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BIBLICAL BOTANY: **FROM THE GARDEN OF EDEN** **TO OUR GARDENS WITHIN**

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Acknowledgements

To the ecosystem that has supported me, sustained me, and listened to me prattle on about plants

these last 6 years:

Thank you.

I love you.

I wrote this for you.

I hope we all find each other in a garden of abundance and ease

soon and in our days.

Project Overview

The biblical narrative begins with two stories of Divine creation. With the raw materials of land, sea, and sky, God sows the earth and all of its inhabitants into being. In the beginning, God promises a relationship between humankind and the natural world and provides a clear space for that promise to play out. People and plants dwell together in a garden where the Divine walks among them. As creations in the divine image, the First People¹ learn to serve as gardeners themselves, commanded by God to watch and work their earthen home. God's first gift to humanity is a garden world of reciprocity and divine encounter. However, even though God promises the First People a fruitful life, the garden dwelling humans turn their sights to fruit of a different kind. In response to an unsanctioned human-plant interaction, God uproots the first human pair from their garden home and sends them out to the land beyond Eden. In the absence of a shared garden plot, God becomes the Place that humans learn to watch and work for as the biblical narrative unfolds.

Exiled from Eden, the First People and their descendants learn how to embody and survive their mortality and their developing Divine relationships, and they do not do it alone. Plants and people go forth from the garden together, stewarding each other through each biblical story. As co-dwellers in the garden and in exile, human and plant kind move together from land to land in

¹ This phrase will be employed throughout the project to refer to the first created humans, often referred to as "Adam and Eve" in colloquial contexts (mostly due to the widespread familiarity with Christian biblical translations). In an attempt to preserve the original text's use of terms such as "human" and "person" in reference to God's initial human creations, I will refer to these original humans as the "First People" throughout this project rather than Adam and Eve. I do this with respectful awareness of this term's contemporary use to refer to indigenous peoples, and hope this association honors and emphasizes the deep connection between people and land shared by First People's past and present alike.

an ongoing journey back to Place. By tracing the partnerships between people, plants, and Place, the arc of the Tanakh can be understood as an ongoing search for an embodied return to Eden. To trace this arc, I have assigned each section of this project a gardening “season,” playing on the attributes and gardening tasks associated with each time of year to emphasize the developing relationships between plants, people, and Divine throughout the text. In this frame, Eden becomes God’s abundant summer garden flowing, and Song of Songs represents a springtime synthesis through which humans come to embody Eden through intimate engagement with the natural world around them. Between these two biblical bookends, I have designated the fall and winter seasons of the biblical narrative as times of spiritual and biological seeding, under-the-soil growth, steady preparation for the seasons to come, and sacred dying for the sake of new life to come. It is my hope that this narrative framework of seasons will aid readers in a creative reimagination of the biblical text as an exploration of God’s gardens and our roles within them.

The named plant-characters throughout Tanakh denote covenantal, romantic, spiritual, and even economic connections in the biblical narrative. Plants herald and heal, protect and purify. They mitigate spiritual and physical maladies and quietly make room for relationships to deepen and transform through their aid. Studying Tanakh with an eye for its botanical details illuminates a world of intertextual meanings as well as cultural, medicinal, and spiritual associations embedded within the biblical narratives. This approach will be referred to as a “plant-hermeneutic” for the purpose of this project, and it is the primary method employed for analyzing biblical scenes throughout this work. Resources used in crafting this hermeneutic ranged from herbalism studies of the Ancient Near East in addition to contemporary herbalism, and biblical scholarship.

This project asks the reader to engage with their assumptions about what drives the biblical text and what it means to be in sacred relationship with the natural world around us. It will begin to explore these questions by applying a plant-hermeneutic to four major seasons in the Tanakh's garden saga: the dual creation narratives in Gen. 1-3, the seeding of families and fates in Genesis after Eden, the exodus narrative and subsequent turn towards the promised land, and the sensual homecoming in Song of Songs. Through each of these seasons, early Genesis callbacks and plant vocabulary keep the reader connected to the texts' garden roots long after its characters leave the physical boundaries of Eden.

Coding Explanation

A system of color coding is used throughout the textual examinations in this project, the key for which can be found on page 9 as well as in Appendix I. This project begins with an exploration of Gen. 1-3, where I suggest that these foundational chapters introduce a garden-frame to the biblical narrative through which the rest of the biblical canon can be read. Through this frame, the created world is God's garden, and the biblical narrative is an ongoing story of humans learning to live interdependently with God and plants alike in covenant. To highlight the extent to which the garden language from early Genesis appears as a linking thread throughout the entirety of Tanakh, key terms from Gen. 1-3 such as land, earth, human (adam), and plantlife are color coded throughout each section of the project. Color distinctions are made between references to general botanical details in the text and "named plant characters," or those plants which are given a specific identity within the textual narrative. Specific garden-related verbs are also assigned colors, with a visual delineation made between verbs that God commands of the

first garden-dwelling humans and verbs that God performs Godself in God's first garden. My hope is that this visual coding will help guide the reader's eye into a "plant-hermeneutic," in which plant and garden details become salient, sacred elements of the biblical narrative critical to the human project of living in divine relationship.

Throughout this project, several names are used to refer to God. An intentional effort has been made to remove male pronouns for God within biblical translations, with "They" "She" and "Godself" used for clarity when necessary. Pronouns and names associated with God are capitalized for clarity as well. Translations of biblical verses throughout the project alternate between Everett Fox and Robert Alter, with source attributions located in the footnotes for each biblical citation. Illustrations for each section were generously created by fellow rabbinic student Arielle Stein.

In addition to "God" and "the Divine," the term "Place" is used throughout this project to refer to the Divine Presence. Though this divine name comes largely from the post-biblical rabbinic tradition, its roots are based in the biblical text of Exodus. Pirkei d'Rabi Eliezer 35:4² states:

.... Why is the name of the Holy One, blessed be God, called Maḳom (place)? Because **in every *place* where the righteous are, God is found with them there**, as it is said, "In every *place* (Maḳom) where I record my name I will come to you, and bless you" (Ex. 20:21).

As this project tracks the transition from life in God's first garden to life as gardeners in the world beyond, understanding God as Place allows for a theological conception of the Divine that travels alongside plants and people as well. God transforms throughout the biblical narrative,

² Accessed via sefaria

morphing from the Gardener who walked amongst Eden's sacred grove into an embodiment of that first sacred place itself. To capture the textual dance between sacred physical s(p)ace and Divine (P)lace throughout the biblical canon, God is also referred to as "P/place" at various points throughout this project.

What happens when we decenter the human roles in the biblical narrative and see even our most intimate stories through the eyes of Place or plants? What do we learn about ourselves and our understandings of God when we pause to identify other players in the biblical text? What might it look like to work towards an Edenic world of reciprocity, care, and divine encounter?

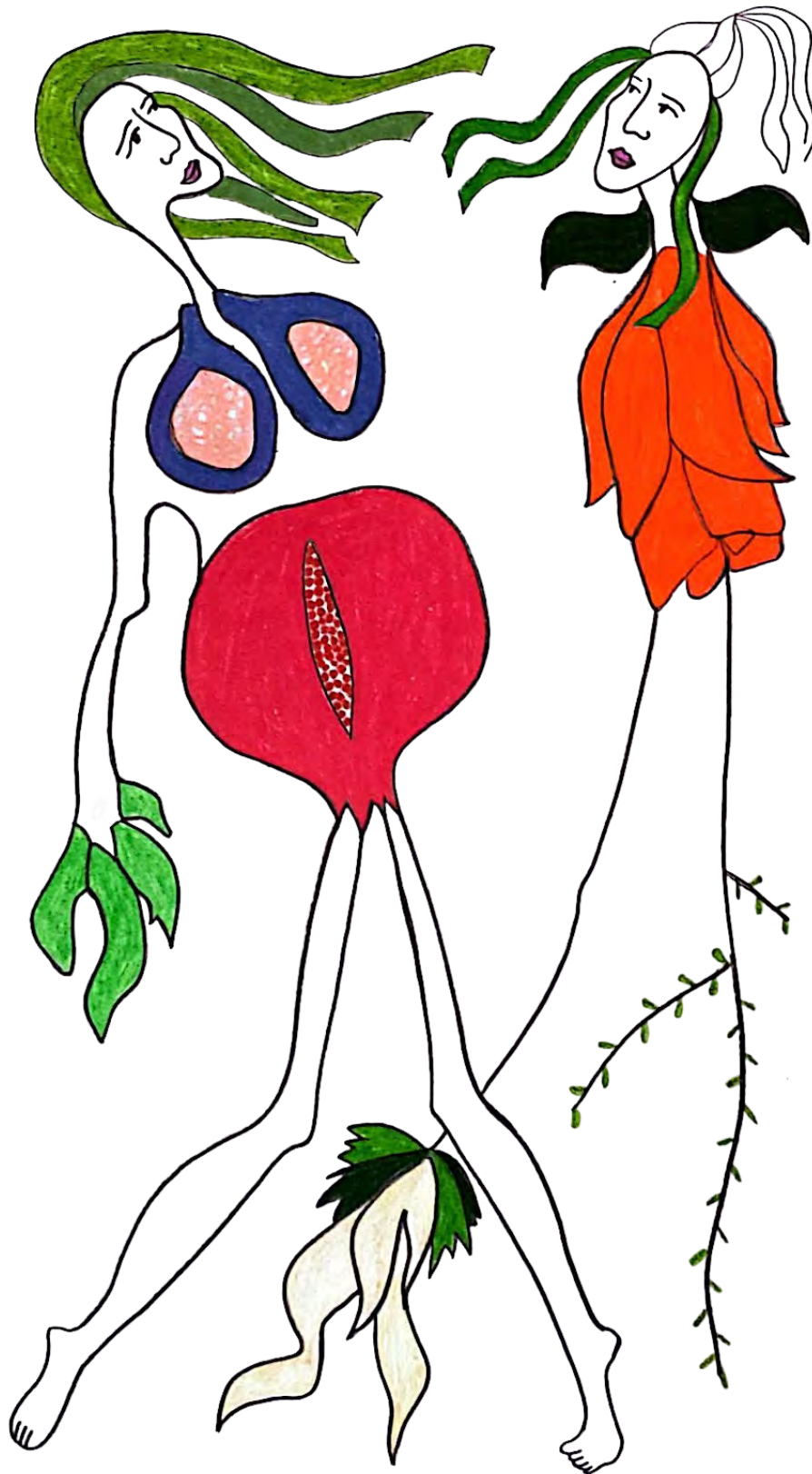
This project only begins to scratch the surface of an interdependence that seeps through every biblical scene and story. It offers just a taste of the fruitful insights that emerge when we take the time to really see every biblical detail as sacred. Through highlighting the botany of these biblical narratives and investigating the cultural contexts of the plants and herbs mentioned throughout the text, a world of depth, symbolism, and somatic spiritual experience emerges. My hope is that this project will inspire reframed interdependence for its readers, and remind us all that life in divine relationship has always been a group project.

The interconnectedness of our world has perhaps never been clearer than it is today. May we ground ourselves in our shared root systems of our interdependence as we continue to work our tired hands deep in the messy dirt of our contemporary landscape. May our shared gardens be places of generosity and abundance, and may we find our way back to Place each day, together.

Color Coding Reference Chart

הָאָרֶץ (<i>ha-aretz</i>) Land, earth	
זֶרַע (<i>zera</i>) Seed	
General plant life & plant byproducts: fruit, flowers, seed-bearing plants, fruit-bearing trees, grasses, fields, shrubs, spices, etc	
אָדָם or אִדְמָה (<i>adam or adamah</i>) Human/Humus:	
Named plant character (specific plant identity)	
Verbs used BY God as gardener or to garden	
Verbs used to describe/ascribe gardening responsibilities from God → humankind	
גֵּן עֵדֶן (<i>gan eden</i>) Garden of Eden (specific place)	
Creation story linguistic callback/reference (use of Gen. 1-3 language in later biblical passage)	
מָקוֹם (<i>makom</i>) P/place (dual meaning: divine and earthly implications)	

Part I (Summer)



Creation with a Gardener's Gaze

The opening chapters of Genesis and the dual creation narratives that they contain represent some of the most well known stories in the entire biblical canon. Though centuries of thinkers have wrestled with what to make of these dual narratives, what undeniably links the two texts is a concerted connection between humankind, Divine Presence, and the natural world. Threaded throughout both stories are the seeds and sproutlings upon and through which the physical and spiritual landscape of Tanakh unfolds. The plant world is introduced in Genesis 1 and specified in Gen 2, thus initiating the centuries-long biblical project of moving from the universal to the particular. These early chapters of Genesis pave the first roadmaps for what it means to live and die as species in deep relationship with the Divine and with each other.

Applying a plant-hermeneutic to the dual creation narratives in Gen. 1-4 frames both stories with a gardener's gaze, highlighting the organic details and plant-partnerships scattered throughout our earliest foundation stories that form the first frameworks for understanding human life and Divine relationship. Through this analysis, members of the plant world emerge as characters critical to the biblical plot, serving as both powerful allies and deadly threats in the narrative and illuminating early biblical understandings of relationships and theology.

God's First Gardens

Everett Fox proposes that one way to read the dual creation narratives of Genesis is to imagine the two accounts as the same story told from two points of view, the first from the heavenly

perspective and the second from the earthly, human perspective.³ Fox's lens allows for the two stories to work alongside rather than against one another. From this perspective, a reciprocity between the two stories emerges as the garden setting of Gen. 2 reflects back to the first tale, and casts the God of Gen. 1 as a divine gardener. As a result, God's first creation acts in Gen. 1 are contextualized, and the inauguration of God's first garden begins with carefully curated separations of land, water, and time.

In the first verses of Genesis, for the first few days of creation, God prepares God's gardening plot with a slew of tilling forces. God acts as a divine separator, a master of boundaries and a delineator of natural elements. On the first day of creation in the very first verse of the Torah, God creates "אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ," the heavens and the earth, separating out a space upon which living things might one day grow. God creates distinctions between light and shade and fences off the heavens from the earth below. Like a gardener moving through the early days of summer, God wakes early and ends late, creating the world with daily rhythms and natural tides. On the third day, God peels back the world's many waters to reveal fertile, dry land beneath, and then God speaks the plant-world into being. Genesis 1:11-13⁴ read:

<p>God said: Let the earth sprout forth with sprouting-growth, plants that seed forth seeds, fruit trees that yield fruit, each in their kind, (and) in which is their seed, upon the earth. And it was so.</p>	<p>וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים תְּדַשְׁא הָאָרֶץ דָּשָׁא עֲשֹׁב מִזְרִיעַ וָרֵעַ עֵץ פְּרִי עֲשֵׂה פְרִי לְמִינֹו אֲשֶׁר זָרַע-בּוֹ עַל-הָאָרֶץ וַיְהִי-כֵן:</p>
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³ Fox, Everett. *The Shocken Bible: The Five Books of Moses*. Vol. 1, Shoken, 1995, p. 16

⁴ Translation: Fox, *The Five Books*, p. 14.; color code key listed p. 10

<p>The earth brought forth sprouting-growth, plants that seed forth seeds, each in their kind, trees that yield fruit in which is their seed, each in their kind. And God saw that it was good.</p>	<p>וַתוֹצֵא הָאֲרֶץ דָּשָׁא עֵשֶׂב מִזֶּרַע זֶרַע לְמִינֵהוּ וְעֵץ עֹשֶׂה-פְּרִי אֲשֶׁר זָרַעוּ-בּוֹ לְמִינֵהוּ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי-טוֹב:</p>
<p>And there was setting and there was dawning, a third day.</p>	<p>וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם שְׁלִישִׁי:</p>

As God's garden plot הארץ springs to life, terms such as vegetation (דשא), herbage/grass (עשב), seed (זרע), fruit (פרי), and tree (עץ) enter the biblical lexicon as general categories of life in the natural world. The act of generation immediately warrants a positive assessment from God, who notably employs the phrase "it is good" two separate times on this third day of Genesis gardening.⁵ As the narrative continues, none of the subsequent days of creation receive the stature of this repeated praise from God. The day in which plant life came into the world remains distinct for its divinely-declared goodness.

On the 6th day of creation God forms humankind (אדם) in God's image. As such, אדם is created with special gardening responsibilities, appointed by God to rule over all the living creatures of הארץ as well as those dwelling beyond its boundaries in the sky and sea. God offers אדם a blessing to make their role in earth's garden clear. Gen. 1: 28-30⁶ read:

<p>God blessed them and God said to them, "Bear fruit and be many and fill the earth and</p>	<p>וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמִלְאוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ וּכְבִשְׁתֶּהּ וּרְצוּ בְּדֹגַת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל-חַיַּה הָרֹמֶשֶׂת עַל-הָאָרֶץ:</p>
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⁵ The third day of creation is the only day in this opening creation narrative in which God declares that things are "good" two times. The other six days are only deemed good a single time each

⁶Gen. 1:28-30, Fox, p. 17 (adapted to remove male pronouns for the Divine)

<p>subdue it! Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the fowl of the heavens, and all living things that crawl upon the earth.</p>	
<p>God said, “See, I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food.</p>	<p>וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים הִנֵּה נָתַתִּי לָכֶם אֶת־כָּל־עֵשֶׂב זֶרַע זֶרַע אֲשֶׁר־עַל־פְּנֵי כָל־הָאָרֶץ וְאֶת־כָּל־הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ פְּרִי־עֵץ זֶרַע זֶרַע לָכֶם יִהְיֶה לְאֹכְלָהּ:</p>
<p>And to all the animals on land, to all the birds of the sky, and to everything that creeps on earth, in which there is the breath of life, [I give] all the green plants for food.” And it was so.</p>	<p>וְלִכָּל־חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ וְלִכָּל־עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלִכָּל רוֹמֵשׁ עַל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה אֶת־כָּל־יֵרֶק עֵשֶׂב לְאֹכְלָהּ וַיְהִי־כֵן:</p>

Here, the lexicon of plant vocabulary first introduced on the third day of creation is linked to אדם in a moment of divine blessing. The world God blesses to אדם is one of summer abundance- one with fruits born and lush green plants in bloom. Included in this blessing are the behaviors that God expects of אדם as the human הארץ--dweller. Though typically translated as a command for fertility through becoming “fruitful,” the first words of blessing ever spoken from God to אדם could also be read as instructions to “be fruit-like.” What is fruit if not generous, abundant, and seed-spreading? This first blessing becomes the phrase employed by the biblical text again and again, each time subtly affirming a plant-state as the actualized promise for אדם⁷. Reading this term with a plant-hermeneutic expands its meaning beyond merely a blessing of biological

⁷ Gen 1:28

fertility. God's first blessing is a command to be generous, abundant, seed-spreading, and inherently entrenched in the ecosystems that sustain us.

אדם is instructed by God to, “bear fruit and be many and fill the land,” three blessings that take on an air of foreshadowing when read alongside rather than apart from the creation account in Eden.⁸ In this first narrative, God blesses אדם to master the land (אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וּכְבָּשָׁהּ) and “rule over” (וַיִּרְדּוּ) all the living things that dwell in land, sea, and sky.⁹ Of the many good plants cultivated on creation's third day, God designates seed-bearing plants (אֶת־כָּל־עֵשֶׂב וְיִרְעֵי הָאָרֶץ) and trees with seed bearing fruit (וְאֶת־כָּל־הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ פְּרִיעַץ יִרְעֶה זָרַע) as sources of nourishment for אדם. Though non-specific in their identifications, the botanical world of Gen. 1 is established as one of goodness and abundance for אדם and all the creatures of the world. There is no sense of scarcity or servitude in this first garden narrative, just summer bounty and stated boundaries around what resources are meant for אדם and what resources are meant for others.

Having divided up the resources and imbued אדם with authority over the living creatures and plants of the world, God is satisfied with Their work and withdraws to rest. Like a tired gardener at the end of a long summer season, God ceases from the work of growing and tending. The creation narrative from God's perspective establishes itself as a period of delineation, cultivation, resource management, and rest. The plants are good, the humans are blessed to be plant-like, and the first creation narrative comes to a close.

⁸ Ie, that the human is told to “fill the land,” presumably beyond just the boundaries of Eden

⁹ Gen. 1:28

An Entangled Eden

Shifting to an earthly perspective of creation, Genesis 2 tells the story of אדם in the Garden of Eden. Though themes of interdependence between humankind and the natural world are woven throughout this narrative as well, there is a notable addition of moral assessment and intimate relationship layered upon the existing plot from Gen. 1. Early in Gen. 2, the linguistic focus shifts from הארץ, the sprouting-place upon which God gardened life into the world in Gen. 1, to אדמה, an earthen place from which אדם is physically created. Even more than in the previous creation narrative, God's role as a gardener is made explicit in Gen. 2. With hands covered in divine dirt, God forms (יצר) a human (האדם) from the soil (אדמה) and then plants (ויטע) a garden to place that human within. Fox writes that “the sound connection [between אדם and אדמה] [is] the first folk etymology in the Bible [and] establishes the intimacy of humankind with the ground.”¹⁰ To highlight the intimate connection between earth and person that Fox argues, אדם and אדמה are color coded with a single hue for the remainder of this project. The linguistic connection between אדם and אדמה establishes these creations as fundamentally related to one another. God formed humans and humus through the same earthen substrate, and the constant repetition of these terms throughout the verses above as well as throughout the rest of the Eden narrative intend to make that fact crystal clear to the reader.

Gen. 2:4b-9¹¹ read:

When God יהוה made earth and heaven—

...ביום עשות יהוה אלהים ארץ ושמים:

¹⁰ Fox, *The Five Books*, p. 19

¹¹ Gen. 2:4b-9, Fox p.17-19

<p>No bush of the field was yet on earth, no plant of the field had yet sprung up, for YHWH, God, had not made it rain upon earth, and there was no human (אדם) to work the soil (אדמה)</p>	<p>וכל וְשֵׁיט הַשָּׂדֶה טָרָם יְהוָה בְּאֶרֶץ וְכָל־עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה טָרָם יִצְמַח כִּי־לֹא הִמְטִיר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים עַל־הָאֲרֶץ וְאָדָם אִין לַעֲבֹד אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה</p>
<p>but a flow would well up from the earth and water the whole surface of the soil-</p>	<p>וְאֵד יִזְעָלָה מִן־הָאֲרֶץ וְהִשְׁקָה אֶת־כָּל־פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה:</p>
<p>And יהוה, God, formed the human, of dust of the soil, [God] blew into his nostrils the breath of life and the human became a living being.</p>	<p>וַיִּצְרֶה יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם עָפָר מִן־הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּנְפַח בְּאַפָּיו נֶשְׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְגִפְשׁ חַיָּה:</p>
<p>God, יהוה, planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the human whom [God] had formed</p>	<p>וַיִּטֵּעַ יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים גֶּן־עֵדֶן מִקְדָּם וַיִּשֶׂם שָׁם אֶת־הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר יָצָר</p>
<p>יהוה, God, caused to spring up from the soil every type of tree, desirable to look at and good to eat, and the Tree of Life in the midst of the garden and the Tree of Knowing of Good and Evil</p>	<p>וַיִּצְמַח יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מִן־הָאֲדָמָה כָּל־עֵץ נָחֵמַד לְמַרְאֶה וְטוֹב לַמֵּאכָל וְעֵץ הַחַיִּים בְּתוֹךְ הָגֶן וְעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וְרָע:</p>

In Gen. 2:9, God brings forth from the אדמה trees, adding them to the אדם/אדמה family as well.

Among these trees are a general categorization of “every type of tree, desirable to look at and good to eat,” but also two named tree-entities located in the midst of the garden: The Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowing of Good and Evil. These two trees are the first plants to receive distinct identities in the biblical canon, the first named “plant-characters” within Tanakh. Though

never given voices of their own, these trees serve as critical characters whose encounters with the story's protagonists lead to fundamental shifts in the biblical narrative.

In Gen. 2:15, God rests (וינחהו) the human (האדם) in the garden, so that the human might work the garden and guard it. Seemingly softer than the image of authority employed in Gen. 1, the experience of האדם in the garden begins in gentle relationship. God makes a point of orienting האדם to his new garden-home, specifically in regards to which plant-resources are safe to consume and which will cause him to die. The named plant-characters reemerge in these verses, this time with Divine warnings attached to them. Gen. 2:15-17¹² read

YHVH, God, took the humans ¹³ and set him in the garden of Eden to work it and to watch it	וַיִּקַּח יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּגוֹי־עֵדֶן לַעֲבֹדָה וּלְשֹׁמְרָהּ:
And God יהוה commanded concerning the human, saying, "From every (other) tree of the garden you may eat, yes, eat	וַיֹּצֵר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים עַל־הָאָדָם לֵאמֹר מִכָּל־עֵץ־הַגֶּן אָכַל תֹּאכַל:
But from the Tree of Knowing of Good and Evil, you are not to eat from it; for on that day you eat from it, you must die, yes, die."	וּמֵעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וָרָע לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי בַיּוֹם אָכַלְתָּ מִמֶּנּוּ מוֹת תָּמוּת:

God commands האדם to work and watch over the garden, and encourages them (plural) to eat from all of the general, unnamed trees in the garden. The named plant-character however, the

¹² Gen. 2:15-17, Fox, *The Five Books*, p. 20

¹³ Reminder that the full color coding chart can be found on page 9 and in appendix I. As an overview for these verses: dark blue-אדם/אדמה/human/earth; yellow- verbs that God assigns to humankind to perform their role in the world; maroon- Eden; light green- general plant life; bright green- named plant character

Tree of Knowing of Good and Evil, may not be consumed as food by **הָאָדָם**. God links eating from this tree to imminent death, bringing death into the biblical narrative for the first time. In Gen. 2:17, God introduces Good, Evil, and Death as concepts somehow housed within a single tree, and instructs **הָאָדָם** to avoid them all diligently. Relying on a tree as the messenger for these intense existential concepts positions these **אֲדָמָה**-sprouted plants as wise, powerful, and even potentially dangerous. If Gen.1 serves to root all of life within the scope of God's garden, then Gen. 2 completes the project by locating death there as well.

As if in direct response to the intensity of introducing these existential concepts to **הָאָדָם** so quickly, God decides that **הָאָדָם** cannot be alone and puts the human in a state of deep rest in Gen. 2:18. God draws out from **הָאָדָם**'s earth-made body a partner to help and to challenge him. Upon waking, the two helpmates cling to one another and dwell together without shame, at home in their bodies and the garden that God crafted for them.¹⁴ The biblical text becomes briefly poetic, introducing an intimate softness between human characters unfelt in the first story. That this human partnership comes to be only after **הָאָדָם** is introduced to the Tree of Knowing of Good and Evil positions the tree as a sort of herald for Divine intervention in human relationship, organically seeding a divine recognition that **הָאָדָם** is “no good” on his own into the narrative.

Fox draws attention to the dance that unfolds in these verses between the power of the natural world and the omnipotence of God's will. Fox writes, “nature disappears as a ruling factor in human affairs, replaced by a principle of morality which is unshakable precisely because it comes from a God who is beyond the rules of nature...But the result is a book in tension.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Gen. 2:18-25

¹⁵ Fox, *The Five Books*, p.4

Though God gives name to moral concepts when introducing the Tree of Knowing of Good and Evil, the fact that God also goes to such lengths to keep האדם away from the tree could be read as a Divine acknowledgement of the plant's potential power. Somehow privy to this piece of insight, a serpent emerges from within the garden to tell the helpmate of האדם, referred to in the text only as “the woman” (האישה) about the true nature of the forbidden tree. The serpent reveals to the woman that rather than inducing death, the tree will open her eyes to a God-like (באלוהים) state of being capable of discerning Good and Evil in the world. As the woman transgresses God's boundary, the text blurs into a mix of linguistic markers previously employed by God. The woman sees The Tree of Knowing of Good and Evil before her, and notes that “it was good (כי טוב) for eating and a delight to the eyes.”¹⁶ The woman's assessment employs language previously offered by God to express approval of creation¹⁷ and to describe the trees האדם was encouraged to eat from in the garden. In a blend of narrative overlap, the garden's first woman admires and then eats from the Tree of Knowing.

The woman shares the fruit with her helpmate, who is conspicuously identified here not as the earth-made-האדם but instead as *her person* (לְאִישָׁהּ). Gen. 3:5-6¹⁸ read:

<p>The woman saw that the tree was good¹⁹ for eating and that it was a delight to the eyes, and the tree was desirable to contemplate. She took from its fruit and ate, and gave also to her husband beside her, and he ate.</p>	<p>וַתֵּרָא הָאִשָּׁה כִּי טוֹב הָעֵץ לְמַאֲכָל וְכִי תִתְּנוֹתָהּ לְעֵינֶיהָ וְנִחְמָד הָעֵץ לְהַשְׁכִּיל וַתִּקַּח מִפְּרִיָּהּ וַתֹּאכַל וַתִּתֵּן גַּם לְאִישָׁהּ עִמָּה וַיֹּאכַל:</p>
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¹⁶ Gen. 3:6

¹⁷ *Ki Tov*; Gen. 1: 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25

¹⁸ Gen. 3:5-6, Fox, *The Five Books*, p.21-22

¹⁹ Light purple used for verbs and statements first employed by God in the early creation narratives

The eyes of the two of them were opened and they knew then that they were nude. They sewed **fig leaves** together and made themselves loincloths.

וּתְפַלְחָנָה עֵינֵי שְׁנֵיהֶם וַיֵּדְעוּ כִּי עֲרֻמִּם הֵם וַיִּתְּפְרוּ עֲלֵהם
תָּאֲנָה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם חֲגָרֹת:

In consuming the fruit from this tree, a fundamental shift occurs in the relationship between the garden's human dwellers. The two must face a terrifying reckoning with their Divine keeper, and the prospect of Divine accountability makes for messy interpersonal responses that seem to sever their previously intimately interwoven relationship with one another. What is not severed, however, is their relationship to the plant power of the garden around them. In the moment that “the man and his woman” realize their earth-made bodies are uncovered and nude, the text tells us that they “sewed fig leaves and made loincloths for themselves.”²⁰ In humanity's first perceived moment of vulnerability, they reach intuitively and immediately for protection from their plant neighbors. The text physically places the human and plant residents in contact with one another, providing the humans temporary respite from their forbidden-fruit-induced self-consciousness through the leaves of a plant ally. Dressed in the leaves and deeds of one another, plants and people await Divine judgment together. In this liminal moment between consumption and consequence, Fig emerges as the quiet protector of the garden's First People.

The textual immediacy with which the humans sew their fig leaf loincloths after realizing their nakedness leads some biblical scholars to speculate that the Tree of Knowing of Good and Evil was itself a Fig tree²¹, and that the humans reached instinctively for its leaves in the aftermath of

²⁰ Gen. 3:7

²¹ Dennis, Geoffrey W. “Fruit.” *Encyclopedia of Jewish Myth, Magic, & Mysticism*, 2nd ed., Llewellyn Publications, 2021, p. 160.

eating from its fruit. Regardless of where one falls on this botanical identification, the introduction of the Fig [tree] as the bible's third named plant-character in this critical moment of human development and divine consequence establishes figs in the textual canon as precious symbols of life in moments of crisis or liminality.

The term fig appears 39 times throughout Tanakh²² in a variety of contexts, signaling sweetness and security when abundant and the embodiment of spiritual destruction when cursed, diseased, or colonized. In Num. 13: 23, Moses' spies bring figs back from Wadi Eshcol as part of their botanical proof that the promised land is one flowing with milk and honey. Just a few chapters later, as the Israelites cry out to Moses over the conditions of their dangerous desert wandering, it is figs that they cite as part of their desert deficiencies, alongside water.²³ In both cases, figs come to represent the potential for persistence and prosperity in moments of liminality and fear. Concretizing this image of life in the face of death even further, in Isaiah 38:21, the prophet medicinally prescribes "fig cakes" in order to keep a physically afflicted person alive (יִרְיָהּ). Physically and allegorically, figs are invoked throughout the biblical texts as symbols to represent various states of prosperity and persistence for God's favored people, with the text employing the image of "each person dwelling beneath their own fig tree" to describe periods of both actualized and yet-realized prosperity²⁴ and the inverse image of "fig trees being laid to waste" to describe a variety of lived, prophesied, or politically threatened states of demise. Through more than 3 dozen appearances in the text, Fig emerges as a plant character with a prosperous, protective personality.

²² Two different concordance volumes were used for this citation. (1) BDB, תַּאֲנֶה, accessed via sefaria <https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.3.7?lang=bi&aliyot=0&p2=BDB> and (2) Strong's Hebrew Concordance, entry 8384 תַּאֲנִים accessed via biblehub https://biblehub.com/Hebrew/strongs_8384.htm

²³ Num. 20:5

²⁴ 1 Kings 5

It is perhaps unsurprising then that in the frantic moments following their forbidden consumption, האדם and האִישה turn to Fig to protect them from their newly sprouted self consciousness. In this pivotal moment of awaiting what God warned האדם would be certain death, the biblical text makes a point of providing a seemingly innocuous botanical detail that paves the way for an entire bible's worth of symbolic references. This rhetorical pattern, in which the text identifies a named plant-character in the midst of, and sometimes for the sake of, furthering the narrative plot, appears for the first time here in Genesis and repeats extensively throughout Tanakh, something which becomes quite clear via applying a plant-hermeneutic to the text. What begins in Gen. 1 on the third day of creation as the sprouting of God's garden flourishes into a diverse biblical narrative woven together by the often understated but powerful presence of the seed-bearing world.

If God's first blessing to humanity is the chance to be fruit-like in a summer garden-world where all beings are at ease with each other and with the land, God's first curse inverts this offering. God's punishments for the fruit-eaters seem entirely geared towards complicating the relationship between humankind and the natural world. God reclaims God's garden and burdens humans with effort while robbing them of their sense of intimate ease, pushing them in a sense out of summer and into fall. What began in Gen. 1 as a lexicon of bountiful botanical offering transforms now to biological and botanical consequences for all of the creatures implicated in the consumption event, serpent and Tree included. Gen. 3:14-19²⁵ read:

(v. 14) God said to the snake... (v. 15) I put my enmity between you and the woman,	וְאֵשֶׁת בִּינָהּ וּבִין הָאִשָּׁה וּבִין זֶרְעָהּ וּבִין זֶרְעָהּ הָיָא יְשׁוּפָהּ רָאשׁ וְאֵתָה תְּשׁוּפָנוּ עֵקֶב: {ס}
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²⁵Gen 3:14-19, Fox, *The Five Books*, p. 23

between your seed and her seed ²⁶ . They will bruise your head and you will bruise their heel	
To the woman [God] said: I will multiply, multiply your pain (from) your pregnancy, with pains shall you bear children. Toward your husband will be your lust, yet he will rule over you	אֶל־הָאִשָּׁה אָמַר הָרְבָּה אֲרֻבָּהּ וְהָרְבָּה בְּעֻצָּב תֵּלְדִי בָנִים וְאֶל־אִישָׁהּ תִּשְׁוָקֶתָּ וְהָיָא יִמְשַׁל־בָּהּ: {ס}
To Adam he said: Because you hearkened to the voice of your wife, and you ate from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, “you are not to eat from it!” cursed shall be the soil on your account, with painstaking labor you shall eat from it, all the days of your life	וְאָדָם אָמַר כִּי־שָׁמַעְתָּ לְקוֹל אִשְׁתֶּךָ וַתֹּאכַל מִן־הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִיךָ לֵאמֹר לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ אֲרֻרָה הָאֲדָמָה בְּעֻבּוּרָהּ בְּעֻצָּבוֹן תֹּאכְלֶנָּה כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ:
Thorn and sting-shrub let it spring up for you when you (seek to) eat the plants of the field	וְקוֹץ וְדוֹרָר תִּצְמַח לָךְ וְאָכַלְתָּ אֶת־עֹשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה:
By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread, until you return to the soil, for from it you were taken. For you are dust, and to dust you shall return.	בְּזֵיעַת אִפְיֶךָ תֹּאכַל לֶחֶם עַד שׁוּבְךָ אֶל־הָאֲדָמָה כִּי מִמֶּנָּה לָקַחְתָּ כִּי־עֹפָר אַתָּה וְאֶל־עֹפָר תִּשׁוּב:

A far cry from the dense linguistic affirmation of the human-humus connection in God's first blessings, here אדם and אדמה are eclipsed in the text by a tizzy of verbs enacted by God and assigned to the humans. Though the text notes in these verses that God delivers consequences to each character individually, the ramifications of each punishment highlight the interdependence inherent to the biblical ecosystem. In the course of describing the serpent's punishment, God plucks the Hebrew זרע (seed) from its previously exclusive botanical contexts and refashions it into a term used to denote “descendants” who will be doomed to endure intergenerational and interspecies discord²⁷ with one another. Just as God's first blessing framed ‘fruit’ as literal and

²⁶ Even in God's first curse, the link between human and plant species is affirmed through God's “seed” language

²⁷ Gen 3:15-16, Fox p. 23

metaphoric abundance for the First People, God's first curse invokes 'seeds' as carriers of their ancestor's consequences. The actions of these first biblical actors reverberate through generations of offspring- for plants and people alike. Interdependence becomes intergenerational through God's first curse.

As the curse-verses continue, the fruits of the botanical world once offered to humankind are placed behind barriers breached only through painful labor of the land and the body. "Thorn and thistle"²⁸ are promised to אדם as barriers between him and the nourishment of the land, introducing a sharpness to the plant-person relationship previously unknown. From the woman God takes the fruit-like promise of painless reproduction, and also reorganizes her helpmate partnership into one of patriarchal power²⁹ by stating that "her person" shall rule over her (ימשל). God next tells אדם that the אדמה will be cursed on his account, a punishment which further emphasizes the link between אדם and אדמה even as it serves to punish them both. Work (עבד), once a gentle garden task bestowed upon האדם by God is transformed for האדם from sacred stewardship to toil, labor, and servitude. Having reframed the humans' life as one of painful labor, God's final curse for Adam serves as a reminder of his inevitable death. In Gen. 3:19 God introduces a concept of death now divorced from the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowing of Good and Evil. God relocates death to something housed within אדם's body, linking it to the very dust God used to form him just one chapter earlier. It is notable that God seems to linguistically preempt any solace Adam may have gleaned at the prospect of being reunited with אדמה in death

²⁸There is translational ambiguity about what to do with these two terms, with most translators agreeing that there is likely no single plant species actually being referenced in these verses. Most translators choose to use "thorn and thistle" because of the phonetic rhythm and imagery evoked, but the terms are arbitrary. Of interest for the scope of this paper is that it seems these terms are employed as a general category of plant-barrier rather than a named plant character

²⁹ Gen 3:16

by employing “dust” (עפר) as the term now used for reminding Adam of both his origins and his ends. If life in these chapters is an abundant connection to a lush garden, death is a dry divorce from soul and soil.

In response to this sentencing, Adam mirrors God’s behavior in Gen. 2:18³⁰ and turns immediately towards partnership and affirming life. Gen 3:20³¹ reads:

The human called his wife’s name: Havva/ Life-Giver! For she became the mother of all the living.	וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ תַּוֵּה כִּי הִוא הֵיטָה אִם כָּל־חַי:
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Once again, the text juxtaposes a Divine introduction to mortality alongside an affirmation of shared life. Life, death, Divinity, and human-doings are presented as interwoven forces within the Eden creation narrative, all connected in a single garden plot. Like subterranean mycelial networks communicating with one another, action in one realm sends shock waves through the others. The biblical text goes out of its way to establish deep relationships between human, plant, and Godkind in these early chapters of blessing and curse.

Finally, God concludes that humankind cannot be permitted to stay in Eden now that they transgressed the boundaries that God commanded of האדם in regards to the Tree of Knowing of Good and Evil. Fearing that the humans will eat from the Tree of Life as well, God resolves to send these First People out from the garden. In one final surge of Divine contemplation and

³⁰ Gen. 2:17-18, Fox, *The Five Books*, p. 20 read:

וּמִעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וְרָע לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי בַיּוֹם אֲכָלְךָ מִמֶּנּוּ מוֹת תָּמוּת
But from the Tree of Knowing of Good and Evil- you are not to eat from it, for on the day that you eat from it, you must die, yes, die

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לֹא־טוֹב הֵיטָה הָאָדָם לִבְדּוֹ אֶעֱשֶׂה־לּוֹ עֶזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ:
[Then] God יהוה said, “It is not good for the Human to be alone; I will make him a helper corresponding to him.”

³¹Gen 3:20, Fox p. 23

consequence, God exiles האדם from the Garden to serve the soil he had once been privileged to rule. The final verses of Genesis 3 and the final words offered in regards to Eden read:³²

So יהוה, God, sent him away from the garden of Eden, to work the soil from which he had been taken.	וַיִּשְׁלַחְהוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מִגֻּר־עֵדֶן לַעֲבֹד אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר לָקַח מִנָּשָׁם:
He drove the human out and caused to dwell, eastward of the garden of Eden, the winged-sphinxes and the flashing, ever-turning sword to watch over the way to the Tree of Life.	וַיִּגְרֹשׁ אֶת־הָאָדָם וַיִּשְׁכֵּן מִקֵּדָם לְגִוְר־עֵדֶן אֶת־הַכְּרָבִים וְאֵת לֵהט הַחֶרֶב הַמִּתְהַפֶּקֶת לִשְׁמֹר אֶת־דֶּרֶךְ עֵץ־הַחַיִּים: {ס}

In these final verses, the verbs employed in Gen. 2:15 to describe the role of man in the garden are repeated and repurposed. The work (לעבד) that Adam had been created to steward in Eden is now his punishment in exile. What's more, his role as "watch guard" (לשמור) of Eden is completely revoked, and mortal האדם is replaced by winged-sphinxes with eternal swords to guard Eden's sacred trees. Though allegorized throughout Jewish tradition, the first named trees of the biblical world never appear again in the biblical narrative. The exile of humanity from the garden is not only a story of radical leaving, it is also a story of radical separation between organic creatures once in deep relationship with one another. While Adam and his newly named wife Chava set out to explore what the wilderness has to offer, the Tree of Life and Tree of Knowing remain behind. Left alone behind their eternal guards, these trees remain in Eden, destined to live a life devoid of the human-neighbors they once knew intimately.

In the very first chapters of Tanakh, humankind's punishment for unsanctioned consumption is a separation between person and P/place. From Eden, the natural world moves from the foreground to the sidelines of the biblical narrative. Even so, the relationship between organic

³² Gen. 3:23-24, Fox, *The Five Books*, p. 25

elements and humankind persists throughout the biblical canon, aiding one another as they learn to live in a post-Eden world. Understanding the dual creation narratives in Genesis as two different perspectives on a single Divine gardening season reveals a nuanced universe of inter-species relationships and interdependence. On these early chapters of Genesis, Robert Alter writes,

The Primeval History, in contrast to what follows in Genesis, cultivates a kind of narrative that is fablelike or legendary, and sometimes residually mythic...Genesis, then, works with disparate materials, puts together its story with two large and very different building blocks, but nevertheless achieves the cohesiveness, the continuity of theme and motif, and the sense of completion of an architectonically conceived book. Although it looks forward to its sequel, it stands as a book, inviting our attention as an audience that follows the tale from beginning to end.³³

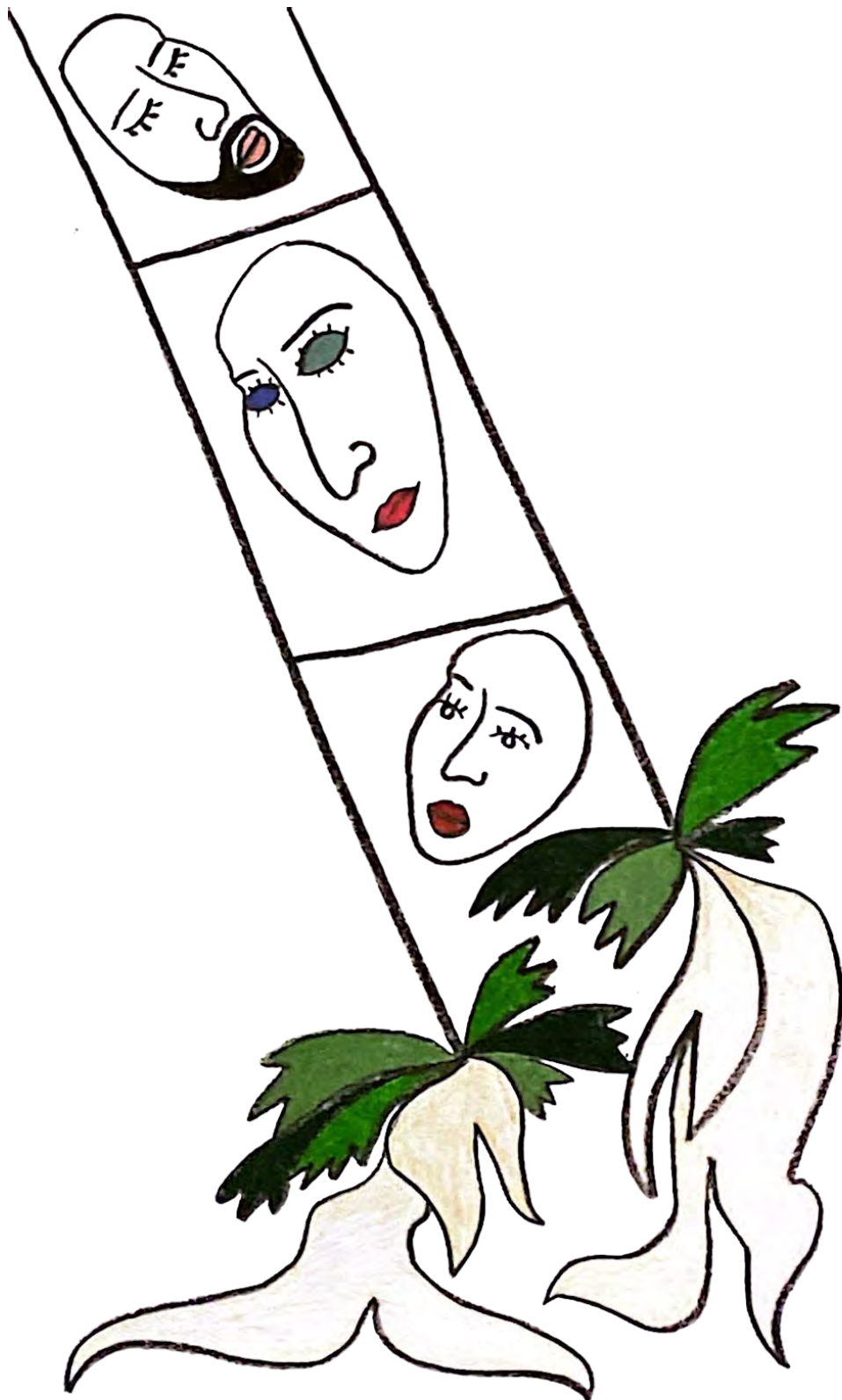
Genesis 1-4 provides our first glimpses into biblical theology, cosmology, and proposed models of relationship. These chapters construct the landscape and set the relational stage upon which all of Tankah unfolds, and in the course of this construction positions plant life as powerful, protective, nourishing, dangerous, and divine all at once. Long before there is ever a chosen people or promised land, there are humans formed of earth and Divine breath, an elemental braiding of soil and soul. To study biblical texts for the thread of descendants born out of these initial garden souls without also tracing the lines born from its sacred soil is to constantly recreate the exile from Eden through exegesis.

By approaching biblical texts with an eye towards the natural world, a cast of plant characters emerges as heralds and helpmates for the Tankakh's human characters. Understanding these plant characters as salient rather than subtle features of the biblical text reveals a world of interdependence, natural wisdom, and deep relationship between people, plants, and P/place

³³ Alter, Robert. *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary: The Five Books of Moses, The Torah*. 1st ed., vol. 1 3, W. W. Norton & Co., 2019. p. 7-9

throughout the Jewish canon. God's summer season of abundance comes to an end as Eden disappears behind the fiery swords of its new divine guardians, and fall arrives as humankind turns to face life beyond their first garden home. Harvesting what blessings they can, humanity must learn to survive in a world where fall and winter follow what had once been their eternal Edenic summer.

Part II (Fall)



From Eden to Egypt: Genesis after the Garden

Throughout the centuries, the Christian tradition has referred to post-Eden reality as the “fall” of humankind. A simple shift in the semantic meaning of this phrase allows for a reunderstanding in which the “fall” that humanity encounters after Eden is seasonal instead of sin-induced. The summer season of creative bounty encountered in Gen. 1-3 shifts to a fall of stormy survival sagas and heated relational harvests. The human characters face floods and navigate sibling rivalries waged over competition for coveted, limited, and sacred resources. Chapter by chapter, human and plant characters navigate a fall season of learning to survive in God’s garden world beyond Eden’s borders. Fall for the biblical humans is a period of harvest; resources are gleaned and shared between people and places alike. Throughout the remainder of the book of Genesis, plants serve as landmarks (literal), love-enhancers (relational), and cultural connectors (economic) that serve to help germinate and fertilize the expanding relational networks of the biblical narrative. The Gofer and Olive wood of the Noah narrative, the Mandrake roots bartered over by Rachel and Leah, and the Spices (balm, balsam, and ladanum) that the Ishmaelite merchants carry with them upon encountering Joseph’s brothers all emerge as salient characters driving the biblical plot through Genesis’ fall season.

All of these plant-characters appear again in later biblical contexts. However, it is their initial introduction in the book of Genesis that establishes them as pivotal players for heralding relationship shifts with the Divine in addition to critical shifts in the textual setting. For Noah, the Olive branch precedes the Noahide covenant, the first human-Divine covenant described in the Tanakh. For Rachel, Leah, and Jacob, the mandrakes precede the birth of several children,³⁴

³⁴ Children, but also tribes, as Jacob’s name will change to Israel and his sons and their descendants become the 12 tribes of Israel. 3 of these tribes are established as the result of the mandrakes in this text.

Jacob's night of angel wrestling, and the introduction of "Israel" as a character in the biblical text. For Joseph, the plant-derived spices carried by the Ishmaelite merchants initiate the centuries-long saga of Israelite slavery and subsequent exodus redemption. Even as the human characters of Genesis explore life in a post-Eden world, the relationships between people, plants, and P/place that unfold throughout its chapters reveal a textual universe still deeply connected to its first garden home. In subtle and overt textual references, post-Eden Genesis reinforces the relationship between אדם and אדמה, and continues to explore their shared interdependence with the Divine.

Seeding Survival: Plant Allies in the Flood Story

Just a few chapters after the dramatic events in Eden, the biblical narrative moves to the story of Noah and the flood. Given the fact that Eden's central conflict unfolds as a result of an unsanctioned interaction between human and plant co-dwellers, one might expect an intentional effort on behalf of the biblical authors to separate people from plant characters in the subsequent narrative development. However, even with its threats of complete destruction, the flood narrative does not stand in polar opposition to Eden's reciprocity and abundance. A close read of Gen. 6-8 reveals that much like in Eden, the fates of אדם and אדמה are intimately intertwined in life and death alike. The Noah narrative and the characters within it rely on multiple plant characters for survival and signs of life. From God's initial warning about the impending deluge of destruction to Noah's world-testing strategies once the rains stopped, the plant characters play a critical role in humankind's ability to endure Divine consequences in a post Eden reality.

Like the early chapters of creation, the first named plant character enters the flood narrative through the Divine voice. God speaks to Noah and tells him of God's plan to destroy all of the living creatures on the earth. In Gen. 6:14,³⁵ God instructs Noah:

Make yourself an ark of Gofer wood With reeds make the Ark, and cover it within and without with a covering-of-pitch	עֲשֵׂה לְךָ תֵּבָה עֲצֵי-גֹפֶר קָנִים תַּעֲשֶׂה אֶת-הַתֵּבָה וְכָפַרְתָּ אֹתָהּ מִבֵּית וּמִחוּץ בַּכָּפָר:
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The term for ark (תֵּבָה) used in this verse appears in just one other biblical context, where it is used to describe the wood-woven basket that Moses' mother places him in as an infant in her attempt to save his life by floating him down the Nile river. This intertextual link establishes the biblical ark (תֵּבָה) as a plant-born liferaft carrying human characters to safety when survival is on the line. The Hebrew term employed in Gen. 6:14 (verse above) to signal that it is the Gofer *wood* that Noah should use for the ark comes directly from the word “עֵץ,” a word last employed by the biblical text to describe the Tree of Knowing of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life. Though sometimes translated as “cypress” wood, the term גֹּפֶר is a hapax legomenon and appears nowhere else in the biblical text. That this גֹּפֶר tree is narratively identified by the Divine to stand in specific relationship with the scene's leading אָדָם could indicate a textual callback to the sacred Trees identified in Eden just three chapters prior.

What is gained by identifying this sort of intertextual connection? Maybe God, finding Herself³⁶ angry and dissatisfied with humanity's behavior yet again, remembered Her First People and first

³⁵ Gen. 6:14, Fox, *The Five Books*, p.35

³⁶ I have a theological discomfort with assigning any gender pronouns for the divine, and as a personal practice use various gender pronouns interchangeably in reference to the Divine. As described in the introduction, for the sake of clarity in this work while still attempting to counter millennia worth of patriarchal influence, I will use She or They as pronouns for God when necessary in textual analysis. Translations and commentaries by Alter, Fox, and the Women's Commentary have been adapted to remove any male pronouns for God, most typically by swapping the pronoun for a proper noun (Divine name).

trees. Perhaps She remembered the way that Eve turned treeward to taste the fullness of Good and Bad and Life all together in a piece of fruit, or the way the Tree lent leaves so generously when the humans' eyes opened to their nakedness and vulnerability. Was it a spiritual muscle memory that brought human and plant allies together in the Divine imagination as they stood together on the precipice of flooded destruction?

With language dripping in early Genesis callbacks and once again linking humanity's place in the world to the trees closest to them, the scene unfolds as God instructs Noah about surviving the flood to come:

6:12 ³⁷ : And God saw ³⁸ the earth and, look, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted the ways on the earth	וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָרֶץ וְהִנֵּה נִשְׁחָתָה כִּי-הִשְׁחִית כָּל-בָּשָׂר אֶת-דִּרְכּוֹ עַל-הָאָרֶץ: {ס}
6:13: And God said to Noah, “The end of all flesh ³⁹ is to come before Me, for the earth is filled with outrage by them, and I am now about to destroy them, with the earth.	וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים לְנֹחַ קֵץ כָּל-בָּשָׂר בָּא לְפָנַי כִּי-מָלְאָה הָאָרֶץ חֲמָס מִפְּנֵיהֶם וְהִנֵּנִי מַשְׁחִיתָם אֶת-הָאָרֶץ:
6:14: Make yourself an ark of Gofer wood With reeds make the Ark, and cover it within and without with a covering-of-pitch	עֲשֵׂה לְךָ תֵּבַת עֲצֵי-גִפְרִית קְנִיִם תַּעֲשֶׂהָ אֶת-הַתֵּבָה וְכָפַרְתָּ אֹתָהּ מִבֵּית וּמִחוּץ בַּכָּפָר:
6:17: As for me, here, I am about to bring the Flood, water upon the earth, to destroy all flesh that has within it the breath of life from under the heavens, everything on the earth shall perish	וְאֲנִי הִנְנִי מֵבִיא אֶת-הַמָּבּוּל מַיִם עַל-הָאָרֶץ לְשַׁחַת כָּל-בָּשָׂר אֲשֶׁר-בּוֹ רֵיחַ חַיִּים מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם כָּל אֲשֶׁר-בָּאָרֶץ יָגוּעַ:

³⁷ Gen. 6:12-14; 17-22, Alter, *The Five Books*, p. 26-7

³⁸ Color Coding: phrases coded in the light blue color signify linguistic callbacks to the Gen. 1-3 text, ie language from Gen. 1-3 repeated in current verse

³⁹ This term for “flesh” first appears in Gen. 2:23 when האדם declares his helpmate as “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”. In its context, the term is an affirmation of the human-humus connection

6:18 ⁴⁰ : But I will establish my covenant with you: you are to come into the Ark , you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you,	וְהִקְמַתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתְּךָ וּבָאתָ אֵל־הַתֵּבָה אַתָּה וּבְנֶיךָ וְאִשְׁתְּךָ וְנִשְׁי־בְנֶיךָ אִתְּךָ:
6:19: and from all that lives , from all flesh, two of each thing you shall bring to the ark to keep alive with you, male and female they shall be.	וּמִכָּל־הַחַי מִכָּל־בֶּשָׂר שְׁנַיִם מִכָּל תָּבִיא אֵל־הַתֵּבָה לְהַחֲיֹת אִתְּךָ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה יְהִיוּ:
6:20: from the fowl of each kind and from the cattle of each kind and from all that crawls on the earth of each kind , two of each thing shall come to you to be kept alive.	מִהָעוֹף לְמִינֵהוּ וּמִן־הַבְּהֵמָה לְמִינָהּ מִכָּל רֶמֶשׂ הָאֲדָמָה לְמִינֵהוּ שְׁנַיִם מִכָּל יָבֹאוּ אֵלֶיךָ לְהַחֲיוֹת:
6:21: As for you, take from every food that is eaten and store it by you, to serve for you and for them as food.	וְאַתָּה קַח־לָךְ מִכָּל־מֵאכָל אֲשֶׁר יֵאָכֵל וְאַסְפֹּת אֵלֶיךָ וְהָיָה לָךְ וּלְהֶם לְאֹכֶלָה:
6:22: And this Noah did; as all that God commanded him, so he did	וַיַּעַשׂ נֹחַ כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה אֱלֹהִים בְּנֹעַם עָשָׂה:

The proliferation of creation-narrative language in these verses paints a picture of God trying to work creation in reverse, stripping the world down to its barest bones in an attempt to restart. But at the same time, the language in 6:12-13 goes out of its way to establish that God is displeased with the flesh-beings (בשר) of the world, not the botanical-beings. After several verses describing God's displeasure with the בשר of the world, in 6:13 God tells Noah that They are about to destroy "all of the flesh beings," and only after this adds, "and the land along with them." The repetition of בשר and הארץ throughout these verses draws attention to the stark lack of אדם/אדמה language throughout this biblical scene. Though perhaps merely the product of different biblical authors than Gen. 2-4, I wonder if it is possible to read this linguistic choice as a nod to an enduring human-earth connection in the face of mutual destruction. A look at the

⁴⁰ Alter uses "and" instead of "but," however I believe "but" more clearly captures the distinction God is making between Noah and the other "flesh of the earth" who will be destroyed. Similarly, I chose to use "come into" instead of "enter" which seemed a more faithful translation of באת

verbs that God commands of Noah and his family in this set of verses seems to re-affirm humanity's role as God's gardeners and caretakers of creation. In Gen. 3:18-19, God curses Adam, telling him that the soil of the world will be cursed on his account and that he will forever only eat food through the sweat of his brow. But here in Gen. 6, even as God looks with destructive dissatisfaction at the created world, God makes no mention of Adam's legacy, assigns no blame to Eden's First People for the current situation, and makes no effort to recreate Adam's curses for Noah. If anything, God puts a fall harvest spin on Eden's early blessing to humankind that they be sustained through the natural world's bounty⁴¹. Ever the Gardener, God tucks a set of harvest and food-storage instructions into Their survival plans for Noah and his family.

God places the blame for the corrupted earth explicitly on its "flesh," (בשר) not the אדם, and gives Noah clear instructions for how he will sustain himself and his family with food throughout the days of the flood. Though God may have exiled the First People from their Eden-garden home, Noah and his family are saved with a partiality that hinges on humanity's plant allies. Even in God's barest, most watery garden, human existence comes down to a plant relationship. Fall sweeps through the wider garden world with stormy rains and even death for most of the world's living inhabitants. Though this fall death follows Eden's summer life, Noah and his family survive in a floating sanctuary, surrounded safely by a womb of wood. Safe in their tree-made ark (תבה), human and plant kind float together through the Divine storm. For Noah and his family, the גפר tree becomes a very literal Tree of Life, carrying human, plant, and animal companions towards the hope of gardens yet to grow.

⁴¹ Gen. 1:29 Fox, *The Five Books*, p. 17: God said, "Here, I give you all plants that bear seeds that are upon the face of all the earth, and all trees in which there is tree fruit that bears seeds, for you shall they be, for eating."

In Gen. 8, after months of torrential rain storms and fatal flooding, the text tells us that God remembers Noah and the other ark inhabitants and allows for the wooden sanctuary to come to a rest safely upon the still-submerged mountains of Ararat (Gen. 8:1-4). Though God has not yet told Noah that it's safe to emerge from the Ark, Noah knows instinctively that survival for him and his family hinges on the rebirth of a healthy, sprouting earth. To test whether the land has dried enough to sustain life, Noah begins to send out bird messengers in the hopes that one will return to him with a botanical sign of life. Gen. 8:6-11⁴² read:

8:6 At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made,	וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וַיִּפְתָּח נֹחַ אֶת-חֲלוֹן הַתֵּבָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה:
8:7 And he sent out a raven; it went out, going out and returning, until the waters were dried up from the earth	וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת-הָעֹרֵב וַיֵּצֵא יְצוּאָ וְשׁוֹב עַד-יִכָּשֶׁת הַמַּיִם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ:
8:8 Then he sent out a dove from him, to see whether the waters had subsided from the face of the soil	וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת-הַיּוֹנָה מֵאֵתוֹ לִרְאוֹת הַקָּלִי הַמַּיִם מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה:
8:9 But the dove found no resting place for the sole of her foot, so she returned to him into the Ark, for there was water upon all the face of the earth. He sent out his hand and took her, and brought her to him into the Ark	וְלֹא-מָצְאָהּ הַיּוֹנָה מְנוּחַ לְכַף-רַגְלָהּ וַתָּשָׁב אֵלָיו אֶל-הַתֵּבָה כִּי-מַיִם עַל-פְּנֵי כָל-הָאָרֶץ וַיִּשְׁלַח יָדוֹ וַיִּקְחֶהּ וַיָּבֵא אֹתָהּ אֵלָיו אֶל-הַתֵּבָה:
8:10 Then he waited yet another seven days and sent out the dove yet again from the Ark	וַיַּחַל עוֹד שְׁבַע יָמִים אַחֲרַיִם וַיִּסָּף שְׁלַח אֶת-הַיּוֹנָה מִן-הַתֵּבָה:
8:11 The dove came back to him at evening time and here! A freshly plucked olive leaf in her beak! So Noah knew that the waters had subsided from upon the earth.	וַתָּבֵא אֵלָיו הַיּוֹנָה לָעֵת עֶרֶב וְהָיָה עֲלֶיהָ יֵזֶת טֶרֶף בִּפְיָהּ וַיַּדַּע נֹחַ כִּי-קָלִי הַמַּיִם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ:

⁴² Gen. 8:6-11, Fox, *The Five Books*, p.39-41

הַדָּמָה, the humus-garden term for earthen land first appearing in Gen. 1:25, sprouts back into the biblical lexicon in Gen. 8:8 as Noah searches for a sign of earth reborn. Then, finally, deliverance arrives for Noah through a tiny plant detail in Gen. 8:11. Tucked safely into the beak of Noah's returned dove is a single olive leaf that carries with it the promise of life renewed.

Later in the biblical text, the Olive tree takes on a significant role in spiritual, political, and ritual moments via the olive oil produced from its fruit. That Olive first appears here in Gen. 8 in this context of rupture and repair is noteworthy. The arrival of an olive leaf ultimately heralds the arrival of God's next promise, the Noahide covenant and God's resolution to never destroy the world in this way again. The authors of *The Torah: a Woman's Commentary* note that the use of an olive leaf in Gen. 8:11 establishes, "the olive branch [as] a symbol of renewal and peace in the aftermath of devastation" (42). We will return to Olive in the next section in an exploration of anointing practices, where it will also be linked semantically to the eventual promise of a messianic age. It is not a coincidence that it is Olive who appears as the sign to Noah that it will soon be safe to venture outside the ark and reestablish life on land.

Olive trees held cultural significance throughout the Ancient Near East in a variety of contexts⁴³.

In his doctorate thesis "The Symbolic and Theological Significance of the Olive Tree in the Ancient Near East and in the Hebrew Scriptures," Dr. Bryan Moselle writes,

The theological significance that emerges in the earliest appearance of the olive branch communicates to the reader that the tree is a representative sign of both Yahweh's faithfulness to Noah in reestablishing the new world, and a foreshadowing of the promise

⁴³ Moselle, Bryan R. "The Symbolic and Theological Significance of The Olive Tree in the Ancient Near East and in the Hebrew Scriptures." *University of Pretoria*, 2015.

of the land his faithful people will inherit. Though it has yet to be developed, the tree will be a sign of covenant prosperity and blessing that Noah's descendants will receive.⁴⁴

As a plant-character personality, Olive brings relief, regeneration, and relational repair to the biblical narrative. With the hope brought through this single olive leaf and with a bit more time to heal and dry, Noah heeds God's call to leave the ark and begin life on land once again.

Once on dry land, Noah offers thanks to God through sacrifices on an altar. Immediately after, Gen. 9:20 states:

Now Noah was the first man of the soil; he planted ⁴⁵ a vineyard	וַיִּחַל נֹחַ אִישׁ הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּטֵּעַ כֶּרֶם:
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Noah is the first person to plant a vineyard in the post-flood world, and the first human character to plant anything in the biblical text. Even in the midst of this Fall season of garden death, Noah embodies an act of radical hope for future springs to come, tucking bulbs into muddy, chilled soil beneath his hands. Until now, the verb “to plant” has appeared in just one other context, Gen. 2:8, when God plants the Garden of Eden. In re-forming the created world, God's role as gardener is reseeded within humankind. In a post-flood reality, Noah becomes “a man of the soil” (אִישׁ הָאֲדָמָה), offering praise to God above and then sticking his hands in the dirt below. If the flood represents the bible's first story of collective trauma, Noah's actions offer one roadmap for spiritual healing. Our Divine connection is not meant to divorce us from the land, even in the most extreme situations. Similarly, this story emphasizes that our attempts to rebuild after rupture are often full of land and plant allies of all kinds. Noah turns to the אֲדָמָה and

⁴⁴ Moselle, “Significance of the Olive Tree,” p. 124

⁴⁵ Color code reminder: light purple- verb first enacted by God in Gen. 1-3

plant-products like wine to help him cope through life after rupture. The messiness that unfolds⁴⁶ in the remainder of Noah's story is a reminder of just how human, just how אדם, Noah truly is as a biblical character. For good and for bad, the אדם/אדמה connection becomes a way forward after tragedy and loss for Noah and his family.

God's post-flood resolution and covenant with Noah reseed Divine relationship and creation in tandem. The language employed by God in establishing a covenant with Noah and his sons is full of linguistic references to the plant-based blessings of Gen. 1-3. Like the First People⁴⁷, God blesses Noah's family and commands them to "bear fruit and be many,"⁴⁸ emphasizing their link to the natural world through semantic symbolism. Acknowledging the wreckage already wrought upon the world, God also resolves quietly to Godself:⁴⁹

As long as all the days of the earth- Seedtime and harvest And cold and heat And summer and winter And day and night Shall not cease	עַד כָּל־יְמֵי הָאָרֶץ וְרַע וְקָצִיר וְחֹם וְקֹיץ וְחֹרֶף וְיוֹם וְלַיְלָה לֹא יִשְׁכָּחוּ
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⁴⁶ Gen. 9:21-27 detail a scene in which Noah drinks heavily from the wine his vineyard produces and his sons are left to deal with the aftermath of Noah's drunken, indecent exposure. In a dramatic scene, Noah blesses the sons he feels took care of his drunken vulnerability acceptably and curses the son who did not. This hyper-human scene, one millions of families around the world could likely relate to today, *still* holds a plant-character/plant-product at its core- the wine that Noah drinks is a product of the land he planted. Here, once again, a scene of biblical blessing and curse unfolds as a result of a human-plant interaction

⁴⁷ Gen. 1:28, Fox, *The Five Books*, p.17

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וּכְבֹּשׁוּהָ וְרָדוּ בַדְגַת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל־חַיַּת הָרֶמֶשׂ עַל־הָאָרֶץ:

God blessed them and God said to them, "Bear fruit and be many and fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, the fowl of the heavens, and all living things that crawl about upon the earth!"

⁴⁸Fox, *The Five Books*, p.42: Gen 9:1: פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ: God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them: bear fruit and be many!

⁴⁹ Gen. 8:22

The sprinkling of seasons, seed-language, creation-narrative callbacks, and land-centered regeneration throughout these verses once again highlights the interwoven relationship between אדמה and אדם and their ongoing connection to the legacies of Eden. Our relationship to the Divine is deeply, intimately connected to our relationship with the אדמה—dirt and the plants it produces. The plant world accompanies Noah and his family on every stage of their flood journey, from the Gofer wood of the Ark, to the Olive branch of the dove, to the linguistic choices in God’s words of blessing. There can be no rejuvenation of humankind without a rejuvenation of earth and seed around them. Only when the soggy earth can once again sustain plant life are Noah and his family blessed with the command פִּירוּ, bear fruit. With hands in the dirt and hearts willing to carry on, Noah, his family, and the natural world move together into the next chapters of biblical life and Divine relationship.

Making a Nation & Changing a Name (Mandrakes)

Genesis’ fall gardening season does not end with Noah. While contemporary readers might associate the fall growing season with root vegetables such as beets, radishes, and carrots, the authors of Genesis turned their gaze to a different root-ally. Mandrake, the thick root mass harvested from the *Mandragora* plant, first appears as a named plant-character in Gen. 30 as Rachel and Leah race to give Jacob children. The curved, leggy root has inspired legends for millenia due to its easily anthropomorphized shape and its associations with fertility and arousal.⁵⁰ Everett Fox calls the plant “love-apples” (דִּוְדָאִים) in his biblical translations, emphasizing their role in sexual intimacy and setting them up for an intertextual link with the

⁵⁰Harrison, RK. “The Mandrake And The Ancient World.” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 28.2 (1956): 87-92. p. 87

lovers (דוידים) who appear in Song of Songs later in the biblical canon.^{51,52} For Fox, the somatic and spiritual associations of the plant are meant to be just as clear to the contemporary biblical reader as they were to an ancient biblical audience.

In his work “The Mandrake and the Ancient World,” Prof. R.K Harrison notes that the Mandrake plant grew abundantly across the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean regions, and notes that the plant was used medicinally and magically across cultures. Human awareness of Mandrake’s known narcotic properties goes back thousands of years, as does the wisdom of its hallucinogenic, sedative, and even poisonous effects at high doses.⁵³ Harrison writes that the plant was lauded for its love-charm and protective powers across the ancient world, in part because of the “quasi-human appearance suggested by the forked roots of the plant.”⁵⁴ Mandrakes had a reputation for potency and power long before ever appearing in the biblical text.

In part because the herb was thought to be so powerful across the ancient world, legends emerged about Mandrake harvesting as an extremely dangerous task. Though much of the documentation for these legends dates to post-biblical periods, their proliferation provides critical cultural insight to the biblical Mandrake plant-character. For example, already in his 1st century work *The Jewish War*, Josephus includes a gruesome description of Mandrake harvesting that requires “either the urine of a woman, or blood” as well as the life force of a dog who then “dies immediately.”⁵⁵ Even in their cultural context thousands of years prior to the documented

⁵¹ Fox, *The Five Books*, p. 141

⁵² Part IV: Spring of this project is entirely devoted to the many plant-characters who appear in the text of Song of Songs, Mandrakes included

⁵³ Carter, Anthony John. “Myths and Mandrakes.” *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, Mar. 2003, p. 143

⁵⁴ Harrison, p. 89

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, 89

examples of the more extreme legends about Mandrake harvesting, the biblical authors were likely aware that Mandrakes were precious, powerful, and dangerously laborious to acquire. Its inclusion in the biblical text as a plant-character would have stood out to ancient and medieval readers alike, perhaps even influencing which aspects of the biblical narrative piqued interest or inspired curiosity.

Given the plant's well-known ancient reputation for being dangerous to harvest, one might expect the biblical authors to include a harvest origin story when introducing the plant-character to the biblical text. Instead, the potent plants make an utterly unglamorous entry into the biblical lexicon. The text simply tells us that Reuben, one of Jacob's sons through Leah, "finds" some mandrakes while spending time out in the fields, and that he promptly brings to his mother⁵⁶.

Gen. 30: 14⁵⁷ reads:

And Reuben went out during the wheat harvest and found mandrakes in the field and brought them to Leah his mother. And Rachel said to Leah, "Give me, please, some of the mandrakes of your son"	(ד) וַיֵּלֶךְ רְאוּבֵן בְּיָמֵי קְצִיר־חִטִּים וַיִּמְצָא דַּוְדָּאִים בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיָּבֵא אֹתָם אֶל־לֵאָה אִמּוֹ וַתֹּאמֶר רַחֵל אֶל־לֵאָה תִּנִּינָא לִּי מַדְרָאִים בְּנֶךְ:
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Right away, the ambiguity around Reuben's casual Mandrake acquisition jumps out for a reader applying a plant-hermeneutic. An ancient biblical audience would have perked up at the text's introduction of this herb as something that Reuben happened to stumble upon. By ancient understanding, Mandrake harvesting could only be accomplished by a skilled landknower (perhaps a gardener?) capable of coaxing the powerful plant from the earth safely. Whose hand liberated these stubborn soil-dwellers from their space in the אדמה such that Reuben had the

⁵⁶ Gen. 30:14

⁵⁷ Gen. 30:14, Alter, *The Five Books*, p. 107

chance to come across them? Perhaps, the biblical authors included this detail to signal that the Mandrakes in this scene were sown, or at the very least harvested, by the Divine hand, just as The Holy One planted the first seeds in Eden.⁵⁸ In humanity's ongoing fall, the season of harvest introduces a basket of unmanned Mandrakes into the biblical narrative. Perhaps this manna-like appearance of Mandrakes points to once again towards a God who continues to garden the post-Eden world through shifting gardening seasons alongside humankind.

As the scene continues, the Mandrakes become an ice-breaking bartering chip and a fertility aid for Leah and Rachel. Distressed that her already fertile sister has come to possess the bounty of Mandrakes, Rachel approaches her sister. Gen. 30:15-18⁵⁹ read:

And she said, "Is it not enough that you have taken my husband, and now you would take the mandrakes of my son? And Rachel said, "Then let him lie with you tonight in return for the mandrakes of your son."	(טו) ותאמר לה המעט קחתך את-אִשִּׁי וְלָקַחְתָּ גַם את- דִּינָא בְּנִי ותאמר רחל לכן יִשְׁכַּב עִמָּךְ הַלַּיְלָה תַּחַת דִּינָא בְּנִי:
And Jacob came from the field in the evening, and Leah went out to meet him and said, "With me you will come to bed, for I have clearly hired you with the mandrakes of my son." And he lay with her that night.	(טז) וַיָּבֹא יַעֲקֹב מִן-הַשָּׂדֶה בְּעֶרְבַּ וַתֵּצֵא לֵאָה לִקְרָאתוֹ וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָי תָּבוֹא כִּי שָׂכַר שְׂכָרְתִּיךָ בְּדִינָא בְּנִי וַיִּשְׁכַּב עִמָּה בַּלַּיְלָה הַהוּא:
And God heard Leah and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son	(יז) וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶל-לֵאָה וַתֵּהָר וַתֵּלֶד לַיַּעֲקֹב בֶּן חַמִּישִׁי:
And Leah said, God has given my wages because I gave my slavegirl to my husband, and she called his name Issachar	(יח) ותאמר לֵאָה נָתַן אֱלֹהִים שְׂכָרִי אֲשֶׁר-נָתַתִּי שְׂפָחָתִי לְאִשִּׁי וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ יִשָּׁשָׁכָר:

⁵⁸ Gen 2:8, Fox, *The Five Books*, p. 19 (pronoun adapted):

וַיִּטֵּעַ יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים גֶּן-בְּעֶדֶן מִקֶּדֶם וַיִּשֶׂם שֵׁם אֶת-הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר יָצַר
God יהוה **planted** a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the Human whom [They] formed.

⁵⁹ Gen. 30:15-18, Alter, *The Five Books*, p.108-9

With the Mandrake's arrival comes the first and only verbal exchange that exists in the biblical text between Rachel and Leah. In his commentary on these verses, Robert Alter notes similarities between this scene between sisters and the birthright-stew exchange between Jacob and Esau,⁶⁰ in which we also see "one sibling barter a privilege for a plant product."⁶¹ Much like the birthright exchange between brothers over a pot of beans, it is clear that both women recognize that what's at stake for them has to do with far more than "just" the plant before them. There is a recognition of the plant's medicinal/magical properties in their exchange, but also a recognition of value, status, intimacy, connection, and power that seems to be on the line for all of the human characters in its vicinity. Both women seem crystal clear about the fact that this product of the *אדמה* will have a significant impact on their relationships with their shared *אדם*. Far from a passive textual detail meant for background fodder, Mandrakes move the biblical narrative and its characters into a flurry of relationship and encounter.

After a brief exchange between the two sisters, in verse 17 Leah's attention turns toward Jacob, as she brags that she has "hired him" for the night through the mandrakes that Reuben brought her. Whether this means that Leah agreed to Rachel's request and exchanged mandrakes with her sister as the price for spending the night with their shared husband, or that the sensual nature of the mandrakes somehow "rented" Jacob into her company through sheer force of attraction, the rush of hyperfertility that Leah experiences in verses 16-21 seem to indicate that Leah used at least some of the precious plant medicine for herself. Over the course of 5 verses Leah births 3 new children into the biblical narrative- Issachar, Zebulun, and Dina. It is only after this trifold surge of fertility, seemingly brought on through her use of- or at least association with- the

⁶⁰ Gen 25:34

⁶¹ Footnote 15, Alter, *The Five Books*, p. 107

Mandrake plant, that God’s attention turns to Rachel’s still-barren womb and blesses her with a child as well. Gen. 30:22- 25⁶² read:

And God Remembered Rachel and God heard her and opened her womb,	(כב) וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־רָחֵל וַיִּשְׁמַע אֵלֶיהָ אֱלֹהִים וַיִּפְתָּח אֶת־רִחְמָהּ
and she conceived and bore a son, and she said “God has gathered ⁶³ (<i>asaf</i>) my shame”	(כג) וַתַּהַר וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן וַתֹּאמֶר אֶסַף אֱלֹהִים אֶת־חַרְפֹּתַי:
And she called his name Joseph, which is to say, “May the Lord gather to me (<i>asaf</i>) another son”	(כד) וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ יוֹסֵף לֵאמֹר יִסֵּף יְהוָה לִי בֶן אַחֵר:
And it happened, when Rachel bore Joseph, that Jacob said to Laban, “send me off, that I may go to my place and to my land .”	(כה) וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה רָחֵל אֶת־יוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל־לְבָן שְׁלַחֲנִי וְאַלְכֶּה אֶל־מְקוֹמִי וְלֵאדָּצִי:

A garden’s worth of events spring forth from the text’s strategic planting of Mandrake roots in Reuben’s hands. Most immediately, the Mandrakes sprout a whirlwind of dialogue, sex, birth, and divine praise within the biblical plot. The relationship between plants and people is reinforced again through the collaboration and negotiation that unfolds. Even as the pulse of the text quickens with activity in response to the Mandrakes, Rachel and Leah pause to make a formal acknowledgment of their plant-induced good fortune as a gift from the Divine. Like Noah, both women pair plant-allyship and Divine praise in their response to life-altering change, linking the births of four biblical children to Divine will and plant-aided wellness.

This trifold connection between Divine Presence, people, and plants reaches far past these

Mandrake-induced births. The narrative immediacy with which the text connects the Mandrake

⁶² Gen. 30:22-25, Alter p. 109

⁶³ Personal translation for “סָאֵף” to highlight that this single verb is used in verses 23-24, from which Joseph’s name is derived. Though translated as opposites in the two verses by Fox and Alter (“God took away my shame” and “may the Lord add another son”) the term סָאֵף is the same verb that God uses to instruct Noah to gather food for survival on the ark in Gen. 6:21. Joseph’s naming carries quiet callbacks to the sustaining bounty once promised to Noah.

exchange to Jacob's request to be set free by Lavan fits into the pattern that a plant-hermeneutic establishes. A named plant-character enters the biblical narrative as a critical interaction point between humans, and a journey with the Divine unfolds as a result. For Jacob, the births brought on by the Mandrake exchange between sisters prompts him to beg his father-in-law to allow him to take his rapidly growing family back to his "place" and to his "land". Perhaps, it is the potency of the Mandrake's presence that stirs Jacob out of a period of spiritual stagnation and reminds him of an enduring homesickness that seems to transcend just the physical. While "place" could refer to his specific homestead, perhaps instead Jacob longs in this moment for Place, the Sacred Garden Presence who knew how to navigate and share abundance.

As he makes his journey homeward, Jacob stops to rest for the night and spends his night wrestling a mysterious angel visitor who renames Jacob as Israel before they part. Though somewhat winding, there is a narrative path from Rachel's request for her sister's Mandrake supply to Jacob's journey toward becoming Israel. From Mandrakes comes Israel, the name which will ultimately be shared with our people's Promised land- perhaps one of the most significant biblical connections between אדם and אדמה. That Jacob's new name becomes the title given to the promised land further reinforces the connections between people, plant, and Place in the biblical narrative.

The Road to Egypt is Paved in Spices: Joseph, Journeys, and Genesis' Close

Though far subtler in their presence, the named plant-characters in the final chapters of Genesis also play a pivotal role in the ongoing collaboration between people and Place. Spices, which come from the drying and distillation of different parts of a plant-body, have served as catalysts

for human interconnection for millenia. Much like the Mandrakes in Gen. 30, the spices in Gen. 37 enter the biblical narrative with the implicit understanding that someone's hands harvested them to get there. Spice routes and trade networks were critical staples in the ancient world, and the biblical writers were almost certainly familiar with the spice trade practices of Ancient Near Eastern peoples. That the biblical lexicon includes spices that come from plants indigenous to areas beyond the immediate land settings of the biblical narrative serves as proof text for some scholars that spices symbolize a cultural, spiritual, or personal exchange within the text⁶⁴. The spice trade first appears in Gen. 37, as Joseph's brothers share a meal together and contemplate the best way to eliminate Joseph from their family system.

In Gen. 37:25, Joseph's brothers look up from their meal and see a caravan of Ishmaelite merchants carrying "balm, balsam, and Ladanum, traveling to take them down to Egypt." The appearance of these merchants inspires Yehudah to beg his brothers to sell Joseph instead of killing him themselves. Like the Mandrake roots, the appearance of these tiny, named plant-characters in the text becomes the bargaining chip that launches a journey towards divine purpose and relationship. The brothers know that selling Joseph to the Ishmaelite merchants will ultimately carry him to (or at least toward) Egypt primarily because of the spices these merchants are traveling with. This shared cultural knowledge of economic plant-exchange networks becomes the catalyst for Joseph's brothers to excise Joseph from the family through trade rather than traitorous murder. Once in Egypt, Joseph rises to leadership through divine visions and strategic social navigation. His identity as a son of Jacob/Israel is exchanged for social, political,

⁶⁴ Moldenke, Harold N. "The Economic Plants of the Bible." *Economic Botany*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1954, p. 152 and; Commentary on Gen. 37:35b, Alter, *The Five Books*, p. 142 "the precise identity of these plant extracts used for medical purposes and as perfume is in doubt, but it is clear that they are costly export items"

and economic capital, all of which serve to ultimately bring the Children of Israel into the Land of Egypt as part of their Divine journey. All of this textual exchange begins with spice details from a single verse.

Later in the same story, the balm, balsam, Ladanum⁶⁵ trio reappears in a stroke of textual irony. Forced to choose between the terror of losing his sons to an Egyptian leader or losing their lives to ongoing famine, Jacob, now late in years and the father of 13 adult children, sends his remaining sons to the “Man” (Joseph) in Egypt who holds their fate in his hands.⁶⁶ In an attempt to gird his children with gifts to appease the intimidating Egyptian ruler, Jacob commands his children to take “balm, balsam, and ladanum” with them as a gift of goodwill for the mystery leader. Without having any idea that this “Man” is Joseph now risen to Egyptian power, Jacob sends his sons to offer Joseph the same spice-tokens that inspired his sale into slavery initially. Alter writes, “the tribute or gift to Joseph includes three of the same items as those in the briefer list of luxury export goods carried by the Ishmaelite traders⁶⁷ who bought Joseph from his brothers and sold him as a slave in Egypt ... the brothers are thus drawn unwittingly into a process of repetition and restitution for their fraternal crime.”⁶⁸ The spice plant-characters of the Joseph narrative form a connective thread of relationship and reckoning for all of the text’s human characters.

This short biblical scene introduces several groups in contact with one another and establishes Egypt as a place of exchange. Midianites, Ishmaelites, Egyptians, and the sons of Jacob all engage in interconnected resource trade and intercultural interaction, symbolized in the text first

⁶⁵ Gen. 27:25, Alter, *The Five Books*, p. 142

⁶⁶ Gen. 42: 1-11

⁶⁷ Gen. 37:25

⁶⁸ Alter, *The Five Books*, p. 168

through plant-product details. The path from Joseph's pit to Joseph's power tills the garden plot of the biblical narrative, planting seeds of the ever-developing Jewish people in the land of Egypt. That this transfer of Jewish bodies from the house of Israel to the house of Egypt is textually introduced first by a list of plant-products should not be overlooked. The story of our salvation from Egypt would not happen were it not for the spice routes that brought us there to begin with. Like spices' ability to invigorate the senses and warm the body's circulatory system, the spice-characters in Joseph's story come to invigorate the narrative and circulate its characters into their next location. Here again, the presence of plant-products appears in a moment in which journey, connectivity, and exchange drive the narrative.

Autumn's Alchemy: Death & the Dirt

Like deciduous trees that gently release their leaves back to the earth as fall turns to winter, the fall season of Genesis comes to a close as first Jacob and then Joseph face their deaths with an acute awareness of their connections to the land. As Jacob dies, he instructs his children to bury him in the Cave of Machpelah, stating in Gen. 49: 29-30; 32:⁶⁹

And he charged them and said to them, "I am about to be gathered ⁷⁰ to my kinfolk. Bury me in the cave with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite	וַיֵּצֵא אוֹתָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם אֲנִי נֶאֱסָף אֶל-עַמִּי קְבְּרוּ אֹתִי אֶל-אֲבֹתַי אֶל-הַמְעֵרָה אֲשֶׁר בְּשָׂדֵה עֶפְרֹן הַחִתִּי:
In the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which faces Mamre, in the land of Canaan, the field that Abraham bought from Ephraim the Hittite as a burial-holding	בְּמַעֲרָה אֲשֶׁר בְּשָׂדֵה הַמַּכְפֵּלָה אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי-מַמְרֵא בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר קָנָה אַבְרָהָם אֶת-הַשָּׂדֶה מֵאֵת עֶפְרֹן הַחִתִּי לְאַחֲזֵית-קֶבֶר:

⁶⁹ Alter, *The Five Books*, p.198

⁷⁰ This is the same verb that God uses to tell Noah to gather food, and the same verb that Rachel cites when she names Joseph.

(32): the field and the cave within it, bought from the Hittites.	מִקְנֵה הַשָּׂדֶה וְהַמְעָרָה אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ מֵאֵת בְּנֵי־חֵת:
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In Gen. 3:18 God curses Adam by telling him that the land will sprout thorns and thistles around him, and that his food shall come from the grassy fields through labor and toil.⁷¹ Here, in Gen. 49, Jacob instructs his sons to bury him in the field (שדה) in the land (בארץ) where his ancestors buried their beloved dead. Again, the text seems to play with God's curse-language to Adam while subverting its severity; where Adam was promised labor in the land, Jacob will find his ultimate rest. Where Adam was doomed to become dust, Jacob turns willingly to the soil where his ancestors already lie. When Jacob took his Mandrake-induced leave from Lavan, he did so under the auspices of returning to his P/place and to his land.⁷² With his final words of burial instruction in Gen. 49, Jacob recreates a willing, conscious unity between place (land) and Place (divine) last seen in the coexistence of Eden. To Jacob's great-grandfather Abraham, God promised a life of seed-descendants who would fruitfully fill the Promised Land. Jacob carries this promise with him in death, as he plants himself in soil of the Promised Land that will one day take on the name bestowed unto him by the angel he wrestled. From Jacob's name and from his seed will spring the Israelites and the name "Israel" given to the land God promised them. Here, at Fall's end, Jacob/Israel becomes the slow-rooting seed tucked beneath the soil to germinate through the dark womb of winter.

In the final verses of the book of Genesis, Joseph faces his death while solidifying a future life in the land for his descendants in a different way. In Gen. 50: 24-26 Joseph tells his brothers,⁷³

⁷¹ Gen. 3:18

⁷² Gen. 30:25

⁷³ Gen. 50, 24-26, Alter, *The Five Books*, p. 201-202

And Joseph said to his brothers, “I am about to die, and God ⁷⁴ will surely single you out and take you up from this land to the land [God] promised to Isaac and to Jacob	וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל-אֶחָיו אֲנִי מֵת וְאֱלֹהִים פָּקֹד יִפְקֹד אֶתְכֶם וְהֶעֱלָה אֶתְכֶם מִן-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאֲבֹתְכֶם לֵאמֹר וְלִיְצָחָק:
And Joseph made the sons of Israel promise, saying, “When God indeed singles you out, you shall take up my bones from this [place]”	וַיִּשְׁבַּע יוֹסֵף אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר פָּקֹד יִפְקֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶתְכֶם וְהֶעֱלָתֶם אֶת-עַצְמוֹתַי מִזֶּה:
And Joseph died, a hundred and ten years old, and they embalmed him and he was put in a coffin in Egypt	וַיָּמָת יוֹסֵף בֶּן-מֵאָה וָעֶשְׂרִי שָׁנִים וַיַּחַנְטוּ אוֹתוֹ וַיִּשֶׂם בְּאֲרוֹן בְּמִצְרַיִם:

Though Joseph dies away from the land of his fathers and is embalmed in the tradition of his found Egyptian family, his final words point towards a return to the Promised Place spiritually and physically. In Gen. 2:23, אדם expresses the extent of his intimate connection with his helpmate in Eden by lauding her as “the bones of [his] bones.”⁷⁵ Now, as the book of Genesis comes to an end, a band of brother descendants promise to carry their own set of beloved bones back to the Promised Land. Alter writes,

The book that began with an image of God’s breath moving across the vast expanses of the primordial deep to bring the world and all life into being ends with this image of a body in a box, a mummy in a coffin. Out of the contraction of this moment of mortuary enclosure, a new expansion, and new births, will follow. Exodus begins with a proliferation of births, a pointed repetition of the primeval blessing to be fruitful and multiply, and just as the survival of the Flood was represented as a second creation, the leader who is to forge the creation of the nation will be borne on the water in a little box—not the “aron” “the coffin,” of the end of Genesis but the *tevah*, “the ark,” that keeps Noah and his seed alive⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Although the dual creation narratives use both YHVH and אלהים as names for God, the Hebrew term used for God in the verses above is “אלהים,” the same God-name used in first the chapter of Genesis in the first creation story. Though this is often used as a way of discerning various biblical authors, I also read it as a subtle nod back towards the first Garden as the book of Genesis comes to a close

⁷⁵ Gen. 2:23, Alter p.15

וַיֹּאמֶר הָאָדָם זֹאת הִפְעַם עֵצָם מִעֲצָמִי וּבִשָּׁר מִבִּשְׁרִי לְזֹאת יִקְרָא אִשָּׁה כִּי מֵאִישׁ לָקַחְתָּ זֹאת:

"This one at last, bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh, this one shall be called Woman, for from man was this one taken"

⁷⁶ Alter, *The Five Books*, p. 202 footnote 26b

Though exiled from God's first garden, there remains an inseparable connection between the אדם and אדמה (man and land/ human and humus). Remnants of God's early Garden continue to sprout through the narratives of the biblical text across its many seasons.

Through a plant-hermeneutic, the fall of post-Eden Genesis emerges as a season of harvest, storage, connection, and death. As they learn to live beyond the borders of Eden while still longing for a return to P/place, plants and people move in partnership with one another in a process of ongoing interdependence. By the end of Genesis' fall, there is an undeniable connection between God and God's people, plants, and land. As fall turns to winter, the Israelites experience a deep freeze of their freedoms and endure a season of slow, winding regeneration even after their liberation arrives.

Part III (Winter)



Winter in the Wilderness

Winter arrives for the Israelites with chilling change. 400 years after Joseph's fruitful time as an Egyptian leader, the expanding Israelite family finds itself enslaved under a new Pharaoh who has no memory of their favored ancestor Joseph. Stirred by the anguish of the people She once stewarded so diligently, The Holy One remembers Her promised seeds and turns towards the cries of the Israelites in slavery. Even with hardened, unyielding earth underfoot and gray skies overhead, the winter gardener trusts that the seeds planted in seasons past will survive winter soil and sprout again in seasons to come. With plagues for the Egyptians and renewed promises of partnership with the Israelite people, the biblical narrative's winter comes with a rush of darkness followed by a slow, steady trek towards brighter days. God's promise of redemption is linked explicitly to a renewed promise of seasons spent in the land (אֶרֶץ) flowing with milk and honey once promised to their ancestors.⁷⁷ Though their trip through the wilderness is full of longing and hardship, winter serves as a season of spiritual hardiness and burgeoning cohesion for the Israelite people. To help them survive the trials of winter and prepare for the spring season ahead, God once again pairs plants and people with one another. Named plant characters become the vehicles through which the Israelites mark their homes to protect themselves from plague, the ritual mixture used to anoint sacred priests and places, and the language used to lament the loss of their familiar life in Egypt for the ongoing uncertainty in the desert. Even in the depths of spiritual winter wilderness, the sacred partnerships between people, plants, and P/place remain deeply embedded in the textual narrative.

⁷⁷ Exodus 3:8

With an Arm Outstretched & Plant in Hand (Hyssop & הסנה *ha-sneh*)

With winter, the once lush world of Genesis becomes brittle, making the conditions just right for life-sustaining fire to burst from dry bark and bush laid bare. As conversation between God and garden inhabitants resumes, God uses plants to re-establish Her partnerships with Her people. Through a burning bush God speaks to Moses⁷⁸ and through a bare wooden staff⁷⁹ God shows Moses, Pharaoh, and the Israelites God's divine powers.⁸⁰ The text offers no descriptors about the nature of these plant-characters whose bodies become puppets for such Divine force, perhaps allowing the reader to imagine both as the simple, bare wooden branches one might encounter during the winter months. The reinvigoration of sacred relationship begins as Moses encounters the Divine in the midst of a plant-character known only as “the bush” (*ha-sneh* הסנה). Ex. 3:2-4⁸¹ read:

And the Lord's messenger appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of the bush , and he saw, and look, the bush was burning with fire and the bush was not consumed	וַיֵּרָא מִלְאָךְ יְהוָה אֵלָיו בְּלַבַּת־אֵשׁ מִתּוֹךְ הַסֵּנֶה וַיֵּרָא וַהֲנֶה הַסֵּנֶה בֹּעֵר בְּאֵשׁ וְהַסֵּנֶה אֵינֶנּוּ אֵכָל:
And Moses thought, “Let me, pray, turn aside that I may see this great sight, why the bush does not burn up”	וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶסְתַּר־נָא וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת־הַמֵּרָאָה הַגָּדֹל הַזֶּה מִדּוּעַ לֹא־יִבָּעַר הַסֵּנֶה:
And the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, and God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!” and he said “Here I am”	וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה כִּי סָר לִרְאוֹת וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו אֱלֹהִים מִתּוֹךְ הַסֵּנֶה וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְנִי:

⁷⁸ Ex. 3:2, Alter, *The Five Books*, p. 220

⁷⁹ This is an interpretation of the Hebrew term מטה as a wooden staff.

⁸⁰ Ex. 4:2-3; 7:9-10

⁸¹ Ex. 3:2-4, Alter, p. 220-21

After generations of wintery silence, person and P/place reconnect through the plant-character that stands between them. The term used for “the bush” (הַסֵּנָה) in these verses appears in only one other context in all of Tanakh, where it is invoked by Moses in his final address to the Israelites before his death. In the penultimate chapter of the Torah, Moses offers blessings to the Israelites through a recounting of the final blessings that Jacob offered to each of his sons before he died. In these near-final words of the Pentateuch, הסנה appears quietly in the very last verse of blessing that Moses gives in reference to Joseph. With language bursting with promises of garden-like abundance, Deut. 33:13-16⁸² read:

And for Joseph he said: Blessed of the Lord is his land , from the bounty of heavens , from dew, and from the deep that couches below	וּלְיוֹסֵף אָמַר מְבֹרָכַת יְהוָה אֲרָצוֹ מִמֶּגֶד שָׁמַיִם מִטָּל וּמִתְהוֹם רִבְצֵת תַּחַת:
and from the bounty of yield of the sun/and from the bounty of crop of the moon	וּמִמֶּגֶד תְּבוּאֹת שֶׁמֶשׁ וּמִמֶּגֶד גֶּרֶשׁ יְרֵחִים:
and from the top of the age old mountains, from the bounty of hills everlasting	וּמֵרֶאשׁ הַרְרֵי־קֹדֶם וּמִמֶּגֶד גְּבָעוֹת עוֹלָם:
And from the bounty of earth and its fullness And the favor of the bush dwelling One. May these come on the head of Joseph, on the brow of him set apart by his brothers	וּמִמֶּגֶד אֲרֶץ וּמִלְאָהּ וּרְצוֹן שְׁכֵנֵי סֵנָה תְּבוּאָתָהּ לְרֹאשׁ יוֹסֵף וּלְקֹדֶקֶד גְּזִיר אֶחָיו:

The humble *Sneh* marks the biblical winter’s start and end. If winter begins with slavery and God speaking to Moses through the *Sneh* with promises of liberation, the season ultimately ends with Moses referencing the same *Sneh* as he prepares his people for his death. In winter’s final death, the Israelites will turn towards spring and their life in the land to come. What happens in the biblical narrative between winter’s start and end is a slow march from enslavement to embodied interdependence. All along the way, God aids the Israelites with plant-characters to keep their

⁸² Deut. 33:13-16, Alter, *The Five Books*, p. 739

spirits strong and their bodies safe as they make their way to the land God promised.

Back at winter's start, Moses receives God's *Sneh*-funneled call with startled apprehension. He asks God how anyone in Egypt will believe he's there on God's behalf, and worries that the people will doubt that God appeared to him at all. With a textual nod to the events of Eden, God responds to Moses' challenge by transforming his wooden staff into a snake. Given that the first story of exodus/exile in the biblical narrative comes after the interactions between snake, tree, and humankind, that God's first demonstration for Moses plays with these elements brings echoes of Eden into the Exodus narrative early on. With wooden staff in hand and God's voice still echoing in his ears, Moses returns to his once-upon-a-time palace home in Egypt to advocate for the freedom of his people.

The plagues that God rains upon Egypt show that even after spending generations beyond the bounds of Eden, plants, people, and P/place exist together in a shared ecosystem. Even in cosmopolitan Egyptian society, the 10 plagues that God sends affect not just the people of Egypt but the land, plants, and livestock they rely on as well. God hardens Pharaoh's heart like the frozen ground of winter,⁸³ leaving him unyielding and unwilling to release his Hebrew slaves to freedom. As the tense negotiations between Moses, God, and Pharaoh reach their climax, the biblical winter reaches its darkest nights. God's final plagues for the Egyptians are overwhelming forces of physical and spiritual darkness. After a plague of all-encompassing night, Moses prepares the Israelites for an impending wave of final-plague death. Facing the raw vulnerability of wintry death, the Israelites are aided once again by a plant-character that sees to their

⁸³ Ex. 7:3

survival. In Ex. 12: 21-23⁸⁴ Moses assembles the elders of the Israelite community and instructs them:

...Draw out and take yourselves sheep according to your clans and slaughter the Passover-offering	(כא) [ויקרא משה לכל־זקני ישראל ויאמר אליהם] משכו וקחו לכם צאן למשפחתכם ושחטו הפסח
And you shall take a bundle of hyssop and you shall dip it in the blood that is in the basin and you shall touch ⁸⁵ the blood that is in the basin to the lintel and to the two door posts, and as for you, none of you shall go out from the entrance of your house until morning	(כב) ולקחתם אגדת אזוב וטבלתם בדם ⁸⁶ אשר־בסף והגעתם אל־המשקוף ואל־שתי המזוזות מן־הדם אשר בסף ואתם לא תצאו איש מפתח־ביתו עד־בקר:
And יהוה will cross through to scourge Egypt, and God shall see the blood on the lintel and on the two door posts, and יהוה will pass over the entrance, and God shall not allow the Destroyer to come into your house to scourge	(כג) ועבר יהוה לנגף את־מצרים וראה את־הדם על־המשקוף ועל שתי המזוזות ופסח יהוה על־הפֶתַח ולא יתן המִשְׁחִית לָבֹא אֶל־בְּתֵיכֶם לנגף

Hyssop, an inconspicuous bushy plant in the mint family related to modern day oregano, is the plant-character whose first role in the biblical narrative serves to save the children of Israel. In exchange for dipping its branches in the blood (דם) of an animal, God holds death itself back from visiting the Israelite homes. Like Noah before them, the Israelites receive clear instructions about how to survive a force of Divinely wrought destruction from the Divine One Himself that hinges on bringing plants and people together. Like Noah the Israelites are told by God to “take” (לקח) a named-plant character and use it for survival. Like Noah, the Israelites are told to get inside and trust that their plant-partnership and Divine promises are enough to keep them safe,

⁸⁴ Ex. 12: 21-23, Fox, *The Five Books*, p.262, personally adapted to remove male pronouns for יהוה

⁸⁵ Lit. touch; again physical intimacy between plant and דם(א)

⁸⁶ The phonetic link between “אדם” and “בדם” throughout this instruction brings the creation of life in early Genesis to the reader’s mind as God/Moses prepare the Israelites to survive a wave of death

and like Noah they are saved. On the darkest night of the year, the Israelites are spared by God's command and Hyssop's hand.

Later in the biblical text, Hyssop plays a critical role in purification rituals for Israelite bodies, homes, and souls. Like so many of the biblical characters who become linked by blood, marriage, or rhetorical foil, Hyssop acquires a helpmate during its biblical journey, partnering with Cedar and birthing potent physical and spiritual purification into the textual universe. It is through these two plants that God allows/instructs the Israelites to emerge from the extreme liminality experienced in an individual body as a result of *Teima* (impurity) and *metzora/tzaraat* (leper/leprosy).⁸⁷ In Numbers, God once again employs the Hyssop-Cedar pair to instruct the Israelites about re-purifying themselves after coming into contact with a dead body.⁸⁸ In Psalms 51:9, the text's speaker begs God to, "Purge me with hyssop till I am pure; wash me till I am whiter than snow,"⁸⁹ just before making the now well-known request for God to "open my lips that my mouth may tell Your praise."⁹⁰ The process of returning to one's true state of personhood and by extension one's truest relationship with the Divine necessarily involves honoring humankind's long standing relationships to planthood. Only through coming into contact with specific, named plant characters can the Israelite person transform their liminality into reconciliation and restoration.

Surrounded by darkness and perched on the eve of their liberation, Hyssop's first appearance in Exodus 12 establishes the plant as a powerful ally for surviving dangerous liminality. On the precipice of deathly plague, God's destructive force is held at bay by braiding together the very

⁸⁷ Lev. 14: 2-6

⁸⁸ Num. 19: 2-3;6;18

⁸⁹ Ps. 51:9, Alter, *The Five Books*, p.133

⁹⁰ Ps. 51:17, Alter, *The Five Books*, p. 134

resources God gifted to the First People in order to spare the Israelites from destruction. The Israelites are to dip Hyssop into the blood of an animal of the land,⁹¹ and paint their doorposts with the resulting blend of plant and blood. By bringing together botanical paintbrush and animal blood, the Israelites symbolically offer homage to the hierarchies of God's first summer garden, where אדם lived with authority and care for the flesh and flora of the world in tandem. Through this carefully orchestrated enactment of God's first earthly ecosystem, the Israelites survive God's deadly plague and turn towards the liberation that lies ahead. This dark moment of liminal, life-or-death narrative is transformed through yet another collaboration of plants, people, and Divine Presence.

Surviving this surge of Divine destruction ultimately thrusts the Israelites into their greatest journey yet- their journey to freedom, to Sinai, and to the Promised Land. However, before even completing the Israelite escape narrative, the text pauses to establish Passover and its rituals as eternal observances for the Children of Israel. Ex. 12:40-42⁹² read,

And the settlement of the Children of Israel which they had settled in Egypt was thirty years and four hundred years	וּמוֹשֵׁב בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר יָשְׁבוּ בְּמִצְרַיִם שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וְאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה:
It was at the end of thirty years and four hundred years, it was on that same day: All of יהוה's forces went out from the land of Egypt	וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וְאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיְהִי בְּעֶצֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יֵצְאוּ כָּל־עֲבָדֹת יְהוָה מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:
It is a night of keeping-watch for יהוה To bring them out of the land of Egypt; That is this night for יהוה, A keeping-watch of all the Children of Israel, throughout their generations.	לֵיל שְׁמֵרִים הוּא לַיהוָה לְהוֹצִיאָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם הוּא־הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה לַיהוָה שְׁמֵרִים לְכָל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְדֹרֹתָם: {פ}

⁹¹ The lamb described in Ex. 12:21 would fall under the category of an "animal of the land" described in Gen. 1:30

⁹²Ex. 12: 40-42, Fox, *The Five Books*, p. 323

In consecrating the liberation of the Israelites in a yearly ritual, the text commemorates what we now call Passover as a “night of keeping-watch” (לַיַּל שְׁמֹרִים). The term used for “keeping watch” in the verses above is the same term used by God in Eden when assigning humanity its task as guardians of the land.⁹³ Embodying the enduring ecosystem of reciprocity between them all, God takes on the task first assigned to humankind’s garden ancestors, serving as the watchguard for the Children of Israel on their darkest night of winter. The Israelites survive, and Moses institutes a yearly memorialization of this moment with a special recognition of God’s lifesaving watchguard. From the bristles of Hyssop’s bushy leaves to embodied garden roles, the Israelite Exodus from Egypt happens as the result of a group project between plants, people, and God. Though their paths to spring will be long and winding, the rest of the biblical winter only further affirms the interdependent ecosystems that exist between them all.

Anointing a Plant Powered Priestly System

The period that follows for the Israelites requires patience, as the Israelites’ growth in the wilderness takes place slowly over the course of a long winter. Freed from the clutches of slavery and forced labor, the Israelites begin their journey towards the Promised Land. Their time in the wilderness will ultimately serve to reorganize them as a people with priestly systems and Divine purpose. As they prepare for future seasons of life in the Land, the Israelites learn to live as a collective like never before. In establishing systems for leadership, organization, protection, and care, the Israelites find new ways to connect with plants and P/place alike. Over the course of their 40 years of wandering, the Israelites move from a state of raw freedom into a realm of

⁹³ Gen 2:15: וַיִּקַּח יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם וַיִּנְתְּהוּ בְּגֶן־עֵדֶן לְעֹבְדָהּ וּלְשִׁמְרָהּ:

God settled the Human in the garden of Eden, to work it and guard it.; That the text of Ex. 12:40-42 also includes references to “day” and “night” only reinforces this Genesis connection.

spiritual and communal interdependence. As if following suit, their plant-partners also enter a new stage of refinement. Instead of acting as single agents, the plant characters accompanying the Israelites in their transformation towards peoplehood also tap into a sense of collective identity. Through oil infusions, incense spice blends, and plant-partnerships, the plant characters of the biblical narrative enter a new stage of complexity and cooperation alongside the Children of Israel following the Exodus from Egypt.

As the Israelites transverse the wilderness, their relationship to P/place is tested again and again as they balance the ongoing uncertainty of winter with new rules for organizing their lives as a collective serving God. After reverting to Egyptian worship practices as they awaited Moses to return to them from Sinai, God commands the Israelites to construct a portable Tabernacle dwelling where people and P/place can interface with one another more directly. Along with this dwelling, God initiates a priestly system of ritual servants and sacrificial offerings to perform on behalf of the Israelites as a system for spiritual communication. As part of the installation of both the Tabernacle and the Priestly family, God instructs Moses to craft an anointing oil to consecrate sacred bodies and sacred space. Ex. 30:22-26; 31⁹⁴ read:

And יהוה said to Moses, saying,	וַיֹּדְבַר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:
“And you, take your choice spices: five hundred weight wild myrrh , and aromatic cinnamon , half of that, two hundred fifty	וְאַתָּה קַח־לְךָ בְּשָׂמִים רֹאשׁ מִן־דְּרֹר חֲמֵשׁ מֵאוֹת וְקִנְמֹן־בָּשֵׂם מִחֲצִיתוֹ חֲמֵשִׁים וּמֵאֲתָיִם וּקְנֵה־בָשֵׂם חֲמֵשִׁים וּמֵאֲתָיִם:

⁹⁴ Alter, *The Five Books*, p. 335

weight, and aromatic cane-bosm ⁹⁵ , two hundred gift weight	
And cassia ⁹⁶ , five hundred weight by the shekel of the sanctuary, and olive oil , a <i>hin</i>	וְקִנְיָה חֲמִשָּׁה מֵאוֹת בְּשֶׁקֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ וְשֶׁמֶן זַיִת הָיָה:
And you shall make of it oil for sacred anointing , a perfumer's compound, perfumer's work, sacred anointing oil it shall be.	וַעֲשִׂיתָ אֹתוֹ שֶׁמֶן מִשְׁחַת־קֹדֶשׁ רִקְחָה מִרְקָחַת מַעֲשֵׂה רִקְחָה שֶׁמֶן מִשְׁחַת־קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה:
And you shall anoint with it the Tent of Meeting and its furnishings and the Ark ⁹⁷ of the covenant	וּמִשְׁחָתָהּ בּוֹ אֶת־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְאֶת אֲרוֹן הָעֵדֻת:
And to the Israelites you shall speak, saying: Oil for sacred anointing , this shall be to me for your generations	וְאֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל תְּדַבֵּר לֵאמֹר שֶׁמֶן מִשְׁחַת־קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה זֶה לִּי לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם:

Moses is instructed to place this sacred oil on the Tent of Meeting, the Ark of the Covenant, the altars, tables, and lamps used for ritual offerings, as well as Aaron and all of his sons in an act of holy appointment. Olive, once a hope-bearing sign for Noah of life renewed, now becomes a sacred substrate for Divine designation. Through this anointing formula, people work in relationship with other people, plants work in relationship with other plants, and together they all become sacred and separate in their roles for serving the Divine relationship. The circulation of spices in this sacred space allows for a circulation of Divine energy within the consecrated sanctuary, its instruments, and the priestly body.

⁹⁵ The term "קנה-בשם" appears 5 times in the biblical canon and there are many who argue that "aromatic cane" is a mistranslation of what was meant to be "cannabis" in the original Hebrew. This theory has been further supported by archaeological discoveries in recent years which identified cannabis resin along with frankincense on ancient Israelite altars. There are several sources for this listed in the works cited/referenced page at the end of this project, including "Cannabis, Moses, and the Israelites" by Edward T. Dodge as well as pieces published by Haaretz and Science Daily

⁹⁶ Cassia (*Cinnamomum aromaticum*) is a fragrant spice made from the inside of the bark of an evergreen tree; another type of cinnamon

⁹⁷ The term used for "Ark" in this verse is ארון, which is the same word used to describe the coffin where Joseph's embalmed body and bones are placed. The "Ark" used by Noah is a different term in the Hebrew

Just a few verses later, another slew of spices enters the lexicon in Ex. 30:34-5:⁹⁸

And יהוה said to Moses, “Take you the spices balsam and onycha and galbanum , spices and clear frankincense , equal part for part it shall be	וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה קַח־לָךְ סַמִּים נָטָח וְשִׁחֲלִית וְחִלְבָּנָה סַמִּים וְחִלְבָּנָה זָכָה בֶּד בְּבֶד יִהְיֶה:
And you shall make of it incense , a perfume compound, perfumer’s work, tinctured with salt, pure and sacred	וַעֲשִׂיתָ אֹתָהּ קְטֹרֶת רֶקֶח מַעֲשֵׂה רֹקֶחַת מִמֶּלֶח טָהוֹר קֹדֶשׁ:
And you shall pound it to fine powder and place some of it before the Ark of the Covenant in the Tent of Meeting where I shall meet you.	וְשָׂחַקְתָּ מִמֶּנָּה הִדֹּק וְנִתְּתָה מִמֶּנָּה לִפְנֵי הָעֵדוּת בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹעֵד לָךְ שָׁמָּה קֹדֶשׁ קֹדָשִׁים תִּהְיֶה לָכֶם:

Like the mixed multitudes of the burgeoning Israelite nation, new entities are formed through the synthesis of multiple plant-characters working together. Plant-character co-ops like the sacred incense blend (קטרת) and the sacred anointing oil (שמן משחת־קדש) soothe the senses of both the Israelites and Divine and ease them into a new era in the post-Eden world. These spice blends become the sensory entry point through which the Israelites identify spaces for Divine encounter, including their own bodies. Anointing the priestly system pairs plants and people together and allows the Israelites to meet with the Place that dwells among them as a result. Through strong smells, warming resins, and sacred oils, the Israelites are given the plant-tools through which they can connect with God as individuals and as a collective.

Frankincense, Myrrh, and Cinnamon have all been studied extensively for their somatic and psychological influences in ancient and contemporary contexts alike. The smoke produced by Frankincense has a specifically psychoactive effect, with studies noting elevated moods and

⁹⁸ Gen. 30:22-26; 31, Alter, *The Five Books*, p. 336 personally adapted- Alter rendered סמים as “fragrances” in his translation but I have chosen to keep the translation as spices for consistency and clarity

expanded consciousness as potential side effects for those in close proximity.^{99,100} In addition to their common use in ancient embalming ceremonies, Myrrh and Cinnamon carry strong scents, and have known antibacterial and mildly psychoactive properties as well.^{101,102} Even this cursory overview of the properties of these spices illuminates why it was these herbs that the biblical authors employed as God's method for awakening and purifying spiritual bodies and sacred spaces. With somatic and spiritual effects well documented in today's scientific world, the oil-substrate used for biblical holy anointing purposes potently affirmed the intimate connections between plants, people, and Divine Presence once again. The priests breathing in the sacred incense and oil compounds that they were commanded to tend as part of their priestly duties would likely have experienced spiritual and psychological elevation just due to their proximity to the powerful herbs around them. That the sacred, scented concoction is a blend of processed, stored herbs the Israelites carried with them from Egypt rather than fresh herbs recently plucked tracks well with the garden realities of late winter. Through careful stores from harvests past, the plant-person connection remains for the Israelites even in the depths of winter wilderness, sustaining their spirituality and shaping their burgeoning religious rituals.

⁹⁹ Boswellia, the tree from which Frankincense resin is produced, has been studied for its medicinal efficacy for ailments ranging from digestion to depression and even cancer (Kahn, Akhtar J. *Medicinal Properties of Frankincense*. International Journal of Nutrition, Pharmacology, and Neurological Disease [Serial Online] 2012, 2012, <https://www.ijnrnd.com/text.asp?2012/2/2/79/95925>)

¹⁰⁰ A joint study exploring the psychoactive effects of the Boswellia plant released by Johns Hopkins and Hebrew University in 2008 lauded the potential for an entirely new class of antidepressants and anti-anxiety medications made from Frankincense: (Moussaieff, Arie et al. "Incense acetate, an incense component, elicits psychoactivity by activating TRPV3 channels in the brain." *FASEB journal : official publication of the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology* vol. 22,8 (2008): 3024-34. doi:10.1096/fj.07-101865)

¹⁰¹ Nemu, Danny. "Getting high with the most high: Entheogens in the Old Testament". *Journal of Psychedelic Studies* 3.2 (2019), p. 120

¹⁰² <https://unitproj.library.ucla.edu/biomed/spice/index.cfm?displayID=5>
https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/myrrh-oil#TOC_TITLE_HDR_4
https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/10-proven-benefits-of-cinnamon#TOC_TITLE_HDR_10

In his piece “The Fragrance of Life: Cinnamon in the Bible” author Prabo Mihindukulasuriya writes,

in the cultural context of ancient Israel the sense of smell was regarded as an important medium for perceiving conditions of life: from fullness of life, health and pleasantness on the one hand (eg. SS. 4.11; Hos. 14.7; Jer. 48.11, etc.), to death, disease and decay on the other (Ex.7.18, 21; 8.10; 16.20, 24; Is. 19.6; 34.3, 12; Joel 2.20; Amos 4.10; Ps. 38.6; Eccl. 10.1, etc.). Therefore, the sweet fragrance of spices was an olfactory symbol of God's holiness because it denoted life and health as opposed to the stench of disease and death.¹⁰³

From the Tree of Life in Eden come the scents of life in the wilderness. The plant-characters in these verses symbolize the thin line between life and death when it comes to Divine encounter, but they also highlight how intimate the connection is between them all. In their intertextual and cultural contexts, biblical fragrances born out of spice plant-characters serve to enliven and enrich the experiences for Place and people together. Spiritual circulation increases as the Israelite ecosystem begins to comprehend the extent of their interdependence on the plants, and people that surround them and the God that guides them.

Even a cursory read of these verses and the larger priestly system with a plant-hermeneutic offers a whole world of cultural and somatic context. Robert Alter notes that like the spices that appeared in the Joseph story, the presence of ritual spices in the wilderness points towards broader cultural connectivity in Egypt and beyond.^{104,105} Frankincense, Cinnamon, and Myrrh, sourced largely from the Arabian peninsula, were highly valued within the spice trade and would have been well known to an ancient biblical audience. Even in the Tent of Meeting, God's most exclusive dwelling space since the days of Eden, plant-characters ignite extensive networks of

¹⁰³ Mihindukulasuriya, Prabo. “The Fragrance of Life: Cinnamon in the Bible.” Academia.edu. 2012, p. 3

¹⁰⁴ In his commentary on Ex. 30: 23-4, Alter writes, “cinnamon was originally raised in Ceylon and elsewhere in South Asia, and the word appears to have arrived in ancient Israel with the luxury import from wherever the plant was grown” Alter, *The Five Books*, p. 335

¹⁰⁵ Alter, *The Five Books*, p. 335

cultural, spiritual, and physical connectivity between peoples. Mihindukulasuriya suggests that these plant details offer, “a vivid glimpse of a Creator who delights in the natural treasures of his own good creation, distributed throughout diverse ecological niches¹⁰⁶”

Longing & Lament (Leeks, Onions, Garlic)

40 years of winter wandering does not unfold without its storms. As the Israelites travel with one another through stretch after stretch of desert landscape, they complain openly to one another and to their leaders about the unending winter around them. Like the harsh world of winter, the landscape that surrounds the Israelites following their liberation is one of scarcity. Water is hard to come by and the first store of it they encounter is bitter and undrinkable.¹⁰⁷ Food-stores are quickly depleted, and the Israelites voice their worried despair to Moses. Stuck wandering through a wintry garden plot, the Israelites worry that they will die in the wilderness and cope by romanticizing seasons past in Egypt, where life was hard but consistent and familiar. Ever the Gardener, God sets up systems to irrigate and sustain the Israelite community through winter in the wilderness. God gives Moses the ability to turn bitter waters drinkable¹⁰⁸ and, according to rabbinic tradition, grants the community well stores of water wherever they travel on account of Miriam’s merit.¹⁰⁹ Noteworthy for the our ongoing trace of Edenic elements in the text is that

¹⁰⁶ Mihindukulasuriya p. 3

¹⁰⁷ Ex. 16:1-3

¹⁰⁸ Ex. 15:23-25: וַיִּצְעַק אֶל-יְהוָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶל-הַמַּיִם וַיִּמְתְּקוּ הַמַּיִם שָׁם שָׁם לֹא חָק וַיִּמְשָׁפֵט וְשָׁם נִסָּהוּ:

He cried out to YHWH,

and YHWH directed him [to some] wood;

he threw [it] into the water, and the water became sweet.—

There he imposed law and judgment for them, and there he tested them:

Noteworthy that it is wood (עץ) that Moses is instructed to throw into the bitter water to make it drinkable—another example of wood serving as a tree of life.

¹⁰⁹ Num. 20:1-2 and Rashi on Num. 20:2:1: “Rashi on Numbers 20:2:1

had no water: From here [we learn that] all forty years they had the well in Miriam’s merit.” (accessed via sefaria); Taanit 9a:9 “R. Jose the son of R. Judah says: Three good leaders had arisen for Israel, namely, Moses, Aaron and Miriam, and for their sake three good things were conferred [upon Israel], namely, the

water first becomes accessible for the Israelites in the desert when God instructs Moses to cast a piece of wood (עץ) into the bitter waters of *Marah*.¹¹⁰ Even in the winter wilderness, wood remains linked to its original Tree of Life ancestor and carries a life-giving legacy as a result. For food, God provides the Israelites with daily *manna*, a food-substance that rains down from the sky six days a week for the Israelites to collect and cook into each day's meals.¹¹¹ Traveling before the Israelites as a guiding cloud,¹¹² God acts as a winter greenhouse for the Israelites as they move through the wilderness, ensuring that they remain nourished and well watered throughout the long trek through the wilderness. Perhaps not since the days of God walking amidst Eden freely has the Divine One dwelled so intimately among Her creations.¹¹³ God becomes the storehouse of carefully rationed supplies that allows for the Israelites to survive a desert winter.

Despite all this supernatural aid, the Israelites grow weary of winter and lament the monotony of their wintry desert existence.¹¹⁴ Even after such highs as receiving the Torah at Sinai and having the Divine Presence dwell among them in their constructed Tabernacle, the Israelites continue to express their concerns that they will not survive the wilderness. In one such scene, the Israelites, sick of their daily *Manna* rations, long for fresh food of the earth and locate this resource in

memories of the soil they've left behind in Egypt. In Num. 11:4-6¹¹⁵ the Israelites complain:

Well, the Pillar of Cloud and the Manna; the Well, for the merit of Miriam; the Pillar of Cloud for the merit of Aaron; the Manna for the merit of Moses. When Miriam died the well disappeared, as it is said, And Miriam died there, and immediately follows [the verse], And there was no water for the congregation....” (accessed via sefaria)

¹¹⁰ Ex. 15:23-25

¹¹¹ Ex. 16:4-5

¹¹² Ex. 13: 21-22

¹¹³ In Gen. 3:8 God “walks within the garden” (אֱלֹהִים מְתִלֵּךְ בְּגֶן), and in Ex. 33:17 Moses begs God to “walk among us” (הֲלוֹא בְלִצְתְּךָ עִמָּנוּ), and God agrees.

¹¹⁴ Num. 11:1; Num. 11:4-6; Num. 14:1-4; Num. 17:6

¹¹⁵ Num. 11:4-6, Alter, *The Five Books*, p.514

And the riffraff that was in their midst felt a sharp craving, and the Israelites, too, again wept and said, "Who will feed us meat?"	(ד) וְהָאֲסִפְסָף אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבּוֹ הָתֵאוֹת תֹּאגֶה וַיִּשְׁבּוּ וַיִּכְפּוּ גַם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמְרוּ מִי יַאֲכִלֵנוּ בָּשָׂר:
We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for free, the cucumber and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic.	(ה) וְזָכְרֵנוּ אֶת־הַדָּגָה אֲשֶׁר־נֹאכַל בְּמִצְרַיִם הֵנָּה אֶת־הַקִּשְׁאִים וְאֶת־הָאֲבִטְחִים וְאֶת־הַתְּצִיר וְאֶת־הַבְּצִלִּים וְאֶת־הַשּׁוּמִים:
And now our throats are dry. There is nothing save the Manna before our eyes	(ו) וְעַתָּה נִפְשָׁנוּ יְבֹשָׁה אֵין כֹּל בְּלִתִּי אֶל־הַמָּן עֵינֵינוּ:

In his article "Historical Perspective on the Use of Garlic," Richard Rivlin notes that Garlic was well documented for its use throughout ancient cultures and in ancient Egypt in particular. Rivlin writes,

...the earliest known references indicate that garlic formed part of the daily diet of many Egyptians. It was fed particularly to the working class involved in heavy labor, as in the building of the pyramids (Moyers 1996). Indeed, a recurring theme throughout early history is that garlic was given to the laboring classes, presumably to maintain and increase their strength, thereby enabling them to work harder and be more productive...^{116,117}

Perhaps, as strength and spirits waned for the Israelites in their ongoing wandering, they began to long not for the conditions of their life in Egypt but rather the herbal allies that sustained them through hardship in the past. Though garlic only appears in this single biblical context, it becomes a giant of spiritual, medicinal, and relational power in post-biblical Jewish culture,

¹¹⁶ Rivlin, Richard S. "Historical Perspective on the Use of Garlic." *The Journal of Nutrition*, Volume 131, Issue 3, March 2001, p. 952

¹¹⁷ Rivlin notes that garlic cloves were discovered in King Tutankhamen's tomb which dates back to Egypt in 1500 BC. He also notes "cultures that developed without contact with one another came to similar conclusions about the efficacy of garlic...Ancient medical texts from Egypt, Greece, Rome, China and India each prescribed medical applications for garlic. In many cultures, garlic was administered to provide strength and increase work capacity for laborers... Modern science is tending to confirm many of the beliefs of ancient cultures regarding garlic, defining mechanisms of action and exploring garlic's potential for disease prevention and treatment" (Rivlin 952)

featured in rabbinic texts and diasporic folk culture throughout generations of Jewish life.¹¹⁸

That it is Garlic and its allium cousins Leek and Onion that the Israelites long for in their vulnerable winter state offers insight to the cultural connotations of these herbs in their ancient context and initiates a centuries-long plant-person partnership in Jewish tradition. Like garlic, whose bulbs are tucked beneath the soil before fall's first freeze and flourish only after enduring a winter of slow, steady growth, the Israelites undergo a period of immersive, extended transformation as the winter goes on.

True to the natural tides of the seasonal world, there is not one specific day that marks the biblical narrative's garden transition from winter to spring. The change happens slowly, with some blooms springing up early as heralds of spring yet to come and other days full of still more wintry sludge. Though the Israelites receive the *matan Torah*, the gift of Torah, in Exodus 19, they will continue to wander in the wilderness for the remaining three books of the Torah's narrative. It is not until after Moses' death that the Israelites cross into the Promised Land, and even then one could argue that the war-filled conquests of the Israelite army in the early books of the Prophets are a far cry from spring-like rebirth. Still, the books of the prophets are full of plant language. Figs, grapevines, trees, pomegranates, palms, apples and more all sprout back into the biblical lexicon as the Israelites wage war for and ultimately settle into life in the promised land. Invoked as signs of divine favor and in warning against widespread societal sin, the proliferation of plant characters that reappear in the post-Torah books of Tanakh point toward spring dawning in the biblical narrative after Deuteronomy's close.

¹¹⁸ An entire Thesis could be written about the relationship between Jews and Garlic throughout history, and large volumes of research on this topic exist already. Though it exists behind a paywall, Jordan Rosenblum's "A Brief History of Jews and Garlic" in *Feasting and Fasting* is a comprehensive starting point.

In his final words to the Israelites, Moses states:¹¹⁹

33:27a A refuge, the God of old, from beneath, the *arms everlasting...	מַעֲנֶה אֱלֹהֵי קֹדֶם וּמִתְחַת *זְרֻעֹת עוֹלָם
33:28 And Israel dwelled securely, untroubled Jacob's abode/in a land of grain and wine, its heavens, too, drop dew	וַיִּשְׁכֵּן יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּטָח בְּדֹד עֵין יַעֲקֹב אֶל-אֶרֶץ דָּגָן וְתִירוֹשׁ אֶרֶץ-שָׁמַיִם יַעֲרֹפוּ טָל:
33:29a: Happy are you, Israel, who is like you? A people rescued by the Lord, your shield of help...	אַשְׁרֵיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל מִי כָמוֹךָ עַם נוֹשָׁע בַּיהוָה *מִגֵּן עֲזָרָךְ

The last image that Moses imparts to his people is one of settled tranquility and abundance last known to the dwellers of Eden. In this formulation, God is not a remote Divine figure of the heavens but rather a being who supports Israel “from beneath” (מִתְחַת) with outstretched arms. At two different points in these verses, Moses utilizes phonetic wordplay to subtly nod towards the image of a restored garden life. First, in Deut. 33.27a, the phrase “arms eternal” (זְרֻעֹת עוֹלָם) evokes the root ז-ר-ע (seed) within Moses’ final offering to the Israelites. The phonetic link colors the image of “eternal arms outstretched” as a subterranean-seeded mycelial network of Divine support, nourishment, and connection. Through Eden’s first *seeds* still everlasting, Moses reminds the Israelites of their eternal ecosystems and interdependence. Rounding out his last words to the Israelites, Moses reminds the Israelites that they were “rescued by יהוה, your shield of help” (עַם נוֹשָׁע בַּיהוָה מִגֵּן עֲזָרָךְ).¹²⁰ Read without the vocalizations added post-canonization by the Masoretic tradition¹²¹, the phrase translated as “shield of help” reads simply, “מגן עזרך”.

Applying a garden-centric plant-hermeneutic, one might choose to read this phrase not as *magen*

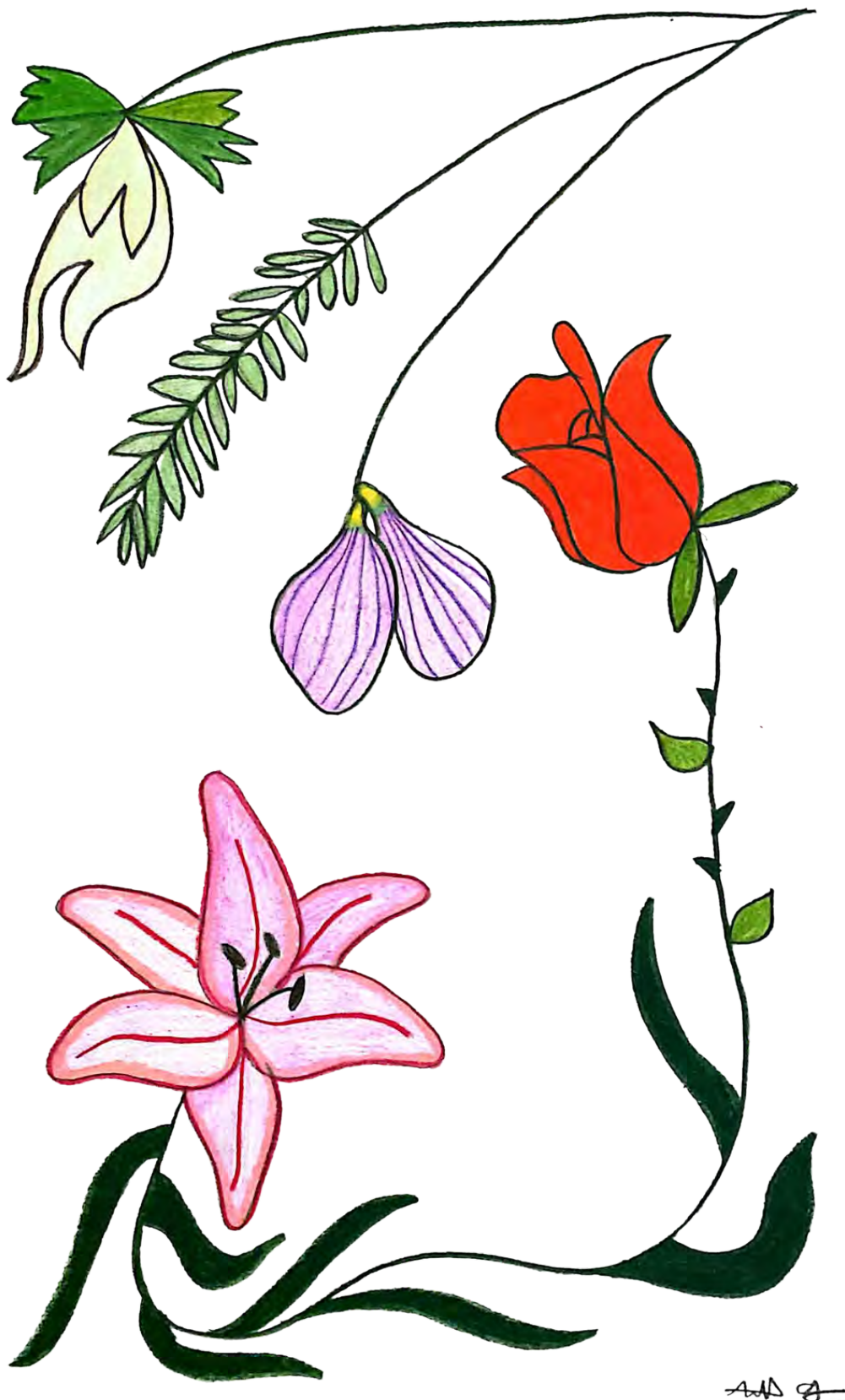
¹¹⁹ Deut. 33:27a-29, Alter, *The Five Books*, p. 741

¹²⁰ Deut. 33:29a, Alter, *The Five Books*, p.741

¹²¹ For context: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Masoretic-text>

(shield) *ezrekha*, but rather as *mi-gan ezrekha*, *from the garden* of your help. What does it do to our interpretation of Moses' last message if instead of lifting up God's military might Moses affirms our interdependence to all of creation with his last breaths? Though certainly not the conventional *pshat* reading of the text, the nuanced linguistic play in these final verses of the five books of Moses gives pause for a reader employing a plant-hermeneutic. As winter comes to an end, Moses sets the Israelites up for the forthcoming spring by invoking the memory of God's abundant garden in their ancestors' summers past.

Part IV (Spring):



AND 8

Resetting the Garden Stage:

No where in the biblical canon does spring flourish as it does in the colorful text of Song of Songs. Though the poem stands on its own as a textual unit concerned primarily with its internal characters, the lexicon of botanical vocabulary employed throughout its verses reveals a broader conversation between Song of Songs and the rest of the biblical anthology. In Songs' poetic expressions of ecstasy and delight, Myrrh, Frankincense, Figs, Cedars, Spices, Pomegranates, and an array of flora work together to drive and describe the intimacy shared by the text's two lovers. The text of Song of Songs dances between the literal and metaphorical, crafting an ambiguity between bodies and botany in the process. As a result, the narrative forges a textual reunification between אדם and אדמה, whereby the two become blurred and embodied within one another through the lovers' intimate delight. Through intimacy and interpersonal connection, plants and people come together and invite the reader into a garden space of paradise and pleasure. In Song of Song's springtime garden of ecstasy, Eden is reenacted and re-membered.

In his article "The Song of Songs and the Garden of Eden," Francis Landy identifies several instances in which, "the garden functions as a setting and a fully-worked image."¹²² Landy notes that the text of Songs is "polysemantic," highlighting the extent to which the language employed throughout the poetic verses carries intertextual resonance along with multifaceted meaning as the speakers dance between metaphor and demure desire. In the latter half of Songs 4, for example, "the garden" is used to describe the beloved's body as well as the meeting place for their encounter. The text reads:

¹²² Landy, Francis. "The Song of Songs and the Garden of Eden." *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 98, no. 4, 1979, p. 517

4:12	A locked garden, my sister, bride, a locked well a sealed spring	גן נעול אחתי כלה גל נעול מעין קתום:
4:13	Your branches, an orchard of pomegranates with luscious fruit, henna and spikenard	שלחית פרדס רמונים עם פרי מגדים כפרים עם נרדים:
4:14	Spikenard and saffron, canna ¹²³ and cinnamon, with every tree of frankincense. Myrrh and aloes with every choice spice/perfume ^{124*}	גרד וכרפם מנה וקנמון עם כל-עצי לבונה מר ואהליות עם כל-ראשי בשמים:
4:15	A garden spring, a garden of living water and streams from Lebanon	מעין גנים באר מים חיים ונזלים מזל-קנז:
4:16	Arise, O north, and come, O south, blow on my garden, let its spices flow. Let my lover come to his garden and eat its luscious fruit	עורי צפון ובואי תימן הפיחי גני יזלוי בשמי יבא דודי לגנו ויאכל פרי מגדיו:
5:1a	I have come to my garden, my sister, bride, I have gathered my myrrh with my spices*...	באתי לגני אחתי כלה אריתי מורי עם-בשמי

The speakers' longing and desire are palpable. In 4:16, the female lover pines for her lover to eat the fruits of her garden, blurring the lines between her body and nature's bounty. Fruit, with all its early Genesis connotations and consequences, appears in the text now as a symbol of sexual and spiritual abundance. While the first biblical couple was exiled from Eden for sharing fruit with one another, here the two lovers delight in the fruits of each other's bodies as well as the

¹²³ Noted above in footnote 91 but repeated here: Like many of the spices in the bible, it is impossible to know the exact species meant by the term "canna." That said, there are many who make convincing arguments that the קנה (canna) mentioned here and elsewhere in the biblical text (such as ex. 30:23 where it is called canna-bosm [קנה-בשם]) is the plant "cannabis," renowned throughout the ancient and contemporary world for its extensive medicinal and psychoactive properties. Evidence of cannabis resin has been discovered in the ancient Jewish worship site of Tel Arad, supporting this claim further. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/cannabis-found-altar-ancient-israeli-shrine-180975016/#:~:text=Roughly%2035%20miles%20south%20of,reports%20Kristen%20Rogers%20of%20CNN,;https://www.edwardtdodge.com/2016/11/14/cannabis-moses-and-the-israelites/>

¹²⁴ Noted above in footnote 94 but repeated here: Personal adaptation of Alter's translation. I inserted "spices" (בסמים) rather than use his term "perfumes" to highlight the spice-presence tracked throughout the earlier biblical texts, beginning with Joseph's brothers and the Ishmaelite merchants

fruits from the lush landscape that surrounds them.

On these verses Landy writes,

The identification of the Beloved with a locked garden (4:12) provides us with our first equivalence: that of the garden and Woman, of whom the Beloved is the idealized representative. Like the garden, the woman is a source of delights, olfactory and delicious seductions... People are themselves paradigms of the garden, products of a cultural process, manifesting itself, above all, in the sense of oneself, as distinct from all others. She is enclosed in her person, protected by the defenses that preserve her identity, her unique privacy. At the same time, as a “sealed spring” (4:12) “...a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters” (4:15), she is a spring distinct from the garden, that is created, that flourishes. The garden (the body, the personality) becomes, as we know through psychoanalysis, an object, inhabited, animated, tended by us, its informing spirit¹²⁵

The spices once used to anoint bodies and buildings designated for sacred service are repurposed to enhance and describe the intimacy between lovers. The natural garden world in Song of Songs becomes its own Tent of Meeting for the texts’ lovers. Eden is rebuilt in the bodies of the lovers and in the blooming world where their love for one another flourishes. In her article, “The Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation,” Phyllis Trible also notes that “person and place blend” in the text of Song of Songs. There is so much botanical language in Song of Songs that the reader cannot help but find themselves planted in a lush garden of reunification beside the two lovers. In fact, Trible wonders if “perhaps the Paradise described in Genesis 2 and destroyed in Genesis 3 has been regained, expanded, and improved upon in the Song of Songs.”¹²⁶ There is notably no mention of God throughout the lovers’ poem, perhaps signaling that people and plants are perfectly in sync with Place in this new garden. Spring blooms in God’s garden and Her creatures run to one another in delight. With hearts full of hope and hands full of fruits, people, plants, and Place dwell joyfully together in a garden world renewed.

¹²⁵ Landy, “Songs and Eden,” p. 519-20

¹²⁶ Trible, Phyllis. “Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 41, no. 1, 1973 p. 42-3

Applying a plant-hermeneutic to Song of Songs reveals a fascinating undercurrent of sexual empowerment in the lovers' recreated Eden. Where the first blessing for humanity was to be fruitful/fruit-like and multiply, here in Songs the two lovers seem more than satisfied in the abundant bounty offered through the bodies of one another. Though the highly sexual nature of the text may seem on the surface to imply procreation as a natural consequence of the lovers' encounters, the plant-characters of these verses signal a different reality. In her article, "Biblical birth control: The surprisingly contraception-friendly Old Testament," Elissa Strauss notes that many of the spices invoked in Songs were actually well-known contraceptives in the ancient world. Strauss writes,

Athalya Brenner points out in her book "The Intercourse of Knowledge: On Gendering Desire and Sexuality in the Hebrew Bible," a number of the plants mentioned in the Song of Songs were used by women in the ancient Mediterranean world as contraception and abortifacients. These include pomegranates, wine, myrrh, spikenard and cinnamon. Brenner goes on to argue that since the book makes no mention of procreation as the purpose of sex, the many metaphors comparing sex to "gardens" and "orchards" may also be read as a reference to the forms of birth control that those gardens provided. Indeed, the man in the poem seduces the woman by offering her many of the plants that would have allowed them to have sex without the risk of pregnancy.¹²⁷

Of the plants that Strauss mentions in this passage, Myrrh seems to be one of the most well-known contraceptives across the ancient world. Many have called attention to the fact that in the book of Esther, the women are anointed with Myrrh oil for a period of twelve months leading up to the beauty pageant for King Ahasuerus. In his article, "As is the Practice of Women, The Practice of Birth Control in the Book of Esther" Rabbi Joseph Prouser notes that if

¹²⁷ Strauss, Elissa. "Biblical Birth Control: The Surprisingly Contraception-Friendly Old Testament." *Salon*, Salon.com, 4 Jan. 2014

the purpose of this textual detail were merely cosmetic, assigning a full year of myrrh dosing to the young women would be largely excessive. Instead, he argues,

Myrrh was a component of many anti-fertility potions in ancient and medieval Western medicine. An ongoing regimen of myrrh mixed with wine (a beverage which notoriously abounds in Ahasuerus' court) was specified when "Soranus, antiquity's foremost writer on gynecology ... described procedures he thought would inhibit conception." In addition to its properties as an oral contraceptive, Soranus specifically discussed the use of myrrh as an abortifacient agent when used as a pessary (a vaginal suppository or ointment). So applied, myrrh functioned as an emmenagogue, inducing menstruation even with the presence of a fertilized ovum...The Kahun papyrus, dating to 1850 B.C.E., describes a male contraceptive cream, of which myrrh appears to be the active ingredient¹²⁸

With this context in mind, the proliferation of Myrrh throughout Songs casts the sensuality between lovers as explicitly for its own sake rather than geared towards a desire to “bear fruit.” Though often employed as both an innuendo and sensory marker, Myrrh travels with the lovers throughout the chapters of Songs, steadily ensuring that their sensuous encounters bear pleasure and not progeny.

1:13	My beloved to me is a bag of myrrh Lodged between my breasts	צָרוּר הַמֵּר דּוּדֵי לֵי בֵין שְׁנֵי יָלָיו:
3:6	Who is she that comes up from the desert Like columns of smoke, In clouds of myrrh and frankincense , Of all the powders of the merchant?	מִי זֹאת עֹלָה מִן־הַמִּדְבָּר כְּתִימָרוֹת עֲשֹׂן מִקְטָרֶת מֵרִיבֹנָה מְכַל אֲבָקֶת רוֹקֵל:
4:6	When the day blows gently And the shadows flee, I will betake me to the mount of myrrh , To the hill of frankincense .	עַד שִׁפְיוֹת הַיּוֹם וְנָסוּ הַצִּלְלִים אֵלַי לִי אֶל־הַר הַמֵּר וְאֶל־גִּבְעַת הַקְּבוּנָה:

¹²⁸Prouser, Joseph H. “As Is the Practice of Women: The Practice of Birth Control in the Book of Esther.” *Conservative Judaism* , vol. 53, no. 2, 2001, p. 52

4:14	Nard and saffron, Fragrant <i>cana</i> ¹²⁹ and cinnamon, With all aromatic woods, Myrrh and aloes— All the best spices ¹³⁰ .	גִּרְדִּי וְכַרְפֹּם קִנְיָה וְקִנְמֹון עִם כָּל־עֵצִי לְבוֹנָה מִר וְאַהֲלֹות עִם כָּל־רֹאשֵׁי בְשָׁמִים:
5:5	I rose to let in my beloved; My hands dripped myrrh— My fingers, flowing myrrh— Upon the handles of the bolt.	קָמָתִי אֲנִי לִפְתֹּחַ לְדֹדִי וַיָּגִי וַטְפוּ־מִר וְאַצְבָּעֵתִי מִר עָבַר עַל כַּפּוֹת הַמַּנְעוּל:
5:13	His cheeks are like beds of spices, Banks of perfume His lips are like lilies; They drip flowing myrrh.	לְחִי כְּפַעֲרוֹנֹת הַבָּשָׂם מִגְדָּלוֹת מְרֻקָּחִים שִׁפְתוֹתָיו שׁוֹשַׁנִּים נְטִפּוֹת מִר עָבַר:

Eden's pre-curse state of non-hierarchical reciprocity is reestablished through the passionate dance between lovers, who seem more than content to reach only for the fruit of one another's bodies. Where the curse that God levied unto the First People promised that procreation would carry pain and patriarchal power dynamics, in Songs' the lovers delight in one another aided by herbal spices that keep them safeguarded against God's Edenic decree. "In many ways, then, Song of Songs is a midrash on Gen. 2-3," Tribble writes, "...female and male are born to mutuality and love. They are naked without shame; they are equal without duplication. They live in gardens where nature joins in celebrating their oneness¹³¹."

The garden setting of Songs brings an Edenic springtime to the forefront of the biblical narrative. Spiritual and physical intimacy are embodied through the lovers' garden, and the resulting

¹²⁹ See footnote 100

¹³⁰ Adapted Alter's translation, personal choice to translate בְּשָׁמִים as "the best spices" instead of "choicest perfumes"

¹³¹ Tribble, "Depatriarchalizing," p. 47

ecosystem stands in perfect harmony with Eden's reciprocity and abundance. After enduring such long, challenging fall and winter seasons, spring blooms in the biblical narrative as a respite of ease for humankind. With no mention of God in these texts, the human characters serve as the chief stewards of the natural world and one another. Now skilled gardeners themselves, the humans of this resprouted garden know how to tend to one another and the natural world around them with reverent delight and care. Eden is reconstructed through an ingathering of people, plants, and P/place

Abundance Embodied

If the exile from Eden was a divorce between people, plants, and Place, Song of Songs renews the bond between them with loving intimacy. With desire and delight, the poem's lovers express their longing for one another through the lexicon of biblical plant-characters, affirming humanity's oldest relationships in the process. The herbs that serve as spiritual and intercultural connectors throughout Tanakh reappear in Song of Songs as the ultimate sensory stimulants.

That these spices and herbs were last associated with priestly rituals and holy spaces makes their mapping onto a woman's body and sexual intimacy all the more significant here. Having traveled from far off lands and over distant seas, spices are long established movers in the biblical text.

In Song of Songs, they move the two lovers closer together and ignite the sensory imagination of the biblical reader. In Song of Songs, plant-characters peak in their service of the biblical narrative.

Spices such as Myrrh, Frankincense, and Cinnamon are not the only biblical plant-characters that enter Song of Songs to heal Eden's legacies of spiritual and physical rupture. In addition to

familiar plant-characters such as Pomegranates, Figs, and Mandrakes, a fragrant array of flowers and fauna also flank the lovers as they find their way back to one another. The two lovers return to a state of reciprocity and abundance through the plants that guide their way and enhance their senses. Tribble writes,

The woman is the garden (4:10-15), and to the garden her lover comes (5:1, 6:2, 11). Together they enjoy this place of sensuous delight. Many trees adorn their garden, trees pleasant to the sight and good for food: the apple tree (2:3; 7:8; 8:5), the fig tree (2:13), the pomegranate (4:3, 13; 6:7), the cedar (5:15), the palm (7:8), and “all trees of frankincense” (4:14). Spices give pleasure as does the abundance of fruits, plants and flowers: the meadow saffron (2:1), the lotus (2:1, 16; 4:5, 5:13; 7:2), the mandrake (7:13), and others (2:12,13; 4:13, 16; 6:11)... In Canticles nature and work are pleasures leading to love, as indeed they were before the primeval couple disobeyed and caused the ground to bring forth thorns and thistles and work to become pain and sweat (Gen 2:15; 3:16, 18,19)¹³²

The pleasure and reciprocity in Song of Songs restores order in God’s garden world by reversing the curses placed upon the primeval couple. Contact with the natural world and with the labor it takes to tend it are restored as acts of pleasure instead of pain. With ecstatic pleasure and interpersonal connection, the lovers delight in their shared fruits and the spice-filled world. Eden’s exile fades to nothing but a memory from summers long past as spring flourishes for the Songs’ lovers in a plant-filled paradise.

In his article “Rethinking Sex and Spirituality: The Song of Songs and its Readings,” David McLain Carr notes that “there is no clear plot or logical sequence” to the Song of Songs’ narrative.¹³³ Where the bible’s summer, fall, and winter gardening seasons progressed linearly through family histories and Divine encounters, the springtime text of Song of Songs is full of

¹³² Tribble, “Depatriarchalizing,” p. 43-44

¹³³ Carr, David McLain. “Rethinking Sex and Spirituality: The Song of Songs and Its Readings.” *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, vol. 81, no. 3/4, 1998, p. 421

wild and abundant life forces unconcerned with narrative coherence. As such, the plant-characters that sprout through the verses of Songs' sow a scattered love story into the confines of a single garden plot. The incoherence of the Songs' plot structure allows for a summary retelling of the entire book just by stitching together the threads of plant-character appearances:

1: 12-14; 16	<p>While the king was on his couch My nard¹³⁴ gave off its scent. A sachet of myrrh is my love to me, All night between my breasts A cluster of Henna, my lover to me, In the vineyards of Ein-Gedi</p> <p>O, you are fair, my lover, you are sweet, Our bed is verdant,¹³⁵ too. Our house's beams are cedar, Our rafters are evergreens.</p>	<p>עַד־שֶׁהִמְלִיךְ בְּמִסְבּוֹ נָרְדִי נָתַן רִיחֹו: צָרוֹר הַמָּוֶר דּוֹדִי לִי בֵּין שְׁדֵי יָלִיו: אֲשָׁפֵל הַכֶּפֶר דּוֹדִי לִי בְכַרְמִי עֵין גִּדִּי: {ס}</p> <p>הַגֵּד יָפֵה דּוֹדִי אֶף נָעִים אֶף־עֶרְשֻׁנו רַעֲנָנָה: קִרּוֹת בְּתֵינּו אַרְזִים (רַחֲיטְנו) [רַהֲיטְנו] בְּרוֹתִים:</p>
2:1-3	<p>(1) I am a rose of Sharon, A lily of the valleys. (2) Like a lily among thorns, So is my darling among the maidens. (3) Like an apple tree among trees of the forest, So is my beloved among the youths. I delight to sit in his shade, And his fruit is sweet to my mouth.</p>	<p>(א) אֲנִי חֲבַצְלֶת הַשָּׂרוֹן שׁוֹשַׁנָּה הַעֲמָקִים: (ב) כְּשׁוֹשַׁנָּה בֵּין הַחוֹתִים כֹּן רַעֲיָתִי בֵּין הַבָּנוֹת: (ג) כְּתַפְּוֹה בַּעֲצֵי הַיַּעַר כֹּן דּוֹדִי בֵּין הַבָּנִים בְּצִלּוֹ חֲמִדְתִּי וַיִּשְׁכַּתִּי וּפִרְיוֹ מְתוֹק לִחְכִּי:</p>
2:16	<p>My beloved is mine And I am his Who browses among the lilies.</p>	<p>דּוֹדִי לִי וְאֲנִי לוֹ הָרָעָה בְּשׁוֹשַׁנִּים:</p>

¹³⁴ Alter, *The Five Books*, p. 590 footnote 12: "This is an appropriately sexy beginning to this richly sensual poem: the lover is lying in bed waiting for her, and as she approaches, she is aware of the fragrance with which she has scented her body. In the next line, it is the lover who metaphorically becomes the fragrance. **Nard, or spikenard, was imported to the ancient Near East all the way from the Himalayas, where the plant was grown, so it is clearly a luxury item**"

¹³⁵ Alter, *The Five Books*, p. 590, footnote 16: "She probably means to say that the bed on which they will enjoy love's pleasures is a forest floor, but she could be saying an actual bed inside on which they lie partakes of the verdancy of the flourishing realm of nature outside. The ambiguity continues with the cedar beams and evergreen rafters of the next line, which are either literal, because they are making love in the forest, or metaphorical, because their house is redolent of the green world outside"

4:13	Your limbs are an orchard of pomegranates And of all luscious fruits, Of henna and of nard—	שְׁלֵחֶיךָ פְּרִדָּס רְמוֹנִים עִם פְּרֵי מִגְדִּים כַּפְּרִים עִם־נֶרְדִּים:
5:13	His cheeks are like beds of spices, Banks of ^s perfume His lips are like lilies; They drip flowing myrrh.	לְחִיָּו כַּעֲרוֹגַת הַבָּשָׂם מִגְדְּלוֹת מְרֻקָּחִים שִׁפְתוֹתָיו שׁוֹשַׁנִּים נֹטְפוֹת מִזֶּר עֵבֶר:
6:2-3	(2) My beloved has gone down to his garden, To the beds of spices, To browse in the gardens And to pick lilies. (3) I am my beloved's And my beloved is mine; He browses among the lilies.	(ב) דּוֹדִי יָרַד לְגַנוֹ לְעֲרֹגֹת הַבָּשָׂם לְרֻעוֹת בְּגָנִים וּלְקֹט שׁוֹשַׁנִּים: (ג) אֲנִי לְדוֹדִי וְדוֹדִי לִי הִרְעָה בְּשׁוֹשַׁנִּים: {ס}
7:13	Let us rise early in the vineyards We shall see if the vine is in flower, If the blossoms have opened, If the pomegranate trees have budded There I will give my loving to you	(יג) נִשְׁכִּימָה לְכַרְמִים נִרְאָה אִם־פָּרְחָה הַגֶּפֶן פֶּתַח הַסִּמְדָּר הִנָּצוּ הַרְמוֹנִים שָׁם אֶתֵּן אֶת־דְּדֵי לִךְ:
7:14	The mandrakes ¹³⁶ give off fragrance, And at our door all luscious fruit, ¹³⁷ fresh picked and stored as well I have laid up for you, my love	(יד) הַדּוּדָאִים נִתְנוּ־רִיחַ וְעַל־פֶּתְחֵינוּ כָּל־מִגְדִּים חֲדָשִׁים גַּם־יִשְׁגִּים דּוֹדִי צִפְנָתִי לָךְ:
8:13-14:	You who dwell in the garden, friends listen for your voice. Let me hear it. Flee my lover and be like a dear or like a gazelle on the spice mountains	הַיּוֹשֵׁבֶת בְּגָנִים חֲבֵרִים מְקַשִּׁיבִים לְקוֹלֶךָ הַשְׁמִיעֵנִי: בָּרַח דּוֹדִי וְדַמְה־לָּךְ לְצִבִּי אוֹ לְעֶפֶר הָאֵילִים עַל הַרֵי בְשָׁמִים:

¹³⁶ "This plant was thought to be an aphrodisiac, as is evident in the story of the mandrakes found by Reuben (Gen. 30:14-16). It is also quite obvious in the Hebrew that dudai'm, "mandrakes," plays on *dodai*, "my love" (in the sense of "love making") that she has just used. Either the phonetic closeness of the two words led to the belief that mandrakes were aphrodisiac, or the belief in their power to stimulate desire generated the name for the plant" Alter, *The Five Books*, p. 612

¹³⁷ BDB Dictionary: מִגְדָּ n.m. **excellence** (NH *id.*, choice fruit; Syriac מִגְדָּ fruit; Arabic مَجْدٌ *glory, honour, nobility*);—מ' cstr. Dt 33:13 + 4 times Dt 33; pl. מִגְדִּים Ct 4:13; 7:14; sf. מִגְדִּיו Ct 4:16—*excellence*: excellent or choice things; always of gifts of nature: שְׁמִים מ' Dt 33:13 i.e. (natural) gifts of heaven; מ' v 14; מ' תְּבוֹאָת שְׁמִים v 14; מ' גְּבוּעוֹת עוֹלָם v 15 (מ' אֶרֶץ וּמִלֵּאָה ||) v 16; pl. abstr. מ' פְּרִי (= excellent fruit) Ct 4:13, 16; מ' alone = foreg., 7:14. (accessed via sefaria)

The love story of Song of Songs is a literal and metaphorical garden of connection. The text reads as a swan-song curtain call for the plant-characters of the previous biblical texts with a swath of flora seeded into the fold as well. The love shared between the text's lovers is inseparable from their connections to the botanical world that surrounds them. The constant shifts between body and botany paint an image of an interspecies garden fully integrated into a single, harmonious whole.

Digging into Divinity

In our ongoing exploration of the ties between plants, people, and P/place, it is worth mentioning that centuries worth of Jewish and Christian scholars alike have argued that the overt sensuality described throughout Song of Songs is meant to denote the intimacy of Divine relationship rather than human sexuality. Carr writes, "In the hands of Rabbinic and then early Christian interpreters, the Song no longer focuses on the love between a man and woman, but upon the love between God and God's people or God and the individual soul. Despite all the clues about its originally non-religious use, the Song was interpreted spiritually by both Jewish and Christian communities."¹³⁸ Many of these interpretations strike a distinction between the Godly and the earthly, and argue that the earth-laden language of Songs is meant to signal "a basic reorientation of human eros away from the visible world toward the invisible world..."¹³⁹ In his piece "The Song of Songs from the Bible to the Mishnah," Jonathan Kaplan notes that "various comments attributed to Rabbi Akiva in tannaitic literature...first attest to the emergence of interpretation of Song of Songs as a divine love song only in the early second century C.E."¹⁴⁰ Though Kaplan

¹³⁸ Carr, "Rethinking Sex," p. 423

¹³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 426

¹⁴⁰ Kaplan, Jonathan. "The Song of Songs from the Bible to the Mishnah." *Hebrew Union College Annual*, vol. 81, 2010, p. 43

goes on to argue that the earliest interpretations of this sort likely date slightly earlier than Akiva's time, he still draws a distinction between the ancient text's original focus on human-to-human love and its later interpretations as a divinely focused text. Like so much of our tradition, we encounter the text of Songs today with an awareness of the centuries worth of voices who have glossed its meaning over time. As such, it is impossible to fully separate the erotic poem's original intent from the frame of divine love placed upon it by millenia of religious sages.

The ambiguity of the divine role in the text only further emphasizes the holy reconstruction of early creation enacted through the springtime abundance encountered in Songs. The First People were created in God's gardener image, and in Songs the humans seem to embody this role so thoroughly that even the brightest religious minds of history were torn trying to discern between the acts of humankind and divine in the poem's 8 chapters. Carr notes that the divine gloss added to the text "invites the believer- invites us- into a massive re-imagining of our world. Now, we are the lover and God is the beloved. Now, we and God are romancing each other in Springtime. And whatever obstacles come between us and God are mere temporary hurdles to a love that is stronger than death."¹⁴¹ Even without our gardening season frame, Carr notes the ways in which Song of Songs represents a spring oasis of resilient love based in reciprocity. In the end, Carr advocates for a reading of the text which integrates the spiritual and the sexual rather than bifurcating them. "Perhaps this often overlooked Biblical book can help us envision a sexuality that is holy and a spirituality that courses through the whole person- that is, the whole embodied person," Carr concludes.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Carr, "Rethinking Sex," p. 428

¹⁴² *ibid.*, p. 432

The blend of sex, soil, and spirituality in Song of Songs seals the circle first started in Eden between אדם, אדמה, and המקום. The mutuality that flows with ease throughout the verses of the text evokes a sense of sweetness and longing not seen since the very first days of summer's garden. After centuries of (largely Christian) messaging that the expulsion from Eden was humanity's fall, what could be more comforting than a restored garden of abundance, where God longs for Their people and the people long for God back? Sexually and spiritually, Song of Songs stands as a climax in both the biblical spring garden and the broader journey from Eden to embodied reciprocity first started in early Genesis. Whether Songs stands as a tale of Divine-human or human-human love, the reciprocity throughout the text seems to blur the need for any distinctions between these types of love at all. Mutual longing is revealed in the text as an element fundamental to holy relationship, and a garden of reciprocal abundance stands as the vessel for holding it all. Shir haShirim shows us that when we live embodied realities that honor interdependence, relationship, and sensory experience, we access paradise and the Divine Presence as one.

Conclusion



Seasons Cycle On

It is impossible to say how many gardening seasons have passed since the days of God's first garden. We could surely cast a seasonal gaze across Jewish history and highlight dark winters and bright springs, but an exact measure of these seasonal cycles is unnecessary. What remains salient throughout Jewish history are the ongoing relationships between people, P/place, and plants across time, space, cultures, and nationstates. The plant-characters painted across the pages of Tanakh follow the Jewish people to every place they inhabit throughout the diaspora. From rabbinic texts to folk traditions stewarded by Jewish homekeepers across time, plants have remained a salient aspect of Jewish ritual, medicine, and spiritual practices. There is not a single Jewish holiday or homestead untouched by the legacy of biblical botany. Spices, herbs, oils, garlicks, and flowers have accompanied the Jewish people throughout the centuries, affirming the ongoing relationship between human and plantkind in their shared, ongoing pursuit of Divine connection.¹⁴³ The Jewish people and the canon of Jewish scriptural inheritance begins in a garden, and in doing so forges an intimate bond between plant and person that remains present throughout our tradition today.

What does it do to our worldview when we shift our gaze of creation to see a single, sprawling, garden shared by us all? What might Judaism look like if the people of the book understood their sacred stories as a multi-season gardening saga that we continue to live out today? How might we shift our spiritual practices if we saw ourselves as sacred stewards of the land and of one

¹⁴³ Two books on the topic of Jewish herbalism have emerged in recent years as authoritative anthologies on regional folk practices: *Ashkenazi Herbalism* and *Ritual Medicinal Lore of Sephardic Women*. These are listed in Appendix III: Resources for Learning More about Jewish Herbalism

another, divinely obligated to practice mutuality? What does it do to us to see gardening as Godly?

These questions do not exist in a vacuum. With the climate crisis actively unfolding in our contemporary moment, adjusting our spiritual outlook could mean the difference between life and death for human and plantkind alike. In our highly polarized, hyper-political contemporary landscape, we need postures of reciprocity now more than ever. There are many in the ecojustice space who have argued that the texts of the biblical canon are the basis for the hierarchical, patriarchal, and consumerist orientations of humankind towards the natural world that have brought us to the ecological crisis we face today. This, I believe, is a critical misinterpretation of the text in its truest form. I hope that this project has illustrated that the biblical universe is an ecosystem that stretches from Eden to the final chapters of the *Ketuvim* and beyond, where plants and people act in deep relationship with one another and with God. There is no reality where a truly Tanakh-based religiosity advocates for human superiority in any realm. Instead, our sacred texts reveal a shared, collaborative garden world connected by a mycelial network of the Divine Life Force. Increasing our awareness about these connections offers us pathways for spiritual attunement and engagement that exist beyond the walls of our formal institutions of Jewish Life.

What do we do with the heightened awareness of interspecies connection brought on through studying sacred texts with a plant hermeneutic? The short answer is: connect. So much of Western culture fueled by white supremacy focuses on hyper individuality, independence, and isolation. The antidote to these woes has been with us since well before our earliest sacred texts were born into the ancient world. We were never meant to live in isolation, and our role in this world has never been merely to consume and control. We were created to live collaboratively

and to behave in ways that honor the fragile interdependence of all living things. Our sacred texts braid God, people, and plants together and our sacred tradition affirms that connection again and again.

Proverbs 3:18 famously teaches us: “A tree of life is she to those who grasp her, and those who hold her are deemed happy¹⁴⁴.” Reach out. Touch a tree. Walk on the grassy bank of a sidewalk. Breathe deeply and take in the scents of the world around you, scents that filled your ancestor’s lungs. Notice the resources and plant-products that accompany you throughout each day.

Welcome plants as sacred ancestors themselves into your rituals and your sacred spaces. Offer a blessing, formal or informal, for the networks of connection that surround you and the soil that sustains you. Compost the construct of God as a heaven-dwelling masculine figure and immerse yourself in an image of God who spreads through the world like invisible mycelia beneath your feet and in your lungs with each step and every breath. Open your eyes and your heart to the radical possibility that we can return to Eden each day through one another.

In her profound book *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, author (and I would argue prophetess) Adrienne Maree Brown writes,

Matter doesn't disappear, it transforms. Energy is the same way. The Earth is layer upon layer of all that has existed, remembered by the dirt...Everything we attempt, everything we do, is either growing up as its roots go deeper, or it's decomposing, leaving its lessons in the soil for the next attempt¹⁴⁵.

Applying a plant-hermeneutic to the biblical text reveals the same truth that Brown writes of here. We are living on the lessons that our ancestors planted into the soil for us to uncover. The

¹⁴⁴ Prov. 3:18, Alter, p.361

¹⁴⁵ Brown, Adrienne Maree. *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*. AK Press, 2021, p. 52;120 (ellipsis marks page break)

water that flowed in the rivers of Eden is the same water that flows through our veins and pours down as rain on our tired earth today. “Do you understand that your quality of life and your survival are tied to how authentic and generous the connections are between you and the people and place you live with and in?” Maree asks.¹⁴⁶ Is this not the question we should be posing for our spiritual existence? As we think about how to shape Jewish life in our turbulent times, our answer lies in authentic connection and interdependence. The text of Song of Songs offers us a roadmap back to paradise, and that roadmap is one of unapologetic, flourishing love for the sake of love itself. Are we willing to drop our polished, detached facades of polite institutional engagement and return to ecosystems that thrive on mutuality and care? Are we willing to bury our hands in the dirt and recognize that God is there too, muddy and waiting to welcome the seeds we plant together?

Each of us lives only for a brief moment, but the gardens we tend today will be what feeds the worlds yet to come. From soil came אדם and to soil will we all return. We will spend far more time as divine dirt than we ever do in our human bodies. May we use our brief, embodied existence to draw close to one another and tend the world around us with diligent care. In Taanit 23a:15, a man named Honi asks a nearby elderly gardener what the point is in planting seeds for trees whose fruit will bloom long after the planter’s lifespan. The gardener responds, “Just as my ancestors planted for me, I too am planting for my descendants.”¹⁴⁷ As if in conversation with this story, Avot d’Rabbi Natan 31b teaches “If you have a sapling in your hand and are planting it, and someone should say to you that the Messiah has come, stay and complete the planting,

¹⁴⁶ Brown, p. 93

¹⁴⁷ Taanit 23a:15, accessed via Sefaria

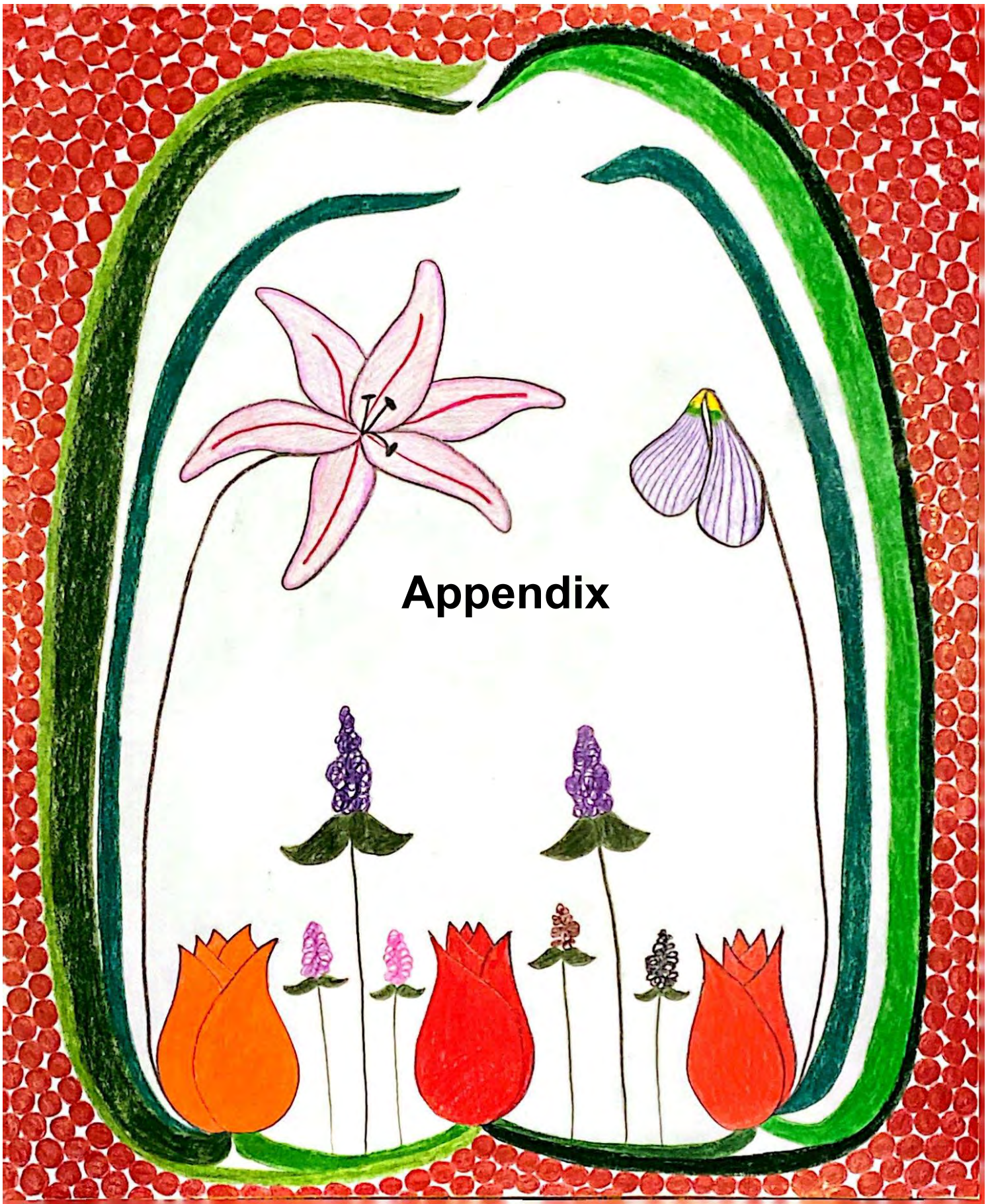
and only then go to greet the Messiah.”¹⁴⁸ We have inherited a garden world that is calling to us to seed it with care. Let us heed this call to care.

May our plant-people connections lead us ever back to the sweet paradise of P/place. May we be unafraid to plant seeds of a better future, even when the ground is cold and unyielding underfoot. May each of us become stewards who safeguard and work for the thriving of us all.

Ken yehi ratzon, so may it be.

¹⁴⁸ Avot d'Rabbi Natan 31b, accessed via Sefaria

Appendix



I. Color Coding Reference Chart

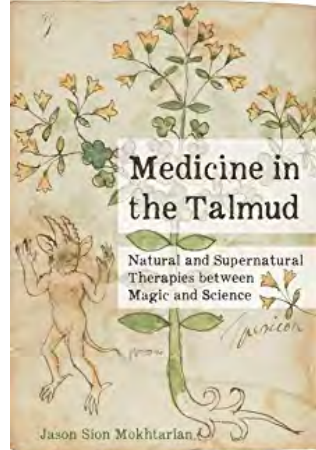
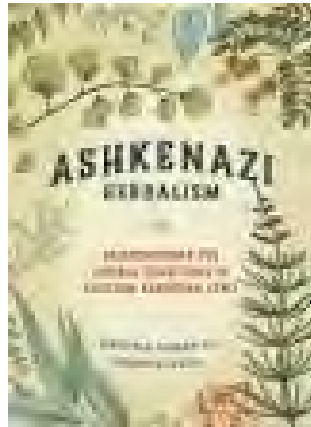
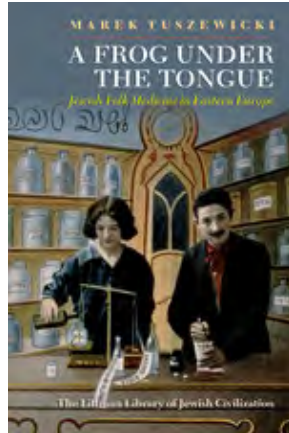
הָאָרֶץ (<i>ha-aretz</i>) Land, earth	
זֶרַע (<i>zera</i>) Seed	
General plant life & plant byproducts: fruit, flowers, seed-bearing plants, fruit-bearing trees, grasses, fields, shrubs, spices, etc	
אָדָם or אִדְמָה (<i>adam or adamah</i>) Human/Humus:	
Named plant character (specific plant identity)	
Verbs used BY God as gardener or to garden	
Verbs used to describe/ascribe gardening responsibilities from God → humankind	
גֶּן עֵדֶן (<i>gan eden</i>) Garden of Eden (specific place)	
Creation story linguistic callback/reference (use of Gen. 1-3 language in later biblical passage)	
מָקוֹם (<i>makom</i>) P/place (dual meaning: divine and earthly implications)	

II. Concordance Source Sheets*

<u>Cedar</u>
<u>Cinnamon & Cassia</u>
<u>Fig</u>
<u>Frankincense</u>
<u>Garlic</u>
<u>Hyssop</u>
<u>Ha-Sneh</u>
<u>Mandrake</u>
<u>Myrrh</u>
<u>Pomegranate</u>
<u>Lilies & Roses</u>
<u>Olive</u>
<u>Tree of Life</u>
<u>Plant Perspectives Sampling (rabbinic & beyond)</u>

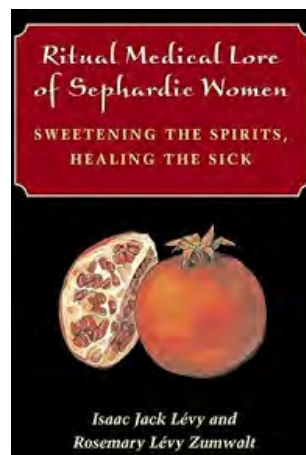
*These pages are linked to sefaria source sheets in the digital version of this project. If you are accessing this project in its printed form and would like to access these text sheets, please email heatherashore@gmail.com

III. Resources for Learning More about Jewish Herbalism

<u>Books</u>	
<p><i>Medicine in the Talmud: Natural and Supernatural Therapies Between Magic and Science</i></p> <p>By: Jason Sion Mokhtarian</p>	
<p><i>Ashkenazi Herbalism: Rediscovering the Herbal Traditions of Eastern European Jews</i></p> <p>By: Deatra Cohen & Adam Siegel</p>	
<p><i>A frog under the tongue: Jewish Folk Medicine in Eastern Europe</i></p> <p>By: Marek Tuszewicki translated by Jessica Taylor-Kucia</p>	

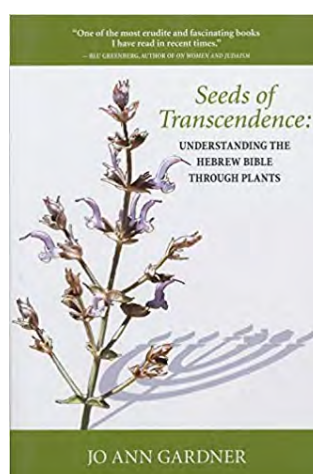
Ritual Medical Lore of Sephardic Women: Sweetening the Spirits, Healing the Sick

By: Isaac Jack Lévy and Rosemary Lévy Zumwalt



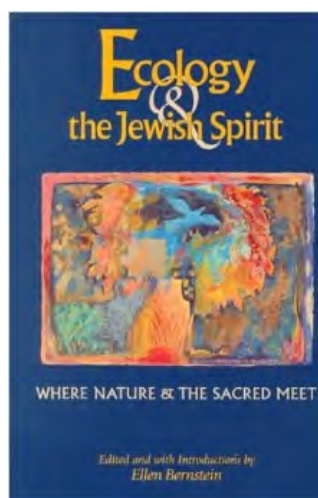
*Seeds of Transcendence:
Understanding the Hebrew Bible
Through Plants*

By Jo Ann Gardner



Ecology and the Jewish Spirit edited

By: Ellen Bernstein



<u>Articles</u>	
<p>“Jewish Folk Medicine”</p> <p>By: J.S. Zidel</p>	<p>https://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10539/19021/(Nov%201933)%20Jewish%20folk%20medicine.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y</p>
<p>“Healing And Medicine: Healing And Medicine In Judaism”</p> <p>By: encyclopedia.com</p>	<p>https://www.encyclopedia.com/environment/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/healing-and-medicine-healing-and-medicine-judaism</p>
<p>“Healing the Spirit: A Jewish Approach”</p> <p>By Nancy Flam</p>	<p>https://www.jstor.org/stable/24460295</p>
<p>“Medicinal Herbs”</p> <p>By: Jewish Virtual Library</p>	<p>https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/medicinal-herbs</p>
<p>“Torah Flora: Plants and Nature in Bible and Jewish Tradition”</p> <p>By: Torah Flora</p>	<p>https://torahflora.org/</p>
<p>“Jewish Healing and Magic”</p> <p>By: Geoffrey Dennis</p>	<p>https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/jewish-healing-magic/</p>
<p>“Healers of the Pale: A Hidden Herbal Legacy”</p> <p>By: Deatra Cohen</p>	<p>https://www.jewishbookcouncil.org/pb-daily/ashkenazi-folk-medicine-the-hidden-herbal</p>
<p>“Health and Healing for Eastern European Jews”</p> <p>By: YIVO</p>	<p>https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Health_and_Healing</p>

<p>“Green Wisdom: Rokhl’s Golden City: The roots of Jewish herbalism”</p> <p>By: Rokhl Kafvrissen</p>	<p>https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/community/articles/green-wisdom-jewish-herbalism</p>
<p>“Women's Medical Practice and Health Care in Medieval Europe”</p> <p>By: Monica H Green</p>	<p>https://www.jstor.org/stable/3174557</p>
<p>“Creating a Sustainable Jewish Ecology”</p> <p>By: Ellen Bernstein</p>	<p>http://www.zeek.net/710ecology/</p>
<p>“The Spiritual Advisor students need right now (hint, it’s not the rabbi)”</p> <p>By: Ellen Bernstein</p>	<p>https://forward.com/opinion/194611/the-spiritual-advisor-students-need-hint-its-not/</p>
<p>“Revisiting the medicinal plants of the Bible and the Holy Land”</p> <p>By: Amots Dafni</p>	<p>https://researchoutreach.org/articles/revisiting-medicinal-plants-bible-holy-land/</p>

Podcasts	
<p>“Jewish Ancestral Healing Ep. 18: Ancestral Wisdom in Jewish Mysticism w/ Jill Hammer”</p>	<p>https://open.spotify.com/episode/3mjP2oTr7St0HDQPP5njuG?si=69bb36b4ca5e4b7f</p>
<p>“Jewish Ancestral Healing Ep 2.4: The alchemy of Ancestral Plants and Moroccan Jewish Longing and Belonging with Mazal Masoud Etedgi”</p>	<p>https://open.spotify.com/episode/69PoKHbETmVN85BUuXsKLy?si=8fcc5a6390a24ab9</p>
<p>“Jewish Ancestral Healing ep. 2.5: Ashkenazi Herbalism with Deatra Cohen and Adam Siegel”</p>	<p>https://open.spotify.com/episode/7Flx0ZxufvyRbc2LrNjS2W?si=c827823c164b4f41</p>

“Jewish Ancestral Healing Ep. 2: Jewish Ancestral Plant Magic w Dori Midnight”	https://open.spotify.com/episode/1QyNi97mb4PYHGcSjv78Y?si=67d956850d384469
“Jewitches: Jews & Garlic”	https://open.spotify.com/episode/2S8sCQ0AyV5MfUmY0XhCBP?si=ba6cf72176c74bb6
“Jewitches: Herbs & Judaism”	https://open.spotify.com/episode/2UcczUFs9g7uDajftmmCtp?si=e8a9835648294814

Contemporary Projects	
“Jewish Seed Project” By: Jewish Farmers Network	https://www.jewishfarmernetwork.org/jewishseeds
“Try it at home” By: Grow Torah	https://www.growtorah.org/try-it-at-home
SWANA ¹⁴⁹ Ancestral Hub	https://www.swanaancestralhub.org/
“Jewish Monthly Tea Experience” By: Gold Herring	https://goldherring.com/team/

Contemporary Experts: Jewish Herbalists in the Field Today	
<u>Name/Website</u>	<u>Notes</u>
Dori Midnight https://dorimidnight.com	About/Bio: My work is rooted in and guided by Jewish ancestral traditions, feminist, decolonial and abolitionist scholarship, queer liberation, and disability and healing justice work. I believe that

¹⁴⁹ From the SWANA Hub website: “**S.W.A.N.A.** is a decolonial word for the South West Asian/ North African (**S.W.A.N.A.**) region in; Swana= a less colonial way to refer to the diverse geographical region more commonly known as the Middle East + North Africa (MENA)”

	<p>rooting into ancient Jewish wisdom from a radical, decolonial and abolitionist position can be a source of support as we work towards the world we dream of, built in interdependence, co-liberation, and love. I offer classes on reconnecting with Jewish ancestral traditions, Jewish plant and protection magic, and remedies and rituals for unraveling times. I write liberatory liturgy inspired by ancient Jewish text and weave collaborative, radical, joyous Jewish community ritual spaces.</p> <p>*though I have been in practice for 20 years, I have yet to find the right word for my work. Healer has never resonated for me, though many people call me that. Some people who work with me also call me “my main witch” or “bubbe.” My prayer is that my work flows in the river of tradition of my Jewish ancestors who called themselves: <i>sanadoras</i>, <i>prekantadoras</i>, <i>mechashefa</i>, <i>buenas madres</i>, and <i>tzadikim</i> – people who carried ancestral wisdom, listened deeply and tended to their communities with love and care.</p> <p>Resources: archived online workshops, shop, general information and networking; very well-known expert in American Jewish herbalism scene</p>
<p>Rebekah Erev Studio</p> <p>https://rebekaherevstudio.com</p>	<p>About/Bio: Rebekah Erev (they/them) is a queer artist, teacher, ritual leader/kohenet, community herbalist, dreamworker, cultural organizer and healer. For over two decades they have practiced and taught a Judaism steeped in the old ways, ancestral and earth reverence and visions of the world to come. They celebrate diaspora with Dreaming the World to Come and with Queer Mikveh Project, a community, advocacy tool and art practice. Learn more here.</p> <p>Resources: workshops, online resources</p>

<p>Jewitches</p> <p>https://www.jewitches.com</p>	<p>About/Bio: Founded in 2020, Jewitches was created to honor the magic, mysticism, and folk traditions found within Judaism. A play on words (Jewish + witches), it was the perfect name for everything it aimed to create.</p> <p>In 2021, Jewitches launched the shop: a place to find all the things a Jewitch could ever want, featuring unique and carefully curated pieces</p> <p>Resources: overview of herbs and judaism (below), very useful links to other practitioners & book lists, media/visual summaries of Jewish plant & folk practice connections</p> <p>Helpful links:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Herbs & Judaism overview: https://www.jewitches.com/post/herbs-judaism • Blog: https://www.jewitches.com/blog • Library: https://www.jewitches.com/library
<p>B'samim Apothecary</p> <p>https://bsamimapothecary.com</p>	<p>About/Bio: Mazal/Maz (they/them/theirs) is a trans/non-binary artist, arab/mizrahi/amazigh jew, child of immigrants, spoonie/chronically ill person, herbalist, Drama Therapist, clown, cultural organizer and poet. Maz utilizes imagination, play, and ritual as tools for liberation, healing and connection. They honor, study and practice the plant medicines, liturgy, piyutim (sacred songs) and healing rituals of their mizrahi and arab jewish lineages, and of the sacred texts of Judaism. They have studied and taught herbalism for the past nine years. Their herbal practices and study merges SWANA ancestral herbal medicine, Jewish mysticism and Torah, intuitive herbalism, and psychology. Mazal is trained as a</p>

	<p>trauma-centered and body-centered Drama Therapist, and brings those frameworks of healing to their herbal work (M.A. Counseling Psychology + Drama Therapy, California Institute of Integral Studies).</p> <p>Resources: herbalist supplies, tinctures, active apothecary</p>
<p>Chelsea Taxman:</p> <p>https://www.chelseataxman.com/ @moon.beam.dreams</p>	<p>About/Bio: With support from my jewish ashkenazi ancestors, my plant teachers, & yoga mentors, I am a healer & plant medicine maker working toward liberation. I want us to take back our power in our own ancestral and intuitive medicine in the home and as sacred practice. As a community herbalist one of my roles is to connect people with plants, education, and collective deep healing. My work is part of a larger movement with other queer healers and collaborators, including the knowledge you bring to the session. I practice and teach with a desire to share, especially with those who might not otherwise find alternative wellness modalities accessible (disabled, trans, queer, low income, diasporic, etc.)</p> <p>I feel inspired by community, lessons from honeybees, queerness, song, and my dreams. My work combines formal and inherited education from many traditions including judaism, ayurveda, raja yoga, and an apprenticeship with traditional chinese herbalism</p> <p>Resources: Chelsea is the herbalist who curated the Gold Herring Jewish Monthly Tea Experience. She also has a free “Jewish Medicinal Herb” curriculum published on her website and through JOFEE. You can access it here</p>

<p>Arielle Bareket:</p> <p>https://www.goldenbonesbotanicals.com</p>	<p>About/Bio: Arielle is a clinical herbalist, registered nurse, gardener, potter, maker and perpetual learner who lives in deep admiration of the plants, animals and the ecosystems on this planet. Trained as a clinical herbalist and a registered nurse, I am an integrative practitioner cultivating a culture in which there's collaboration with respect between various healing modalities, each being valid and having a place and purpose.</p> <p>Resources: limited resources on her website, but teaches with Row & Sage</p>
<p>Row and Sage</p> <p>https://www.rowanandsage.com</p>	<p>About/Bio: Rowan + Sage is a <i><u>small-batch apothecary</u></i> and <i><u>online community herbalism school</u></i> led by Sarah Corbett – a clinical herbalist with over a decade of experience in plant medicine and holistic healing. Rowan + Sage was born from Sarah's experience of connecting with plants for support during an intense time of disabling chronic illness. Like many others on the plant path, nature called her back home, showing her the healing that is possible when we come into reciprocal relationship with the more-than-human world.</p> <p>Resources: Herbaria subscription, expert workshops with Jewish herbalists</p>
<p>Myrto Daskaloudi</p> <p>Moonsofaphrodite.com</p>	<p>About/Bio: Myrto (she/her) is a Greek & Jewish herbalist, astrologer, and dancer from so called Hudson, NY / Mahican lands. In her work, she weaves together her love for the plants with her ancestral stories of the stars. You can connect with her work via her website, moonsofaphrodite.com, as well as in her featured workshop, <u>Greek & Jewish Protection Plants</u>.</p> <p>Resources: Greek & Jewish plant workshop: https://www.rowanandsage.com/contributors/myrto-da</p>

	<u>skaloudi#:~:text=Greek%20%26%20Jewish%20Protection%20Plants</u>
<p>Evan Cohen (she/her)</p> <p><u>www.bigcatbirthbotanicals.com</u></p>	<p>About/Bio: Evan is a queer, southern, Jewish doula & herbalist who comes to this work with deep integrity. She has lived in the mountains of Western North Carolina for the past 12 years, and has a strong connection with the abundance of herbal medicine that this land has to offer, as well as the community at large. As an activist, Evan strongly believes that everything and everyone is connected, and all of our actions impact one another and the earth. With the values of harm reduction, trauma-informed care, gender inclusivity, and a dedication to anti-racism work, Evan aims to create a nourishing container for anyone who enters. Evan's work embodies a gentle yet strong core, deep listening, and intuition. It is her goal to listen to what is not being said, to be quiet enough to hear what needs to come up, and to make space for you to feel safe, seen, and supported. As an herbalist, doula, and flower essence practitioner, Evan uses both intuition and experience to offer guidance, insight, and education. You can connect with her work via her website, as well as in her featured workshop, <u>Listening to The Flowers</u>.</p> <p>Resources: birth doula, herbal allyship, mentorship (for doula but perhaps in herbal stewardship)</p>

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