

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED IN EDEN? CREATION STORIES IN GENESIS

Genesis 1-2.4a: In the beginning, when *Elohim*¹ was **creating** (*bara*) the heavens and the earth, his spirit (*ruach*: ‘wind-breath-spirit’) brooded over the waters of the wild waste, and he said: “Let there be light!” And there was light. *Elohim* saw the light: that *it was right*.² He divided the light from the darkness, day and night, and that was the first day. On the second day *Elohim* divided the waters below the sky from those above. On the third, he made dry land appear, and the earth **brought forth** (*yatsa*) plants. On the fourth, he made two great lights, greater and smaller, to rule the day and the night. On the fifth, he made sea creatures and birds.

On the sixth day *Elohim* **made** (*yasah*) animals and creeping things. Then he said: “Let us **make** a Human (*‘a adam*),³ in our image, according to our likeness! Let them rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, animals, all the earth, and all crawling things that crawl about upon the earth.” So *Elohim* **created** (*bara*) a Human (*‘a adam*) in his own image: “In the image of *Elohim* he **created** it; / Male and female he **created** them” (26-27). Then he told them to be fruitful and **multiply** (*rabah*), and gave them all fruit-bearing trees for food. And *Elohim* saw all that he had made: *it was just right*!² On the seventh day *Elohim* rested, blessed that day, and made it holy.

Genesis 2.4b-3.24: In that day when YHVH⁴ *Elohim* was **making** (*yasah*) earth and heaven, before there were any plants or animals, there was no Earthling (*‘a adam*) to cultivate the earth (*adamah*). So YHVH *Elohim* **molds** an Earthling from earth, breathes (*naphach*) life into it, so that it becomes a living being (*nephesh*); he plants it in a garden, along with the tree of life and the tree of knowledge.⁵ YHVH *Elohim* tells the Earthling: “Of every tree in the garden you may freely EAT: But of the tree of the knowledge of **right and wrong**, you shall not EAT of it: for **in the day that you EAT** you shall surely die” (2.16-17).

YHVH *Elohim* sees that *it is not right*² for the Earthling to be alone, so he decides to make a counterpart⁶ for it; he **molds** all the beasts of the field and birds of the air, which the Earthling names, but no counterpart for it is found among them. So YHVH *Elohim* puts the Earthling to sleep, takes a rib and some flesh, and **builds** a Woman-Wife. The Earthling is now a Man-Husband (*ish*), and he is also able to name this new creature correctly: “she shall be called Woman [*ishah*], because she was taken out of Man [*ish*]” (2.23).⁷ The two are naked but do not know it (*yada*).⁵

1. *Elohim*: God. The Heb. word has a plural form (*im*) but a singular meaning--though he calls himself “us” in v. 26.

2. *right*: Heb. *towb*, from TWB, ‘to do or make straight’; *wrong* (2.17) is Heb. *rah*, from RWH, ‘to make crooked.’

3. In Hebrew, the word for ‘the human,’ *‘a adam* comes from the word for ‘ground,’ *adamah*, whence ‘Earthling’ in Chapter 2. In English, the word *human* comes (through Latin *humanus*) from an Indo-European root, *dhghem-*, that means ‘earth’ (*humus*); the words *humility* (L. *humilis*) and *humor* come from the same root.

4. YHVH, probably pronounced *yah-weh*, often translated into English as LORD, are the letters of the Tetragrammaton, יהוה - I AM. God’s name appears here for the first time; according to Exodus 3.13-14, it was not revealed to the Israelites until the time of Moses. Because of its sacredness, the Name is not spoken by Conservative or Orthodox Jews, who regularly substitute *Adonai*, ‘Lord.’

5. The Hebrew word *da’ath* derives from the root YDA, ‘to have intimate (including carnal) knowledge of.’

6. Hebrew *ezer kenegdo*, perhaps best thought of as ‘a helping partner,’ *not* a subordinate or servant.

7. Hebrew *ishah* means both ‘woman’ and ‘wife’; *ish* is both ‘man’ and ‘husband.’ But the Man’s derivation of the word *ishah* from *ish*, as if the female had been added to the male (*ish + ah*) is doubly mistaken: (1) etymologically, *ishah* does not derive from *ish*; (2) genetically, both male and female derive from the Human (*‘a adam*), not from the

male alone.

The *knowing*, naked, smooth-tongued Snake⁸ slithers in to exploit the confusion inherent in YHVH *Elohim's* mixed message: *EAT but Don't EAT!* He whispers to the woman, "Hath God said, Ye shall not EAT of all these garden trees?"(3.1) She corrects him: "We may EAT the fruit of the garden trees: But of the fruit of the [unnamed!] tree in the midst of the garden,⁹ *Elohim* hath said, Ye shall not EAT of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die" (3-4). The Snake replies—truthfully!: "Ye shall not surely die: For *Elohim* doth *know* (*yada*) that **in that day** ye EAT thereof, then your **eyes** shall be opened, and ye shall be as *elohim* [gods!], *knowing* (*yada*) **right and wrong**" (5). Seeing that the tree is good to EAT, and pleasant to the **eyes**, and desirable to make one wise, she EATS and gives some to her husband, who also EATS. Their **eyes** are opened, and they *know* (*yada*) they are naked—and ashamed: "Who told you you were naked? Did you EAT from the tree I told you not to EAT from?" (11)

The Man says: "The woman you gave me gave me fruit, and I ATE" (12).

The Woman says: "The Snake tricked me, and I ATE" (13).

YHVH *Elohim* then proceeds to reorganize their lives (14-19):

To the snake [now speechless] G*d says: "Because you have done this, | you are **cursed** above all cattle, | and above every beast of the field;¹⁰ | on your belly you shall go, | and dust you shall EAT¹¹ | *all the days of your life*.¹² | And I will put enmity between you and the woman, | and between your seed and her seed; | it shall bruise your head, | and you shall bruise its heel."

To the Woman: "I will greatly **multiply** (1.28) your pain in childbirth;¹³ | in sorrow you shall **bring forth** (*yatsa*) children; | your desire shall be for your husband, | and he shall rule over you."

To the Man: "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, | and have EATEN from the tree | of which I commanded you, | 'You shall not EAT of it': | **cursed** is the ground for your sake; | in sorrow¹³ you shall EAT of it *all the days of your life*.¹² | Thorns also and thistles shall it **bring forth** to you; | and you shall EAT the herb of the field.¹⁰ | In the sweat of your face shall you EAT bread, | till you return to the ground;¹⁴ for out of it you were taken: dust you are, and to dust you shall return."

Adam¹⁵ calls his wife's name Eve (*Cevah*); because she was the mother of *all living*.¹²

YHVH *Elohim* clothes the Humans with skins and sends them forth into the world to labor together and to **bring forth** life, children and nourishment, saying: "the Human has now become *like one of us*,¹⁶ **knowing right and wrong**. So now, lest he reach out his hand and take also from the Tree of Life (*chay*) and EAT and *live all the days . . .*"¹²

4.1: Adam *knows* his wife, Eve; she conceives and **brings forth** Cain. But that is another story.

8. *snake: nachash*, from NCHSH, 'hiss, whisper.' The snake is NOT Satan, but he is *yarum*, 'sly, smooth'; the Humans are *eyrom*, 'naked, hairless,' also 'smooth,' but they lack subtlety.

9. There are, in fact, *two* trees in the middle of the garden, a Tree of Death and a Tree of Life (22).

10. The snake is cursed more than every domestic animal ('cattle') and "every [wild] *beast of the field*." The Human is not cursed, but the ground (*adamah*) is cursed (17), so that he is condemned to EAT "the herb of the field" (18).

11. *EAT*: Hebrew '*akal*. The Human EATS the (forbidden) fruit. The snake EATS dust ('*aphar*'); the Human EATS that which has been produced from humus, the (dust of) the ground.

12. *all . . . life*: Heb. *kowl . . . chay*. The Serpent and the Human (v. 17) are condemned "all the days of thy life," but the same words are used to affirm Eve's as "the mother of all living" (v. 20): *Cevah*.

13. *pain in childbirth*: '*itsavon*, 'sorrow, labor,' also defines the man's struggle to produce a life from the ground (17).

14. *ground*: Hebrew *adamah*. The Earthling (man and woman) will return to the Earth from which they were taken.

15. *Adam*: When the prefix 'a (the) is dropped, the common noun for Human becomes the proper name of the Man. We usually call these *nepheshim* Adam and Eve, but they are not named until *after* they eat from the Knowledge Tree.

16. Remember that the Human was originally created “according to our *likeness*” (1.26). Is it not **right** for the Human to be like *Elohim*, in whose image they were made?