

# Brushes with the Bible

Jewish Commentaries and Biblical  
Illustrations

## **The Book of Genesis**

by

**Yardenna Lubotzky (Roston)  
and Ruth Mark (Rotter)**

with insights by

**Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**



Dedicated in loving memory of  
Irving and Beatrice Stone

**Brushes with the Bible (Bein Kodesh le-Mikchol)**

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# The Connection between Art and Midrash

## Introduction

We have chosen in this book to compare artists' conceptions of biblical scenes with traditional Jewish commentaries, even though these two forms of interpretation are generally distant from each other in chronology, religion, culture, and style. The scenes selected for examination are from the portions of Genesis read each week in synagogues. The traditional Jewish commentaries from the time of the Talmud to the modern-day period were chosen for the light they cast on the artists' interpretations of those scenes. The comparison is especially interesting when the artist and commentator had no knowledge of each other's work, belonged to different religions, and lived in entirely different worlds yet offered, in their contrasting written and visual forms, similar answers to questions arising from the text.

In order to clarify the value of such comparisons, it may be helpful to establish first some of the characteristics of the Midrash and of the art works.

The Midrash expands and builds upon the text in its description of scriptural figures, inviting us to share its thoughts and emotions as it fills gaps left in the biblical account. It suggests conversations, actions, and spiritual quandaries that are not specified in the Bible itself. By describing the qualities and personalities of scriptural figures, the Midrash helps us to visualize the characters more vividly as human individuals. A further aspect of the Midrash is its focus on the literal meaning of the text. In that respect, it does not add elements, but attempts to verify the exact meaning of the words in a manner that enhances our understanding of the course of events and thereby offers deeper insights into the characters' motives.

Visual representations of those scenes inevitably depict a frozen moment in time, a moment that the artist wishes to eternalize, usually choosing the highpoint of the action. At times, an artist will provide a series of pictures illustrating stages in the narrative, but even then will concentrate only on those scenes deemed to be of importance. Such illustrations cannot rely on words nor on the movement of time, only on form, color, and other constituents of art. In order to analyze effectively the artist's interpretation of a biblical scene, one must examine the components of the picture, including structure, perspective, the use of warm or cold colors, symbolic elements, and the characters' gestures and facial expressions. In addition, identifying the school or group of painters to which the artist belonged can deepen our appreciation of a work; the knowledge of the artist's life, background, and world outlook can help with understanding the message being conveyed. (This present book will focus on the interpretation of the text implied by the illustrations, and not by their significance in the history of art.)

Even though art and Midrash convey their messages in different "languages" – or perhaps because of that discrepancy – there can be significant value in comparing them. Associating two contrasting interpretations can indeed prove fruitful, leading to fresh insights into the text, both on the emotional level and the intellectual level. Emotionally, the visual presentation of a scriptural event provides a more human approach, encouraging in the viewer a degree of identification with the characters depicted. This often provokes a lively dialogue not easily

available in a reading of the written account. Intellectually, a study of the visual rendition can stimulate reassessment of one's previous interpretation of the text, and lead to a new understanding of the relevant verses and commentaries.

There is a myriad of artworks depicting scenes and inspired by the Book of Genesis; therefore, a lot of factors led us to our selection of the illustrations examined. Preference was given to pictures that revealed the artist's interpretation of the text. We often grouped paintings together that express varied representations of the same scene. Especially emphasized are illustrations that reveal in gesture or expression human elements of the biblical characters likely to produce an emotional response in the viewer, while maintaining the artistic value of the work. Despite these criteria, the collection of artworks included for examination depends ultimately upon personal choice. The result provides, of course, only one exploratory journey out of innumerable other approaches in interpreting the Book of Books.

## **Acknowledgements**

We would like to express our thanks to all those who were involved in the preparation of this book; those who encouraged us to write it and those who generously read through the various drafts and offered suggestions. Their contribution is evident in both its design and content.

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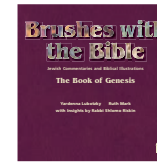
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Thank you all,

Yardenna and Ruth

# Reader's Guide



Our aim in this book is to present to the reader major themes from each weekly portion of the Bible, and to supply two or three art illustrations that allows comparison of the verbal and visual interpretations of the scriptural narrative. The visual versions are, by nature, more immediate – connecting the viewer emotionally with the biblical event.

The book is aimed at a varied readership – celebrants sitting around the Sabbath table, groups of mixed religious and secular students, and diverse types of educational frameworks.

For the reader's convenience, the book's contents are divided into separate categories, with a different icon for each one, enabling the reader to choose the aspect of greatest interest.

## The Icons



**Art analysis:** This consists of a description of the artwork and its message, an analysis of its components, the focus on specific details such as the use of color, the gestures and facial expressions of the characters depicted, and the suggestions concerning the interpretation of the text implied in the illustration. This section forms the central element in the book.



**Commentaries:** These are traditional Jewish interpretations of the biblical text, with comments on their connection with the illustration.



**Aspects for special investigation:** This is a guide to each illustration that may provide helpful analysis.

**Insights by Rabbi Shlomo Riskin.**

One of the more intriguing challenges in my role as a communal rabbi has been the preparation of the Shabbat sermon on the week's Torah portion. As soon as one sermon was finished, I would already be thinking about the theme for the next week. Consequently, the Bible, and especially the Pentateuch and its leading commentators, became beloved companions with a permanent place on my night table so as to be accessible should I wake unexpectedly. The Bible transformed into a key component of my personal, religious experience.

Biblical commentators have exposed me to many secrets. The Divine wisdom interspersed throughout the Bible resembles a splendid diamond, shining forth simultaneously in multiple shades. Even when the differing textual interpretations appear contradictory, we need only to step back and broaden our perspective. Then we are able to encompass the wealth of knowledge and enlightenment emerging from the Bible and realize how much these various interpretations really complement each other. Talmudic sages emphasize many times that the biblical text in essence contains many truths; each one contributes in turn its own unique note to the glorious symphony. This combination of assorted melodies surprisingly does not produce dissonance, but harmony.

As early as the Middle Ages, Biblical commentators often reiterated that there are 70 different ways to interpret the Torah, reflecting the varying understandings of it. Presumably the choice of the number 70 is also a veiled reference to the '70 languages' and the '70 Nations of the World', given that the Torah and the prophets' primary purpose, the grand visions of the End of Days, apply to all 70 Nations of the World and to each and every generation.

This volume opens our eyes to additional interpretations of the text, while comparing and contrasting them. These interpretations emerge from the world of Torah, Jewish tradition and from the world of artists from the 70 Nations of the World and different cultures. All of them read the Torah and used visual and verbal means to express the particular facet they found there. The artist, like the commentator, has a unique gift, divine inspiration, emanating directly from the ultimate Creator.

I am delighted with the opportunity to present here some of the enlightenment that each Torah portion inspired in me, thereby contributing to the rich and fascinating dialogue found in this volume. Reading this book will provide a rewarding experience that will help renew our love for and delight in the Torah. The book surprises the reader, not just with the range of interpretations it presents, but also by virtue of its presenting a new and refreshing way of studying Torah, using exegesis and esthetics. Let us hope this book finds favor and positive acceptance in the eyes of God as well as our readers, and that with it we shall experience 70 new and ancient facets of our sacred and beloved Torah.

**Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

Chief Rabbi of Efrat  
Chancellor, Ohr Torah Stone



In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.  
Now the earth was unformed and void,  
and darkness was upon the face of the deep;  
and the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters.  
And God said:  
"Let there be light."  
And there was light.  
And God saw the light, that it was good;  
and God divided the light from the darkness.  
And God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night.  
And there was evening and there was morning,  
one day.

(Gen. 1, 1-5)

And God said:  
"Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven  
to divide the day from the night;  
and let them be for signs,  
and for seasons, and for days and years;  
and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven  
to give light upon the earth."  
And it was so.  
And God made the two great lights:  
the greater light to rule the day,  
and the lesser light to rule the night; and the stars.  
And God set them in the firmament of the heaven  
to give light upon the earth,  
and to rule over the day and over the night,  
and to divide the light from the darkness;  
and God saw that it was good.  
And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

(Gen. 1, 14-19)



## The Creation of Light


**Let there be lights:** On the first day the sun and moon were created, and on the fourth He commanded that they be suspended in the heavens. All subsequent objects intended for heaven and earth were also created on the first day, with each having its date determined for it. It is written that "the heavens" includes its progeny, and "the earth" includes its progeny.

**To divide the day from the night:** when the first light was hidden. But during the seven days of creation the first light and dark alternated during day and night.

(Rashi, Gen. 1:14)



**The Creation of Light by Gustave Doré, France | 1832-1883**

 Doré's *Creation of Light* is divided diagonally into three triangular sections (note the right-hand portion) consisting of light, clouds, and Earth. The first two are dominant and in contrast to one another. Light bursts out powerfully from behind the clouds. The clouds themselves represent the absence of light and thereby illustrate the difference between light and dark (note the idea of darkness as being the absence of light in the chapter on "The Days of Creation"). The threefold diagonal structure suggests movement and continuity as the light reaches the universe with its widening rays indicating its positive and beneficial nature.

## Light as a positive element

**"Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for eyes to behold the sun..."**

(Eccl. 11:7)

**Let there be light:** Before the creation of the heavens, the light of God filled the universe. When the heavens were spread out like a curtain, they divided the light from the deep so that there was darkness on the face of the deep. He commanded: "Let there be light," creating it first because it was pleasant and good for every action.

(Hizkuni, Gen. 1:3)

When the heavens were spread out like a curtain, they divided the light from the deep so that there was darkness on the face of the deep. He commanded: "Let there be light," creating it first because it was pleasant and good for every action.

(Hizkuni, Gen. 1:3)

When God created light on the first day, Adam could see from one end of the universe to the other. But when God saw the generation of the Flood and perceived their evil acts, he hid it from them, as is written: "But from the wicked their light is withholden" (Job 38:15). For whom did He preserve it? For the righteous in the future.

(Hagiga 12a)

It is clear from those two passages that the light created on the first day was a spiritual light of special strength. The from Hagiga states that this light after its creation was reserved for future righteous beings. That hidden light is conceived as enlightenment, a form of vision not available to all. Light symbolizes the good and the pleasant and, according to Hizkuni, was the first element to be created; its function being to shed a positive and optimistic hue on all that was to be subsequently created.

## The Creation of Light

- The first light as abstract or concrete
- The contrasts between light and dark and the intervening states
- The spread of light represented by horizontal lines, compared to the pictorial techniques of Doré, Tissot, and Raanan in the following illustrations:





**Creation, The First Day by James Tissot, France | 1836-1902**

Tissot's painting consists of a turmoil of color and a directionless whirl, indicating expressionistically the process of the light separating itself from the dark. Intermediary states are represented with light dimmed or muted as the darkness is driven away by the burgeoning brightness. The spreading light is viewed through both lines and circles, while in the center of the painting, the sun is reflected in the water with its yellow-orange hues seeming to swell outward as the light drives the darkness away. The mistiness in the bottom corners and the gloominess in the top corners create the impression of a curtain opening as the inverted triangles touch each other, while in the center, murky horizontal lines divide the proliferating light from the reflection in the water.

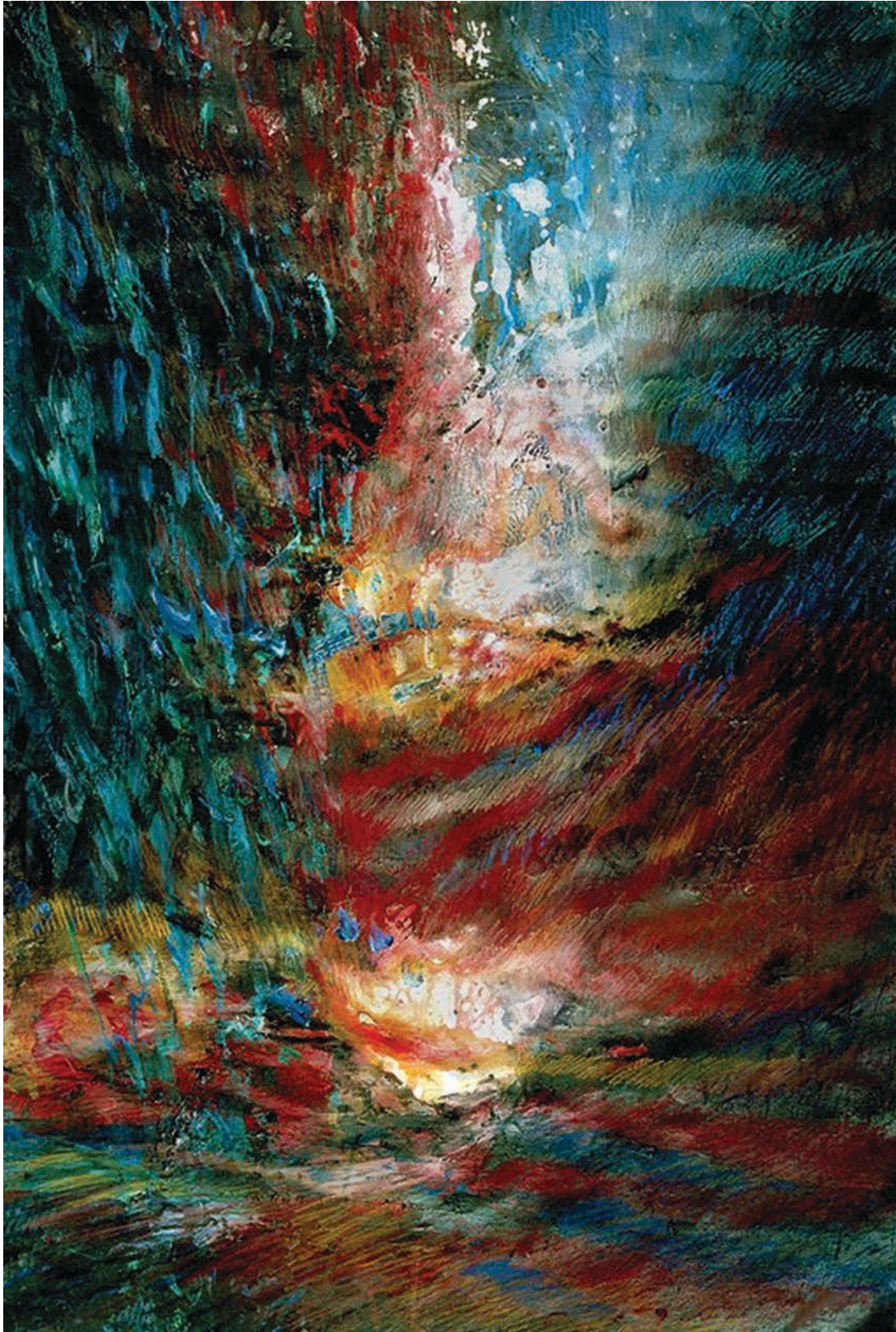
**And God divided the light from the darkness:** God placed a dividing curtain so that there should be an intervening period that was neither light nor dark. God determined that dark should not follow light immediately, but that the light should gradually ebb until darkness takes over the interval, being at times close to light and at times close to dark, so that mankind could better endure the transition.

(Ha'amek Davar, Gen. 1:4)

The first chapter of Genesis states that not only was light created but that God divided the light from the dark. What is

the meaning of this division? Is not light by its nature separate from darkness? It seems this is not so, for light can be misty; fog exists where light can be hazy and indistinct. Therefore the division constituted a specific act: the creation of a clear light, free of mistiness or haze. The division was not simply between good and bad light but between two distinct elements: light as originally created, which required a positive declaration, and darkness that belongs close to the void which it represents.

(Rabbi Adin Even Yisrael Steinsaltz, "Let there be light: light as an original creation")



**Day One by Yoram Raanan, Israel | 1953 -**



### **The creation of light as an abstract element**

Light was the first element created out of the void but that first act was astounding, for light was not formed from physical material. Light exists in itself. It has no source and no border – it has no tangible center and no objective.

(Rabbi Adin Even-Yisrael Steinsaltz, "Let there be light: light as an original creation")



### **"The Hidden Light" in Art**

#### **Rav Kook on light as an artistic creation**

Rav Kook, when discussing with the Jewish sculptor Malenikov, the relationship between halakha and sculpture, remarked: "When I was living in London I used to visit the National Gallery and the paintings I loved most were those by Rembrandt. I believe he was a tzaddik. When I first saw Rembrandt's paintings, they reminded me of a rabbinical comment on the creation of light. When God created light, it was so powerful that one could see from one end of the universe to the other and God was afraid that evil men would misuse it. What did he do? He concealed it, withholding it for future use by the righteous. However, from time to time men of stature appear whom He blesses with that hidden light. I believe that Rembrandt was one of them and that the light in his paintings is indeed the light that God created originally.

(Yehudah Gelman, "The Teachings of Rabbi Kook")




Yoram Raanan's painting shows the light descending diagonally, spilling into an amorphous melange of colors.

The painting sparks a sensation of primeval creation. The first shaft of light breaks through the chaos.




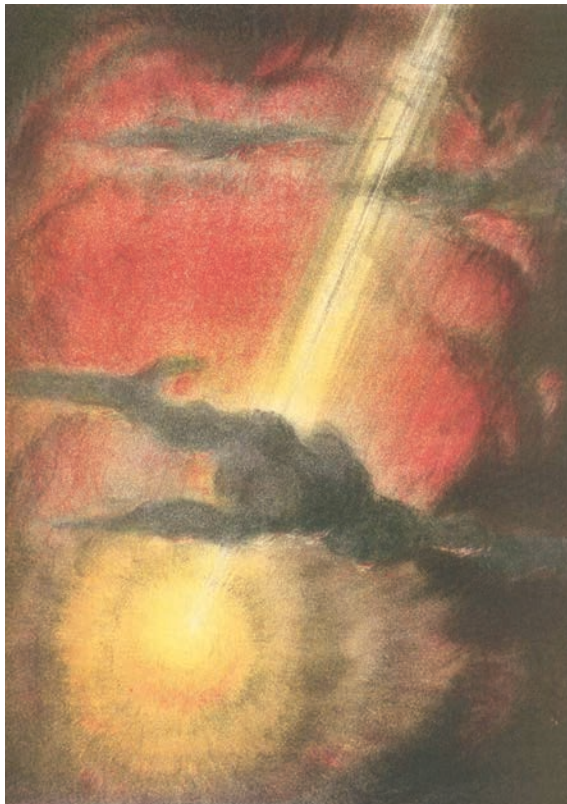
**Bereisheet Synagogue,  
Belu Simion Fainaru, Israel | 1959-**

 In Belu Simion Fainaru's piece, a cube of Jerusalem stone sits in a pool of shallow water. The cube is hollow and inside it is a neon menorah, and its light peeks through the cracks in the surfaces. The cracks on the sides are in the shape of the first six letters of the Hebrew alphabet and on the top is the letter *shin*. The letters, representing the Seven Days of Creation, appear on the outside of the cube and their mirror image is reflected in the water. In order to view the letters in their proper form, one has to be positioned inside the cube. But the cube is sealed – a reference to the hidden light preserved for the righteous that is destined to surface in the future.



**"And God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life..."**, (Genesis 2, 7) **Abel Pann, Israel | 1883-1964**

 In Pann's work, Adam is a grayish blob, dark, gloomy and limp. The Divine Light infuses him with spirituality. The light transforms Adam into a being in the image of God on this earth. The light in Abel Pann's Creation series symbolizes the unique, spiritual essence of Creation and is apparent in the depictions of the sun and the moon (shown on the following pages) and the breath of life in the form of light breathed into Adam.



**“And God made...the great luminary...”** (Genesis, 1, 16)  
**Abel Pann, Israel | 1883-1964**

The sun is drawn in dramatic flame colors with lines bursting forth. The light is dominant over the darkness which appears only on the margins and in a few dark clouds. The great luminary is a ball of fire spreading warmth and light. The red waves of heat spread randomly in all directions, unlike the yellow shaft of light aimed downward at a specific place. This ray of light can also be understood as a descending from a higher source that is the creator of light. Abel Pann draws in an expressionist style. The painting's outlines are blurred. The shape of the luminaries is hinted at and creates a spiritual sensation and abstract perception of creation.



**“And God made...the small luminary...”** (Genesis, 1, 16)  
**Abel Pann, Israel | 1883-1964**

The small luminary is drawn in cold, pastel shades of blue and violet, in the shape of closed, clearly defined circles. Darkness dominates light. The painting depicts images of the full and half moon. The way the moon is presented (in the shape of a scythe) hints at its minimal size relative to the great luminary.



With the light that God created on the first day, man could see from one end of the universe to the other – so stated R. Yaakov. But the sages state that although the luminaries were created on the first day, they were only set in place on the fourth.

(Hagiga 12a)

Rabbi Yaakov and the Sages try to understand the repetition of the creation of light and the luminaries on the first and fourth days.

According to R. Yaakov the light of the first day is a primeval light of unique intensity and is essentially different from the luminaries created on the fourth day.

According to the Sages, the light and the luminaries are part of the same light, but the process of creation was gradual: the creation of light was creating something from nothing - on the first day; and the placement of the luminaries in the skies occurred on the fourth day.

**The paintings by Doré, Tissot and Raanan** are about the creation of light on the first day. **Abel Pann's paintings** depict the creation of the luminaries on the fourth day.

The moon said before the Holy One blessed be He: “Master of the Universe, can two kings use one crown? He said to her: Go and make yourself smaller!”

**She said before Him:** “Master of the Universe, because I stated something correct to you, I should go and make myself smaller?”

(Hulin 60b)

Abel Pann's painting of the moon emphasizes the process of its diminution, as described in the comment by the sages. It is presented in the painting as a kind of eclipse.



### **The great luminary and the small luminary**

- warm or cold colors
- the way the light spreads – linear or circular motions
- is light coming out or going in

In the beginning God created  
the heaven and the earth.  
Now the earth was unformed and void,  
and darkness was upon the face of the deep;  
and the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters.  
And God said: "Let there be light." And there was light.  
And God saw the light, that it was good;  
and God divided the light from the darkness.  
And God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night.  
And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

(Gen. 1, 1-5)

And God said: "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the  
waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters."  
And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which  
were under the firmament from the waters which were above the  
firmament; and it was so.  
And God called the firmament Heaven.  
And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

(Gen. 1, 6-8)

And God said: "Let the waters under the heaven be gathered  
together unto one place, and let the dry land appear."  
And it was so.  
And God called the dry land Earth,  
and the gathering together of the waters called He Seas;

(Gen. 1, 9-10)

and God saw that it was good.  
And God said: "Let the earth put forth grass, herb-yielding seed,  
and fruit-tree bearing fruit after its kind, wherein is the seed  
thereof, upon the earth."  
And it was so.  
And the earth brought forth grass,



## The Days of Creation

herb-yielding seed after its kind,  
and tree bearing fruit, wherein is the seed thereof,  
after its kind; and God saw that it was good.  
And there was evening and there was morning, *a third day*.  
And God said: "Let there be lights in the firmament of the  
heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for  
signs, and for seasons, and for days and years; and let them  
be for lights in the firmament of the heaven  
to give light upon the earth."  
And it was so.  
And God made the two great lights: the greater light to rule  
the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; and the stars.  
And God set them in the firmament of the heaven  
to give light upon the earth, and to rule over the day and over  
the night, and to divide the light from the darkness;  
and God saw that it was good.  
And there was evening and there was morning, *a fourth day*.  
And God said: "Let the waters swarm with swarms of  
living creatures, and let fowl fly above the earth in the open  
firmament of heaven."  
And God created the great sea-monsters, and every living  
creature that creepeth, wherewith the waters swarmed, after  
its kind, and every winged fowl after its kind;  
and God saw that it was good.

(Gen. 1, 10-21)

And God blessed them, saying: "Be fruitful, and multiply,  
and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the  
earth." And there was evening and there was morning,  
*a fifth day*.  
And God said: "Let the earth bring forth the living creature  
after its kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the  
earth after its kind." And it was so.  
And God made the beast of the earth after its kind,  
and the cattle after their kind,

and every thing that creepeth upon the ground after its kind;  
and God saw that it was good.

And God said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness;  
and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea,  
and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth,  
and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth."

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

And God blessed them; and God said unto them:

"Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth,  
and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea,  
and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that  
creepeth upon the earth."

And God said: "Behold, I have given you every herb-yielding seed,  
which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the  
fruit of a tree-yielding seed – to you it shall be for food;  
and to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air,  
and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is  
a living soul, [I have given] every green herb for food."

And it was so.

And God saw every thing that He had made,  
and, behold, it was very good.

And there was evening and there was morning, *the sixth day*.

(Gen. 1, 2-31)

And the heaven and the earth were finished,  
and all the host of them.  
And on the seventh day God finished His work  
which He had made;  
and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made.  
And God blessed the seventh day,  
and hallowed it; because that in it He rested from all His work  
which God in creating had made.

(Gen. 2, 1-3)

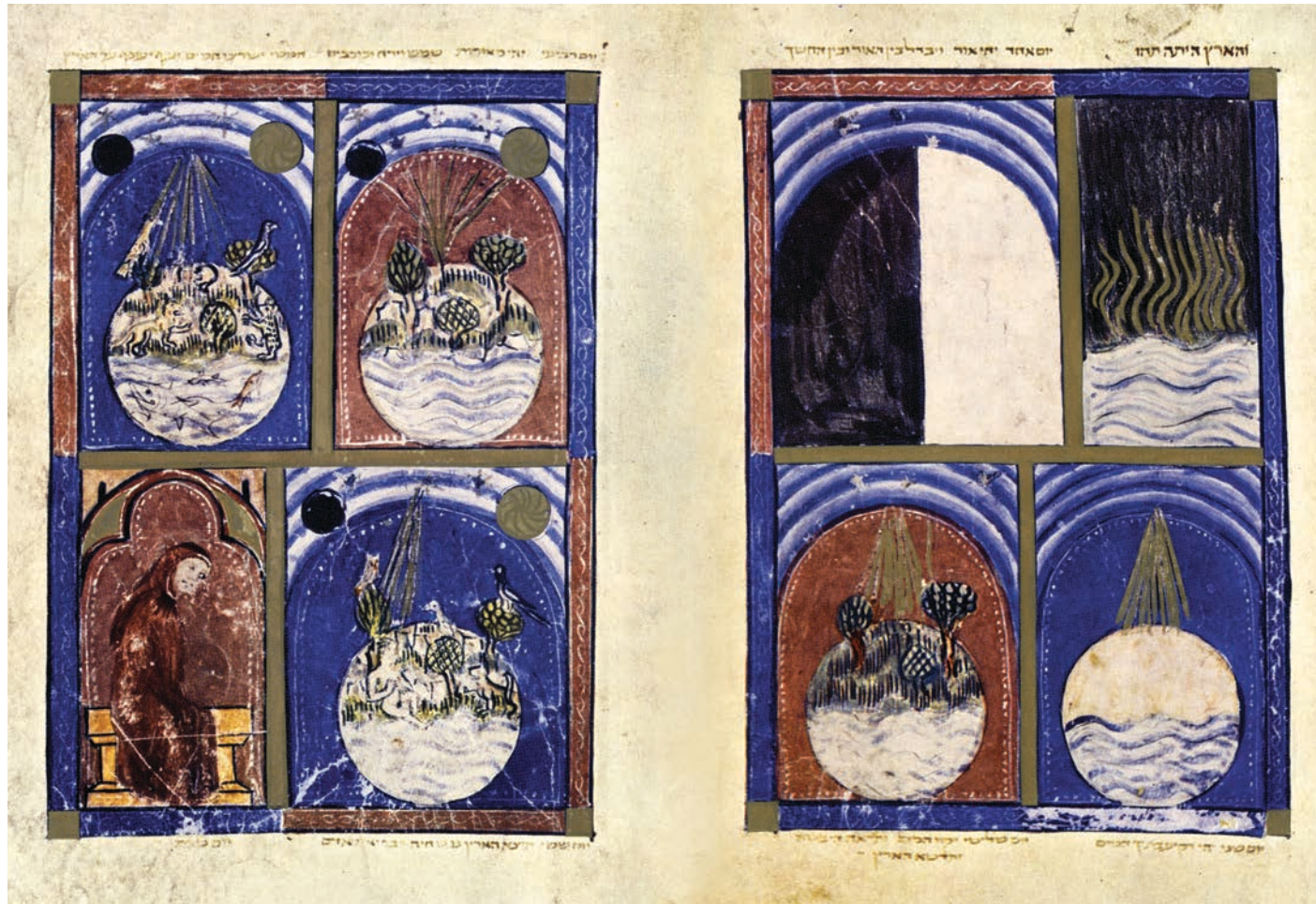


and the earth was  
without form and void

Day one: Let there be light  
and God divided the light  
from the darkness

Day four: Let there  
be lights...sun and moon  
and stars

Day five: let the waters  
swarm abundantly...and let  
birds fly above the earth



Day two: Let there be a  
firmament in the midst  
of the waters

Day three: Let the waters be  
gather and let the dry land  
appear and let the earth bring  
forth grass

Day six: Let the earth bring  
forth living creatures  
The creation of man

The Sabbath

### Sarajevo Haggada, Spain | c. 1350

The depiction of Creation in the Sarajevo Haggada is orderly in structure. Seven is an odd number, but the painting adopts an even number of sections to preserve symmetry and balance between the two halves of the page. There are eight rectangular frames, clearly divided, with each frame presenting a day of Creation. The first additional frame to the seven days, describes chaos before Creation in the form of black and white undulations, with vapors rising above depicted by gold wavy lines on a black background. The six days of Creation are each placed in a blue and gold frame functioning as a gateway to the day itself. The depiction of the first day differs from that of the other days as there was no physical reality of Earth to describe. The vertical division of the area into black and white suggests an intangibility (note the commentators' discussion of how the separation occurred). The subsequent days all share essentially the same pattern: a circle with diagonal lines above, with the circle representing the world, and the lines symbolizing God who ordained

the Creation. The entire depiction is symmetrical, and the various days are consistent as the additional elements created each day are imposed upon what had been created before, and are repeated for the following days. Thus the trees formed on the third day reappear on the fourth, fifth and sixth days; the luminaries, first depicted on the fourth day, continue to appear on the fifth and sixth days, and the birds of the fifth day are repeated on the sixth day. Similarly, the subtle use of blue and gold in the frames not only produces a balance between the two halves – an effect of order and equilibrium in the world and a clear division between the days of creation – but also a sense of continuity and progression from day to day. That aspect is consistent with the literary description of the events of Creation in the opening chapter of Genesis, for there too an effect of constancy and continuity is produced by the repetition of phrases such as: “And God said,” or “It was evening and it was morning.”

Day four: let there be luminaries, sun, moon and stars



Details from the *Sarajevo Haggada*, Spain | c. 1350

Day one: Let there be light and God divided the light from the darkness.



## He Who created light and darkness

### And God divided the light from the darkness:

This is not the darkness mentioned in verse 2 which is fire, but it is the absence of light, for God gave light the facility of disappearing until its return.

(Nahmanides, Gen. 1:4)

God created darkness on the face of the deep, for darkness was a created element, as is written: "He creates light and creates darkness" (Is. 45:7) but before then there was no light or darkness visible except to God.

(Hizkuni, Gen. 1:2)

Nahmanides and Hizkuni present two different interpretations for the creation of light and darkness. According to Nahmanides, God created light, and the darkness mentioned in that verse was merely the absence of light. According to Hizkuni, there were two creations, one for light and one for darkness. The Sarajevo Haggada divides its picture into two – half light, half dark – suggesting that darkness was created separately. In Doré's version, which appears in the chapter on the creation of the luminaries, the light is seen as emerging from the dark, which suggests that darkness consisted of the absence of light.



The depiction of light on the fourth day, when the luminaries were created, undergoes a change. On previous days, the light originated from a single point in the sky and radiated toward Earth, while on the fourth day it is depicted as beaming in full force from the heavens and then concentrating on one spot, perhaps to distinguish between a divine, spiritually-emanant light and a natural light, aimed and focused on the created universe. On the fifth and sixth days, although the luminaries appear again in the sky, the light is once again represented as a spiritual light emanating from one point and radiating toward Earth, as on the second and third days. Interestingly, on the sixth day the rays of light are more limited and are aimed only to one side – the side where Adam appears, "the crown of creation."

The Creation of Light, Gustave Doré



The Sabbath Day



Details from the *Sarajevo Haggada*  
Barcelona | c. 1350

The section devoted to the Sabbath presents a person resting. It does not match the account in Genesis, but does conform to the wording of the Ten Commandments: Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath unto the Lord thy God, in it thou shalt not do any manner of work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor the stranger that is within thy gates; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the seas, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it. (Ex. 20:9)

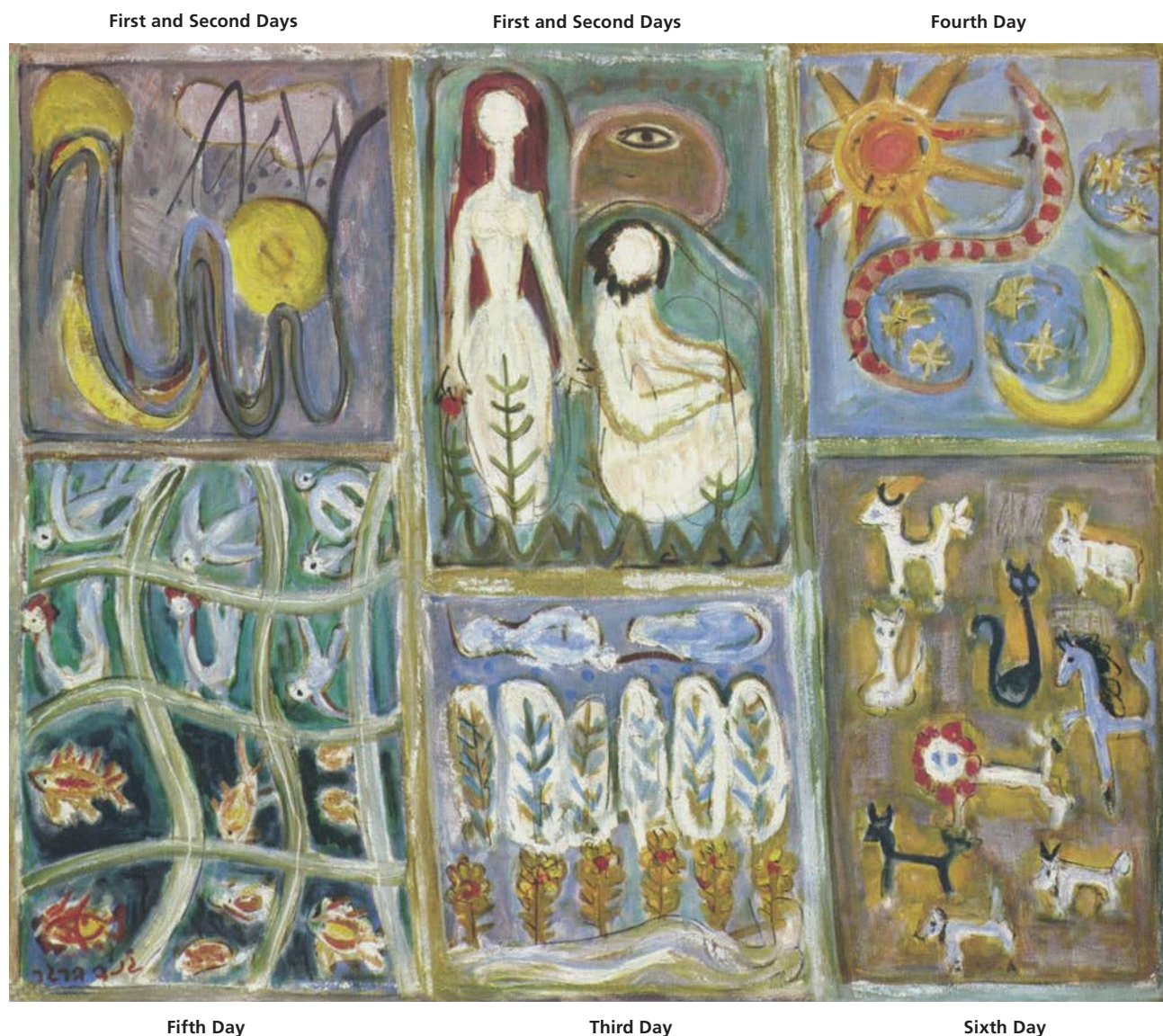
The Creation from a thirteenth-century Christian manuscript: God is depicted in human form as active throughout the period of Creation but resting on the seventh day.

It would seem according to the commentaries that the world was trembling and unstable until the coming of the Sabbath when it was then made firm. The idea being that God now created the spirit of the universe, as in the phrase: "and on the seventh day He rested," (i.e., refreshed the spirit) (Ex. 31:17). When the Talmud states: "When Sabbath ends, the spirit leaves" (Beitza 17a), it plays on the word "spirit." It merely suggests that there is an allusion, not arguing that it is the literal meaning. The word, "shabbat," (He rested), is read as if it means "the Shabbat had arrived," and the word "vayinafash," (and He was refreshed), as hinting that all creatures were given their souls, which they had not possessed until then. (Or HaHayim, Gen. 2:2)

The Or HaHayim confers on the Sabbath a special function of endowing all creatures with spiritual richness.

The picture of the Sabbath in the *Sarajevo Haggada*, depicting man as resting and not God, indicates the belief that the Sabbath was created for humans. Man, possessing the finest soul of all creatures - "the crown of creation" - becomes the central figure in the creation of the seventh day.

On the seventh day of rest after six days of Creation, it was God who rested; therefore, the phrase "and rested" refers to Him. The commandment to the people of Israel to cease from work on the Sabbath is derived from that phrase. Christian depictions of the seventh day portray God the Creator resting in full majesty from his labors and that representation of God appears throughout such illustrations. In this manuscript the change is dramatic – man, not God, is resting. The artist embellishes this Jewish manuscript, wishing to avoid any physical depiction of God. [This idea appears in Bezalel Narkis, *Illuminated Jewish Manuscripts*]



***The Six Days of Creation* by Genia Berger, Israel | 1907-2000**

Genia Berger adopts a naïve style for her painting *The Six Days of Creation*. The creation of Adam, which took place on the sixth day, is placed in the center of the painting, and the rest of creation is set in a random order in an effort to give primary importance to Adam. On the painting of the sixth day, an eye appears, which represents God gazing at man and woman. The image here is marked by a disembodied eye symbolizing one of the characteristics of God: the quality of observing and examining mankind. Unlike the eye of God, the humans are drawn without eyes although the animals possess them. A man without eyes is a man without a personality or identity, especially from the perspective of a painter! The artist may have wished to represent man and woman with white bodies and eyeless to indicate the human race as a whole, or to imply that they have not yet eaten from the Tree of Knowledge and do not yet know right from wrong. The depiction of Adam seated,

with his back to a standing Eve, creates a sense of tension and alienation between man and woman. This feeling is strengthened as the woman is portrayed concealing the red fruit held in her hand furthest from Adam. The sixth day is split into two paintings, separating the creation of man from the creation of the animals, in contrast to the description in Genesis. This "mistake" is quite common in paintings. Perhaps it is intended to elevate the prestige of man, who is superior to all other creatures. The artist in general preserves the framework of the six days. The first and second day are united. Both illustrate a distinction between opposites: light and dark, and the waters and the heavens. The Sabbath day was not included, as the painting focuses on the six days of Creation culminating with the creation of man. The omission of the Sabbath may attest to the artist's worldview.

### **The Six Days of Work**

- The style of the painting (realistic, abstract, naïve...)
- The sequence of days and an omission
- The depiction of God
- The depiction of man and its significance



And the Lord God said:  
"It is not good that the man should be alone;  
I will make him a help meet for him."

And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man,  
and he slept;  
and He took one of his ribs,  
and closed up the place with flesh instead thereof.  
And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from the man,  
made He a woman, and brought her unto the man.

And the man said:  
"This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh;  
she shall be called Woman,  
because she was taken out of Man."

(Gen. 2, 18-23)

**It Is Not Good That the  
Man Should Be Alone**



**The Creation of Eve by Abel Pann, Israel | 1883-1964**  
**"And He took one of Adam's ribs" (Gen. 2:21)**

In this painting, Adam lies spread-eagled, helpless, and asleep: "And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept." The woman emerges from Adam's body in an orange-yellow flame, from near his ribs. In contrast to the man, she is erect, a figure full of life moving upward, like a chrysalis about to open – mystical and spiritual yet at the same time satanic and threatening (resembling a devil emerging from a bottle). As the midrash states: "Satan was created with her." The expressionistic style produces the effect of a miraculous event. The fire burning where the man and woman meet, although not mentioned in the text, is a familiar symbol. Fire can be warm and pleasant – the flame of love – or consuming and destructive – the fire of lust, hatred, and jealousy.



## And He took one of his ribs, and closed up the place with flesh instead thereof.

In the following passages, commentators differ concerning the creation of woman, focusing on the meaning of the word "rib," and the precise part of the body from which woman was formed. Apart from the varied understanding of the term, the dispute is related to concepts of the status and function of a woman. The biblical text is, as usual, very brief and can be interpreted in various ways. Each midrash represents the worldview, and in this case represents the relationship to women.

R. Yirmeya b. Elazar said: God created Adam with two faces, as is said: "Thou hast hemmed me in behind and before" (Ps. 139:5). "And God built the rib"- Rav and Shmuel both comment. One claims it refers to "a face" and one claims it refers to a "a tail."  
 (Berakhot 61a)

What is the difference between the two readings? "Tail" assumes a progressive creation: In the first stage, man was created with an extra limb, and in the second stage woman was created out of that limb. This reading assumes a hierarchical order, as may be seen from the following passage:

One of the reasons that woman was not created together with man, while other creatures were created male and female simultaneously, was that man's primary function was to serve God and for no other purpose. Woman was

created later, since her purpose was to serve man and allow him to study Torah.

(Yalkut MeAmLoez, Gen. 2:21-22)

**God first created a creature with two faces**, one in front and one behind; then He split them into two and made one of them into Eve.

(Berakhot 61a)

Rashi chooses the interpretation that the rib is the face. On linguistic grounds he understands *tzela* to mean "side," as in the phrase: "*tzela hamishkan*" (the side of the Tabernacle). He therefore adopts the concept of equality in the creation, namely that man was first formed with two faces and then divided into male and female. He does so on the basis of Midrash Rabba (Gen. 8:1) cited below. The potential for the Divine Presence or fire arising from the joining of man and women is known from the following midrash:

It is recorded in the name of R. Meir: Man and woman share a Divine Presence...the letter *yud* in the word *ish*, and the letter *heh* in the word *isha* together form one of God's names. If the two are worthy, then the Divine Presence is bestowed on them; but if they are unworthy, the divinity departs, and the remaining letters *aleph* and *shin* form the word "*esh*" (fire), which consumes them.

(Pesikta Zutrata, Gen. 2:23)




## It is not good that the man should be alone: The Creation of Eve

- The effect of warm or cold colors
- The relationship between man and woman
- The structure of the following illustrations






***The Creation of the Woman* by Brian Morrison, USA | contemporary**

 Brian Morrison's painting presents the couple through various visual features and as opposing characters. Man is seated in a stable position (the form of a firmly-based triangle), alert and aware of what is happening around him, in contrast to the scriptural account: "And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept." Nevertheless, Adam seems helpless, weary, and unable to comprehend what is happening. He looks away from the woman in puzzlement.

The woman, depicted in bright blue, lies sprawled on a type of solid object, perhaps a rock, appearing to be lifeless. This frozen depiction of the woman stands in sharp contrast to Pann's representation of her painted in warm tones, erect, floating in the air, yet full of movement and vitality. Pann's Eve has spirituality and power, while Morrison's Eve suggests alienation and subservience.

 Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch follows Rashi's reading. The bodily material of man was taken from the soil. God then took one side of man and built it into woman. Man was subsequently divided into two, one part being made into woman. Man was initially one single being before being divided into two. God thereby ensured woman's equality with man.

The rabbis deduce from this reading the characteristics of woman - her voice, her temperament, and her earlier spiritual maturity - all derived

from the form of her creation. She was created from man's body which was already a living and feeling entity, as opposed to man who was created from the soil.

(Hirsch, Gen. 2:21)

The assumption that the creation was progressive allows Hirsch to attribute greater spirituality to woman, an aspect expressed in Abel Pann's picture.

## Adam and Eve as Symbols of Matrimony



***The Angel of the Divine Presence Clothing Adam and Eve with Coats of Skins* by William Blake, England | 1757-1827**

In Blake's painting, Adam and Eve are portrayed as a shy boy and girl embraced by an angel who is attempting to join and propel them into each other's arms, while placing his foot between them. Overhead there is a canopy of palm trees reminiscent of a *sukka* and clouds representing the glory of God. On each side, are flames from the altar with thick palm tree trunks above. The canopy indicates their bond with God.

The flames above the two altars are twofold in their effect, implying both the sacred fire of the Divine Presence and the flames of temptation and lust. The characters are depicted within a gateway, an entrance to the world, which is dark on one side and light on the other. The painting is full of grace and optimism, but also indicates tension in the future.



***Adam and Eve* by Maxwell Kofi Donkor, Ghana | contemporary**

The statue, made of wood, is designed in the tradition of ethnic African sculpture. The carvings in the wood hint at the Tree of Knowledge as well as imply that the couple constitute the stock from which mankind descends. It emphasizes that they are joined back-to-back as in the midrash cited below. Their bodies are similar, yet different in function. The woman's body lacks hands, as though she is wearing a baby carrier, the purpose being to indicate her assigned role of raising children. The man (as pictured in this photograph) is behind her in the shadow with his hands embracing the woman's thighs in a supportive and protective posture. By photographing the statue with the woman facing forward and with the light on her countenance, Kofi suggests that in her lies the future and continuity of mankind.

R. Yirmeya b. Elazar said: When God created man, he created him bisexual, as is suggested in the phrase: "Male and female he created them." R. Shmuel b. Nahman said: When he created man, he created him double-faced, and then split them back-to-back.

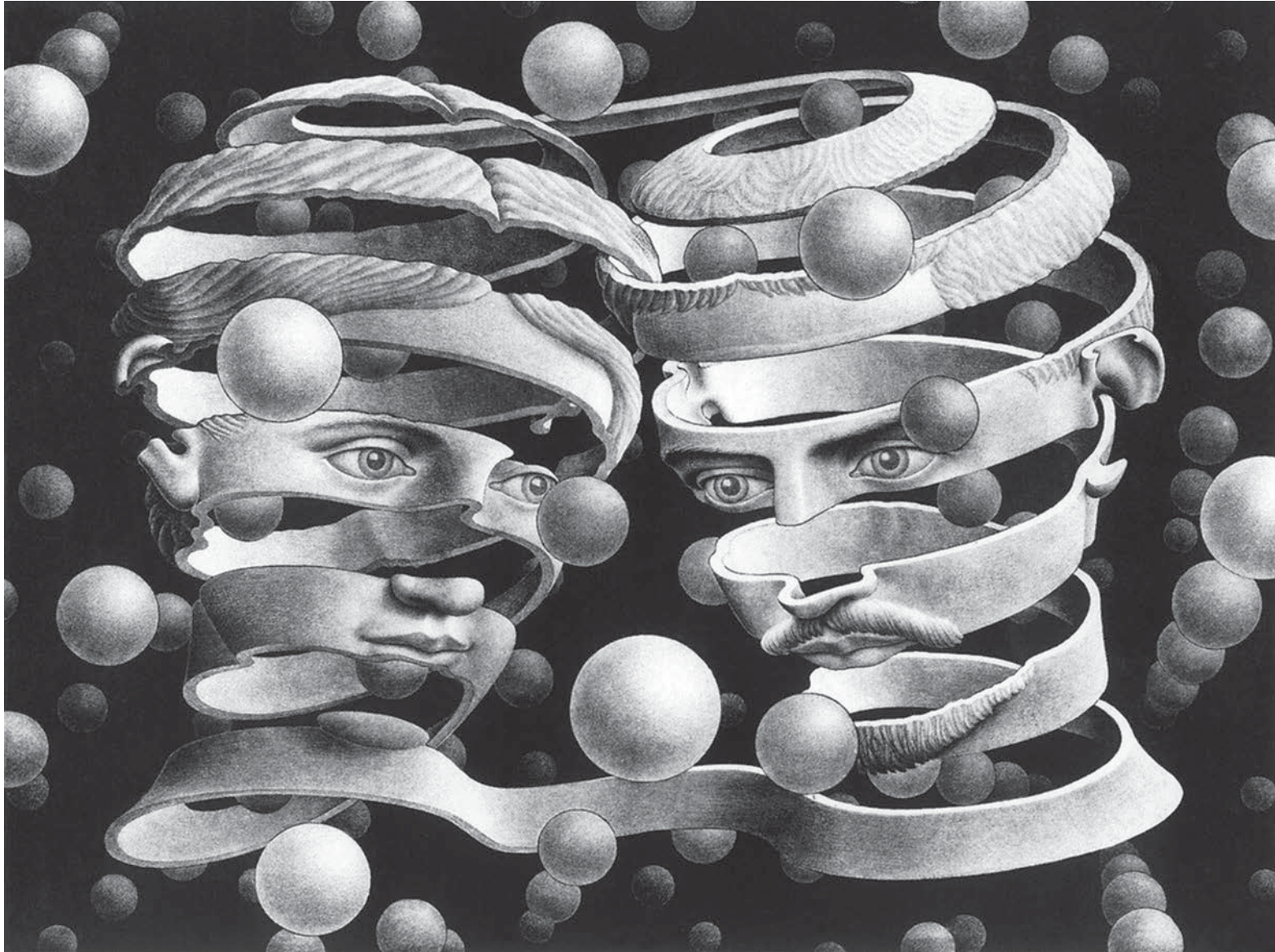
(Midrash Rabba, Gen. 8:1)

It is not good for man to be alone. They should face each other, in love, as in the phrase: "I have set the Lord ever before me" (Ps. 19:8). The meaning of "ezer kenegdo" (help mate against him), is not in the sense of opposition but of mutual love, facing each other. For when there is dispute, each turns a back upon the other and they do not face one another.


(Kli Yakar, Gen. 2:18)

The commentators use the image of facing each other to describe the relationship. This element can be found in the illustrations.





***The Bond of Marriage* by Maurits Cornelis Escher, Holland | 1898-1972**

 The painting surrealistically portrays the ideal of marital unity. The man and woman are not looking at each other but gazing at a point in front of them. They are very similar with only minor details revealing their identity, such as the man's moustache and beard, and the woman's hair.

Two spirals join the man's head (on the right) and the woman's head (on the left) – the endless threads connecting their

foreheads and necks to create a double union. Celestial bodies float in front of and behind the couple, as well as within their heads which appear hollow. The man and the woman in this painting represent a complex relationship – on the one hand, they exhibit infinite contact and movement whereby the couple could complement each other, and on the other hand, they demonstrate the possibility of a breach in their relationship.

### **Examples of Matrimony**

- Connection – presentation of the relationship between man and woman
- Tension – presentation of tension between the married couple

# The First Marriage: Overcoming Loneliness

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

**“It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help-opposite for him.”** (Gen. 2:18)

The Torah opens on the grandest scale possible, the Creation of the world: heavens and earth, firmament, sun, moon, stars, and the planet itself. Each day we climb the ladder of Creation until the sixth day, when man appears. But even after that, the epoch described still seems remote, carved out of a meta-historic consciousness dealing with such realities as the Garden of Eden and the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil. Our imagination only goes so far in understanding that period of time, and without relying on metaphor most would be lost.

But directly after the prohibition of tasting the forbidden fruit, we read the first verse which has an immediate bearing on the modern human condition: “And the Lord God said: ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a ‘help-opposite’ for him” (Gen. 2:18). Adam may still be in the Garden of Eden, but who doesn’t understand what it means to be alone? With this verse we recognize his flesh-and-blood reality. His dilemma is ours, and the next paragraph deals with the major existential issues of humanity, then and now: how the Torah views the fundamental human need which only marriage can fulfill, and the ideal relationship between husband and wife, and the significance of the sexual act between them.

The first problem in the biblical text is the strange Hebrew term, “*ezer kenegdo*,” that God uses to describe the creature He will provide for Adam to overcome his being alone. The literal translation is “help-opposite,” “help-mate,” “a help to match him,” or “compatible helper,” which do not fully reflect the inherent tension in the Hebrew.

Rashi, in explaining the phrase, writes: “If the man is worthy, then his wife will be an *ezer*, ‘a helper,’

and if not, then she will be *kenegdo*, ‘against him,’ an opposite force.” This interpretation reflects the antithetical nature of the phrase, but doesn’t reconcile the contradictory concepts. Despite Rashi’s commentary, a “help-opposite” remains a difficult construction. If it’s not good for Adam to be alone, why doesn’t God simply create a “helper” for him? Why an “opposite”?

Second, if God is so worried about Adam being alone, then why, in the midst of the segment dealing with the creation of Eve, does the text digress and turn to Adam’s naming of the animals?

The key to understanding the difficult term “help-opposite” lies in the introductory verse: “It is not good for the human being to be levado, ‘alone.’” Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik discusses the tragedy of aloneness most poignantly in his book *The Lonely Man of Faith*. Aloneness has two aspects: First there is social loneliness, the lack of someone with whom to share one’s innermost thoughts and emotions. Several verses back we read “the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground...and man being became a living soul” (v. 7). The Targum translates “living soul” as *ruah memalela*, a spirit that speaks. Perhaps axiomatically a human being is a creature that speaks, and must speak, to feel alive. Aristotle defines the human as a social animal. The act of communication is built into us. Indeed, one of the worst punishments imaginable is solitary confinement.

The second type of aloneness cuts close to the very bone of life and death. We could call it existential aloneness, a concept already alluded to in the Torah with the odd form of the verb *heyot* in our key verse, which connotes existence, literally: “it is not good...existing (*heyot*)...man alone” (v. 18). In this form the word *heyot* suggests the existential condition of one’s being; not only our being socially lonely, but specifically relating to an aloneness that penetrates to the depths of

one’s very existence. We generally live each day as though we will continue to live for eternity, but at the back of our minds we are aware of the painful truth that the day will arrive when we must, each of us, embark upon a journey we must take alone. The bleak, black specter of non-existence at the end of the road, is the angst which echoes God’s declaration that “it is not good for man to be alone.”

The Torah is telling us, therefore, that what a human being desperately needs is a relationship that will help assuage both social loneliness as well as existential aloneness; one’s complement/companion must serve as share- and soul-mate, as well as a link to eternity. How does the *ezer kenegdo* help overcome social loneliness? This can happen only if there is a willingness to limit oneself and allow the other person not to necessarily agree, sometimes to stand opposite and think opposite. A marriage partner is not an automatic amen-sayer, constantly regaling his/her spouse with compliments and praises, a trophy/accessory who serves drinks, sets the table or provides money in the bank. A genuine life partner must be able to say “no” if that is what is necessary – the *kenegdo* part – because if you marry a yes-sayer, you aren’t really confronting or being confronted by an “other”; you are not sharing your life with a truly significant “other.” Moreover, if the partner is always expected to agree, the lips may be moving “yes,” but the heart may be saying “no” silently until the heart breaks from the weight of “nos.” In the end, a help-opposite on both sides creates its own synthesis, and only with this formula can a new oneness emerge. The couple must drink together, but not always from the same cup, so that one can correct the other, complement the other, cheer and comfort the other, help and be helped by the other. Only then is the one not alone; only then is there a partner each can respect, thereby creating a relationship in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts – a

unit in which one plus one equals three. Hence, the greatest help is provided specifically by a loving partner who at times stands in opposition for the good of the other as well as for the good of the relationship.

From this perspective we can answer the second textual question which queries why God, in *media res creatio*, turns to the creatures of the world to line up and be named by man. The Midrash makes the daring suggestion that Adam cohabited with all of the animal creatures, but was totally unsatisfied; "He did not find in them a help-opposite." The reason for Adam's failure in attaining satisfaction is suggested by the fact that God asks him to name the animals. When we name something, we define it, and when we define it, we control it.

However, a relationship of control is not a relationship of complement; it is one-sided, taking and not giving. Indeed, humanity is commanded to control the physical, animal world ("and subdue it" (1:28)), but one spouse is not to control the other. For if one does, he/she has lost out on discovering the *ezer kenegdo* and overcoming social loneliness.

From this perspective, we can appreciate a profound biblical verse: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh" (2:24). The biblical Hebrew word for "cleave," "*davok*," generally connotes a compatibility of sensitivities and goals, a unity of mind and spirit. The Bible is telling us that such a real "togetherness" of personalities might happily lead to a oneness of body in the sexual union – a union which may well result in a permanent relationship, but provides a literal oneness only temporarily – a union which hopefully renders each filled and fulfilled as a part of the other, but still retains each individual apart and distinct.

Thus, clearly, the individual is enabled to reach his/her greatest potential precisely because he/

she is not isolated and lonely, but is also a part of another.

The author of Ecclesiastes puts it very well: "Two are better than one...woe to one who is alone when he falls, for there is no one to lift him! If two sleep together they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? A three-ply cord is not easily severed" (4:9–12). If the text is praising the importance of two together, how do we come to a three-ply cord? In a caring marital relationship, the added strength of two together creates the new third entity which is the marital relationship itself; one plus one equaling not two, but three!