the species, He gave the sons of Noah permission to slaughter and eat them since their existence was for his sake. Yet with all this, He did not give them permission regarding the soul thereof, and He prohibited them from eating a limb cut off from a living animal, and in addition He gave us [the children of Israel] the commandment prohibiting the eating of all blood because it is the basis of the soul, as it is written: "For the life of all flesh- its blood is its life. Therefore I say to the Israelite people: You shall not partake of the blood of any flesh; for the life of all flesh is its blood."<sup>513</sup> Thus He has permitted the eating of the body of dumb animals after death, but not the soul itself.

This indeed is the reason for the commandment of killing [animals in the prescribed manner before eating their flesh], and for the saying of the Rabbis:<sup>514</sup> "The duty of relieving the suffering of beasts is a Biblical requirement." And this is the meaning behind the benediction which we make before killing animals: "[Blessed are You God, Ruler of the universe] Who sanctifies us by commanding us concerning the

<sup>507</sup> Genesis 9:3.

<sup>508</sup> Sanhedrin, 59b

<sup>509</sup> Genesis 1:30

<sup>510</sup> Genesis 1:30.

<sup>511</sup> Ecclesiastes 3:21.

<sup>512</sup> Genesis 6:12.

<sup>513</sup> Leviticus 17:14

<sup>514</sup> Shabbat 128b.

killing [of animals]. "I will yet discuss the purport of the commandment prohibiting the eating of blood when I reach thereto,<sup>515</sup> if God will reward me.

The meaning of the expression, "every herb yielding seed..., and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for food", is that they should eat the seeds of herbs, such as the grains of wheat, barley, beans, and the like, and that they should eat all fruits of the tree; but the tree itself was not given to them for food, nor was the herb itself until man was cursed and he was told, "But your food shall be the grasses of the field."<sup>516</sup>

(לא) וירא אלהים את כל אשר עשה והנה טוב מאד ויהי ערב ויהי  
בקר יום הששי :

(Meaning) - והנה טוב מאד

The meaning of the word מאד (very) is "mostly." On the sixth day God added this word because he is speaking of creation in general which includes evil. Thus He said that "it was very good", meaning its מאד mostly good, thus conveying the thought that even the small part of it which is evil is basically also good, as is explained further on. It is this thought which is the basis of the saying of the Rabbis in Beresheet Rabbah:<sup>517</sup> "And, behold, it was very good. And, behold, it was good — this refers to death." Similarly the Rabbis mentioned, "This means the evil inclination in man," and, "This means the dispensation of punishment." Onkelos also intended to convey this thought for he said here, "And, behold, it was very orderly," meaning that the order was very properly arranged since the evil is needed for the preservation of the good, just as it is said, "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven."<sup>518</sup> Some Rabbis explain<sup>519</sup> that on account of the superiority of man, He added special praise on his formation, i.e., that he is "very good."

רמבן — בראשית פרק ב

(א) ויכלו השמים והארץ וכל צבאם :

(What does it mean all?) - וכל צבאם

"The hosts of the earth" are those which have already been mentioned: beasts, creeping things, fish, all growing things, and also man. "The host of the heavens" refers to the two luminaries and the stars, mentioned above, just as it is written: "And when you look up to the sky and behold the sun and the moon and the stars, the whole heavenly host..."<sup>520</sup> It also includes the Separate Intelligences,<sup>xxxiv</sup> just as it is written: "I saw the Lord seated upon His throne, with all the host of heaven standing by Him",<sup>521</sup> and also, "The Lord will punish the host of heaven in heaven."<sup>522</sup> It is here [in the expression, "all

<sup>515</sup> Leviticus 17: 14

<sup>516</sup> Genesis 3:18

<sup>517</sup> Beresheet Rabbah 9:5

<sup>518</sup> Ecclesiastes 3:1

<sup>519</sup> Beresheet Rabbah 9:14

<sup>520</sup> Deuteronomy 4:19

<sup>521</sup> I Kings 22:19

<sup>522</sup> Isaiah 24:21

the host"], that He has hinted at the formation of the angels in the work of creation. Similarly, the souls of men are included in the host of heaven.<sup>xxxv</sup>

(ג) ויברך אלהים את יום השביעי ויקדש אתו כי בו שבת מכל מלאכתו אשר ברא אלהים לעשות

**ויברך. ויקדש - (Why both words?)**

Rabbeinu Shlomo [Rashi] quotes from Beresheet Rabbah,<sup>523</sup> He blessed it through the Manna. [On all other days of the week there fell one portion per person, whereas on the sixth day — the eve of the Sabbath — a double portion fell.] And He sanctified it through the Manna [by not having it fall on the Sabbath]. The verse is written here with reference to the future. In the name of the Gaon Rav Saadia<sup>524</sup> they have said that the blessing and sanctification refer to those who observe the Sabbath, meaning that they will be blessed and sanctified. However, from the intimation of the verse it does not appear that it refers to something which will happen in the future. Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra said that the blessing signifies additional well-being, that on the seventh day there is a renewal of procreative strength in the body, and in the soul, a greater capacity in the functioning of the reasoning power. "And He sanctified it" by not working on it as He did on the other days. Now Ibn Ezra's interpretation is correct to those who believe in it for this additional well-being he speaks of is not perceptible to human senses.

The truth is that the blessing on the Sabbath day is the fountain of blessings and constitutes the foundation of the world. "And He sanctified it" that it draw its sanctity from the Sanctuary on high. If you will understand this comment of mine you will grasp what the Rabbis have said in Beresheet Rabbah<sup>525</sup> concerning the Sabbath: ["Why did He bless the Sabbath? It is] because it has no partner,"<sup>526</sup> and they have further related [that God said to the Sabbath]: "The congregation of Israel will be your partner." And then you will comprehend that on the Sabbath there is truly an extra soul.

**אשר ברא אלהים לעשות - (Why both words?)**

Rashi, quoting Beresheet Rabbah<sup>527</sup>, explains that the work, which should have been done on the Sabbath, was done on the sixth day by God doing double work. Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra, however, explained simply that מלאכתו ("His work") refers to "the ability of all species to which He gave the power 'to make' [i.e., to produce] after their own kind. [The verse then would translate as, "Which God had created in order לאשות (to make it)."]

To me, the explanation appears to be that [on Shabbat] God rested from all his work that He created out of nothing; לאשות to make from it all the works mentioned on the six days. So this verse is stating that God rested on Shabbat from creating and forming the creations that He had created on the first day, and from the formation He formed on the rest of the days. And it is possible that the word לאשות (to make) is connected with the expression above in the verse, "because on it God ceased from all his work which He created from making"<sup>528</sup>, [understanding the word לאשות as מלאשות (from

<sup>523</sup> Beresheet Rabbah 11:2.

<sup>524</sup> Mentioned in Ibn Ezra here.

<sup>525</sup> Beresheet Rabbah 11:9.

<sup>526</sup> Beresheet Rabbah

<sup>527</sup> Beresheet Rabbah 11:10

<sup>528</sup> Genesis 2:3

making)). Interpreting the construction of the word this way can also be seen in other verses: "Until he ceased to measure it לִסְפֹּר."<sup>529</sup> "And they stopped building לִבְנוֹת the city",<sup>530</sup> which should read מִלְבְּנוֹת (from building); "Beware of going up עלֹל the mountain"<sup>531</sup> (which should read מִעֲלֹל from going up) "And they did not depart from the commandment of the king,"<sup>532</sup> which should read מִמִּצְוֹת (from the commandment). There are many other examples of this.

Know that in the word לַאֲשׁוֹת (to make, to do) is also included a hint that the six days of creation represent all the days of the world, i.e., that its existence will be six thousand years. For this reason the Rabbis have said:<sup>533</sup> "A day of the Holy One, blessed be He, is a thousand years." Thus on the first two days the world was all water, and nothing was perfected during them. They allude to the first two thousand years when there was no one to call on the name of the Eternal. And so the Rabbis said:<sup>534</sup> "The first two thousand years there was desolation." However, there was the creation of light on the first day corresponding to the thousand years of Adam who was the light of the world<sup>535</sup> and who recognized his Creator. Perhaps Enosh did not worship idols until the death of the first man.

On the second day God said, "Let there be a firmament... and let it divide",<sup>536</sup> for on that "day" [i.e., the second thousand-year period] Noah and his sons — the righteous ones — were separated from the wicked, who were punished in water.

On the third day, the dry land appeared; plants and trees began growing, and fruits ripened. This corresponds to the third thousand-year period which begins when Abraham was forty-eight years old,<sup>537</sup> for then he began to call the name of the Eternal. "A righteous shoot"<sup>538</sup> did then spring forth in the world for he attracted many people to know the Eternal, just as the Rabbis interpreted the verse: "And the souls that they had gotten in Haran"<sup>539</sup> — and he commanded his household and his children after him, "and they shall keep the way of the Eternal, to do righteousness and judgment".<sup>540</sup> This course continued until his descendants received the Torah on Sinai and the House of God was also built on that "day," and then all commandments — which are "the fruits" of the world — were affirmed. Know that from the time twilight falls it is already considered as the following day. Therefore, the subject of every "day" begins somewhat before it, just as Abraham was born at the end of the second thousand years. And you will see similar examples for each and every day.

On the fourth day the luminaries — the large and the small and the stars — were created. Its "day," in the fourth thousand-year period, began seventy-two years after the First Sanctuary was built and continued until one hundred seventy-two years after the

<sup>529</sup> Genesis 41:49

<sup>530</sup> Genesis 11:8

<sup>531</sup> Exodus 19:12

<sup>532</sup> II Chronicles 8:15.

<sup>533</sup> Beresheet Rabbah 19:14.

<sup>534</sup> Avodah Zarah 9a.

<sup>535</sup> Yerushalmi Shabbath 2, 6: "The first man was the light [Literally: the candle] of the world

<sup>536</sup> Genesis 1:6

<sup>537</sup> In Avodah Zarah 9a it appears that Abraham, at the end of the first 2000 years, was 52 years old.

<sup>538</sup> Jeremiah 23:5

<sup>539</sup> Genesis 12:5. "These are the converts which they converted." (Beresheet Rabbah 39:21)

<sup>540</sup> Genesis 18:19

destruction of the Second Sanctuary. Now on this "day," but all the Israelites enjoyed light<sup>541</sup>, "for the Presence of the Lord filled the house of the Lord"<sup>542</sup> and the light of Israel became the fire upon the altar in the Sanctuary, resting there like a lion consuming the offerings. Afterwards their light diminished and they were exiled to Babylon just as the light of the moon disappears before the birth of the new moon. Then the moon shone for them all the days of the Second Sanctuary, and the fire upon the altar rested on it like a dog.<sup>543</sup> And then the two luminaries disappeared towards evening and the Sanctuary was destroyed.

On the fifth day the waters swarmed with living creatures and fowl flying above the earth. This was a reference to the fifth thousand-year period which began one hundred seventy-two years after the destruction of the Second Sanctuary since, during this millennium, the nations will have dominion, and man will be made "like the fish of the sea, like creeping things that have no ruler, He has fished them all up with a line, pulled them up in his trawl, and gathered them in his net"<sup>544</sup> and no one seeks the Eternal.

On the sixth day in the morning, God said: "Let the earth bring forth the living creature after its kind, cattle and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after its kind."<sup>545</sup> Their creation took place before sunrise, as it is written, "When the sun rises, they come home and couch in their dens."<sup>546</sup> Then man was created in the image of God, and this is the time of his dominion, as it is written, "Man then goes out to his work, to his labor until the evening."<sup>547</sup> All this is an indication of the sixth thousand year period in the beginning of which the "beasts," symbolizing the kingdoms that knew not the Eternal will rule, but after a tenth of it — in the proportion of the time from the first rays of the sun to the beginning of the day<sup>548</sup> — the redeemer will come, as it is said concerning him, "And his throne is as the sun before Me."<sup>549</sup> This is the son of David, who was formed in the image of God, as it is written, "And behold, there came with the clouds of heaven, one like a human being; He reached the Ancient of Days and was presented to Him. Dominion, glory, and kingship were given to him."<sup>550</sup> This will take place one hundred eighteen years after the completion of five thousand years, that the word of the Eternal by the mouth of Daniel might be accomplished: "From the time the regular offering is abolished, and an appalling abomination is set up—it will be a thousand two hundred and ninety days."<sup>551</sup> It would appear from the change of days — from the swarms of the waters and the fowl created on the fifth day to the beasts of the earth created on the sixth day — that in the beginning of the sixth thousand-year period a new ruling kingdom will arise, "fearsome, dreadful and very powerful"<sup>xxxvi</sup>, and approaching the truth more than the preceding ones.

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<sup>541</sup> Exodus 10:23

<sup>542</sup> I Kings 8:11

<sup>543</sup> Yoma 21b. Maharsha

<sup>544</sup> Habakkuk 1:14-15

<sup>545</sup> Genesis 1:24

<sup>546</sup> Psalm 104:22

<sup>547</sup> Psalm 104:23

<sup>548</sup> Pesachim 94a

<sup>549</sup> Psalms 89:37.

<sup>550</sup> Daniel 7:13-14

<sup>551</sup> Daniel 12:11.

The seventh day which is the Sabbath alludes to the World to Come, "which will be wholly a Sabbath and will bring rest for life everlasting."<sup>552</sup> And may God guard us during all the days and set our portion with His servants, the blameless ones.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

**(ד) אלה תולדות השמים והארץ בהבראם ביום עשות יי אלהים ארץ ושמים :**

**אלה תולדות השמים והארץ בהבראם - (What is the purpose of this verse?)**

The Torah tells us here about the heaven and the earth, the rain and the growth after they had been created and put in proper order. The heavens shall give their dew and rain, and the ground shall give her increase,<sup>553</sup> and they will make possible the existence of all living beings.

The word בהבראם (when means they were created) can hint at two words בהייא Meaning God created them with the letter ה [the last of the four letters of the Tetragrammaton]<sup>554</sup> It is for this reason that Scripture until this point mentioned only the word אלהים. This is explained in the verse, "For all these things has My hand made"<sup>555</sup> and so did Job say, "Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this?"<sup>556</sup> This being so, the expression, "in the day that the Eternal God made", refers covertly to the word בראשית (in the beginning).

**(ה) וכל שיח השדה טרם יהיה בארץ וכל עשב השדה טרם יצמח כי לא המטיר יי אלהים על הארץ ואדם אין לעבד את האדמה :**

**וכל שיח השדה - (Clearing up an ambiguity in the text)**

Our Rabbis<sup>557</sup> believed that every herb of the field that was created on the third day did not come forth above the ground then, but remained just below the surface of the earth until the sixth day when God caused the rain to fall on them causing them to grow.

In my opinion, following the plain meaning of the text, on the third day the earth did bring forth the grass and the fruit trees in their full-grown stature and quality as He commanded concerning them. [Verse five comes to tell us here that] there was no one to plant and sow them for future purposes, and the earth would not produce until a mist would come up from it and water it, and man was formed who would work it — to seed, to plant, and to guard. This is the meaning of the "shrub of the field... had not yet grown". It does not say "the shrub of the ground" for only a place which is cultivated is called "field," as in "Which you have planted in the field"<sup>558</sup> and "We will not pass through field or through vineyard".<sup>559</sup>

This is the course of the world that was to be following the six days of creation and forever after, that due to the mist the heavens will bring down rain, and due to the rains the earth will make the seeds that are sown in it to spring up.

<sup>552</sup> Tamid VII, 4

<sup>553</sup> Zechariah 8:12.

<sup>554</sup> Menachoth 29 b.

<sup>555</sup> Isaiah 66:2. In Kabbalah, the last letter ה of the Tetragrammaton is considered the yad hashem (the hand of God).

<sup>556</sup> Job 12:9.

<sup>557</sup> Beresheet Rabbah 12:4

<sup>558</sup> Exodus 23:16.

<sup>559</sup> Numbers 20:17.

ס את האדם עפר מן האדמה ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים ויהי האדם לנפש חיה :  
(ז) וייצר יי אלהי

**ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים - (What was breathed in?)**

This alludes to the superiority of the soul, its foundation and secret, since it mentions in connection with it the full Divine Name. And the verse says that He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life in order to inform us that the soul did not come to man from the elements, as He intimated concerning the soul of moving things, nor was it an evolvement from the Separate Intelligences. Rather, it was the spirit of the Great God: "out of his mouth comes knowledge and discernment."<sup>560</sup> For he who breathes into the nostrils of another person gives into him something from his own soul. It is this which Scripture says, "And the breath of the Almighty gives them understanding,"<sup>561</sup> since the soul is from the foundation of understanding by way of truth and faith. This corresponds to the saying of the Rabbis in the Sifre; "Vows are like swearing by the life of the King oaths are like swearing by the King Himself." Although there is no proof for it in Scripture, there is an allusion to it: "By the living God, and by the life of your soul."<sup>562</sup> And in the Midrash of Rabbi Nechunya ben Hakanah we find:<sup>563</sup> "What is the meaning of the word וינפש (and He rested)?"<sup>564</sup> It teaches us that the day of the Sabbath preserves all souls, for it is וינפש [i.e., from the word nefesh, soul]. It is from here that you will understand the expression, "speaking the oath of God".<sup>565</sup> The person learned in the mysteries of the Torah will understand.

Know that those who engage in research have differed concerning man. Some say that man has three souls. One is the soul of growth, like that in a plant; or you may call this "the force of growth." Then there is also a soul of movement in him, which Scripture mentioned concerning fish, animals, and everything that creeps upon the earth. The third is the rational soul. And there are some philosophers who say that this soul in man which comes from the Most High comprises these three forces while the soul is but one.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

This verse in its plain meaning so indicates for it states that "God formed man of the dust of the ground", but he lay there lifeless like a dumb stone, and the Holy One, blessed be He, "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and then man became a living soul", able to move about by virtue of this soul, just like the animals and the fish, concerning which He said: "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures,"<sup>566</sup> and "Let the earth bring forth the living creature."<sup>567</sup> This is the meaning of the expression here, לנפש חיה (into a living soul) man was made, meaning man turned into a soul in which there is life, after having been as a potsherd with the potsherds of the earth. For the letter ל in the word לנפש indicates the opposite, [namely, that from being a potsherd he became a living soul]. And so it is in the verses, "And the water shall turn

<sup>560</sup> Proverbs 2:6.

<sup>561</sup> Job 32:8.

<sup>562</sup> II Kings 4:30

<sup>563</sup> Sefer Habahir, 57.

<sup>564</sup> Exodus 31:17

<sup>565</sup> Ecclesiastes 8:2.

<sup>566</sup> Genesis 1:20.

<sup>567</sup> Genesis 1:24

לדם (into blood) upon the dry land"<sup>568</sup> And it turned (into a snake); And He made the sea לחרבה (into dry land).<sup>569</sup>

Onkelos, however, said: "And it became a speaking soul in man" From this it would appear that his opinion coincides with those who say that man has various souls and that this rational soul which God breathed into his nostrils became a speaking soul.

It appears to me that this also is the opinion of our Rabbis, as we may deduce from what they said:<sup>570</sup> "Rava created a man. He sent him to Rabbi Zeira who spoke to him but he did not answer. Said Rabbi Zeira to him: 'You are created by one of the colleagues; return to your dust.'" In Vayikra Rabbah<sup>571</sup> we find written; "Said Rabbi Avin: When a man sleeps, the body tells the נשמה (the moving spirit), and the נשמה tells the נפש (the rational soul), and the נפש tells the angel." So also the verse, "He gathers unto Himself his spirit and his breath,"<sup>572</sup> indicates, according to its plain meaning, that "his spirit" and "breath" are two distinct things.

**(What does it say that God created man again?) - וייצר יי אלהים את האדם**

That being so, the verse, "And the Lord God formed man", states the formation of movement, that man was formed into a creature capable of movement since "formation" denotes life and perception by virtue of which he is a man and not a kneaded mass of dust, just as it is said, "And the Lord God formed out of the ground every beast of the field, and He brought them unto the man."<sup>573</sup> And after He formed him with the power of perception, He breathed into his nostrils a living soul from the Most High, this soul being in addition to the formation mentioned, and the whole man became a living soul since by virtue of this soul he understands and speaks and does all his deeds and all other souls and their powers in man are subject to it. The letter ל in the word לנפש is thus the ל indicating possession, just as in the following verses: "My lord, O king, לך אני (I am yours), and all that I have,"<sup>574</sup> לקונה (to him that bought) it, throughout his generations;<sup>575</sup> לך אני (I am yours), save me.<sup>576</sup> Or, it may be that the verse is stating that man wholly became a living soul and was transformed into another man, as all His formations were, from now on, directed towards this soul.

**(ח) ויטע יי אלהים גן בעדן מקדם וישם שם את האדם אשר יצר :**

**(Meaning) - ויטע יי אלהים גן בעדן מקדם -**

Rashi explained that "in the east of Eden He planted the garden." But Onkelos translated מקדם to mean "previously," [that is, before man was created. And so have the Rabbis said in Beresheet Rabbah,<sup>577</sup> and this is the correct explanation. The meaning of ויטע (and He planted) is not that He brought the trees from another place and planted them here for it was from that place that He caused them to grow, just as it is said, "And out of

<sup>568</sup> Exodus 4:9.

<sup>569</sup> Exodus 4:3

<sup>570</sup> Sanhedrin 65b

<sup>571</sup> Vayikra Rabbah 32:2

<sup>572</sup> Job 34:14

<sup>573</sup> Job 34:19

<sup>574</sup> I Kings 20:4.

<sup>575</sup> Leviticus 25:30.

<sup>576</sup> Psalm 119:94

<sup>577</sup> Beresheet Rabbah 15:4.

the ground the Lord God caused to grow every tree."<sup>578</sup> But the purport of the expression, "and the Eternal God planted", is to state that it was "the planting of the Lord",<sup>579</sup> for before He decreed upon the earth, "Let the earth put forth grass,"<sup>580</sup> He had already decreed that in that place there be a garden, and He further said: "Here shall be this tree, and here that tree," like the rows of planters. It was unlike the rest of the places on the earth concerning which He said, "Let the earth put forth grass... and fruit-tree", and it then grew without order.

Now concerning the trees of the garden of Eden He decreed that they grow branches and bear fruit forever, the root was never to wax old in the earth, and the stump was never to die in the ground.<sup>581</sup> These trees were not to need any one to tend and prune them. For if they were in need of cultivation, who would have tended them after man was driven from there? This also is the meaning of the expression, "And the Eternal God planted", that they were His plantings, the work of His hands,<sup>582</sup> and existing forever, even as it is said, "Its leaf shall not wither, neither shall the fruit thereof fail ... because the waters thereof issue of the sanctuary."<sup>583</sup> If so, what then is the meaning of the verse: "And He put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and to keep it?" He put him [man] there so that he should sow for himself wheat and all kinds of produce, and every herb bearing seed, and rows of spices, reaping and plucking and eating at his will. This also is the meaning of "to cultivate it and to keep it"<sup>584</sup> — to cultivate the ground of the garden by the rows he [man] would make there, for the part of the garden where the trees were was not to be cultivated. It is possible that [in the words לעבדה ולשמרה — literally, to cultivate her and to keep her,] He refers to the garden in the feminine gender, just as in the verses: "And as the garden causes the things that are sown in her to spring forth",<sup>585</sup> "And plant gardens".<sup>586</sup>

Our Rabbis noted this use of the feminine gender, referring in Beresheet Rabbah<sup>587</sup> to לעבדה ולשמרה — they say, "these words refer to the sacrifices, as it is said, תשמרו (Ye shall serve) God upon this mountain."<sup>588</sup> It is this which Scripture says, תשמרו (Ye shall keep) to offer unto Me in its appointed season."<sup>589</sup> The intent of the Rabbis in this interpretation is that plants and all living beings are in need of primary forces from which they derive the power of growth and that through the sacrifices there is an extension of the blessing to the higher powers. From them it flows to the plants of the garden of Eden, and from them it comes and exists in the world in the form of "rain of goodwill and blessing,"<sup>590</sup> through which they will grow. This conforms to what the Rabbis have said:<sup>591</sup> "The trees of the Eternal have their fill, the cedars of Lebanon,

<sup>578</sup> Genesis 2:9

<sup>579</sup> Isaiah 61:3

<sup>580</sup> Genesis 1:11

<sup>581</sup> Job 14:8.

<sup>582</sup> Isaiah 60:21

<sup>583</sup> Ezekiel 47:12

<sup>584</sup> Ezekiel 47:15

<sup>585</sup> Isaiah 61:11

<sup>586</sup> Jeremiah 29:5

<sup>587</sup> Beresheet Rabbah 6:8

<sup>588</sup> Exodus 3:12

<sup>589</sup> Numbers 28:2.

<sup>590</sup> Taamth 19a.

<sup>591</sup> Beresheet Rabbah 15:1.

which He hath planted.<sup>592</sup> Rabbi Chanina said: Their life shall have its fill; their waters shall have their fill; their plantings shall have their fill? "Their life" refers to their higher foundations; "their waters" refer to His good treasure<sup>593</sup> which brings down the rain; and "their plantings" refer to their force in heaven, just as the Rabbis have said:<sup>594</sup> "There is not a single blade of grass below that does not have a constellation in heaven that smites it and says to it, 'Grow.' It is this which Scripture says, "Do you know the laws of heaven or impose its authority on earth?"<sup>595</sup>

(ט) ויצמח יי אלהים מן האדמה כל עץ נחמד למראה וטוב למאכל ועץ החיים בתוך הגן ועץ הדעת טוב ורע:

**ועץ החיים בתוך הגן ועץ הדעת טוב ורע - (What does middle mean?)**

Since the Bible says, "And the tree of life in the midst of the garden", and does not say "in the garden," and, moreover, since it says, "But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God said: 'Ye shall not eat of it,'"<sup>596</sup> and does not mention it or refer to it by another name, we must say, according to the simple meaning of Scripture, that it was a known place in the garden which was "in the midst" thereof. This is why Onkelos translated: "in the middle of the garden." Thus according to Onkelos the tree of life and the tree of knowledge were both in the middle of the garden. And if so, we must say that in the middle of the garden there was the likeness of an enclosed garden-bed made which contained these two trees. This "middle" means near its middle for with respect to the exact middle, they have already said that no one knows the true central point except God alone. "And the tree of life." This was a tree the fruit of which gave those who ate it long life.

**ועץ הדעת טוב ורע - (Man's original nature)**

The commentators have said that the fruit thereof caused those who ate it to have a desire for sexual intercourse, and therefore Adam and Eve covered their nakedness after they ate of it [the fruit]. They quote a similar expression [where "good and evil" refers to such desire], the saying of Barzillai the Gileadite, "Can I tell the difference between good and bad?"<sup>597</sup> meaning that this sexual desire was already removed from him. But in my opinion this interpretation is not correct since the serpent said, "And you shall be as God, knowing good and evil." And if you will say that the serpent lied to her, now [Scripture itself attests to the truth of his statement in the verse], "And the Eternal God said, 'Behold man has become like one of us knowing good and evil.'"<sup>598</sup> And the Rabbis<sup>599</sup> have already said, "Three stated the truth and perished from the world, and these are: the serpent, the spies, and Doeg the Edomite."<sup>600</sup>

The proper interpretation appears to me to be that man's original nature was such that he did whatever was proper for him to do naturally, just as the heavens and all their

<sup>592</sup> Psalm 104:16.

<sup>593</sup> Deuteronomy 28:12.

<sup>594</sup> Bercshith Rabbah 10:7

<sup>595</sup> Job 38:33

<sup>596</sup> Genesis 3:3

<sup>597</sup> II Samuel 19:36.

<sup>598</sup> Genesis 3:22

<sup>599</sup> In Pirka D'Rabbeinu Hakadosh, Section 3

<sup>600</sup> I Samuel 22:9-10. Sanhedrin 90a

hosts do, "faithful workers whose work is truth, and who do not change from their prescribed course,"<sup>601</sup> and in whose deeds there is no love or hatred. Now it was the fruit of this tree that gave rise to will and desire, that those who ate it should choose a thing or its opposite, for good or for evil. This is why it was called עץ הדעת טוב ורע (*the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*), for הדעת in our language is used to express will. Thus in the language of the Rabbis: "They have taught this only with regards to one שדעתו (whose will) is to return,"<sup>602</sup> and "his will is to clear" [the produce in the store-room in his house before Passover] And in the language of the Bible, "What is man that you should care for him?"<sup>603</sup> meaning that "You should desire and want him בשם ידעתך בשר,"<sup>604</sup> meaning "I have chosen you of all people." Similarly, Barzillai's expression, האדע "Can I distinguish between good and bad?"<sup>605</sup> means that he lost the power of thought, no longer choosing a thing or loathing it, and he would eat without feeling taste and hear singing without enjoying it.<sup>xxxix</sup>

Now at that time sexual intercourse between Adam and his wife was not a matter of desire; instead, at the time of begetting offspring they came together and propagated. Therefore all the limbs were, in their eyes, as the face and hands, and they were not ashamed of them. But after he ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, he possessed the power of choice; he could now willingly do evil or good to himself or to others. This, on the one hand, is a godlike attribute; but as far as man is concerned, it is bad because through it, he has a will and desire. It is possible that Scripture intended to allude to this matter when it said, That God made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions.<sup>606</sup> The "uprightness" is that man should keep to one right path, and the "seeking out of many inventions" is man's search for deeds which change according to his choice. Now when the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded Adam concerning the tree, that he should not eat of its fruit, He did not inform him that it has this quality. He told him without any qualification, But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden,<sup>328</sup> that is to say, the one that is known by its central position, you shall not eat thereof. And this was what the woman said to the serpent. And the verse which states, But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it,<sup>607</sup> mentions it to us by its true name.

(יא) שם האחד פישון הוא הסבב את כל ארץ החוילה אשר שם הזהב :

ארץ החוילה אשר שם הזהב - (Which lands are being referred to here?)

This is to explain that it is not the Havilah of Egypt, concerning which it is said, "And they dwelt from Havilah, by Shur, which is close to Egypt",<sup>608</sup> for this one [referred to here] is in the extreme east. The verse mentions also, "there is the bdellium",<sup>609</sup> in praise of the river, that in the sand that is in it and on its bank there is found that good gold, the bdellium and the onyx stone. For these things are found in rivers; in some, silver

<sup>601</sup> Sanhedrin 42 a.

<sup>602</sup> Pesachim 6a

<sup>603</sup> Psalms 144:3

<sup>604</sup> Exodus 33:12

<sup>605</sup> II Samuel 19:36

<sup>606</sup> Ecclesiastes 7:29

<sup>607</sup> Genesis 2:17.

<sup>608</sup> Genesis 25:18.

<sup>609</sup> Verse 12.

can be found. Similarly, the bdellium and precious stones are found mostly in rivers. In the opinion of former scholars,<sup>610</sup> Pishon is the Nile of Egypt; it compasses this entire land of Havilah, and comes from there and passes the whole land of Egypt until it falls into the great sea at Alexandria in Egypt.

**(יז) ומעץ הדעת טוב ורע לא תאכל ממנו כי ביום אכלך ממנו מות תמות :**

**לא תאכל ממנו - (Meaning)**

He admonishes him against eating the fruit, for the tree itself is not edible. And so it says further on: "But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden." Similarly, "And you may eat from your vines and your fig trees."<sup>611</sup> Likewise, "In toil shall you eat it"<sup>612</sup> means "eat its fruit."

**ביום אכלך ממנו מות תמות - (When were they supposed to die?)**

At the time you eat of it, you will be condemned to die. Similarly, we find: On the day you go out, and walk anywhere else, you can be sure that you will die.<sup>613</sup> This does not mean that he [Shimei] is to die immediately on that day; nor does it refer to his mere knowledge thereof, namely that he is to know that he will die eventually for all the living know that they shall die.<sup>614</sup> But it does mean that at the time he [Shimei] goes forth from Jerusalem, he is liable to death at the hand of the king, and he will slay him when he pleases. [Similarly, in the verses:] "But they shall not go in to see the dismantling of the sanctuary, lest they die."<sup>615</sup> "And they shall not bear sin for it, and die thereby."<sup>616</sup> Their intent is [not that those who transgress against these prohibitions will die immediately], but only that they will be liable to death and will die on account of this sin of theirs.

Now in the opinion of men versed in the sciences of nature, man was destined to die from the beginning of his formation, on account of his being a composite [of the four elements, and everything that is composite must revert to its original components]. But now He decreed that if he will sin he will die on account of his sin, like those who are liable to death at the hands of Heaven for such sins as a non-priest eating the Heave-offering, or a priest who has drunk wine or who does not wear the [required number of priestly] garments when performing the Service in the Sanctuary, and other cases. There the intent is that they will die prematurely on account of their sin. This is why in stating the punishment [after Adam ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge] He said, "Until you return to the ground- for from it you were taken. For dust you are, and to dust you shall return."<sup>617</sup> by your nature. In the beginning before he sinned, Adam also ate of the fruit of the tree and of the seeds of the earth; and if so, there was bound to be depletion in his body, and he was subject to the cause of existence and destruction.

But in the opinion of our Rabbis,<sup>618</sup> if Adam had not sinned he would have never died, since the higher soul bestows life forever, and the Will of God which is in him at

<sup>610</sup> Rabbeinu Saadia Gaon and Rashi

<sup>611</sup> II Kings 18:31.

<sup>612</sup> Genesis 3:17

<sup>613</sup> I Kings 2:42

<sup>614</sup> Ecclesiastes 9:5.

<sup>615</sup> Numbers 4:20

<sup>616</sup> Leviticus 22:9.

<sup>617</sup> Genesis 3:19

<sup>618</sup> Shabbath 58b

the time of his formation would always cleave to him and he would exist forever, as I have explained in the verse, "And God saw that it was good".<sup>619</sup>

Know that composition indicates destruction only in the opinion of those wanting in faith, who hold that creation came by necessity. But in the opinion of men of faith who say that the world was created by the simple Will of God, its existence will also continue forever as long as it is His desire. This is clear truth. That being so, "for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die" means that then you will be condemned to die since you will no longer exist forever by My Will. And the matter of eating [from the other trees] was to Adam at first only a source of enjoyment. And it is possible that the fruits of the garden of Eden were absorbed in his limbs as the Manna, and they sustain those that eat them. But when He decreed upon him, "And you shall eat the grass of the field"<sup>620</sup> and with the sweat of his face he shall eat bread of the earth, this [the food] became a cause for decomposition since he is dust, and dust he eats, and unto dust he shall return.

**(יח) ויאמר יי אלהים לא טוב היות האדם לבדו אעשה לו עזר כנגדו :**

**לא טוב היות האדם לבדו - (Why is it not good?)**

It does not appear likely that man was created to be alone in the world and not beget children since all created beings — male and female of all flesh — were created to raise seed. The herb and trees also have their seed in them. But it is possible to say that it was in accordance with the opinion of the Rabbi who says:<sup>621</sup> "Adam was created with two faces [i.e., male and female persons combined], and they were so made that there should be in them an impulse causing the organs of generation to produce a generative force from male to female, or you may say 'seed,' in accordance with the known controversy concerning pregnancy, and the second face was a help to the first in the procreative process. And the Holy One, blessed be He, saw that it is good that "the help" stand facing him, and that he should see and be separated from it or joined to it at his will. This is the meaning of what He said in the verse, 'I will make him a helper opposite him.'"

The meaning of the expression, "it is not good", is that it cannot be said of man that "it is good" when he is alone for he will not be able to so exist. In the work of creation, "the good" means existence, as I have explained on the text, "And God saw that it was good."

**(יט) ויצר יי אלהים מן האדמה כל חית השדה ואת כל עוף השמים ויבא אל האדם לראות מה יקרא לו וכל אשר יקרא לו האדם נפש חיה הוא שמו :**

**אשר יקרא לו האדם נפש חיה - (Meaning)**

Rashi comments: "Invert [the phrasing of the sentence] and explain it thus: and every living creature to which Adam would give a name, that should remain its name forever." And Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra said that the letter ל of the phrase, that the man called, is carried forward [to the word נפש, making it לנפש (to the creature)], and whatever the man called to every living creature, that was to be its name.

<sup>619</sup> Genesis 1:10

<sup>620</sup> Genesis 3:18

<sup>621</sup> Berachoth 61a

It is possible that the phrase be explained in connection with the matter of "the help" that God gave to Adam, and the meaning is that האדם נפש חיה (man is a living soul), as it is said, "And man became a living soul,"<sup>622</sup> and it is as I have explained it there. And He brought before him all species so that every one of them unto which Adam would give a name and say that it is a living soul like himself, that would remain its name and be a help to him. So Adam gave names to all, but as for himself he found no help which he would be able to call "a living soul" like his own name.

(כ) ויקרא האדם שמות לכל הבהמה ולעוף השמים ולכל חית השדה  
ולאדם לא מצא עזר כנגדו :

(What is the connection of these two phrases?) - ולאדם לא מצא עזר כנגדו

Rashi comments: "When He brought them, He brought them before him as male and female. Thereupon Adam said, 'All of them have a mate, and I have no mate!' Immediately, the Eternal God caused a deep sleep to fall upon him." Rashi explained it well for by Scripture's bringing the verses concerning "the calling of names" into the matter of "the help" that God gave Adam, it proves that this interpretation mentioned above is correct.

"The calling of names," in the opinion of the commentators,<sup>623</sup> is to be understood in its plain sense, namely, that everyone should have a name for himself so that they be known and recognized in their progeny by the names Adam would call them, names which would be valid forever. Now when the Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to make "the help" for Adam He brought all species before him since He had to bring them before him in pairs so that he should also give a name to the females of the species; for in some [species, both male and female] are called by one name, and in others they differ, such as bull and cow, he-goat and she-goat, sheep and ewe, and others. When Adam saw them mating with each other, he had a desire for them, but as he found among them no help for himself, he was saddened and fell asleep. God then caused a deep sleep to fall upon him so that he should not feel the removal of a rib from his body.

In my opinion, however, "the calling of the names" is identical with "the help" [as I explained in the above verse], and the purport thereof is as follows: the Holy One, blessed be He, brought before Adam all the beasts of the field and all the fowl of the heavens, and he, recognizing their nature, called them names, that is, names appropriate to them. By the names it was made clear who is fit to be the help for another, meaning, fit to procreate with one another. Even if we are to believe that names are merely a matter of consensus and not of nature, [i.e., that they do not reflect the essence of the object bearing the name], we can say that "the calling of the names" means the division of the species as — male and female — they passed before Adam and he contemplated their nature as to which of them would be a help to each other in procreation so that they should beget offspring. Thus he called the large creatures by one name and the beasts by another so they would not beget offspring from one another, and so on for all species. And among them all he did not find a natural help for himself so that it could be called by his name for "the calling of the names" signifies the division of the species and the separation of their powers from each other, as I have explained above. Now it does not mean that it

<sup>622</sup> Genesis 2:7.

<sup>623</sup> Rashi and R'dak.

was in Adam's power to find a help for himself among them since they were all created with natures [different from that of man]. But it means that if Adam was to find satisfaction with one of the species and he would choose it for his help, the Holy One, blessed be He, would adapt its nature to him, as He did with the rib, and He would not have found it necessary to build "a new structure."<sup>624</sup> This is the meaning of the verse, And whatsoever the man would call every living creature, that was its<sup>625</sup> name; that is to say, that was to be its name, for the Holy One, blessed be He, would so preserve it along the lines which I have explained.

In my opinion it is correct to say that it was His will, blessed be He, not to take Adam's rib from him to make him a wife until he himself would know that among the created beings there is no help suitable for him and until he would crave to have a help suitable for him like her. This was why it was necessary to take one of his ribs from him. This is the meaning of the verse, "But for Adam there was not found a help meet for him"; that is to say, but for the name Adam (man), he found no help suited to be opposite him and to be called by his name so that he should beget children from that "help". We need not resort here, therefore, to the words of the commentators<sup>626</sup> who say that the name "Adam" comes here in place of the reflexive pronoun ["himself." The verse would thus read: "But for himself] he found no help meet for him," just as, "My wives of Lemech",<sup>627</sup> "And Jephthah, and Samuel",<sup>628</sup> [which should read, "and Jephthah and myself"]. This is the meaning of Adam's saying: "This is now bone of my bones"; that is to say, "This time I have found a help for me which I did not find till now among the other species, for she is "bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh",<sup>629</sup> and is fit to be actually called by my name for we shall propagate together."

In the word זֶה (this, this time) there is a secret; it will be made known from our words in the section הַבְּרִכָּה, <sup>630</sup> if my Rock will bless me, enabling me reach thereto. This is why Adam repeats, "because זֶה (this) was taken out of man". [Delve into it] and understand.

**(כד) על כן יעזב איש את אביו ואת אמו ודבק באשתו והיו לבשר אחד :**

**על כן יעזב איש את אביו ואת אמו ודבק באשתו והיו לבשר אחד - (Meaning)**

The Divine Spirit says this, thus prohibiting immoral relationships to the Sons of Noah.

**(What is the point of this?) - והיו לבשר אחד -**

Rashi writes, "The child is created by both parents, and there in the child, their flesh is united as one." But there is no point to this since in beast and cattle too, their flesh is united into one in their offspring. The correct interpretation appears to me to be that in cattle and beast the males have no attachment to their females. Rather, the male mates with any female he finds, and then they go their separate ways. It is for this reason that Scripture states that because the female of man was bone of his bones and flesh of

<sup>624</sup> Eruvin 18a

<sup>625</sup> Genesis 2:19.

<sup>626</sup> Ibn Ezra and Radak.

<sup>627</sup> Genesis 4:23.

<sup>628</sup> I Samuel 12:11

<sup>629</sup> Genesis 2:23

<sup>630</sup> Deuteronomy 33:1

his flesh, he therefore cleaves to her and she nestles in his bosom as his own flesh, and he desires to be with her always. And just as it was with Adam, so was his nature transmitted to his offspring, that the males among them should cleave to their women, leaving their fathers and their mothers, and considering their wives as if they are one flesh with them. A similar sense is found in the verses: "For he is our brother, our flesh",<sup>631</sup> to any that is near of his flesh.<sup>632</sup> Those who are close members of the family are called "near of flesh". Thus man will leave "the flesh" of his father and his mother and their kin and will see that his wife is nearer to him than they.

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<sup>631</sup> Genesis 37:27

<sup>632</sup> Leviticus 18:6

## NOTES

<sup>i</sup> By beginning with Rashi's comment, Ramban illustrates the preeminent position that this eleventh century Northern French commentator has earned in the Jewish community of Gerona. It seems that Rashi's commentary had to be addressed prior to any alternative perspective being offered. Rashi had already become the lens through which Torah was being read. Ramban picks up Rashi's opening question, "What is the purpose of this text?" He agrees that this is a valid question but then goes on to forcefully argue a theological answer that affirms God as creator. This is a timely outspoken rebuke directed against the Maimonidians and it is an answer that Ramban will continue to develop throughout his commentary.

<sup>ii</sup> Ramban called the belief that the world was created by a creator (God), the שורש האמונה "the source of our faith". It was the central belief for him, the foundation of Judaism upon which the power, authority and providence depended. Elsewhere (Exodus 3:16), Ramban writes that the purpose for the prayers that we say and the gatherings that we hold are an opportunity to express "our inner conviction that He is our Creator and that we are His creatures." His emphasis on this point needs to be seen in light of both the rise in prominence of Aristotelian thought in the Christian world as well as its popularity by the Maimonidians.

Early in the 13th century the major works of Aristotle were made available in a Latin translation, accompanied by the commentaries of Averroës and other Islamic scholars. Thomas Aquinas, (1225-1274) an Italian philosopher and one of the leading Roman Catholic theologians, sought to reconcile Aristotelian philosophy with Augustinian theology employing both reason and faith in his pursuit. Christianity was being confronted with Aristotelian thought promoted by the philosophical school of Averroism that asserted that philosophy was independent of revelation. Aquinas seeking to reconcile the Augustinian emphasis of faith with the Averroist desire for knowledge derived from the senses, Aquinas insisted "that the truths of faith and those of sense experience, as presented by Aristotle, are fully compatible and complementary." See "Aquinas" *Microsoft Encarta*, 2003.

At the same time that Aquinas's work was reflecting the Christian world's confrontation with Aristotelian philosophy, Maimonidians in the Jewish community were challenging long accepted beliefs as well. In their view, the universe is eternal and therefore never was created. It was a theory that offered a universe that was constant and unchanging. In Maimonides Guide (2:22), Maimonides maintained that according to the Aristotelians, God cannot intervene in a matter so small as changing the size of a fly's wing. See Seeskin's Maimonides *A Guide For Today's Perplexed*, 45-46).

Ramban's statement therefore, that "this is the essential teaching" of Judaism challenge the competing schools of thought at the time, challenging the ethical philosophy of Maimonides and Aristotle and elevating God as an active participant in the universe.

<sup>iii</sup> In this comment, Ramban is commenting on the active involvement of God in history. As Rashi had commented, if God is the creator, then he has dominion over his creation. God may determine who will dwell where. As the biblical account attests to,

God banishes people from the land when they sin. The notion of an active providence was view held by the Christian world as well and was discussed in depth in Aquinas's work. See <[http://www.medievalchurch.org.uk/p\\_thomas.html](http://www.medievalchurch.org.uk/p_thomas.html)>

<sup>iv</sup> Psalm 111:6 text has been reversed to offer an explanation for the creation story. It seems questionable if this was the Psalmist's original intention in this line.

<sup>v</sup> Moshe Idel writes that Ramban while he hesitated to present the Kabbalah as an ultimate answer and did not accept philosophy as an adequate interpretation of Judaism, "nevertheless, he undertook no serious and complete critique of it as a harmful way of thought. His attitude toward philosophy is ambiguous..." (Idel 69). The mysticism that Ramban offers is not anti-philosophical. Rather, it is a way of combining the philosophical knowledge with the esoteric neo-platonism. While little is known about Ramban's kabbalah (with much of the work attributed to him questioned), there seems a high degree correlation between his comments about *sfirot* and the teachings of his kabalistic teachers.

<sup>vi</sup> Ramban is one of the first to write down the Kabbalistic teachings. His attitude towards philosophy was ambiguous but his opinion of Kabbalah was not. Ramban believed there was a limited corpus of secrets that had been transmitted esoterically and could not be expanded. Although conscious of the problems and quandaries of the Spanish Jew, Ramban was hesitant to present openly the Kabbalah as an ultimate answer. His kabbalistic teachers had warned against this. Ramban's conception of Kabbalah is of a limited corpus of secrets consisting of "theosophic explanations" of biblical verses that was received by Moses and transmitted orally until the Ramban. He taught his kabbalistic traditions only to his intimate students. This hesitancy can be reflected in the comment of his student, R. Isaac of Acre, "My teacher told me that towards the end of the Rabbi's [i.e. Ramban's] days, R. Sheshet went to him in Acre and asked the secret [explanation] of the giants in Genesis and Nachmanides said [to him] that... he did not care to hint it in writing." (Idel, p. 61-71.)

<sup>vii</sup> While Ramban quotes Rashi to prove his point that the whole text leads to the creation of light, it seems less clear that this was Rashi's intention with these words. But rather to demonstrate that the text does not strive to list an order of creation as would appear.

<sup>viii</sup> Rashi in verse six suggests the sun among other things were created on this day.

<sup>ix</sup> Ramban having now discussed his predecessors comments goes on to make his own statement. Notice the high respect still maintained for simplicity/literal meaning or *pshat*.

<sup>x</sup> This is also the theory of Rambam, "All things on earth have one common substance; the heavens and the things in them have one substance different from the first"

(Moreh Nebuchim II, 26) It seems also that Ramban is making a polemical statement with his repetition of the ideas that all from one source.

<sup>xi</sup> Raman, by using the word בתחלה, indicates his opinion that the word beresheet is not in a construct state as Rashi holds.

<sup>xii</sup> Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters distancing from the anthropomorphic identity of God

<sup>xiii</sup> "This sphere in its totality is composed of the celestial orbs, the four elements and their combinations; there is no vacuum whatever therein, but the whole space is filled up with matter." (Guide of the Perplexed Friedlander's translation I, 72.)

<sup>xiv</sup> The adornment on the top of the letter כ hints at the Crown above, from which all emanations issue. It is also referred to as *Ein Sof*.

<sup>xv</sup> God, according to Ramban has will and thought. To the Maimonideans, this cannot be possible as they view God as unchanging. To have a thought implies the ability to change and their concept of God precludes this.

<sup>xvi</sup> A polemic against those who would say existence is by chance alone

<sup>xvii</sup> Ten times the phrase "And God said" is used in the chapter of Creation.

<sup>xviii</sup> For the Maimonists Torah is an allegory. It didn't happen but it is a nice story. Ramban says not only did it happen, but that beyond the literal meaning there is meaning. While the Maimonists would argue that God doesn't do anything, Ramban writes here that God is the primoral creator that brings forth things into existence.

<sup>xix</sup> Rashi seem to be addressing here the problem as to what this verse is doing here. There already was a separation between light and darkness. What does it mean then that God divided the light from the darkness? Further, why in this verse does the declaration that it was good by God appear prior to the act of creation? The Agadah that Rashi quotes suggests that *vayavdel* means here that He set apart the light for the righteous in the world to come. Thus *ki tov* could not have been written after the separation of the light for the righteous from the ordinary light, since the remaining light was no longer perfect, so it is mentioned before the separation, before the righteous light is set aside.

<sup>xx</sup> Ibn Ezra opinionion is that the division was not because it was unseemly that the light and darkness function in a confused manner, but it was for the purpose of assigning each one a separate name.

<sup>xxi</sup> There is a theological problem if God is not all knowing.

<sup>xxii</sup> Light, is the closest physical emanation and was a common image for the neo-Platonists.

<sup>xxiii</sup> One day then means the entire day consisting of evening and morning that are occurring simultaneously in different places.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Ramban here suggests here an ongoing act of creation that is responsible for the continued suspension of the *rakiah*, then stops abruptly and feigns ignorance and mystery. In his sermon on *Temimah*, Ramban writes, "But the matter of Ma'aseh Beresheet is obscure, and I do not know it, and even if I did know it, I would be forbidden to reveal it publicly." Idel suggests that these passages indicate Ramban's acknowledgement of his ignorance on the real kabbalistic meanings of creation and therefore "probably, he did not write a kabbalistic commentary on this issue." It may be a hidden critique of his contemporary kabbalists. See Idel, p. 52, 58.

<sup>xxv</sup> See also Moreh Nebuchim II, 26, where Rambam discusses this saying of Rabbi Eliezer and concludes that he is not able to explain it sufficiently. Ramban, however, explains it further on in the text in a way which makes it consistent with the theory of creation from absolute nought.

<sup>xxvi</sup> But instead He decreed that the waters which filled the whole world should go down as would be natural for the earth, and that the earth should come up as would be natural for the water.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Again this is the major thought of Ramban, all existence is to acknowledge our creator, "We have no other reason for the Creation" Seder Bo in Exodus.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Rashj. The title *Harav* (the Rabbi, the Master) without specification of the name is used by Ramban only with reference to Rashi or Rambam. It is the highest mark of respect. Precedent for it is found in the Talmud where just the title *Rabbi* meant Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi, redactor of the Mishnah, and the title *Ray* was a reference to Abba Arucha, founder of the Babylonian Academy of Sura.

<sup>xxix</sup> In our text of Rashi: "functioned together both by day and by night." However, during the seven days of creation it was the primeval light that functioned, its concealment taking place on the eve following the Sabbath (so clearly explained in Maharal's commentary on Rashi — Gur Aryeh). Light being concealed for the rightous אור זרוע is a powerful image for a people waiting for miraculous interventions

<sup>xxx</sup> This expression of Onkelos is found in Leviticus 11:44, where the Hebrew reads, *hasheret haromes*, which Onkelos translated, *richasha d' rachish*. Thus it is obvious that Onkelos understood both words (*sheret* and *remes*) as conveying a sense of movement.

<sup>xxx</sup> Translations which read "that 'they may swarm' in the earth" are thus according to Rashi's interpretation. Ramban, as here explained, understands the sense of the verse to be: "that they may move about' the earth."

<sup>xxxii</sup> Quoted above: *And you be ye fruitful and multiply, 'shirtzu' zn the earth and multiply therein (9:7)*. Thus the first expression *and multiply* establishes the commandment of procreation; the second refers to the duty of making the whole earth habitable for people.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Ramban, a physician was trained in the sciences of the Arab world. His description here of blood hints at his medical expertise.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Intelligences without matter, generally referring to the angels and spheres. See Rambam, Hilchoth Yesodei Hatorah 3:9. Also Moreh Nebuchim, I, 49: "The angels are likewise incorporeal; they are intelligences without matter, etc." (Friedlander's translation.

<sup>xxxv</sup> Ramban is thus inferring that the souls of all men of all generations were created at the beginning of creation. This thought is clearly expressed in the other writings of Ramban. (See Ramban's letter to Rabbeinu Yonah, Kithvei Haramban, Vol. I., 383. See also in same volume his Commentary to Job 38:21, p. 117).

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Ramban is referring here to rise of Islam. See Idel, 58.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> The six days of creation that are described in the Torah foreshadow the coming events of the world. The sixth day, which commenced in the year 1240 (when Ramban was forty-five years old) marked two creations. The beginning part of the day God created beasts, symbolizing the nations of the world, the second creation was man, the ultimate redeemer. The seventh day is the World to Come. (Chavel, p. 76).

<sup>xxxviii</sup> The division of opinion among the philosophers as to the nature of the soul is clearly marked in Jewish philosophy. Ibn Ezra (Ecclesiastes 3:7) writes at length to prove that the soul in man consists of three parts. He quotes Saadia Gaon to be of the same opinion. The poet-philosopher Solomon ibn Gabirol (M'kor Chayim 5:20) also held this theory. Ramban, however, in his Sh'monah P'rakim, Chapter 1, holds that man's soul is but one.

<sup>xxxix</sup> According to Ramban, prior to eating the fruit, Adam did naturally that which is just and proper. He had no will to disobey because he had no will. Like the planets that follow their path, Adam could not make choices. It was the fruit of the tree which Adam ate that gave rise to will and desire. The power of will and freedom, Ramban says is Godlike because it can lead to good or bad depending on how it is used. Later commentators will ask of Ramban how he was then able to "fall" if he didn't have free will prior. See Safran, 86.

**RABBI OBADIAH SFORNO (THE SFORNO)**

Rabbi Ovadiah Sforno, born in 1470 in Cesena Italy and dying in Bologna in 1550, was a product of the Italian Renaissance.<sup>633</sup> An Italian physician, judge, and biblical and talmudic exegete, he left behind a timely and relevant commentary on the Torah addressing the needs of the people of his day. His work reflects his diverse interests, the philosophical, aesthetic, and scientific advances of his time, and the cultural and political environment of late fifteenth to early sixteenth century Italian Jewry. Sforno lived, for most of his life, during a period of immediate peace and tranquility, amidst distant storms of anti-Semitism that eventually would envelop his own community. In his introduction, he explains that his goal is to provide access to the wisdom of the Torah to a people who no longer understand nor appreciate its worth. They were a people, in his eyes, who were dwelling in a foreign land, learning Christian teachings, and concentrating their efforts on the accumulation of wealth rather than on Torah; which they no longer understood. Sforno's commentary, relying on pshat and avoiding mystical interpretations, was intended to change these misconceptions.

There are few facts known about Sforno's personal life. He revealed little about himself, his family, or his life in his writings. The limited information we do have is gleaned indirectly from letters that have survived to his brother Hananel and to his colleagues and students. There are no details of his father, Jacob Sforno<sup>634</sup>, nor do we have any information about his mother or his wife. Even his rabbinic teachers are unknown, leaving an air of mystery surrounding this Torah scholar.

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<sup>633</sup> While most accounts of his life date his life as 1470 (5230) – 1550 (5310), there is another tradition that has him born in the year 1475 (5235).

<sup>634</sup> It is interesting to note that this commentator has and goes by a first and last name, in contrast to the commentators that preceded him.

Growing up in Cesena, in northern Italy, in the late fifteenth century, Sforno was fortunate to live in a stable and peaceful environment. The Jewish communities of Italy were among the oldest in Europe and served as a cultural bridge between the Middle East, Spain, and Ashkenazic Jewry. Traveling teachers, such as ibn Ezra, had brought over the intellectual treasures of their communities to these Italian cities. And while the Jewish communities in the southern cities had experienced decline in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries because of persecution and forced conversion, the Jewish communities in the northern Italian cities were prospering. Jews were coming from southern France, Germany, Spain, and Portugal for economic opportunity and to avoid religious persecution. Many Marranos settled in Italy following their expulsion from Spain. Jews were invited to serve as bankers for the lower and middle classes which the Italian bankers were not interested in servicing. Besides being bankers, they worked as pawnbrokers, traders, artisans, and doctors, some even being employed by the court and papacy. By the early 1500's, the Jewish communities of Italy such as Mantua, Venice, Padua, Florence, and Rome, though not large, were thriving.

In Cesena, Sforno seemed to have excelled in both his Jewish and secular studies based on his later writings. As a young boy in an Italian city, Sforno would have been educated in subjects such as mathematics, literature, philosophy, and the sciences.

In Rome, he continued his studies at the university, ultimately receiving a medical degree in 1501. While a student, he was supported by his brother and by the money he earned teaching Torah and Hebrew. His learning earned him a prominent place among scholars. When Johann Reuchlin, the well known German scholar and humanist was in Rome (1498-1500) and desired to perfect his knowledge of Hebrew literature, Cardinal

Domenico Grimani advised him to apply to Sforno. Reuchlin is said to have been so impressed with Sforno that later, when the Jews were under attack by the Church, he became a spirited defender of the talmud and the Jews.

Sforno compiled a grammar book of Hebrew which he translated into Latin. It was most probably used by him to help the students that he was teaching. Sforno also wrote a commentary on Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes as well as a philosophical work refuting Aristotelian philosophy entitled, *Ohr Amim* "Light of Nations", which he translated into Latin and dedicated to Henry II of France (indicating that there was a close relationship between the two of them).<sup>635</sup>

After thirty years in Rome, Sforno left and for a while led a life of wandering. From letters addressed to his brother Hananel, it would appear that he was in "poor circumstances." Finally, he moved to Bologna where he continued his studies of medicine and eventually became an outstanding doctor. Outside of medicine, he earned a reputation as a *posek*, a "Jewish law decider", and officiated as a judge in the local Jewish court. He assisted in the reestablishment of printing in Bologna, where some of his writings were published, and also established an academy of Torah study which he headed until his death in 1550.

Sforno lived in a relatively free and open society. The fact that he was able to attend the university and associate with prominent men and even kings indicates it was a period of "intellectual openness and tolerance".<sup>636</sup> The popes who headed the Church at that time protected the Jewish community and it prospered. During the reign of Julius II's successor, Leo X. (1513-22), the Roman Jews enjoyed uninterrupted quiet, so much so

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<sup>635</sup> Pelcovitz ix

<sup>636</sup> Ix Pelcovitz

that they inquired in Jerusalem if the advent of the Messiah were not drawing near. Another sign of the Jewish community's prosperity can be seen in a 1514 document that shows the people of Rome fearful that the Jews had accumulated too much money. Pope Paul III (1534-50) was also very favorable to the Jewish community. Paul permitted all the Jews who had been banished from Naples, as well as those coming from Palestine and Africa, to settle in Rome. He abolished the passion-plays in the Coliseum, where Jews had often been murdered, and granted permission in 1545 to Antonio Blandao, Isaac ben Immanuel de Lattes, and Benjamin ben Joseph Arignano to establish a Hebrew printing-press in Rome.

The Jewish community felt at home in the Italian Renaissance and much acculturation took place. Jewish preachers wove quotations from Greek and Latin literature into their sermons. Jewish commentators used classic rhetoric in their study of the Bible. Jewish music composers, such as Solomone Rossi of Mantua, wrote music for the synagogue in the Renaissance style. A Jewish theater was established by Leone de'Sommo that produced Hebrew dramas. Jewish authors, such as Judah Abravanel, wrote works on cosmic love in the Neo-Platonic tradition. As one historian puts it, "The Italian Jews of the Renaissance were comfortably Italian in language and culture. Renaissance Jewish bankers adopted the style of the Italian upper classes and cultivated a taste for art, literature, and affluent living."<sup>637</sup> This free exchange of ideas enabled Christians to become acquainted with Jewish Kabbalah and use the Zohar to confirm truths in Christianity, while Jews became familiar with the Humanist movement sweeping across Europe.

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<sup>637</sup> Ben Sasson, 497.

Yet at the same time, storms of anti-Semitism were raging all around. In the north, in 1475, a Franciscan monk accused the Jews of a ritual murder in the city of Trent. The entire community was arrested and subjected to torture ending in executions and expulsions. To the west and south, the 1492 expulsion from Spain affected the Jews in Sicily and Sardinia who were also under the rule of Aragon. As large numbers of Spanish Jews fled to Italy, Sforno must have been aware of the deteriorating Christian-Jewish relationship that seemed to be occurring everywhere, even in Italy. In 1510 the kingdom of Naples, under Spanish rule, expelled the Jews. In 1516 the Venice ghetto was established<sup>638</sup>. Even in Rome, "despite good personal relations between Renaissance princes and humanists and some Jews, the Renaissance remained deeply attached to the traditional Christian image of the Jew as a deliberate disbeliever."<sup>639</sup>

In 1549, a new pope, Pope Julius III, took charge of the Church. His ascension marked a new series of persecutions for the Jews of Italy. Three years after Sfrono's death a quarrel broke out between the two Hebrew printing-houses in Venice, those of Bragadini and Giustiniani; the wrangle went so far that both parties complained to the Pope. The result was a public burning of the Talmud by papal edict issued August 12, 1553. The burning took place in Rome on Rosh Hashanah followed for a while by Church censorship on all Jewish writing. In 1555, all Roman Jews were forced into overcrowded ghettos and barred from most economic opportunities. Marranos who had returned to Judaism were burned at the stake. In large sections of Italy, Jews were being driven out. "Although the serious persecution of Jews in Italy did not begin until after his

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<sup>638</sup> It is important to point out that the term ghetto which originally designated the section of Venice to which Jewish residence was restricted did not at that time mean a walled-in impoverished Jewish quarter. In fact, the Jews in Venice continued to intermingle socially with non-Jews. See Seltzer, 800.

<sup>639</sup> Ben Sasson, 498.

death, his later years were clouded by the many difficulties that confronted the Jewish population."<sup>640</sup>

In 1567, seventeen years after Sforno's death, his short commentary on the Torah for which he would become most famous, was published in Venice. It reflects his background in medicine, his concern that the Torah not be seen as illogical or redundant, the influence of Christianity, and a reaction to the scientific developments, the Italian Renaissance and Humanism. In his introduction, Sforno writes that his commentary comes in defense of those who "discredit and give blemished explanations to the reasoned words, stories and order of Torah, (which in reality is) a wholly precious treasure, straightforward to all who discern (and understand) and there are none to say, Restore! (did) awaken and convince me to find desirable words which would relate (Torah) in a straightforward manner, removing all obstacles so that its righteousness might shine forth brightly..."<sup>641</sup>

Sforno's background in medicine and the sciences is reflected in a number of his commentaries throughout the Torah. This can particularly be seen in his comments on skin ailments where he refers to doctors explaining that once the natural skin is destroyed it is replaced by something similar to skin.<sup>642</sup> In our pericope, this can be seen where Sforno, commenting on the word ולשמרה suggests that "to guard it" refers to his soul that it not be sustained by therapeutic fruits.<sup>643</sup> It can also be seen in Genesis 1:14 where he suggests using one's own senses to prove the validity of a biblical verse.

<sup>640</sup> Pelcovitz, Raphael Rabbi, *Sforno* (New York: Mesorah Publications, 2001) x.

<sup>641</sup> Sforno's introduction see Pelcovitz xvi.

<sup>642</sup> Leviticus 13:19

<sup>643</sup> Genesis 2:15

For the most part Sforno sticks to the *pshat*, seeking to explain in a few words the possible ambiguities, inconsistencies, or obscure references of a particular verse. He tends to be more interested in elucidating the sense of a complete passage rather than a particular word. By interpreting the verse according to the "grammatical and linguistic connotation of the words," and avoiding any mystical or esoteric interpretations, Sforno hoped to demonstrate that the Torah was logical, reasoned, and relevant. In the introduction to his Torah commentary Sforno writes, "...because our people dwell in an alien land and concentrate their efforts on the accumulation of wealth, feeling that this will protect them from the exigencies of their time. This in turn results in a condition where they have no proper time to consider the wonders and wisdom of our Torah, and even brings them to question the importance of our holy Torah, becoming critical of its teachings, for they do not understand it properly."<sup>644</sup> In Sforno's eyes, the Jews had grown comfortable in Italy and had grown to believe that wealth could protect them from the ravages of anti-Semitism that surrounded them. To counteract this trend and to refute claims that the Torah was illogical and redundant sought to demonstrate that the Torah was meaningful and relevant to sixteenth century Jews.

Yet often, Sforno will go beyond the simple and straightforward meaning of a verse and offer a scientific or ethical explanation that related to the current world around them. For example, a moral lesson can be seen when Sforno comments on the Tree of Knowledge advising, "To choose the sweet even it is harmful and reject the bitter even when it is beneficial".<sup>645</sup>

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<sup>644</sup> Sforno's introduction see Pelcovitz, xvi.

<sup>645</sup> Genesis 2:9

Living in a city under the authority of the Pope, it is not surprising that Sforno would have been influenced by his Christian neighbors. He had personal relationships with members of the Christian clergy and nobility. Further, living in Italy Sforno would have been exposed both to the refugees flooding the city and the theological crisis that Europe was experiencing with both Humanism and the start of the Reformation. His comments to Genesis (25:26) and (32:29) seem to allude to the difficult conditions of his fellow Jews. He strives to encourage them with words of hope and faith in the ultimate triumph over Essau, which is synonymous with Rome. Similarly, his experience with the court may have influenced his comments in Exodus (22:27), where he comments that "The evil which befalls the king will, in most cases, cause great evil and harm to the community as well." In his pericope, Sforno's emphasis on Shabbat as a reward in Genesis (2:3) can be seen as a refutation to those who would argue that the Torah speaks little of the eternal reward as opposed to the Christian faith which has a heavy emphasis on it.<sup>646</sup>

The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were also rich with new scientific understandings of the universe that managed to find its way into academic circles of discussion. In Sforno's commentary on the word השמים in the opening verse which is usually translated as "the heavens" one can see an example of how Sforno incorporated the ideas of his day into his Torah commentary<sup>647</sup>. Sforno points out that the word השמים is in actuality the plural of the Hebrew שם or "there". He comments that this word indicates "an object far removed from our point of perspective, on two sides, both equidistant from all sides. This can only be true of a sphere which revolves around a

<sup>646</sup> Pelcovitz, xi.

<sup>647</sup> Shlomo Riskin, Rabbi "Shabbat Shalom: Welcoming the Future" *Jerusalem Post*.  
<<http://www.jpost.com/Editions/2000/10/26/Columns/Columns.14373.html>>

perfect circle."<sup>648</sup> Sforno is explaining here that every point on the planet is equidistant from the heavens, and for this phenomenon to be true, the world must be moving in a spherical pattern.

Sforno's comment echoes the heliocentric Copernican position that the earth rotates daily on its axis and revolves yearly around the sun.<sup>649</sup> Copernicus (1473-1543) spent a considerable amount of time in Italy, studying at the University of Bologna and even giving a lecture on astronomy in 1500 in Rome while Sforno was living there. While there is no evidence to suggest that these two minds ever met up, it is not unreasonable to suggest that Sforno, a respected intellectual, had heard of the theories of Copernicus and accepted his vision of an earth revolving around the sun. While this scientific theory would be rejected as blasphemous by most Christian theologians of the period, Sforno seems to accept it and suggests that from this fact the human being is placed right at the center, equidistant, from the two "theres".

In addition to advances in the sciences, sixteenth century Italy was home to great advances in the arts. Renaissance painters turned from the purely religious subjects of the Middle Ages to a depiction of the natural world. There were technical advances in the representation of perspective, anatomy, and light. The fact that the Torah says that man and woman were naked but not ashamed (Genesis 2:25), prompts Sforno to say that at one point every limb was just like every other. Something that Michelangelo might concur with.

Literature began emphasizing man's emotions and sensitivities. Sforno, writing for the readers of his time, sought to speak to topics that concerned them. So when he

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<sup>648</sup> Sforno Genesis 1:1

<sup>649</sup> "Copernicus" *Microsoft Encarta* 2003.

comments on the Tree of Knowledge, which the Torah describes as "pleasant to look at" Sforno comments that it would "expand man's heart and sensitize his mind to receive the intellectual flow emanating from high...."<sup>650</sup>

The greatest influence, however, on Sforno's commentary was the Humanist movement. It emphasized the dignity and worth of the individual. Its basic premise of was that people are rational beings who possess within themselves the capacity for truth and goodness. The humanist movement, which started in Italy, greatly influenced the fields of literature and art. It emphasized the value of the classics for their own sake, rather than for their relevance to Christianity. The invention of printing with movable type, around the mid-15th century, gave a further impetus to humanism through the dissemination of editions of the classics. German scholar Johann Reuchlin, who had coincidentally studied under Sforno, extended humanism into the field of theology.<sup>651</sup>

The imprint of Humanism can be seen all over Sforno's commentary. In Genesis, the Torah tells us that man was created in "the image and form of God." Sforno in his commentary explains that "in God's form" means that just as God has the power to choose as He wishes (which is always Good) so too does man have the power of choice. What makes humanity unique among all of God's creations, and what makes humanity occasionally "God like", is the ability of human beings to choose. Free will is our defining characteristic. Humanity has the ability to acquire knowledge and then to make decisions. Sforno holds that unlike the angels, man has freedom of choice, which is a power equal to that of the Creator Himself. But man does not always choose well, which

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<sup>650</sup> Genesis 2:9

<sup>651</sup> "Johann Reuchlin" *Microsoft Encarta* 2003.

is what distinguishes us from the Divine.<sup>652</sup> Sforno, capturing the ideals of Humanism, suggests that “man can choose to attain this perfection, by striving to delve into the aforementioned wisdom...”<sup>653</sup>

Sforno was one of the great luminaries of medieval Italian Jewry, he lived during a period of volatile change in the relationships between Italian Jewry and the general Italian population, characterized by the trauma of the Spanish Inquisition, the institution of anti-Jewish laws in Italy, and Papal enmity. His commentary reflects his background in medicine, his concern that the Torah not be seen as illogical or redundant, his desire to show its attributes against Christianity, its relevance to science, and a reaction to the Italian Renaissance and Humanism.

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<sup>652</sup> Genesis 1:26

<sup>653</sup> Genesis 1:27

## ספרנו בראשית פרק א

**(א) בראשית ברא אלהים את השמים ואת הארץ :****בראשית - (When did time begin?)<sup>i</sup>**

[This means] at the beginning of time, the very first moment which could not be a part of time, since time did not exist prior to it.

**ברא - (What was the universe made of?)<sup>ii</sup>**

He made "something" from "nothing"; hence the concept of time cannot apply [to this] at all.

**אלהים - (What does this word connote?)<sup>iii</sup>**

The word אלה denotes the eternal, and this is why the שדים (demons) who are like human beings, and can die, as our sages testify<sup>654</sup>, are called לשדים לא אלוהים "to demons, no gods"<sup>655</sup> whereas God, the Blessed One, is called אלה for He is surely eternal as it says, "and he forsook God Who made him".<sup>656</sup> He is called אלהים in the plural form to teach us that He is the form of all forms be they everlasting or otherwise, as it says, "the whole earth is full of his glory,"<sup>657</sup> for nothing can exist except that which is reserved from His existence; and there can be no being without His Being, as it says, "and You preserve them all."<sup>658</sup> In a similar sense, all who are separated from matter (i.e. the angels) are called אלהים. Expert judges are also called אלהים, when they judge (guided by) the "image of God". The idea that God's superior Being as the Eternal, from whom emanates the everlasting power of others, and who are separated from matter (i.e., the angels), is indicated in the expression אלהי האלהים "He is the God of gods"<sup>659</sup>.

**את השמים - (Where is our world in relation to the universe?)<sup>iv</sup>**

The word שם there denotes a far, distant place. Whenever a word is changed from the singular to the plural (i.e. by adding the letters ך and ם) preceded by a פתח it indicates two that are equal. Therefore the word שמים indicates an object far removed from our point of perspective, on two sides, both equidistant from all sides. This can only be true of a sphere which revolves around a perfect circle. Therefore, [the Torah states] that [God] created this object which is now equidistant [to our naked eye] from all sides. This is the גלגל the celestial sphere (the sphere of the Zodiac) and that is why it does not say ברא שמים "He created heaven", rather את השמים for the (term שמים) is not one that can be expressed independently by itself but only in relationship to our place (i.e., the earth).

**ואת הארץ - (Meaning)**

The Torah then says "and the earth" meaning the central point which is fitting for the celestial sphere.

<sup>654</sup> Chagigah 16a

<sup>655</sup> Deuteronomy 32:17

<sup>656</sup> Deut 32:15

<sup>657</sup> Isaiah 6:3

<sup>658</sup> Nehemiah 9:6

<sup>659</sup> Deuteronomy 10:17

**(ב) והארץ היתה תהו ובהו וחשך על פני תהום ורוח אלהים מרחפת על פני המים :**

**והארץ היתה תהו ובהו - (Creation from nothing and actualized)<sup>v</sup>**

That earth, which was created, was a combination of primeval matter called תהו and primeval form called בהו, for it would not be suitable (possible) for primeval matter to exist without being clothed in some form. This then, was the first combination by necessity, of matter and form. The Torah is explaining that primeval matter was a totally new creation (there being no 'matter' preceding the world's creation). The matter in this initial combination is called תהו for it only possesses potential but no actuality, as it says "for they are vain"<sup>660</sup>, that is, something not existing in reality, only in the imagination. The form of that initial combination is called בהו for in it the תהו is found, in actuality. The prophet calls אבני בהו "stones sunken in the primeval mire"<sup>661</sup>, any object which does not remain in a given form for an appreciable period of time, just as we call the initial form בהו which immediately clothed itself in a variety of forms (namely the four elements).

**וחשך - (The creation of darkness)**

The dark air which emanated from the first combination was on the surface of the two lower elements (water and earth) which also emanated from the first combination; these encircled one another.

**ורוח אלהים מרחפת על פני המים - (Meaning)<sup>vi</sup>**

The [angels] that moved the spheres who are called רוח "wind" as it says, "Who makes wind His angels (messengers)"<sup>662</sup> moved the dark air over the surface of the water, which then encompassed the foundation of the earth. As a result, the inner part (of the dark air) close to the orb overheated through the friction of its movement and that became the element of fire, while that part (of the dark air) close to the water was cooled by the water, except for a portion thereof which became heated, thereby forming sparks which gave forth light.

**(ג) ויאמר אלהים יהי אור ויהי אור:**

**ויהי אור - (Light is sown for the righteous)**

This is the light of the seven days [of Creation] for the purpose of generating growth without the benefit of seed. This [phenomenon] will also come to pass at the end of days (literally the future) for our Sages tell us that this hidden light will be used for the purpose of bringing forth cakes and woolen robes without the medium of planted seeds.<sup>663</sup>

**(ד) וירא אלהים את האור כי טוב ויבדל אלהים בין האור ובין החשך :**

**וירא אלהים את האור כי טוב - (What does it mean for God to see?)<sup>vii</sup>**

And so it was, for God saw (comprehended) (that light was good) and He chose its existence toward the end of the achievement of good, and He brought it (light) into

<sup>660</sup> I Samuel 12:21

<sup>661</sup> Isaiah 34:11

<sup>662</sup> Psalm 104:4

<sup>663</sup> Shabbat 30b

being through His knowledge which is the efficient cause' (that alone brought it into actuality).

**ויבדל אלהים בין האור ובין החשך - (Explicating the text)**

During those days that the primeval light served the world, there were period of light and periods of darkness without the revolution of the spheres. It was so only through Divine Will which separated between the 'time' of light and the 'time' of darkness.

**(ה) ויקרא אלהים לאור יום ולחשך קרא לילה ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום אחד :**

**ויקרא אלהים לאור יום - (How can there be day before the sun was created?)<sup>664</sup>**

Although the periods of light and darkness did not function at that time in the same manner as they do today, when we call (these periods) by their names of day and night, nonetheless....

**ויהי ערב ויהי בקר - (Explaining the meaning of the text)**

Although God separated light and darkness so that they might serve at different times, without benefit of the revolution of the spheres, nonetheless He separated (these periods of light and darkness) in a gradual manner so that there was a time called 'evening' as night arrived and a time called 'morning' as day came.

**(ו) ויאמר אלהים יהי רקיע בתוך המים ויהי מבדיל בין מים למים :**

**יהי רקיע בתוך המים - (How is this happening?)<sup>665</sup>**

Let the nature of the elemental waters become as though the form of a wheel is girdling it, separating one part from the other, in such a manner that a portion of the upper waters adjacent to the air mass charge once again to the nature of vapor. In this manner, they will be elevated to a (higher) area of the elemental air. This air will now perforce somehow be made into a place for that portion (of water) which changed to vapor. It will expand considerably into a larger area than it was originally (and become the firmament).

**(ז) ויעש אלהים את הרקיע ויבדל בין המים אשר מתחת לרקיע ובין המים אשר מעל לרקיע ויהי כן :**

**ויעש אלהים את הרקיע - (How is this happening?)**

Now, since the rest of the foundation waters which remained below those waters that vaporized, gathered together, as it says, "let the waters beneath the heaven be gathered, it should follow that the upper waters which become vapor would have filled the vacuum left by the departure of the waters. However, He made the רקיע which separated (the higher and lower waters), in such a manner that it (the רקיע) was given the power of restraint, preventing the vapor portion – that is the water which was above the firmament – from descending; in a manner that the (newly) fashioned atmosphere did fill the void while the vapor remained in its initial position. Now when the moist vaporized water becomes dense, it brings forth rain, snow and hail as it becomes laden heavily (with water) and descends (to the earth), as it says, "At the sound of His giving a multitude of waters in the heavens".<sup>664</sup> Since the elemental waters, which are denser, are above the light air, this condition, is contrary to nature, indicating that it is an act performed by

<sup>664</sup> Jeremiah 10:13

God's Will, directed without a doubt toward a (good) purpose and end, as it says, "the firmament shows His handiwork".<sup>665</sup>

**ויהי כן - (Meaning)**

It remained so contrary to its own nature.

**(ח) ויקרא אלהים לרקיע שמים ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום שני : פ**

**ויקרא אלהים לרקיע שמים - (Meaning)**

Because the heavenly functionaries reach the earth through the medium (of the רקיע) as it says, "And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, to dominate by day and by night, and to separate, etc..."<sup>666</sup>

**(ט) ויאמר אלהים יקוו המים מתחת השמים אל מקום אחד ותראה היבשה ויהי כן :**

**יקוו המים מתחת השמים אל מקום אחד - (Explaining the meaning of the text)<sup>1</sup>**

This drying [process] by which the exposed [dry] land occurred, was not due to the effect of the constellations מערכות השמים as many may think, rather (God) commanded that (the waters) be gathered in order that they not transgress (their bounds). Therefore, though they are higher than the earth they do not descend upon it, as our senses testify, as it says, "You set a bound which they do not pass over, that they may not return to cover the earth."<sup>667</sup>

**(י) ויקרא אלהים ליבשה ארץ ולמקוה המים קרא ימים וירא אלהים כי טוב :**

**ויקרא אלהים ליבשה ארץ - (Why is this taught a second time?)**

He called that specific area (i.e. dry land) by its [original] general name (i.e. ארץ earth) since that area was the principal intended part of the entire earth, as it states: "He formed to be inhabited"<sup>668</sup>

**וירא אלהים כי טוב - (What is the meaning of "saw"?)**

He so wanted it, toward the intended end which was good.

**(יא) ויאמר אלהים תדשא הארץ דשא עשב מזריע זרע עץ פרי עשה פרי למינו אשר זרעו בו על הארץ ויהי כן :**

**דשא - (Meaning)**

This refers to a variety of herbage fit for animals as it says, "For the pastures of the wilderness spring forth abundant growth."<sup>669</sup>

**עשב מזריע זרע - (Meaning)**

For man to eat.

**עץ פרי עשה פרי למינו - (Meaning)**

A hybrid of two kinds will not reproduce.

<sup>665</sup> Psalm 19:2

<sup>666</sup> Genesis 1:17,18

<sup>667</sup> Psalm 104:9

<sup>668</sup> Isaiah 45:18

<sup>669</sup> Joel 2:22

ויהי כן - <sup>li</sup>(Meaning)

So it was established (and remained) that it not be able to accept less than its [inherent nature] or more [of a different species] so that if perchance there be a hybrid from two kinds, it will not reproduce.

(יד) ויאמר אלהים יהי מארת ברקיע השמים להבדיל בין היום ובין הלילה והיו לאתת ולמועדים ולימים ושנים :

יהי מארת ברקיע השמים - <sup>lii</sup>(Where is the source of light?)

Let there be the spark of light from the luminaries in that firmament created on the second day, and let it increase and refract so as to work upon the lower land, as related in this chapter. We see through our own senses that there is an increase of light when it passes through clear (pure) water.

(טו) והיו למאורת ברקיע השמים להאיר על הארץ ויהי כן :

להאיר על הארץ - (Meaning)

That blended light shall shine [upon the earth in a manner] suitable for its inhabitants.

ויהי כן - (Meaning)

That blend [of light filtered through the firmament], which came about perforce by God's command, was established and remained (for all time).

(טז) ויעש אלהים את שני המארת הגדלים את המאור הגדל לממשלת היום ואת המאור הקטן לממשלת הלילה ואת הכוכבים : (יז) ויתן אתם אלהים ברקיע השמים להאיר על הארץ :

ויעש אלהי - <sup>liii</sup>(Why were they made different?)

Regarding the luminaries and other stars [the word used is] ויעש (and he made), for they were already [created] as part of the spheres, or of the heavens, the creation of which the Torah already related (in verse 1), therefore the verb "create" is not used, but "ויעש" (make).

Now the reason why they were made [different than the other spheres and orbs] in round forms and as shining ones, is because, כי טוב "that it was good", i.e., God's intent was for the good (of mankind) which was the proper ultimate purpose of His act.

(יח) ולמשל ביום ובלילה ולהבדיל בין האור ובין החשך וירא אלהים כי טוב :

ולמשל ביום ובלילה - (Meaning)

[They rule by] generating existence (creatures) in the lower world. This [light] was necessary to function with the primeval light to bring living creatures into being, for they are more important (and complex) than the plant world.

ולהבדיל בין האור ובין החשך - (Meaning)

[This means] to separate, in the lower world, through its rising and setting, between the period of light which was called day and the period of darkness which was called night, as it says above to "separate between the day and the night".<sup>670</sup>

**(כ) ויאמר אלהים ישרצו המים שרץ נפש חיה ועוף יעופף על הארץ על פני רקיע השמים :**

**יעופף על הארץ על פני רקיע השמים - (What is there purpose?)**

They cleanse the air of the earth, on behalf of its inhabitants, of extraneous moisture coming from the firmament, which was created on the second day, through the medium of the sparks which worked upon it.

**(כא) ויברא אלהים את התנינם הגדלים ואת כל נפש החיה הרמשת אשר שרצו המים למינהם ואת כל עוף כנף למינהו וירא אלהים כי טוב :**

**ויברא אלהים את התנינם - (What is there purpose?)**

The generative potential which was present in the water (as endowed by God), was not sufficient (in power) to bring forth the first sea-giants without seed, until God created at that time sufficient potential power to do so.

**יברך אתם אלהים לאמר פרו ורבו ומלאו את המים בימים והעוף ירב בארץ : (כב) ו**

**ויברך אתם אלהים - (What is there purpose?)**

Their end purpose would not be realized unless they were numerous.

**אלהים תוצא הארץ נפש חיה למינה בהמה ורמש וחיתו ארץ למינה ויהי כן : (כד) ויאמר**

**תוצא הארץ נפש חיה - (Meaning)**

A living soul in addition to the living plants which grow.

**ויהי כן - (Meaning)**

Nothing was added or diminished; and if a new hybrid by crossbred from two species it will not be capable of reproducing.

**(כה) ויעש אלהים את חית הארץ למינה ואת הבהמה למינה ואת כל רמש האדמה למינהו וירא אלהים כי טוב :**

**ויעש אלהים את חית הארץ למינה - (Meaning)**

He endowed each species with whatever senses and facilities were required by that species.

**(כו) ויאמר אלהים נעשה אדם בצלמנו כדמותנו וירדו בדגת הים ובעוף השמים ובבהמה ובכל הארץ ובכל הרמש הרמש על הארץ :**

**ויאמר אלהים נעשה - (Meaning)**

<sup>670</sup> Genesis 1:14

He then endowed His **פמליא** "His heavenly host", with the power to impart the heavenly image to the subject which was prepared for it (i.e., man).

(Meaning) - **אדם**

[Man is] a species of the "living being" species, which I formed, whose name is "Adam", as it says, "And man became a living creature". Let us make him...

(Meaning) - **בצלמנו**

Who shall be one that is everlasting (**נצח**) and endowed with reason (**שכל**) and this God, the Blessed One, gave man an opening in His Torah to acquire knowledge regarding those separated from matter (i.e., the angels) through the intuitive knowledge of our souls.

(What is the distinction here made by the **"כ"**?) - **כדמותנו**

Indeed, that he be in a small way like the Heavenly host, insofar as they function with knowledge and recognition. However, their actions (the angels) are [performed] without [freedom] of choice, and in this sense man is not like them. In a limited manner, man is also like God the Blessed One, Who acts with choice. However, God's choice is always to do good, but man's choice is not [always] so. In this area the Divine (freedom of choice) is afar superior to man's freedom of choice. Therefore it says **כדמותנו** "as our likeness", not **בדמותנו** "in our likeness" [which would mean it is so] in truth.

(כז) **ויברא אלהים את האדם בצלמו בצלם אלהים ברא אתו זכר ונקבה**  
**ברא אתם :**

(How is man made in the image of God?) - **בצלם אלהים**

The term **אלהים** used in a comparable sense (or as a counterpart) can be applied to every intelligent force (object) separated from matter which is perfect (complete) and (can function) in actuality and as such, is perforce everlasting. Therefore (this term) is used regarding God, the Blessed One, and His angels. It is also applied to judges (reflecting) their power of reason which is suitable for them. However, even though human reasoning functions without any material medium, expanding to the extrasensory and to a limited extent, even into the future, nor does this power weaken through much use or with age but increases in strength, which demonstrates that man's reason is also without a doubt separated from matter – seeing that the opposite is true of all physical material powers- nonetheless, before man contemplates and thinks deeply, lacking the perfection and completeness prepared for him, he cannot be called **אלהים**, but can only be called the "image of **אלהים**" until he attains perfection. This is especially (so until he attains) the wisdom which brings to the love and awe of God. Only then will he become one who is intellectually apprehensive in deed (action); perfect and separated from matter, resulting in immortality, existing even after the death of his body. Now since man can choose to attain this perfection, by striving to delve into the aforementioned wisdom (it follows) that if he restrains himself from this perfection) his intellectual powers will remain only potential, deprived of all perfection in the actual (as it was in the beginning), resulting in his desolation and destruction, as it says "Man is in his splendor but does not understand, he is like the beasts that perish"<sup>671</sup> All this God, the Blessed One, taught us in these two words, saying **בצלם אלהים** "in the image of God".

<sup>671</sup> Psalm 49:21

(כח) ויברך אתם אלהים ויאמר להם אלהים פרו ורבו ומלאו את הארץ  
וכבשה ורדו בדגתהים ובעוף השמים ובכל חיה הרמשת על הארץ :

(Meaning) - וכבשה ורדו

To protect it with your intelligence, and prevent the beasts from entering your limits (boundaries), for you will rule over them with nets and snares, to subject them to your service.

(כט) ויאמר אלהים הנה נתתי לכם את כל עשב זרע זרע אשר על פני כל  
הארץ ואת כל העץ אשר בו פרי עץ זרע זרע לכם יהיה לאכלה :

(Meaning) - הנה נתתי לכם

For human consumption.

(ל) ולכל חית הארץ ולכל עוף השמים ולכל רומש על הארץ אשר בו  
נפש חיה את כל ירק עשב לאכלה ויהי כן :

(Meaning) - (ל) ולכל חית הארץ

But for all the beasts of the earth, and the animals and birds I have given...

(Meaning) - את כל ירק עשב לאכלה

Species of herbs which are not planted by seeds.

(לא) וירא אלהים את כל אשר עשה והנה טוב מאד ויהי ערב ויהי בקר  
יום הששי :

(What is there purpose?) - כל אשר עשה והנה טוב מאד<sup>xiv</sup>

The end result of existence *in toto* was far greater than the end result of each particular part which was intended for the general purpose.

(Meaning) - יום הששי

The first (sixth day) which was the beginning of all sixth days (erev shabbos) when all deeds are completed so as to rest on Shabbat, as it says, "And do all you work"<sup>672</sup> followed by, "But the seventh day is a Shabbat"<sup>673</sup>

## ספרנו בראשית פרק ב

(א) ויכלו השמים והארץ וכל צבאם :

(Why did creation finish?) - ויכלו

Having reached the end purpose of existence (Creation) in general.

(ב) ויכל אלהים ביום השביעי מלאכתו אשר עשה וישבת ביום השביעי מכל  
מלאכתו אשר עשה :

(When?) - ויכל אלהים ביום השביעי

<sup>672</sup> Exodus 20:9

<sup>673</sup> Exodus 20:10

God completed all creative activity at the (exact) beginning of the seventh day at the indivisible moment which marked the inception of the future time, but yet was not part of it, as our Sages said<sup>674</sup>, "He entered into it by a hair's-breadth".

**וישבת ביום השביעי - (How was the day distinguished?)**

That entire day was distinguished from the first six days by abstention (from creative activity).

**(ג) ויברך אלהים את יום השביעי ויקדש אתו כי בו שבת מכל מלאכתו אשר ברא אלהים לעשות**

**ויברך אלהים את יום השביעי - (Meaning\*)**

Every future seventh day was blessed with an "added soul" so that I be more prepared than any other day to be "illuminated by the light of life"<sup>675</sup> as our Sages state, ששבת זיי "When Shabbat ends, woe! The additional soul is lost".<sup>676</sup>

**(ד) אלה תולדות השמים והארץ בהבראם ביום עשות יי אלהים ארץ ושמים :**

**אלה תולדות השמים והארץ בהבראם - (Inpotontia and form)<sup>xv</sup>**

These plants and living creatures which we have already mentioned, were the products of heaven and earth *inpotontia*, and were contained within form from the time of their creation, from which time (all) active and passive, eternal and perishable powers were present, as it says (in verse 1) תא השמים (the heavens) (proceeded by the indefinite article את). This is to be understood as an amplification, i.e., including its "offspring heavenly bodies and constellations. ואת הארץ "and the earth" which similarly is an amplification including its "offspring" (the trees, herbage, and living creatures). However, all these only became actual...

**ביום עשות יי אלהים ארץ ושמים - (Explaining the dual names of God used)**

On that day He set in order, from heaven, the permanent natural laws of the earth and its "offspring". This was after the six days of creation. He is then called ה' אלהים for by setting this order, He made its existence permanent.

**(ה) וכל שיח השדה טרם יהיה בארץ וכל עשב השדה טרם יצמח כי לא המטיר יי אלהים על הארץ ואדם אין לעבד את האדמה :**

**טרם יהיה בארץ - (Potential and Actual State)**

The reason that the trees were only in their potential and not actual state when they were created, in such a manner that there were as yet no trees of the field, and so also...

**וכל עשב השדה - (Meaning)**

Had as yet sprouted.

**כי לא המטיר - (Meaning)**

Hence the "material" was not prepared to realize its complete potential, for it lacked rain and work of the soil (by man).

<sup>674</sup> Beresheet Rabbah

<sup>675</sup> Job 33:30

<sup>676</sup> Beitzah 16a

**(ו) ואד יעלה מן הארץ וחשקה את כל פני האדמה :**

**ואד יעלה מן הארץ - (Dew)**

When God established as a continual order plant life, a mist came up from the earth which caused dew, as a blessing, to water the earth, bring forth and bud, without benefit of rain or (man's) working of the soil.

**(ז) וייצר יי אלהים את האדם עפר מן האדמה ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים ויהי האדם לנפש חיה :**

**וייצר יי אלהים - (How did God create man?)**

However, to bring forth living creatures, it was not sufficient (to use the earlier method and powers). The Creator utilized different ways and methods (to create all living creatures).

**עפר מן האדמה - (Meaning)**

A distinguished part (of the ground).

**ויפח באפיו נשמת חיי - (Meaning)**

A vivifying soul ready to receive the "image of God" as it says, "And the breath of God that gives them understanding."<sup>677</sup>

**ויהי האדם לנפש חיה - (Meaning)**

In spite of all this (his special forming by God), he was still only a living creature, unable to speak, until he was created in God's image and likeness.

**(ח) ויטע יי אלהים גן בעדן מקדם וישם שם את האדם אשר יצר :**

**אשר יצר - (Meaning)**

After He formed him in the distinguished manner already mentioned, He placed him there (in the garden), being a place suitable for man to receive God's image and acquire intellectual reasoning (functioning) powers, through its atmosphere and food.

**(ט) ויצמח יי אלהים מן האדמה כל עץ נחמד למראה וטוב למאכל ועץ החיים בתוך הגן ועץ הדעת טוב ורע :**

**ויצמח יי - (Meaning)**

His food, without suffering.

**נחמד למראה - (Meaning)**

Gladdening and broadening the heart, preparing it and making it receptive to the flow of intelligence, as it says, "And it came to pass when the minstrel played that the hand of God came upon him."<sup>678</sup>

**ועץ הדעת - (What made this tree a Tree of Knowledge?)<sup>679</sup>**

Knowledge is given one's attention to and focus one's heart on what is good and evil. From this (source of the word דעת) we also find, "and Adam knew"<sup>679</sup> meaning that he became aware and concentrated his heart on her. This is also why we call a relative מודע

<sup>677</sup> Job 32:8

<sup>678</sup> II Kings 3:15

<sup>679</sup> Genesis 4:1

as it says, "a relative of her husband"<sup>680</sup> for it is natural that one concerns himself for the needs of his relative, as it says, "And a brother is born for adversity"<sup>681</sup>

**טוב ורע - "Why have both words?"<sup>vii</sup>**

To choose the sweet even when it is harmful and reject the bitter even when it is beneficial.

**(י) ונהר יצא מעדן להשקות את הגן ומשם יפרד והיה לארבעה ראשים :**

**נהר יצא מעדן - (Meaning)**

Without need (lit, pain) of rain or the labor of man.

**(יא) שם האחד פישון הוא הסבב את כל ארץ החוילה אשר שם הזהב :**

**שם האחד פישון - (Why give the name of the river?)**

The Torah tells us how praiseworthy was the river that watered the garden, the name of which is unknown to us, by informing us of the names of the rivers branching out from it, which are well known to us as commendable for their size and the quality of their waters and fruits.

**(טו) ויקח יי אלהים את האדם וינחחו בגן עדן לעבדה ולשמרה :**

**לעבדה - (Meaning)**

To work, to perfect, his soul of life, as it says, "And He blew into the nostrils the soul of life."<sup>682</sup>

**ולשמרה - (How was it kept?)**

That it, his soul of life, not be diminished through the impact of nature's heat upon his fundamental vitality; this therapeutic aid coming from the esteemed fruits which constantly replaced what man's constitution lost, for these fruits never rotted.

**(טז) ויצו יי אלהים על האדם לאמר מכל עץ הגן אכל תאכל :**

**מכל עץ הגן - (Meaning)**

According to the changing seasons, as affected by the stars as it says, "It shall bring forth new fruit every month."<sup>683</sup>

**(יז) ומעץ הדעת טוב ורע לא תאכל ממנו כי ביום אכלך ממנו מות תמות :**

**ומעץ הדעת - (Where was the tree?)**

Which was situated in the midst of the garden near the tree of life mentioned above, as it says, "a tree of life in the midst of the garden"<sup>684</sup> This is in keeping with "I have set before you life and death."<sup>685</sup>

<sup>680</sup> Ruth 2:1

<sup>681</sup> Proverbs 17:17

<sup>682</sup> Genesis 2:7

<sup>683</sup> Ezekiel 47:12

<sup>684</sup> Genesis 2:9

<sup>685</sup> Deuteronomy 30:19

**(יח) ויאמר יי אלהים לא טוב היות האדם לבדו אעשה לו עזר כנגדו :**

**לא טוב היות האדם לבדו - (Why is it not good for man to be alone?)**

The goal and purpose intended in his being in the likeness and image of God will not be realized if man will have to occupy himself alone, to supply the needs of life.

**עזר כנגדו - (What does it mean to be "opposite"?)**

This means a helper that will be, as it were equal to him in image and likeness. This was mandatory so that the helper would appreciate his needs and meet them at the proper time. The word כנגדו (opposite him) implies that when an object is placed on one side of a scale it will be even with the object on the other side providing they are both equal in weight. Only then is it נגדו (opposite) one another on a straight line, rather, one will go up and the other down (higher or lower). This is what is meant by our Sages when they "Moses was equal to all of Israel." It would, however, not have been proper for the helper to be completely equal to him for then one would not be properly able to work for and serve the other.

**(יט) ויצר יי אלהים מן האדמה כל חית השדה ואת כל עוף השמים ויבא אל האדם לראות מה יקרא לו וכל אשר יקרא לו האדם נפש חיה הוא שמו :**

**ויצר יי אלהים מן האדמה כל חית השדה - (Meaning)**

He gave them a complete form as feeling creatures; the heavenly force not being sufficient to do so without the help of the natural reproductive force.

**ויבא אל האדם - (What is meant by this verse?)**

So that man might recognize that he needed a new creation (as a mate) seeing that there was none among the living creatures to serve him suitably.

**לראות מה יקרא לו - (What does is the connection between seeing and naming?)**

So that he might see and discern what name was proper for each one of them, according to the function most suitable to its form.

**נפש חיה הוא שמו - (Why is this name specified?)**

The particular name by which it was called indicated the form of that living creature meaning the essence of its living soul which represents its actuality in existence.

**(כ) ויקרא האדם שמות לכל הבהמה ולעוף השמים ולכל חית השדה ולאדם לא מצא עזר כנגדו :**

**(כא) ויפל יי אלהים תרדמה על האדם ויישן ויקח אחת מצלעותיו ויסגר בשר תחתנה :**

**ויפל יי אלהים תרדמה על האדם - (Meaning)**

So he should not be afraid or experience pain.

**ויקח אחת מצלעותיו - (What is the significance of this verse?)**

Since the choicest dust had been gathered and all proper material went into man's living form, therefore when God wanted to fashion the female form, which was almost similar to him (Adam), it was fitting to take some of his material being (body), namely one of his sides.

**(כב) ויבן יי אלהים את הצלע אשר לקח מן האדם לאשה ויבאה אל האדם :**

**ויבן יי אלהים את הצלע - (What is the difference between man and woman?)**

That she may have the form of man and his faculties differing from only in the physical vessels (i.e. sex) –this being the difference between them, (otherwise) both have the possibility for the attainment of perfection, (be the measure) abundant or meager.

**(כג) ויאמר האדם זאת הפעם עצם מעצמי ובשר מבשרי לזאת יקרא אשה כי מאיש לקחה זאת :**

**זאת - (Referring to what?)**

This female

**הפעם - (Referring to what?)**

This time it is...

**עצם מעצמי ובשר מבשרי - (Meaning)**

Henceforth, however, the female of the human species will not be so (she will be formed separately from man).

**לזאת - (Referring to what?)**

This. Every female woman, in the future....

**יקרא אשה - (Pointing out the similarity in words)**

Even though she will not be a part of man.

**כי מאיש לקחה זאת - (Meaning)**

The first one of all (women).

**(כד) על כן יעזב איש את אביו ואת אמו ודבק באשתו והיו לבשר אחד :**

**על כן - (Why is it a result of that?)**

Since the first woman was intended by God to be similar to man as much as possible to such an extent that He formed her from (man's) body.

**יעזב איש את אביו ואת אמו ודבק באשתו - (What is the connection of this verse?)**

It is proper that man should attempt to marry a woman suitable for him and suitable to cleave to him. This he shall do even though it may be necessary to leave his father and mother; there can be no authentic cleaving among those who are not alike; it can only be among those who are similar, for only then can they be of one mind.

**והיו לבשר אחד - (What is meant by one flesh?)**

In all their actions they will aim to attain the perfection intended by man's creation, as thought he two were as only one flesh.

**(כה) ויהיו שניהם ערומים האדם ואשתו ולא יתבששו :**

**ערומים - (What is the significance?)<sup>viii</sup>**

At that time, all their organs, limbs and actions were used for the purpose of fulfilling God's will exclusively not to attain physical pleasure at all. Consequently the act of sexual congress was to them normal as that of eating and drinking; therefore their reproductive organs were regarded by them as we regard our mouth, face, and hands.

## Notes

<sup>i</sup> Sforno, disagreeing with Aristotelian thought, accepts perspective offered by Rambam (Guide II:30), "that the world was not created in a "temporal beginning" for time belongs to the created things." That the doctrine of the "eternity of the world" is rejected because time didn't exist, time was created at this instant. In a work entitled *Or Ammim* (Bologna 1537) Sforno writes a lengthy argument against the theories of Aristotle on the eternity of matter, on God's omniscience, and on the universality of the soul.

<sup>ii</sup> Sforno rejects the Aristotelian notion of a pre-existing universe or even pre-existing stuff. Similar to Ramban, Sforno interprets the word ברא to mean creation from nothing - יש מאין.

<sup>iii</sup> God is not only the creator but the sustainer as well. Further, the word is descriptive, signifying the eternal and the everlasting separated from matter that can be applied to the angels and those who exhibit divine intelligence.

<sup>iv</sup> Sforno points out the word השמים is plural, referring to two 'theres' to two 'far aways' (as the Hebrew word *hayadayim* refers to two hands) that can only be if the world is moving in a spherical pattern. In proposing this theory, this fifteenth century thinker (1470-1550) who lived for a while in Italy, seems to be picking up on the scientific thinking of Copernicus (1473-1543) who was proposing a revolutionary, and in some circles blasphemous theory, that contrasted with the long held acceptable of the earth being the center of the universe. Having a spherical rotation, delegates the earth from the center of the cosmos to merely revolving around the sun. Sforno deduces "a crucial moral lesson from an earth constantly revolving on its own axes, as it revolves around the sun... It means, for him, that the human being is placed squarely at the center of the earth, equidistant from the two "theres" or "far-aways" of the heavens." Rabbi Shlomo Riskin <http://www2t.biglobe.ne.jp/~BokerTov/rbranch/r5760/r60gen01.htm>

<sup>v</sup> Similar to Ramban, Sforno wrestles with the ancient debate of Aristotle and Plato.

<sup>vi</sup> Rambam refers to forces of God as angels (Guide II:6). We can see here another example of how Sforno was influenced by Rambam.

<sup>vii</sup> Like Rambam, Sforno Distancing himself from anthropomorphism.

<sup>viii</sup> Sforno confronts what seems to be a contradiction in the text by explaining it beyond the literal meaning of the text.

<sup>ix</sup> Sforno here is referring to water wheels and water pressure a reflection of the time period in which it was written in.

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<sup>x</sup> Sforno's reliance on the senses reflect the science of the Renaissance that suggests that one can learn natural phenomenon of the present and past through careful observation.

<sup>xi</sup> The notion that two species from mixed seed will not reproduce was within the scope of scientific reasoning of the sixteenth century.

<sup>xii</sup> This is another example of the use of empirical science "We see through our senses..."

<sup>xiii</sup> The notion that creation was for the purpose of man was not a novel idea of Sforno's. However, the emphasis which he placed on this notion is reflective of the popular thinking of the time.

<sup>xiv</sup> Rabbi Joshua Levine Grater suggests that this comment should be interpreted as a proverbial piece of advice. Noticing that while God concludes each day by saying "it was good" but at the end God says it was "very good", Grater is suggesting that while the micro picture may only be ok, the macro picture is wonderful. As he puts it, "While the details of our lives might bog us down and impress upon us that life is hard, filled with suffering and devoid of daily joy, the big picture of our existence, the overall reality of our lives can be seen as very good, very blessed, very joyous." This is another example of how Sforno will offer proverbial advice occasionally as he deviates from the *pshat*. Rabbi Joshua Levine Grater *Bereshit and Goodness* October 24, 2003, <<http://www.pjtc.net/Bereshit%20and%20Goodness.htm>>.

<sup>xv</sup> Also This can be seen in his use of neo-platonic explanation in (Genesis 2:4) where he explains away the seemingly redundancy of the text by suggesting that the plants and living creatures already mentioned were created *in potentia*.

<sup>xvi</sup> It is interesting to note that we have knowledge of how Sforno's brother helped support him while in school.

<sup>xvii</sup> Here is another example of how Sforno offers proverbial advice another than sticking to the *pshat*.

<sup>xviii</sup> Sforno's comment here notion of the human body during the Italian Renaissance. The human body was appreciated for its natural beauty. Artists strove for realistic depictions of the human figure.

## CONCLUSION

The creation story told in Genesis, chapters one and two, inspires more questions than it provides answers. Its fifty-five verses have challenged our greatest thinkers to posit on the fundamental questions of existence. How did it start? Why was there a creation? Who is the Creator? What is the purpose of human existence? While these existential questions are not explicitly found in the Torah, they are raised explicitly by Judaism's biblical commentators who have formed a scaffolding of exegesis that helps uncover meaning in a text, which as Rashi suggests, is "nothing if not mysterious."<sup>686</sup> Each biblical commentator offers a perspective that reflects the societal lens through which he sees the world. This can be seen in the opening three words of the Torah.

Why, Rashi asks, does the Torah begin with creation and not with the first commandment directed towards Israel? One answer that he provides is that the purpose of the creation story is to teach that the land of *Eretz Yisrael*, which in his time was being fought over by the Christians and Muslims, belonged to the Creator who ultimately decides who may dwell in it.

For Ramban, the purpose of this text is very much influenced by the Maimonidian Aristotelian thoughts that were popular in his day which challenged the idea of creation from nothing. Ramban held that the purpose of this opening text was nothing less than to teach the very root of Jewish faith. The belief in God, the creator. He writes that "He who does not believe in this and thinks that the world always existed denies the essential teaching of Judaism and has no Torah at all." Relying on his teachings of Kabbalah, that

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<sup>686</sup> Translation from Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, *Genesis: The Beginning of Desire* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1995).

before had never been recorded, Ramban hints that the explanation of Creation cannot be understood merely from the Biblical account.

Ibn Ezra, focuses on the linguistics of the opening verse and avoids offering a rationale for creation here. Instead, like Ramban who will later agree with him, he suggests that the text supports his neo-Platonic view that creation was *ex-nihilo* יש מאין. He points out that the etymological meaning of the verb ברא is to “cut out and put into shape” thereby assuming matter. By using his knowledge of the language learned in Judeo-Muslim Spain, ibn Ezra is able to offer an interpretation that would resonate with many in his community.

Sforno, sees in this opening verse of Torah, s description of the beginning of time. And if there is a beginning, then one must accept that the universe is not eternal, that it was created by a creator. In the world of the Italian Renaissance, this confirmation was in itself a significant idea.

Another illustration of how these four commentators approach the text from different perspectives can be seen in their comments to נעשה אדם בצלמנו כדמותנו, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”<sup>687</sup> Sfrono, influenced by the Humanist movement, Sforno suggests that what makes humanity “made in the image of the divine” is humanities capacity for free choice. Rashi, wonders why two words are used here, which seems superfluous. He suggests that we are similar to the divine in our ability to understand and to be creative. Ibn Ezra, finds it important to write that while it might seem that God has an image, what the verse is really referring to man; soul which is incorporeal. And Ramban, suggests that while man’s body can be compared to the earth,

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<sup>687</sup> Genesis 1:26

his soul can only be compared with the divine. This distinction between body and soul was popular in Medieval Christian Europe.

These commentators come to this Torah as products of their environment. They are indebted to the Muslim and Christian hermeneutics that they learned from their neighbors. They employ in their commentaries the secular knowledge of grammar, philosophy, and science. And many of their comments are influenced by or responses to the Karaite, Christian, and Muslim communities. Studying how biblical commentators were influenced by the world around them teaches how new spiritual or philosophic developments or crises can result in new views of Torah, revelation, and exegesis. Thinking what motivation drove each comment helps one to better understand these Jewish thinkers words by placing them in context. For while the commentaries may have originally been intended for a particular community its value has become timeless.

Applying these same ideas to the commentaries used by the Jewish community today challenges the reader to take a critical look at scaffolding that currently surround the Torah. Three commentaries, Hertz, Plaut<sup>688</sup>, and Etz Hayim, stand out as exegesis that reflects the religious, literary, and scientific development of the twentieth century.

The Hertz *chumash* was first published in 1936 under the direction of the Chief Rabbi of the Great Britain, Dr. Joseph Hertz. It cited freely from both classical and modern biblical exegetes. In its introduction it states as its aim, "the elucidation of the text and the exposition of the spiritual and ethical teachings of the Torah. Published in the thirties many of its comments seem a response to both source criticism and scientific secularism. For example, in the opening words of Genesis, Hertz writes, "Ages untold

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<sup>688</sup> While this commentary is generally referred to as the Plaut commentary after its main editor, Bernard J. Bamberger was responsible for the book of Leviticus.

may have elapsed between the calling of matter into being and the reduction of chaos to ordered arrangement." A comment that seems targeted at those who would discount the sanctity of the text by taking a literal reading.

In 1981, seventeen years after the project was conceived, the Reform movement's commentary entitled *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, but referred to as the Plaut commentary after its main editor Rabbi, Gunther W. Plaut, was published. It was the first major commentary published after the Holocaust and after the creation of the State of Israel. It was the first one that was influenced by the rush of Biblical archeology discoveries following the six day war, and it was the treat the Torah as a composite document produced by many hands over many ages. It relied on the Documentary Hypothesis, quoted freely from Christian and Muslim religious sources as well as contemporary observations by scientists, historians, and non-religious thinkers. Its comments reflect a Jewish community that was wrestling with its understanding of God but which had great faith in modern man. It reflects a secure liberal Jewish community accepts truth from any source. In its comments to the opening words of Genesis, we read, "The Book of Genesis does not appear to tell of human growth and development in a way palatable to moderns, schooled in the principles of evolution..." This is a commentary that addresses a community for which Torah is secondary to secular science.

The Etz Hayim commentary was published in 2001 by the Conservative movement. It contains a *psbat* commentary that strives for a contextual meaning of the text using contemporary scientific scholarship based on the JPS five volume commentary edited by Rabbis Lieber and Potok. A *drash* section of commentary, edited by Rabbi Harold Kushner, follows offering traditional commentary and contemporary thinkers. Finally it

also includes a section on how *Halakhah* is linked to the biblical text. While there was much uproar when it first came out concerning the authorship of the Bible, the actual commentary says little explicitly to challenge one who believes that the Torah is divinely written. It reflects a need for more spirituality combined with the historical knowledge of today. I would suggest that it reflects the spiritual movement now being experienced in the United States filled with a return to meditation, God, and ritual as well as Conservative Judaism's continual struggle to identify itself. In its opening comment on the opening words of Genesis one can see how this commentary distinguishes itself from the Plaut commentary. "The Creation narrative in the Bible is a document of faith. In its quest for meaning it give expression to the fundamental premise of the religion of the people Israel: The universe is entirely the purposeful product of the one God, a transcendent being, beyond nature, and sovereign over space and time." How historians will interpret this commentary awaits us.

These three commentaries, Hertz, Plaut, and Etz Chaim, I believe join the medieval commentaries of Rashi, ibn Ezra, Ramban, and Sforno in adding to the scaffolding surrounding the Torah. Future generations will benefit from their teachings and will continue to ponder the societal influences that shaped these commentaries.

If we can learn from this study how our teachers of the past were willing to speak in the language of their time, to challenge long held conclusions, and to cull ancient teachings for their contemporary problems, perhaps we too can inspire and continue in their sacred endeavor. For truth is contemporary and timeless, relative and universal, and perhaps, both simple and incomprehensible.



## Beresheet: My Translation

In<sup>1</sup> the beginning of God creating<sup>2</sup> the heavens and the earth, when the earth was formless and void, and darkness covered the deep<sup>3</sup>, and the spirit of God hovered over the waters, and God said, "Let there be light!" And there was light. God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light day and the darkness He called night. And there was evening and there was morning on day one.

God said, "Let there be a canopy<sup>4</sup> in the midst of the waters that will separate the waters from the waters." And God made the canopy and separated the waters under the canopy from the waters above the canopy. And it was so. God called the canopy sky<sup>5</sup> and there was evening and there was morning the second day.

בראשית: ברא אלהים את השמים ואת הארץ: והארץ היתה תהו ובהו וחשך על פני תהום ורוח אלהים מרחפת על פני המים: ויאמר אלהים יהי אור ויהי אור: וברא אלהים את האור כי טוב ויבדל אלהים בין האור ובין החשך: ויקרא אלהים לאור יום ולחשך קרא לילה ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום אחד: פ

ויאמר אלהים יהי רקיע בתוך המים ויהי מברל בין מים למים: ויעש אלהים את הרקיע ויבדל בין המים אשר מתחת לרקיע ובין המים אשר מועל לרקיע ויהי כן: ויקרא אלהים לרקיע שמים ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום שני: פ

<sup>1</sup> The text is believed to be written by a sixth century BCE priestly author. Compared to other ancient middle eastern texts, it is a radical change (demythologized) origin of the cosmos compared to the Ugaritic Baal epic or Babylonian Enuma. The structure of the story has the first three days describing the creation of the habitat, and the last three days describing the creation of its inhabitants. God names the things on the first three days and leaves Adam to name things on the remaining days. "Creation", *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Paul Achtemeier (New York: Harpercollins, 1996) 209.

<sup>2</sup> The verb ברא "bara" is used exclusively for divine creativity. It is the subject of much discussion among the commentators. Interestingly, the verb is only used on the odd days of creation. The parallel verb עשה is used on the even days. However, both are used in the context of the creation of man and woman (1:26-27) and Shabbat (2:3).

<sup>3</sup> Deep - תהום - Deep sea/abyss... the deep that couches below. The word is also found in Genesis 7:11, 8:2, 49:25, Exodus 15:5, Deuteronomy 33:13 Isaiah 63:1,3, Jonah 2:6, Proverbs 8:28, and Job 28:14. It refers to the cosmic abyssal water that enveloped the earth. It is treated as a Hebrew proper name. While at one point the word may have referred to a mythical being like the Mesopotamian Tiamat, in this case the term is demythologized. Nahum Sarna *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, (Philadelphia: JPS, 1989) 6.

<sup>4</sup> Canopy/Firmament - רקיע - One must imagine here a flat earth and a domed expanse of heavens holding back celestial waters from terrestrial. The word suggests a thin sheet of beaten metal (Exodus 39:3, Numbers 17:3, Jeremiah 10:9, Job 37:18). Similar metaphors for sky are found in Homer. Job 26:13 depicts God's breath as the force that calmed or spread the heavens. The ancient Hebrews imagined the world as flat and round, covered by the great solid dome of the firmament which was held up by the mountain pillars (Job 26:11, 37:18) Above the firmament and under the earth was water, divided by God at creation. (Gen 1:6, 7 Psalms 24:2, 148:4). The upper waters will join with the waters of the primordial deep during the Flood. The rains were believed to fall through windows in the firmament (Genesis 7:11, 8:2). The sun, moon, and stars moved or are fixed in the firmament. Within the earth lay Sheol the realm of the dead. (Numbers 16:30-33, Isaiah 14:9) *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*.

God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered into one place, that the dry land may be seen. And it was so. God called the dry land Earth and the gathering of the waters, He called "seas", and God saw that it was good. God said, "Let the earth sprout grass,<sup>6</sup> seed bearing plants,<sup>7</sup> fruit trees of its own kind, with its seeds within it, upon the earth." And it was so. The earth brought forth grass, seed bearing plants, and fruit trees of its own kind with its seeds within it. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning the third day.

God said, "Let there be lights<sup>8</sup> in the canopy of the skies that will distinguish between the day and the night, and they will serve as signs for seasons, for days and for years. They will be for lights in the canopy of the sky to light up the earth. And it was so. God made two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the smaller light to rule the night and the stars. And God set them in the canopy of the skies to light up the earth to rule in the day and the night and to separate between the light and the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning the fourth day.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִקְוּ הַמַּיִם מִתַּחַת  
הַשָּׁמַיִם אֶל־מָקוֹם אֶחָד וַתֵּרָא הַיַּבֶּשֶׁת  
וַיִּהְיֶה יָבֹשׁ: 1 וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לַיַּבֶּשֶׁת אֶרֶץ  
וּלַמַּקְוֹת הַמַּיִם קָרָא יַמִּים וַתֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים  
בִּיטּוֹב: 2 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים הָדָשׁ אֶרֶץ  
הָרִשָּׁא עֲשֵׂב מְזִירָע וְרֵעַ עֵץ פֶּרִי עֹשֶׂה פֶרִי  
לְמִינֵהוּ אֲשֶׁר וְרַעֲיוֹנוֹ עַל־הָאָרֶץ וַיִּהְיֶה כֵן:  
3 וַתּוֹצֵא אֶרֶץ הָאָרֶץ דָּשָׁא עֲשֵׂב מְזִירָע וְרֵעַ  
לְמִינֵהוּ וְעֵץ עֹשֶׂה פֶרִי אֲשֶׁר וְרַעֲיוֹנוֹ  
לְמִינֵהוּ וַתֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים בִּיטּוֹב: 4 וַיִּהְיֶה  
עֶרֶב וַיִּהְיֶה בֹקֶר יוֹם שְׁלִישִׁי: 5

4 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי מֵאֲרֵת בְּרִקִּיעַ  
הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הַיּוֹם וּבֵין הַלַּיְלָה  
וְהִי לַאֲתָת וּלְמִזְעָדִים וּלְשָׁנִים וְשָׁנִים:  
5 וְהִי לְמֵאֲרֵת בְּרִקִּיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהָאִיר  
עַל־הָאָרֶץ וַיִּהְיֶה כֵן: 6 וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־  
שְׁנֵי הַמֵּאֲרֹת הַגְּדֹלִים אֶת־הַמֵּאֹר הַגָּדֹל  
לְמִשְׁלַת הַיּוֹם וְאֶת־הַמֵּאֹר הַקָּטָן  
לְמִשְׁלַת הַלַּיְלָה וְאֵת הַכּוֹכָבִים: 7 וַיִּתֵּן  
אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים בְּרִקִּיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהָאִיר  
עַל־הָאָרֶץ: 8 וְלְמִשְׁלַת הַיּוֹם וּבְלַיְלָה  
וּלְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הָאֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ וַתֵּרָא  
אֱלֹהִים בִּיטּוֹב: 9 וַיִּהְיֶה עֶרֶב וַיִּהְיֶה בֹקֶר  
יוֹם רְבִיעִי: 10

<sup>5</sup> Sky – שָׁמַיִם – can also be translated as heavens. Always plural. Heaven was the place of the stars, sun and moon (Gen 1:14-16) of the birds (1:20) It is also a abode of God (1 Kings 8:30) where God is enthroned (Isaiah 66:1) Elijah taken there (II Kings 2:1-12) Heaven as witness (Deuteronomy 32:1)

<sup>6</sup> Sprout – תִּדְשָׂא – Hiphil, Imperfect. 3 feminine singular. (jussive) cause to sprout or shoot forth, produced by the earth. The word מְזִירָע is not used as in Job 38:27 "caused to spring forth by God.

<sup>7</sup> Greens, plants, herb – עֵשֶׂב – Isaiah 42:15 food for cattle Deuteronomy 11:15, human food Gen 3:18.(BDB 793)

God said, "Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures and let birds fly above the earth, in the open canopy of the skies." God created the great serpents,<sup>9</sup> and every living creature that creeps, with which the waters teem, and every kind of winged bird. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them saying, "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the waters of the seas and let the birds multiply on the earth." And there was evening and there was morning the fifth day.

God said, "Let the earth bring forth every kind of living creature: cattle, creeping things, and animals of every kind." And it was so. God made animals of every kind, cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps on the ground of all kinds. And God saw that it was good.

God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the animals, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth." And God created man in His image. In the image of God, He created him; male and female, He created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth, and master it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth."

God said, "Behold, I have give you every seed bearing plant that is upon the earth, and every tree that has seed bearing fruit, they shall be yours for food. And for all the animals of the earth, for all the birds in the sky, for everything that creeps on the ground, which has the breath of life, all the green vegetation shall be their food." And it was so. God saw all that He had made, and found it very good. There was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

י' וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִשְׂרְצוּ הַמַּיִם שֵׂרָץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה וְעוֹף יִעוֹפֵף עַל-הָאָרֶץ עַל-פְּנֵי הַקִּיץ הַשָּׁמַיִם: וַיַּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הַתַּנִּינִם: הַגְּדִלִים וְאֵת כָּל-נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה: הַרְמוּשָׁה אֲשֶׁר שִׂרְצוּ הַמַּיִם לְמִינֵהֶם וְאֵת כָּל-עוֹף כָּנָף לְמִינֵהוּ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב: וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים לֵאמֹר פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת-הַמַּיִם בְּיִמְיָם וְהָעוֹף יִרְבֵּי בָאָרֶץ: וַיִּבְרָא יְהוֹשֻׁעַר בְּיָוֶם חֲמוּשִׁי: פ

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים הִנֵּה אֶת-הָאָרֶץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה לְמִינָהּ בַּהֶמָּה וְרֶמֶשׂ וְחַיְתוֹת-אָרֶץ לְמִינָהּ: וַיַּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-חַיְתוֹת הָאָרֶץ לְמִינָהּ וְאֶת-הַבְּהֵמָה לְמִינָהּ וְאֵת כָּל-רֶמֶשׂ הָאֲדָמָה לְמִינֵהוּ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדֹמוֹתֵנוּ וְיִרְדּוּ בִדְגַת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה: וּבְכָל-הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל-הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל-הָאָרֶץ: וַיַּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים: וְאֵת-הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם: וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ וּכְבֹּשׁוּ וּרְדוּ בִדְגַת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל-חַיָּה הַרְמוּשָׁה עַל-הָאָרֶץ:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים הִנֵּה נֹתַתִּי לָכֶם אֶת-כָּל-עֵשֶׂב: וְרֹעַ זֶרַע אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי כָל-הָאָרֶץ וְאֶת-כָּל-הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר-בּוֹ פְּרִי-עֵץ זֶרַע זֶרַע לָכֶם יְהִי לְאֹכְלָהּ: וְלִכְלִיחַיִת הָאָרֶץ וּלְכָל-עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּלְכָל: הַרְמוּשָׁה עַל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-בּוֹ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה אֶת-כָּל-יִרְקַע עֵשֶׂב לְאֹכְלָהּ: וַיַּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה טוֹב מְאֹד וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִיבֹקֶר יוֹם הַשִּׁשִּׁי: פ

<sup>8</sup> Lights-luminary - מארת - Proverbs 15:30 Num 4:9,

<sup>9</sup> Serpent, dragon, sea-monster, whales - התנינים הגדלים - (Exodus 7:9, Jeremiah 51:34)

The heavens and the earth were finished, and [so were] all their array. God completed by the seventh day His work that He had made, and He ceased on the seventh day from all the work which He had made. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, for on it, God abstained from all His work, which He had created to do. This is the story of earth and sky when they were created;

On the day when the Eternal God made earth and sky.<sup>10</sup> All the shrubs of the field were not yet on the earth, and no greens of the field had yet sprouted, because the Eternal God had not sent rain upon the earth and there was no man to work the soil, but a flow would well up from the earth, and it watered the entire surface of the land. The Eternal God formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.

The Eternal God planted a garden in Eden, in the east and placed there the man whom He had formed. The Eternal God caused to grow out of the soil every tree that is pleasant to look at, and good for food, the Tree of Life in the middle of the garden, and the Tree of Knowledge [of what is] good and bad.

A river went out from Eden to water the Garden, and from there it separated and becomes four branches. The name of the first is Pishon which surrounds all the land of Chavilah, where there is gold. The gold of that land is good. Also found there is bdellium and lapis lazuli stones. The name of the second river is Gichon. It surrounds all the land of Kush. The name of the third river is Chidekel (Tigris), which flows to the east of Asshur. The fourth river is P'ras (Euphrates).

**ב** ויכלו השמים והארץ וכל צבאם:  
וַיְכַל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְלַאכְתּוֹ  
אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִכָּל-  
מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה: וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים  
אֶת-יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ כִּי בּו-  
שְׁבֹת מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר-בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים  
לַעֲשׂוֹת: פ אֱלֹהִים תּוֹלְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם  
וְהָאָרֶץ:  
בַּיּוֹם עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶרֶץ וּשְׁמַיִם:  
וְכָל יוֹם הַשָּׁדָה טָרַב וְהָיָה בָּאֶרֶץ  
וּכְל־עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׁדָה טָרַם יִצְמַח כִּי לֹא  
הִנְטִיר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים עַל-הָאָרֶץ וְאָדָם  
אֵין לְעַבֵּד אֶת-הָאֲדָמָה: וְאֵד נִעְלָה  
מִן-הָאָרֶץ וְהִשְׁקָה אֶת-כָּל-פְּנֵי-הָאֲדָמָה:  
וַיִּצַּר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם עֹפָר  
מִן-הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים  
וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה:

וַיִּשַׁע יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים בְּרִבְעוֹן מְקוֹם וַיִּשָּׁב  
שָׁם אֶת-הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר הָצַר: וַיַּצְמַח  
יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מִן-הָאֲדָמָה כָּל-עֵץ נֹחֵם  
לְמַרְאֵה וטוֹב לְמֹאכָל וְעֵץ הַחַיִּים בְּתוֹךְ  
הָעֵץ וְעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וְרָע:

י וַיִּהְיֶה יֵצֵא מִעֵדֶן לַהֲשִׁקוֹת אֶת-הָעֵץ  
וּמִשָּׁב יִפְרָד וְהָיָה לְאַרְבָּעָה רָאשִׁיב:  
וְשֵׁם הָאֶחָד פִּישׁוֹן הוּא הַסָּבִב אֶת  
כָּל-אֶרֶץ חַוִּילָה אֲשֶׁר-שָׁם הַזָּהָב:  
וְהַזָּהָב הָאָרֶץ הַהִוא טוֹב שָׁם הַבְּדֵלָח  
וְאֵבֶן הַשֹּׁהַב: וְשֵׁם הַנָּהָר הַשֵּׁנִי גִיחוֹן  
הוּא הַסָּבִב אֶת כָּל-אֶרֶץ כּוּשׁ: וְשֵׁם  
הַנָּהָר הַשְּׁלִישִׁי חִידֵקֵל הוּא הַחֹלֶץ קִדְמוֹת  
אֲשׁוּר וְהַנָּהָר הָרְבִיעִי הוּא פְּרָס:

<sup>10</sup> Genesis 2 older view of creation, order reversed map appears first (2:7) plants and animals later (19-20). Woman created separately (2:22) instead of simultaneously (1:26-27)

The Eternal God took the man, and placed him in the Garden of Eden, to work it and to preserve it. The Eternal God commanded the man, "Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat, but from the Tree of Knowledge of what is good and evil, you shall not eat from it, for on the day you eat from it, you will certainly die."

The Eternal God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper for him." The Eternal God formed from the ground, every beast of the field, and every bird of the heaven, and brought them to the man, to see what he would call them. Whatever the man called each living creature, that is its name. The man gave names to every animal, to the birds of the sky, to all the animals of the field, but the man did not find a helper for himself.

The Eternal God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man and while he slept. He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh in its place. The Eternal God fashioned the rib that He took from the man into a woman, and He brought her to the man. The man said

"This one at last is bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh.

This shall be called Woman,  
for from Man was she taken."

Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother, and cling to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

וַיִּקַּח יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם וַיְנַחֲהוּ  
בְגַן-עֵדֶן לְעֲבֹדָה וּלְשִׁמְרָה: 11 וַיֹּצֵר יְהוָה  
אֱלֹהִים עַל-הָאָדָם לֵאמֹר מִכָּל עֵץ-הַגָּן  
אָכַל תֹּאכַל: 12 וּמִעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וָרָע  
לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי בַיּוֹם אֲכָלְךָ מִמֶּנּוּ  
מוֹת תָּמוּת:

11 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לֹא-טוֹב הִנֵּה  
הָאָדָם לִבְדּוּ אֶעֱשֶׂה-לּוֹ עֹזֵר בְּמִקְדָּה:  
12 וַיִּצַּר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מִן-הָאֲדָמָה כָּל-  
חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה וְאֵת כָּל-עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיָּבֵא  
אֶל-הָאָדָם לִרְאוֹת מִה-יִקְרָא-לּוֹ וְכָל-  
אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָא-לּוֹ הָאָדָם נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה הוּא  
שְׁמוֹ: 13 וַיִּוְקֵלָא הָאָדָם שְׁמוֹת לְכָל-  
הַבְּהֵמָה וְלַעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּלְכָל חַיַּת  
הַשָּׂדֶה וְלָאָדָם לֹא-מָצָא עֹזֵר בְּמִקְדָּה:

14 וַיִּפֹּל יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים בְּרִדְמָה עַל-הָאָדָם  
וַיִּישָׁן וַיִּקַּח אֶחָת מִצַּלְעָתָיו וַיְסַגֵּר בָּשָׂר  
תַּחְתָּנָה: 15 וַיִּבֶן יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-  
הַצֶּלַע אֲשֶׁר-לָקַח מִן-הָאָדָם לְאִשָּׁה  
וַיָּבֵאהּ אֶל-הָאָדָם: 16 וַיֹּאמֶר הָאָדָם

זֹאת הִנֵּפֶעַם

עַבֵּב מִנְעַצְמִי

וּבָשָׂר מִבְּשָׂרִי

לְזֹאת יִקְרָא אִשָּׁה

כִּי מֵאִישׁ לְקָחָהּ זֹאת:

17 עַל-כֵּן יַעֲזֹב אִישׁ אֶת-אָבִיו וְאֶת-אִמּוֹ  
וַיִּדְבַק בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ וְהָיוּ לְבָשָׂר אֶחָד: 18

<sup>11</sup> Hebrew taken from the Jewish Publication Society Hebrew English Tanakh, Second Edition. 2000.

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