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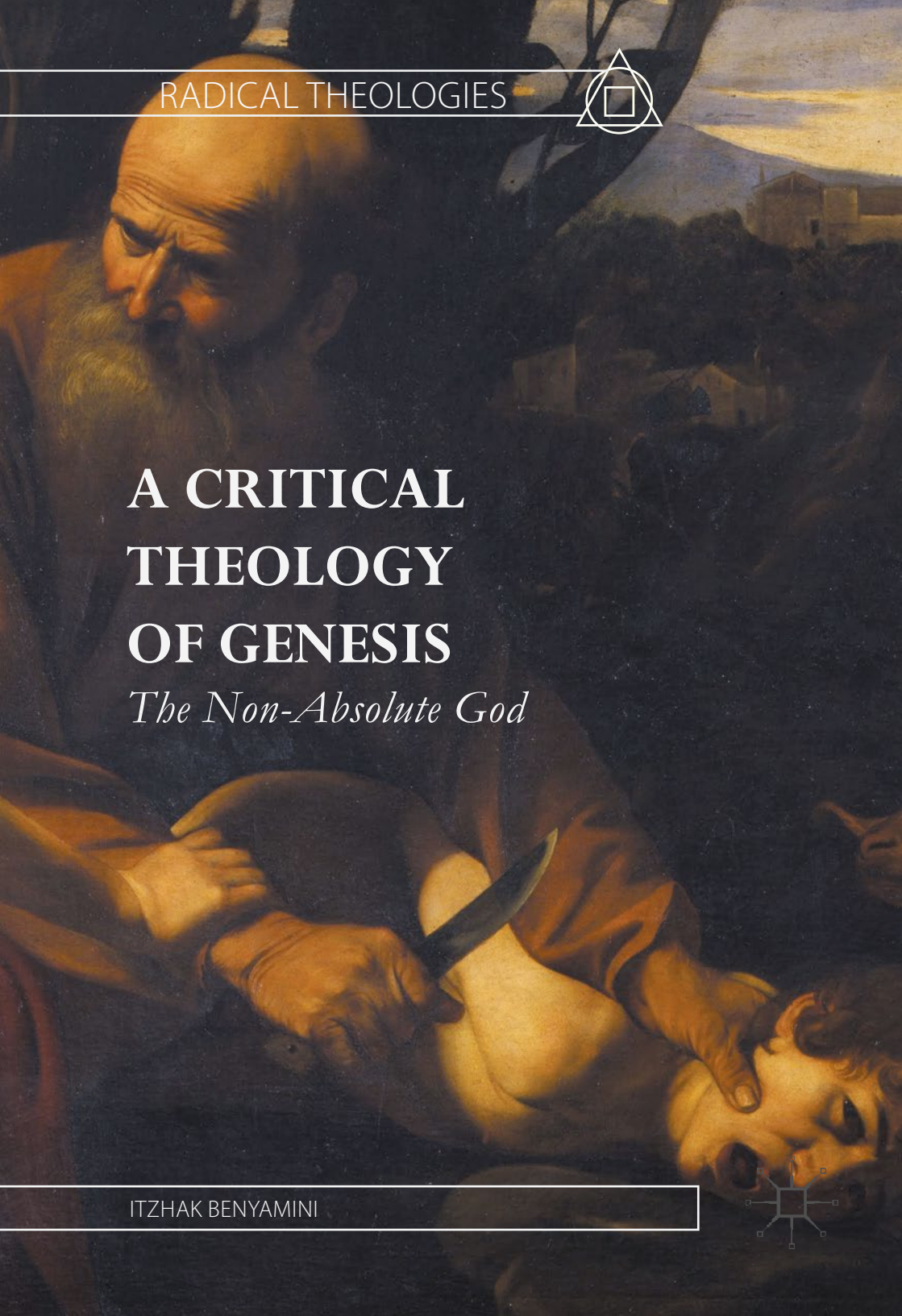

A CRITICAL THEOLOGY OF GENESIS

The Non-Absolute God

ITZHAK BENYAMINI

Radical Theologies

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Itzhak Benyamini

A Critical Theology of Genesis

The Non-Absolute God

Translated from Hebrew by Jeffrey M. Green

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Contents

Foreword to "A Critical Theology of Genesis"

Itzhak Benyamini, in his tantalizingly fresh reading of Genesis, writes plainly and elegantly what he describes as a "critical theology." The focus is not exclusively on God—but it is primarily on the Bible's leading character. What Benyamini means by "critical theology" is something fairly specific. He means a theology that takes a critical stance vis-à-vis the deity while, at the same time, seeking to understand what motivates God and what is accomplished, for better or worse, by what God does. His approach is both objective and subjective, like the deity himself. He is not interested in reconstructing or constructing a system, but rather, in deconstructing the deity's behavior, as related in the biblical text, and examining the factors that may account for it. He is not so much looking for a method within the madness, so to speak, as for an explanation for the variously unpredictable and often complicated moves the deity makes. Why would God do what God does? What is in it for God?

As theologically oriented Biblicists like Yochanan Muffs (*The Personhood of God*, 2005) have observed, on account of the heavy anthropomorphism of the embodied God that we find in the Hebrew Bible, a properly theological approach must be essentially psychoanalytic. What is scrutinized is the mind of God. Benyamini's reading is suffused with psychoanalysis, informed by both the classic concepts of Freud and by those of his postmodern critical follower, Jacques Lacan. The biblical God, as understood by Benyamini, is complex to the point of being paradoxical. Thus, for example, the Creator God of Genesis is set within an amorphous reality that precedes the act of creation and is therefore both prior to creation and coextensive with it. This God, who is not yet God, wills himself into

existence—wants to be—but cannot be until he injects order into the chaos by means of a creative act. This primal act is speech ("Let there be light"), which both sets God apart from the created world as Other and establishes God as the speaking Subject. Speech both marks God as the Creator and assigns the deity a mouth, entailing a corporeal form that is at one with the created world.

This is indeed a paradox, as the Bible insists on the Otherness of the deity and on his disconnectedness from materiality. But paradox has always characterized any theology of the Hebrew Bible that can be taken seriously. God is transcendent and immanent, outside nature and engaged in history, just and compassionate, universal and giving particular attention to Israel. The theology of the biblical God must operate within the dynamic tension between these opposing tendencies.

Benyamini, one might say, is an interpreter beautifully suited for the task of biblical theology. He, too, works within the tensions of his contrasting loyalties and inconsistencies. He writes self-consciously as a Jew of a traditional bent. In the Israeli context, this means he is not Orthodox, not observant out of religious obligation (out of a sense of being commanded by God), but is respectful of his people's traditional allegiance to Jewish folkways and has a not antithetical, if not positive, attitude toward a belief in God. Stemming from *mizrachi*, Middle Eastern (as opposed to European), Jewish roots, Benyamini's relationship to Judaism is not atypical. Trying to understand God is part of Benyamini's cultural worldview, and in his readings of Genesis, he expresses his commitment to that tradition.

At the same time, Benyamini is a critical thinker who has internalized secular Western philosophy from Plato to Derrida, with heavy concentrations of Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. And he is psychoanalytically oriented, seeking to identify the motives in the divine behavior that power the personal and interpersonal ones. In adopting a hyper-critical stance vis-à-vis his subject, Benyamini is again conducting himself in a manner befitting the biblical text. For as Herbert N. Schneidau, above all, has made plain in his remarkable 1976 book, *Sacred Discontent: The Bible and Western Tradition*, the Hebrew Bible is in its very essence a critique of the surrounding cultures. But, in keeping with the complexity that characterizes the subject–object relationship, the biblical authors stand apart and relate to cultural systems of which they were themselves a part. The critic commenting from the sidelines is also, paradoxically, an insider, which is what enables him to make sense, unpack, question, challenge, and sometimes revolutionize the culture to which he belongs.

It is this very ambivalence—standing on the outside, belonging to the inside—that is reflected in Benyamini's relationship to the interpretative tradition of biblical commentary, to which he now makes his own significant contribution. On the one hand, he makes a point of going his own way, trying to read the Bible with his own eyes, engaging his own sensibilities, asking his own questions, and providing his own answers and perspectives, regardless of what he thinks the biblical authors and their earlier interpreters may have expected of him. Well-versed in both traditional and contemporary commentary, he officially eschews both, rejecting the bonds of dependence that draw him into a sustained conversation with them. His dialogue is, in an avowedly Buberian sense, with the voices he hears in the biblical source—*sola scriptura* in a Jewish version.

On the other hand, Itzhak Benyamini positions himself within two streams of biblical interpretation—the traditional Jewish, which brings him to cite and engage with some of the major exponents of the diverse commentarial tradition, such as Rashi (eleventh-century France), Abraham Ibn Ezra (twelfth-century Spain), and Nachmanides (thirteenth-century Spain and Palestine); and the Jewish and secular modern, which brings him to cite and engage with such diverse exegetes as Umberto Cassuto (early to mid-twentieth century) and Jacques Derrida.

And yet, Benyamini's approach to text is less Derridean than Buberian. For Derrida, a text has no ontology except as the projection of a reading mind, which inscribes it with tentative meanings, to be undone as they are made. Benyamini encounters his texts, reacts, and responds to them, as a result of his reading experience and the critical thought by which he analyzes them. A poet and essayist, as well as a philosophical and psychoanalytical critic, Benyamini lays out his close reading and the sense he makes of it in a manner that not only captivates but also provokes the reader to respond thoughtfully. Benyamini's dialogue with the text is sure to become a dialogue with the reader, who will be induced, if not seduced, to re-engage the classic texts for oneself. The incorporation of (an English translation of) the texts under discussion in the book makes the effort of access the easy part. The hard part, as always, is in getting one's head around and within what one reads.

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A Late Self-Report: Concerning the Rewriting of "God"

Before my reader and myself lies an English version of my book on Genesis, which was published in Hebrew four years ago. Now that it is reaching out to the Christian world, the text demands an inner response concerning the author's fantasy of constructing an identity contradicting the *Christian-self-sacrificial* one, perhaps because he bears the Christo-Jewish name of *Itzhak* (Isaac), and concerning the implication of this fantasy to the exegetical orientation of the book, for now the book is formulated anew, in a manner foreign to the original writing, and as such it has been Christianized (a metaphysical condition that is the scion of the lingual transference, and as such, lives beyond the statistical data about the religious identity of future readers).

*

And so, with the aim of sharpening my own understanding, and more, of the expression *Critical Theology*, which I have set out in my work on the monotheistic religious and cultural position, and in its appearance in the present book, I offer a cluster of words to an imagined (mainly Christian) readership. Via this response to this imagined response of a reader, something additional might be learned, and the present work might be made more accessible. Moreover, already at this stage, the reader should acknowledge the regrettable—or perhaps not—fact that this is an experiment in theology, tentative, partially unraveled, and open to a number of intellectual and theological conclusions.

Since I began working on this book on Genesis, some years have passed, years that have burdened me with theological and religious withdrawals toward certain imaginary versions of Judaism, and even toward Christianity. These withdrawals were directed, almost unintentionally, toward religious practices that sought to become more flexible—or that were forced to become more flexible because of their historical constraints—within rigid communal frameworks (as if they were previously guided by the sayings of Rabbi Michel de Certeau concerning the ethics of *daily life*).

The present work offers the exegetical possibility of rethinking the meaning of God, of the term, the word "God," within the historical inflation of these kinds of rethinking. As such, it is also a platform for rethinking the concept of the *human* in our age of post-humanism that deconstructs the very basis and motivation for articulating the human. Perhaps now is the time to direct ourselves to the *quilting point* (in the Lacanian sense of a key to reread the whole field all together) of current discussion concerning human discourse—the concept of God and its configuration as a *Subject of Desire* as much as an *automaton* in a way that man's reaction to IT is the very basis for our definition of the human.

Nevertheless, the basis for our way of defining God is by considering him as a God that creates by a *verbal work*, and as a WORD. As such, He creates himself for the sake of the human. So, the exegetical direction in the first chapters of my book is to write about the *createdness* of God as a word and as an entity, and, thus, His *dependence* as both a concept and a being (whether real or imaginary) on the cosmic as human connection. The text does this by means of a close reading of the opening verses of Genesis, verses that begin a certain book—the Bible, as well as a certain reality, which is present as a text and within the text.

This *God* creates by means of the word. And he does so within the text and to the reader as a word *God*, which is present on the page—and no more than that. For there is nothing more powerful and essential than that for theo-logy, even in the pathetic moments when it is sure that it is evading, momentarily, the fact that it is always onto-theology. (Today, several years after writing the book, I might say that I also fell under the influence of that fantasy of non-onto-theology although the past author within me could have argued that it was all done from the ironic position of the quasi-naive writer.)

*

In the light of the writer's imagining of the increasing reactions in Israel to everything that touches on religion and politics, as reverberations of states of inner crisis and of the religious turmoil outside, doubt arises within him as to the legitimacy of rewriting God or the word *God*. Indeed, this is a rewriting of God, while extracting the truth that abides within the self-evident: that first of all He is a word. Incidentally, perhaps in the footsteps of Heidegger, the philosopher of *Sein*, this extraction is indeed the truth. Or . . . actually because of the falseness of the word, that is, the presence of God as a word, it misses what preceded it as a word, or overlaps it and the image that the word bears. For a reciprocal, violent dynamic always exists between the truthfulness and falseness of this statement regarding the priority of the word to the divine essence, or, vice versa—the lie that exists alongside this truth in the violent reverberation between them, which defines each one anew as truth and as falsehood, until it almost, and more, abolishes the distinction between them. The violent turbulence of monotheism is nearly impossible to release, except by means that perpetuate that turbulence. It might be argued that monotheism is the history of these releases, these writings and rewritings.

Indeed, the essence of God as we conceptualize it (shall we say that it is not only a conceptualized, but also an active substance in human history, and only in human history, following Hegel, the philosopher of *Geist*, and Jung, the psychologist of the *Selbst*?) is tightly bound up with the perpetuating way in which this word is inscribed, by means of the terms "God," "Elohim," "the Divinity," "the Lord," "Allah," "Christ," and so on. And all the ways of silencing, erasing the multiplicity of these names cannot blur this fact about the basis of the formulation of faith. The various writings act in the world as experiential revelations or as communal rituals, which are consolidated in relation to the degree of softness or difficulty of these formulations. Moreover, with respect to the pre-religious and pre-reverential feeling about the divine, as derived from a certain form of Heideggerian *Sorge*, as a *voice of hope for the future*, it apparently exists with the imagined man and woman as *individuals*, in their desire for a better future, very much private. Is this a real pre-verbal basis, which can almost not be conceptualized, which preceded the Word? This dilemma concerned me in composing the current text under the original Hebrew title to be translated here as *Abraham's Laugh: A Commentary on Genesis as a Critical Theology*, when I sought to think out the basis of Abraham's faith in a feeling of *future reality*, which was as yet unformulated. The formulation only enters later on, a theological-symbolic formulation, or a

way of defining the God word, a formulation, the encounter with which is traumatic, because of the difference between the divine = future as something that cannot be grasped and the figure of God, the figure of Trauma.

In this way, faith moves in its daily life between emphases on catastrophe and promise. The promise is something sensed, both pre-verbal and verbal. And the dynamic is in this movement (in the number and variations of directions) with these factors: the movement of hope for the future, generally in relation to a primary catastrophic situation, suffering, lack, but not necessarily → a feeling touching upon some addressee, which makes the future possible → the birth of the word that establishes the feeling as a concept → the primary consolidation and later the theological formulation of the figure of God, which envelops the feeling → the giving of existential hope and meaning to the man and woman, while establishing the word in an enveloping community → the birth of a secondary catastrophe, which derives from the very establishment of the word God in the face of human life, in various forms of God as an aggressive figure, as in Job (perhaps as the emissary of Satan), God as a figure that defines the catastrophic situation and is responsible for it, breakdowns in human life in the wake of communal-religious tensions, and so on.

It must be emphasized that this is the formulation of a primary and direct sensation, which is enveloped in theological terms, even if then, as in the present instance, it seeks to emphasize the primacy of this feeling to the word. In this respect, the Word is indeed primary, but only in its own verbal arena, and thus it writes the word "God," and to present, regarding the way the phrase "let there be light" wrote God, both on the page and also beyond it. Here we have the sense of reverberation, as well, between the picture of the ink of the word, God, which is created on the page as beginning the book of the Bible and the God that is *external* to the page, which is created there. This precedence preoccupied Judaism in various traditions at the time of the Second Temple, like the *logos*, which exists in the Greek world, and these two conceptions ultimately reverberated in the well-known verses that begin the Gospel of John in the manner of Philo. The word is not necessarily primal in the sense of a rational force, but is more a life-giving force. Perhaps this is what the ancient cavemen felt as they pondered, or what the disciples of Aristotle felt, as they wrote down his metaphysics, a feeling culminating in the theologians of monotheism and its Druse, Bahai, Kabalistic, extensions, and so on.

These Perceptions, which I am pointing out here, and which existed at the time of composing the body of the book four years ago, cling to me on the personal level of identity and also on the intellectual level. On the one hand, I still hold on to the desires of my childhood for Jewish sources and existence, as well as for the traditions of the Persian-Oriental home of my father and mother, from which I come, and on the other hand, I am uncomfortable with religious coercion in Israel, with the orthodox religious frameworks that this Oriental identity tends not to abandon. In addition, there is discomfort with intellectual discourse on the encounter with the divine and with God as an encounter with the traumatic and/or the Real, as it frequently exists in Christian discourses of philosophy, history, and psychoanalysis.

Two models of a tradition that is an alternative to the discourse of trauma and coercion (which I regard as such, which echo each other, and also reinforce each other, even if sometimes they are presented as opposing each other) accompany me at the moment: the first is an Oriental-Sephardic-traditional one (as I imagine it to be), and the second is one that I have recently come to know, from the ceremonial point of view. I knew about it remotely, though apparently I was always close to it intellectually: Reform Judaism. My present connection to the latter's approach comes from attending a number of religious encounters in Beit Daniel, a Reform synagogue in Tel Aviv. These two models describe various possibilities of intra-religious opposition and subversion. How can they exist along with the violence of monotheism? For what is the true religious existence and theological action of monotheism if not antireligious action, as we were taught by Franz Rosenzweig, the theologian of Jewish existence? They are different in that soft traditionalism (*masorti* in Hebrew) is prepared to act within the frameworks of orthodoxy and to be slightly off key within them, while returning to the truth of familial religious experience as waiting for the compassion and mercy of the promise, a return to the official frameworks as their mirror image, flattering or not, while depending on the approach of those frameworks, whereas the Reform movement, as its name indicates, is building a new community and a new institution, without undermining the traditional framework from inside.

*

Thus, the following exegetical reformulation has the function here of being an agency of the author's broader theo-political strategy. All this is

under the rubric of *critical theology* and its implementation as hermeneutic-textual work. The proposed theological work is a critical examination of the conceptualizations of the human being, the believing human being, and of God, conceptualizations that are usually bound by an inflationary dynamic of radicalization, as many monotheistic frameworks have known. In many cases, because of inner social and communal circumstances, this dynamic greatly intensifies these experiences as *ganz andere, absolute Other*. A possible outcome of the discussion is actually the establishment of a new or renewed theological position, though this might not be so essential. My motivation is to propose a slight contribution to the existing religious frameworks, which can be defined as soft, and which were consolidated over the centuries, and especially in the past decades in Judaism, as additional monotheistic traditions.

In this way, my discussion can be called *radical theology*, but only so long as it is critical concerning *the radical formulation of theology itself* (by radical theology, I mean the most recent a-theology, the postmodern orientation of writing a non-onto-theology by fantasizing the more radical notion of God in its most Christian mode. All this by forgetting the Jewish option of the soft and traditional way of the layman). If that is true, my orientation is also relevant to my own understanding of the notion of *critical theology* as by criticizing the *critical* orientation as well, and not on behalf of some conservative motivation but for the purpose of pushing forward the wagon of *soft* theology.

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Anyhow, all of this is to be accomplished by insisting upon close scrutiny of the holy verses, but not an overly literal reading. If there is objection to what is described in the verses does not contain everything, it may be answered that I am not interested in the external reality, as it were, which the biblical text represents. In fact, the written text is the reality I wish to investigate. It is not a literal reading in the simple sense, but only a literalness, which is the basis for a critical and liberating theology. All of this is done based on the assumption that the literal here, the biblical wording is serious about itself, believes in itself as describing true reality. The assumption here is not that this is a text presented by some divine agent, but that the writing, by people, was done under *their* assumption that the divine inscribes it on their page. In this respect, the text does not have human intentions except for a direction beyond the human, as the human grasped

it, whereby the *Geist* expresses itself in these verses, the human dimension that was inscribed in the word "God," in the most Hegelian sense there can be, and in the most Jewish sense there can be.

*

In the first chapter of his *Five Books of Faith*, the one on Genesis, Prof. Yeshayahu Leibowitz tells about what he said to a "great Jew," who had lost his faith after Auschwitz: "That means you never believed in God, but only in God's help, and that faith is truly disappointing. God does not help. But the believer in God is not at all connected to the concept of God's help. The categories of reward and punishment do not apply to faith itself, which is demonstrated in the Binding of Isaac. In the Binding of Isaac the mercy of heaven or the righteousness of God are not mentioned, nor is a warning against punishment. This faith is demonstrated in what a person is prepared to do *for the sake of heaven*, meaning: not to satisfy his needs or natural urges, whether material or spiritual, but for the service of God, without any condition".

I oppose this barren position, unconnected to life and to the voice of the future in it. Indeed, as the reader soon will come to understand, Leibowitz is the most exact representative of the rival theology to the present theological effort. So perhaps, particularly in the face of this Judeo-Hegelian formulation of mine, the ironic smile of that radical thinker will stand out, with the claim that here we have fallen into the trap of Christian faith out of our reduction of the divine to the human and out of our ostensible nullification of the transcendental divine dimension in it. Is it not the case that our openness to the Reform Jewish approach also returns us to this Christian-human place? What remains? A traditional existence that is slightly off key within orthodoxy? In contrast, perhaps, perish the thought, in our dwelling upon the word that is beyond God, might not a gnostic dimension have been produced about a divinity that is beyond? Or an anthropological observation of the human gut feeling regarding the vitality of this world, and not really of the dimension beyond the beyond?

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Givataim, Israel
July 2015

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When We Read the Bible

When we read the Bible, especially Genesis, the first book, we already know what it says, because we luxuriate in the shade of exegetical giants, who inspire us with confidence. We take what is said in the Bible for granted. We know that God created the world perfectly, since he is perfect; that he razed the Tower of Babel because it reached the heavens; that human beings are bad and God, who is good, sought to correct them; that Abraham came from his father's pagan city, Ur of the Chaldeans; that God tested Abraham, who experienced abysmal, Lutheran terror in his encounter with the almighty, transcendent God, in the series of trials to which he subjected him, etc., etc. Nevertheless, doubt occasionally arises within this confident understanding, as to whether this is really how it is. This doubt animates a desire to reread the simple text of the Bible with our own eyes and to listen with our own ears, word by word. We could do this with the assistance of our traditional and modern commentators, but we propose holding them in temporary abeyance, keeping them at a distance to leave room so that we, without veneration for former exegetes, can add to the vast field of commentary.

The following chapters present our interpretation of Genesis from the stories of creation to the Binding of Isaac. Our proposed interpretation argues for the possibility of a *soft* relation to God, not a relation of fear and trembling, but one such as the sort of Jew known as *traditional* ordinarily experiences. To make this possible, other interpretations will temporarily be set aside for the sake of an original look at Scripture, in order to present our Don-Abraham-Quixote not as an eternal knight of faith, but as a cunning believer responding to God's derisive demand of him.*

I. Benyamini, *A Critical Theology of Genesis*,
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SUPPLEMENT: * It may be asked to what extent it is possible to read the story of the Binding of Isaac and Abraham's relation to God without getting tangled in Søren Kierkegaard's interpretative net, from which great figures such as Lacan, Derrida, and Leibowitz sought to extricate themselves, drowning at the same time. Is there any correspondence at all between his Protestant Christian position and a Jewish one, especially a biblical Jewish approach? Has it been taken into account that Kierkegaard's terror has its origin in Paul, who confronts us with the Absolute—the traumatic encounter with an angry God—which Christianity in fact pinned to the Bible? This terror extends into the modern era of the Death of God, when all that can be done is to create a theology of the Death of God, out of the crisis, while the crisis itself is a religious experience, an existential crisis of faith. Given the tension between the ethical and the religious in Kierkegaard, is it possible to place the *joker* in the guise of an intermediary between the religious and the ethical? The future is the joker, the joyful motion toward tomorrow, determinedly but not absolutely based on a jocular God, not with absolute certainty, but with light hope.

So, let us read, let us encounter the written word, sometimes accompanied by various interpretative possibilities, not necessarily subordinate to them, but subordinate rather to the words, to the written word taken as literally as possible.* Consequently, we will scout out the meaning of the text for ourselves, not for the Truth that stands behind it.

*Moreover, the available modes of discourse—that of the traditional commentators, against the background of their faith; that of academics, against the background of their understanding of Ancient Near Eastern cultures and the conduct of the Israelites in the biblical Period; and that of the philosophers against the background of the thought of Hegel, Kierkegaard, and others—will set the stage for our interpretation, and, insofar as they can, beyond the primary encounter with the written word, they will bolster the principal reading and interpretative analysis.

We will read Genesis without letting God alone. We will ask about him before probing the innards of Adam, Noah, Abraham, and the other knights of faith (if that is what they are). For these figures encounter God, and the subject exists only in encounter with the Other, hence, with God. Therefore, with the primary openness of reading, we will dwell upon unprocessed language, we will establish the facts about God, about his image, so they can serve as the basis for extending the commentary to humanity.

The approach proposed here is that of *the immediate presence of language, the masoretic Hebrew text, for the reader*, the primordial placement of the word. This is encounter with the final effect of the language in its presence before us (not exactly in the Buberian sense of the revelation of the divine in the language to the reader), *since the language itself contains possible solutions to the difficulties that it raises.*

This reading experience does not claim to achieve a final formulation of the *correct* meaning as opposed to other, earlier interpretations. They are all attached to the word. They all perform the primordial act, which we, too, wish to perform again, with all its implicit innocence, or the regaining of innocence. This approach is one of commitment to the language, not necessarily to a theological position, but commitment to subjective encounter with the word. If there is truth in it, it is the truth of that encounter, and its subjectivity means that the reader, too, brings all of his or her cultural baggage to the reading, and it, too, reads the language.

We propose a platform *for a critical (and not a faith-based) theology*, which is also conflictual, confrontational, and directed at a critical examination of the question of faith, especially when it stands before the Absolute. This theology does not neglect the theological, but at the same time, it makes possible a critical discussion of the manner God and the believer are placed within this discourse: Does the model for understanding the image of God require him to be *the Absolute*? Is the believer necessarily *submissive*? What about a daily life of compromise? How does such a life guide movement toward this Other in a different way? The key lies in the hands of the traditional person, though he or she suffers a dismissive attitude from both sides: regarded as semi-religious by the pious and, by outmoded sociologists, as a sanctimonious petit-bourgeois. However, even if religious people are unaware of it, a subversive position can be extracted from their modus operandi, within another kind of discourse: a position that creates a different significant possibility, one that is no less legitimate, for the monotheistic religions.

* Translator's note: Here in the foreword, we translate the Hebrew names of the deity as "God," but we will not do so when the distinction between Elohim and YHVH is important to our interpretation.

PART I

The Creation

Chapter One: The Creation of God

> In the beginning Elohim created heaven and the earth. (1:1)

Opinions are divided. The first verse appears to announce and summarize what follows (as asserted by Cassuto, for example), and as such, it contains all the details of the act of creation, in the sense that God (Elohim) created everything out of everything, both sides of the world, that of heaven and that of earth, which stand opposite to each other, like God and the image standing before him when he creates the Other.

> And the earth was *tohu vavohu*, and darkness was upon the face of the abyss; and the spirit of Elohim hovered over the surface of the water. (1:2)

And . . . Right after the introduction, our story begins: the plot. The conjunction "and" shows that something already happened in the past. There was something. Therefore, when God created the world, the world was already in some sort of state.

God was the sole factor, the only pre-conscious entity active against the inanimate: a world that was in *tohu vavohu*, darkness in the abyss, and water, which is an abyss. Everything was mingled with everything and with nothing, in confusion, with no differences. Nevertheless, let us emphasize: in a way the world was already in existence (and even if we accept Rashi's opinion, which is contrary to that of Cassuto, that Verse 2 is

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the continuation of Verse 1, and that they both are an introduction, their meaning is: *When God first came to create the world, the state of affairs was such and such* . . . Even so it can be understood that Verse 2 describes the state of affairs before the creation).

It also could be that God still does not exist, *in the full sense*, but only in his spirit, which hovers over the surface of the water, and, just as water and dry land were not fully realized before God spoke, so, too, God was not created until the moment he began to act, when he spoke; speaking made him, when he became the speaker who said, **Let there be light.** Only then did speech distinguish him (from the rest of the world). Then, he was no longer just spirit but also speech. In the beginning, God was created by the very act of creation, meaning that he created himself along with the creation of objects, making a distinction between him and the created object exterior to him, but deriving from his creative essence.

In his conversations on the weekly Bible portion, Yeshayahu Leibowitz, a man of faith,* declares that God's essence *does not* derive from his being the creator of the world, but rather, from his very divinity, and that God could have existed without the world. This is an extension of his argument against pantheism, the idea that the world and God are the same. However, in our reading, I emphasize that God is not the world, and he creates it as an external Other; God becomes what he is and is materialized from the hovering spirit, turning into a divinely ruling essence as a consequence of creating what is Other than himself, to which he henceforth relates. This is the meaning of the Hebrew particle "*et*," which marks the direct object of a verb: it shows the origin of God as a subject in relation to an object, the world. Thus, the first sentence describes relations between God and the world and presents God's main characteristic: he is the creator of the world (and he needs the world).** No wonder Leibowitz speaks of Hegel with some distaste.***

* Below in our commentary on Genesis, we will explain the distinction between *a person of faith*, who places the concept of God above life, in contrast to the *traditional* person. Abraham is the key to the traditional outlook, not that of faith, which is to say that Abraham is not a knight of faith but a man acting with cunning in relation to God, perhaps as the young, anti-Jewish Hegel wrote in "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate," and we cunningly turn his words into praise for this Jewish attitude.
** Here, the reader is entitled to object that this is an anthropomorphic presentation of God. We, in our innocence, read, for example, that God speaks, eats, smells sacrifices, comes down from heaven, walks about, creates man

in his image, feels sorrow in his heart, weeps, not that a being who eats and speaks is necessarily a human being, or only a human being.

*** That very Hegel about whom promising young French intellectuals like Sartre, Bataille, and Lacan heard in the 1930s in a course given in Paris by the Russian immigrant, Alexandre Kojève, who taught about Hegel's dialectic of the master and the slave. For our purposes, Lacan's attentive ear is relevant, for, following Hegel, as interpreted by Kojève, he formulated the doctrine of the dialectic between the ego (the slave) and its mirror image (the master). The deadly aggression between these two basic factors, the viewers and the viewed, of course destroys the joy of discovering the self in the mirror.

As for the antiquity of the world, it appears that in backward extending eternity, not only did God exist, but so also did the world, although chaotic in structure. Still, it did exist, and the divine creation merely set boundaries and organized the matter in that chaos. This moment of creation, as noted, is none other than the moment of the establishment of God as separate from chaos and as its organizer.

Tohu vavohu (chaos). God takes control of *tohu vavohu* and makes it into something else, a living reality. Light pierces the darkness and confusion and separates itself from darkness. Hence, darkness was not created. Darkness was there, and it remains a survivor from the confusion, and it is the remnant of creation.

The earth is *tohu vavohu*, and God struggles against it, making it into something unlike what it was, without the primordial *tohu vavohu*.*

* In the background, as it were, the ancient myths of the struggle against Tiamat resonate, the divine embodiment of the primal sea in the Mesopotamian epic, "Enuma Elish," but we are halted by the finality of the text, which does not know or speak about Tiamat.

And the spirit [Heb., *ruaḥ*] of Elohim. Although Hermann Cohen stated that "God is spirit," he is also a body, the body that descends into Adam's world later on, and he is also speech by means of the body, the mouth. *Ruaḥ* here means wind and not only spirit. It also carries the sense of spirit, his immateriality, which was his only essence in the beginning. He materialized in his own flesh by means of his primal speech, thereby creating himself beyond his own limitations as spirit. The continuation of materialization in flesh will be Adam (this is not necessarily an allusion to the future Gospel of John).

In this sense, the circularity of the snake that grasps its tail can serve as a metaphor for the consolidation of the world-God as a pair, as God creates the world from the nothingness of spirit, by giving it form. By forming and setting the boundaries of his various objects, he becomes a creative subject, created as God, who is not only spirit, not only a spiritual wandering in the expanses of the void. This void is not nothingness. Rather, the void is the vagueness of the world at its beginning and the vagueness of God before his creation, and only the piercing of light, the division of the world into objects, and the separation of God from the world creates substance, in no other sense than the placing of a boundary between clear being and vague nothingness.

Creation is not ex nihilo, but from confusion, from chaos. It is the differentiation of being from confusion, which is not nothingness but a distortion of being, and, retrospectively, it understands this. Language alone is what creates this substance and is capable of making it non-chaotic.

> And Elohim said, Let there be light, and there was light. (1:3)

In the act of creation, which is to say, speech, God becomes aware that he is alone. He speaks to himself, within himself, or to the space before him, creating and then observing his handiwork; he is an artisan, and his craft is his alone, entirely. It is his Other, but an Other that is not included within him, in the image of himself. Only in that way can he see it, in relation to the image of his huge self.

One might object and ask whether he was truly alone in the sense of being a solitary individual and in this sense of having no retinue, or was he, in fact, not distinct from the confusion, so that his hovering spirit was mingled with the mixture of water and land? In other words, before the creation, God might not have been a single isolated being but a flow, **spirit**, in a world that was not distinct from him. That primordial flow could also have been full of many essences, of liquidity mingled with the world, so that outwardly as well, he was not single and solitary. Only in the creation of the world, which was Other and distinct did his isolation from himself come into being, as well as his isolation from the world, which was Other.

Only by saying, **Let there be light** did he separate himself and become Other, isolated with respect to created things, meaning that at the moment of creation, for a fraction of a second (which was also the birth of time),

when he spoke the words, light was not yet created, but it was no longer mingled with *tohu vavohu*, and that first moment of speaking, that fragment of a second, was the great moment of isolation, for only at the conclusion of the expression, "Let there be light … and there was light" was there light. Only then can one speak of God as isolated in the ordinary sense of the term. Let us reiterate: this was the first time in his history that God spoke, and this moment was the first moment of his isolation and also the moment when a world differentiated from him was born.

God presents the first differentiating creation to himself, the light, and he does not know in advance whether the result will be equal to the promise. As we shall see below, about Abraham, God is a *voice of promise for the future*, and this aspect already exists here *with respect to God himself*. He creates out of persuasion by his own promise to himself, a promise that is not made in full confidence, but one that enables the addressee of the promise to expect a better future.

In the following days as well, his imperfection spurs him to persist in creation, and every daily act of creation, of one object or another, brings God to praise it and say **it was good**, meaning: it was a big success. I am pleased with the work of my hands. Still, something urges him to keep on, despite the temporary achievement.

God will come to be nostalgic for the moment of creating a world that is Other, when he was by himself, for himself, and within himself, and creating. The words, **Let there be light,** make the Other burst forth, realize the thing that is Other, and embody the idea of light, which had been in his mind. First, there was the fantasy with which God indulged himself in the six days of creation, but afterward, it became increasingly clear that his words were not properly understood. By whom? Without an addressee for his complaint, God sees Adam as his only interlocutor, to move beyond the isolation of his supreme responsibility. The confusion of tongues (at the Tower of Babel) puts an end to the divine fantasy of genesis because in the beginning, the signifier "light" had just one signified, one meaning, and everything was clear and unequivocal.

> And Elohim saw that the light was good; and Elohim separated the light from the darkness. And Elohim called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day. (1:4–5)

The light was good—not only in the sense that the created thing was good (ethically good), but also in the sense of liberation from the primal,

divine isolation toward a world in which the Other dwells (and this is good *for* God). This "good" also contains the implicit possibility of declaring of something that "it is bad," as history will later make evident to God.

The reader is entitled to ponder whether or not our remarks here have gnostic potential. In this context, let us state that we do not see that Genesis was written with ethical intent, even if our attitude may be termed nihilistic. Good and bad here do not have human, ethical meaning. These terms do not *truly* represent the good or bad actions of people—as, for example, between a person and his or her fellow being—but rather, a response to God's desire for separation (good) and his distaste for the elimination of separation (bad). This is the basis upon which the acts between people are grasped as good or bad, even the murder of Abel, of which the primary fault was the sacrifice blood going back to the earth. We maintain that God's concern for the injury to one's fellow being *veils* his fears of intermingling and of the negation of his separate existence from the world.*

* Usually, human morality is signified as a most important aspect of religion—as the most ancient and strongest concern of the deity—from the first commentators on Scripture up to Levinas' intentional display of innocence. The externalization of this aspect makes Scripture, in which God *ostensibly* speaks (as a representation of the divine voice, the true power of which lies in the reality of the text for the reader, more than any reality behind it), into a text sanctified by its readers. In fact, they want God truly to speak to them, for him not be immobilized only in his own desires. They project inherent sanctity upon the text, not dependent upon their own desire. Therefore, the appropriate step for the readers is to grasp Scripture, which sanctifies itself, as ostensibly ethical, whereas, not ostensibly, Scripture does sanctify itself from behind the veil, as beyond morality, as in love with itself, conceiving itself to be separate and superior to all other texts in the world, as sacred.

And Elohim separated. The craftsman only makes distinctions, differentiations within the world, like the blacksmith who takes raw iron and forges a knife or a shovel from it, and, while doing so, names them and distinguishes them from one another and from the other things in the world. Thus, God calls the light "day" and the darkness "night," and later, **he made, he separated, and he called** are related to each other. Separation makes possible the good. It encompasses the satisfied statement, **that it was good**, whereas the pre-verbal confusion is bad, the impurity of non-separation (in Mary Douglas' terms). Confusion is bad. Later, the words "man" and "woman," as words, create them as such, and Adam himself is also a partner in the work

of creation in that he gives the animals names and thus creates them and gives them life, makes them exist in words (the elephantine animal becomes an elephant). **The tree of the knowledge of good and evil** is none other than the tree of knowledge of the good, which has been separated out, and primal, chaotic badness. The moment they eat of knowledge, humans know shame, which is connected to the organs that differentiate and distinguish within the polymorphous-perverse body, between the organs that give pleasure and the other organs, and it marks them, sets them apart as forbidden to be seen. Language, only by its use, by its signifiers, will enable people to experience the primal chaotic, the contaminating badness. Language comes with God, as a tool, though a confusing one, which, while it separates, also creates a gap within God between the fantasy of the signified as meaning and the reality of the signifier, the gap of the joke.

God does not summon the objects in advance—that is to say, the plants, animals, stars, and the like—rather, he creates their *actions*, out of desire that this world will act. As we see from his words:

> Let there be a firmament within the water, and let it separate water from water. . . . And Elohim said, Let the water under heaven be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear. And it was so. Let the earth make grass grow, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit with their seed in it, each according to its kind, upon the earth. And it was so . . . Let there be lights in the firmament of heaven to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years . . . And Elohim set them in the firmament of heaven to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. (1:6, 11, 14, 17, 18)

And so on until the crown of the world:

> Then Elohim said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, and the cattle, and all the earth, and every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. (1:26)

Here, the action in the world is one of controlling and ruling! A representative of God has been created, endowed with authority, who will rule

over that which the creator has just made, to restrain the earth, as though he did not trust its chaotic nature. Man, God's active agent is made in the plural image implied by the grammatical form of Elohim, **in *our* image, after *our* likeness**, and this image is that of a foreman, controlling and dominating natural animals and nature itself.

We take note that the God-of-language fears lest he merge back into the world which is Other. *The tension of God's envy of the earth* appears to emerge here, with all his efforts to subdue the earth, first by means of the various creatures, which he blesses with **be fruitful and multiply**, and later by means of the rational creature, Adam, who is blessed with his own dominion over those intermediary creatures, the animals and fish, who ruled over the earth and mingled too much with it. Now human beings will rule over them as well, until they, too, mix with it. At that time, God will once again place himself as a factor external to the earth (and to mankind), and he will demand subjection to him alone, this time by means of his nation.

> And Elohim said, Let there be a firmament within the water, and let it separate the water from the water. And Elohim made the firmament and separated the water from below the firmament from the water which is above the firmament. And it was so. And Elohim called the firmament heaven. And it was evening and it was morning, a second day. (1:6–8)

The first primordial material is apparently water, which entails the danger of liquidity. At first, the abyss was water, and water is *tohu vavohu*, and perhaps the abyss (*tehom*) is close to *vohu*.

Water, which is most definitely primordial, is now divided in two: order was created within it, meaning that the beginning of differentiation was within water, between water of one kind and water of another kind. This is an extension of the division between light and darkness. Differentiation is from a single thing to a pair of things: water above and water below, like male and female, like light and darkness, in a binary relation.

This can also be viewed from a slightly different angle: the firmament is a tool of separation, like the essence of light and its function. A tool was created, which enters something in order to divide it in half, and then to commingle with one of the halves. Thus, light separates darkness and becomes half of what was created out of the darkness. The firmament separates water from water and then combines with one half of the water.

This shows that the tools were created ex nihilo (but matter was not created ex nihilo), by bootstrapping, produced by the act of separation that they effectuate. The moment before their creation, they did not exist, but at the moment of their creation, they, in turn, create something else, which is separate from its Other but also from within it. Thus, though slightly differently, creation takes place on the following day as well, when the water within the lower water recedes, and the dry land is revealed. In retrospect, it may be said that the water is a tool of separation not just as material but also because of its liquidity, its flow, which reveals the dry land.

> And Elohim said, Let the water under the heaven be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear. And it was so. Elohim called the dry land earth, and the water that were gathered together he called seas. And Elohim saw that it was good. (1:9–10)

It was stated that the earth already existed, but now we hear that it was created. This is because earth was no longer the confused reality that it was at first. Now it is the name *erets* (land), which was given to *yabasha* (dry land), in that it is distinct from water.

> And Elohim said, Let the earth make grass grow, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit with their seed in it, each according to its kind, upon the earth. And it was so. The earth made grass grow, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit with their seed in it, each according to its kind. And Elohim saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a third day. (1:11–13)

God's self is the counterpart of the land or the earth, which is its helpmate. See Rashi's explanation of the expression, "as against him" (the Bible's term for Eve's relation to Adam as his helpmate): *If not a helper, then as against him*. The earth is a partner in the act of creation, and plants grow from it, and man was created from its dust, and this spouse is God's Other, the Other he cannot do without.

Some objects of creation, such as light, the great lights, the sea monsters, the fish, and the animals were created directly by God in his act of speech, but here, things are not so simple. God commands the earth to

create, or he indicates that from now on, this is what will happen, that the earth will make plants grow. In this sense, the earth itself is a creator, and God becomes a planner or a futurist. The earth is the creator, the actor, and therefore God *promises* it fertility, continuity. Significantly, the gender of the Hebrew word *adama* [earth] is feminine.

> And Elohim said, Let there be lights in the firmament of heaven to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the firmament of heaven to give light upon the earth. And it was so. And Elohim made the two great lights, the large light to rule the day, and the small light to rule the night, and the stars. And Elohim set them in the firmament of heaven to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And Elohim saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day. (1:14–19)

To rule. The first created things already persist in the divine act of creation, in that they rule over *what has so far been created*, and their dominion finds expression in creating a separation in *what has so far been created*, just as humanity, too, is to rule over the created things, since Adam gives them names and distinguishes them from each other.

> And Elohim said, Let the water bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the firmament of heaven. And Elohim created the great sea monsters and every living creature that creeps, with which the water swarms, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And Elohim saw that it was good. And Elohim blessed them, saying, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the water in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth. And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day. And Elohim said, Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds. And it was so. And Elohim made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the cattle according to their kinds, and everything that creeps upon the ground according to its kind. And Elohim saw that it was good. (1:20–25)

Above, we said that the earth is the creator, but here, the picture is more complex, for the Hebrew says *totse* [let it bring forth], while of God, it says, *vaya'as* [and he made]. This expression reinforces the picture of cooperation between God and the earth, since animals are not connected to the ground, and cooperation with God is needed to create them, whereas plants grow from the earth. Ironically, Adam's body will be created entirely from the earth, and then God will plant a spirit in him, that primal spirit which was God's before the moment of creation, when his spirit hovered over the surface of the water, which is to say, that spirit which sought to distinguish itself from the earth.

> And Elohim said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. (1:26)

Here, God (Elohim), both as a word and as an entity (though he says, "let us"), is single and alone—or does he have a retinue (these are the main possibilities).* Did the speech truly take place in the void? For later on, there are divine or semi-divine beings, angels, alongside him, and he is like a king who issues instructions. Are they, perhaps, the sustainers and creators? This is indicated by evidence regarding his retinue (later in the story of creation), for it says, **And Elohim said, Let us make man [adam] in our image, after our likeness** (1:26), though immediately afterward, we read, **And Elohim created man in his own image, in the image of Elohim he created him; male and female he created them** (1:27), which is to say either that man is like Elohim in the sense of singularity within plurality or, perhaps, that the dimension of being a couple is present within Elohim, and this is the plurality. As below, in the second version of the creation, we read: **And YHWH Elohim said it is not good for man to be alone, I will make him a helpmate as against him** (2:18). Above, we referred to Rashi's comment on this expression, which implies that Elohim is alone and has no helpmate "as against him." Consequently, he first creates the man, and only then does he change his mind and introduce the woman. As Rashi wrote: "*We have not learned that he spoke with his court, but with himself* . . . so that it cannot be said that there are two authorities."

* We are not opposed to the notion that there are angels alongside God, as represented in the plural form, "Elohim," but we emphasize the dimension of plurality within God, a dimension that can also be actualized as angels. As to the argument that the *ancient* reader knew there were angels as something self-evident, so the author saw no need to indicate it—perhaps this is the case, but we do not grant priority to a hypothetical ancient reader over a contemporary reader confronting the present text *as such*.

However, we cannot ignore God's words as they appear even later (perhaps a third version of the creation of man?): **This is the book of the generations of Adam on the day that Elohim created man, he made him in the likeness of Elohim. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and called them Man on the day of their creation** (5:1–2). This passage implies that he created a couple from the beginning, according to the divine model, but a couple that is one, just as the divinity itself contains plurality as unity (in the sense that the principle of plurality is an extension of the principle of duality, of a couple that is no longer one).

In the story of the Tower of Babel, God (Elohim) again refers to himself in the first person plural: **Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language** (11:7), when the principle of divine plurality goes down to humanity to impose plurality on them, in opposition to their desire for unity. Moreover, plurality is necessary to this One, in order to emphasize his being that way, and therefore God (Elohim) confuses the people of Babel, who are descendants of Shem, from whom a single lineage will be chosen: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob-Israel, and Judah.

Here, we answer the question about the plurality of God by stating that, even if our investigation later concludes that he has a retinue, it can also be said in reply that the word "Elohim," which is plural in form, conveys the nature of the deity. Even if this is not so, this word exposes us to the inner drama that takes place within the figure of Elohim, as a group, a group of one, which speaks from within it, with inner voices from within it, a group which could be demonstrated by a retinue. In any event, we read, **and he said**, in the singular, and there is no clear addressee. Hence, Elohim is alone.

Given our remarks below, which interpret God as laughing, and in the light of the aforesaid, one may ask: at the moment of creation, was it an act of self-amusement so God could free himself from boredom (not the boredom of isolation, but from lack of self-differentiation)? So that something would happen? Amusement does not contradict God's being

by definition in control of the others. In his isolation, he creates, and even if lower semi-entities are mentioned, there are still no other Elohims, until we come to Jacob and the *terafim* [household gods] that Rachel steals from Laban (Ch. 31). If so, up to and including Abraham, there is just one Elohim, who is plural in grammatical form, and all human beings act in relation to him or to his angels, who are merely his agents, from the people of Sodom to Melchizedek, "priest of God Most High" (14:18), which does not contradict the existence of YHWH, the most high God (14:22).

This One, who acts within himself, attributed this unity of the One both to himself and to the Jewish people, from Abraham on, as opposed to intermingling with the Other, the nations of Canaan. Think of the disgracing of Dina, when Hamor and his son Shechem want the children of Abraham to intermarry with them (Ch. 34). Such an intermingling with the womb of Canaan, with the cursed soil, appears to threaten our God and makes him recoil from what appears to be incest with Mother Earth, as a confusion. For with the Patriarchs, Elohim increasingly adopts the principle of the king-father and departs from the maternal principle of creation, where there was separation, but out of working with the confusion, with the primeval *tohu vavohu*.

> And Elohim created Adam in his own image, in the image of Elohim he created him; male and female he created them. (1:27)

Regarding use of the first person plural in the words of Elohim, some commentators argue that Elohim might be addressing his servants (see above), or it could be a formal mode of discourse, or an expression of urging himself. As for the creation of Adam and Eve as two, some commentators argue that an androgynous being was created (as in Plato's *Symposium*), and only afterward, it split (see the Midrash in Breshit Raba 8,1). We can sharpen this by noting that "Elohim," a word in plural form, speaks in the first person plural, and then he relates to Adam in the singular, but he describes Adam's deeds in the plural, including his being male and female. Perhaps the relations between plural and singular here are a mirror image of the relation between Elohim and Adam: on the one hand, Adam is singular, but on the other hand, plural. He is Man: **And Elohim created man in his own image,** but the plural verb form is used: **and let them rule**. The plurality within man might imply the same plurality within the divinity, which could be the plurality of a male–female couple. Perhaps

Elohim addresses one aspect of the Other within himself; and perhaps that aspect is the aspect of the created world, the earth. We have to set aside our modern conception of the earth as the globe, one planet among others, and view the earth as the whole world.

> And Elohim blessed them, and Elohim said to them, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and conquer it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that creeps upon the earth. And Elohim said, Behold, I have given you every plant sowing seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with tree fruit sowing seed for you to eat it. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has a living soul, every green plant for food. And it was so. And Elohim saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day. (1:28–31)

Until now, it said **it was good**, and now, it says **very good**, because this is the action that concludes creation, and this restrains the "good" that has so far been established.* Until now, creation had been good, but always on the verge of slipping into badness, and the word "good" also contains hidden knowledge of the bad, of the return to the first, primal badness. But "very good" derives from the fact that now there is someone to restrain this goodness, someone who will rule it as an agent of the creator.

* Until now we have taken **good** as in the expression **it was good**, not in the moral sense, but as an expression of the joy God takes in the work of his hands. Now we appear to be taking it as an expression of value. Nevertheless, these are not opposing positions, because when the One is content with what has happened to him, this will serve as the basic value *in his world view*, distinguishing between what is good and what is bad.

> And the heaven and the earth and all their host were completed. And on the seventh day Elohim finished his work, which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. And Elohim blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it he rested from all his work which Elohim created in doing. (2:1–3)

God (Elohim) stops to rest. He suspends his labor and wonders about what he has done, is impressed by its beauty, and he does not merely act. He halts, perhaps with the assumption that the project is entirely complete, perfectly, and everything is good: **And Elohim saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good** (1:31). This goodness projects his own image upon Elohim in his own eyes. This deity desires and becomes, acts and intervenes in the world of humanity for himself.

Were completed. These verses have been much discussed, including the fact that the word *shabbat*, in the sense of a holy day, does not appear here, but only **the seventh day**, and the verb **he rested**. So what is the meaning of **were completed**? Does it, as in the Septuagint (and as expressed in the Samaritan version of the Torah), in fact, refer to the sixth day, in which the creation was completed? The correction (or source) of the Septuagint appears to be logical, but it has to be applied to the seventh day, that is, to the Sabbath, for the verb translated as **completed** can also be understood as **included**, in the sense of comprising all of creation. In other words, the Sabbath day is not an idle pause, but it is a divine act of creation in which on one day, perhaps in thinking to himself, everything that was done so far is included. This is completion of the entire act of creation, the conclusion that comprises retroactively everything that was done. Hence the verse **And the heaven and the earth . . . were completed** addresses the first verse: **In the beginning Elohim created heaven and the earth,** and both of them together, in fact, describe the sum of the divine action.

Furthermore, the separation of the seventh day from the others also comprises the whole of the rest of creation; it is the extension of the same logic, because all the created things were, in fact, *separations*, yet this is the primary separation, which separates itself from all other separations but also includes them all—this is the essence of the biblical God, Who creates the Other, is sanctified opposite the Other, and the Other enables him to be an existing essence by himself: God. However, since he is the creator, God also includes the Other, which is separate from him, like a womb and the fetus inside it. The intervention in the world by this God has the tension that makes something Other—humanity, the world, nature—but it also detracts from God himself as containing the separate Other.

God hallowed the seventh day in the sense of separating it from the others. Thus, this separation is also a type of sanctification. Thereby God performs the first religious act of separation and distinction between the sacred and the profane.

What is sanctification? Is it to be understood as the *traumatic* of Rudolf Otto and Freud and as the *real* in Lacan (in relation to "what does not go")? For the ordinary person, it is not usually revealed as a truly transcendent revelation, for it is self-evident. God does not spoil things, does not ruin anything, does not do anything bad, but accompanies and supports from the side, while his existence is expressed in abiding. After the six days of creation, God hallowed the Sabbath day, the day of rest for him, but this Sabbath day did not cease. Rather, it has continued since then to this day, except for a number of the creator's disturbances, when he decided to intervene in the world again. The Sabbath day, to hallow it, could be any day. This does not nullify the distinction between holy and profane, but the matter of point of view is significant in relation to such an existing thing, which is grasped as sanctified by the religious person, although, and even because, it is rather ordinary.

Chapter Two: Creation of the Earth

> These are the generations of the heaven and the earth when they were created on the day YHWH Elohim made the earth and the heaven. (2:4)

Here begins the second or supplementary description of the story of creation. The apparent contradiction between the two accounts does not necessary imply two schools or writers, but two modes of a single subjective structure, exactly as in the Freudian unconscious wherein two (or more) apparently contradictory ideas can dwell, together forming the structure of the subject, according to the model of over-determination.

Protestant source theory would say that in this chapter, the Jahwist School expresses itself, because, for the first time, the name YHWH Elohim appears, whereas earlier, only the term Elohim was used. However, we suggest, following in the footsteps of others, that this name expresses a certain aspect of the divinity. As a word, Elohim might symbolize the primal essence of the Creator, which is less involved later on in what has been created, as compared to YHWH, the God of Israel. See the remarks of Judah Halevi on this in the Kuzari and also Rashi, on this verse, who says: "YHWH is his name," and, on **Elohim created** (1:1), he wrote that YHWH is the aspect of judgment (*midat hadin*) and Elohim is the aspect of mercy (*midat haraḫamim*).*

I. Benyamini, *A Critical Theology of Genesis*,
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* In this context it is appropriate to present the words of Franz Rosenzweig, with which I agree word for word: "For it is certain that the text as it is has an intention; it is not only something that was written, which is essentially what interests the Protestant science of the Bible; it also speaks: Read me—Understand me! And for understanding it, there is the meaning of the text as edited and finalized, and not the meaning of various sources, which can be peeled away and removed from it. Just as one must read *Faust* as it is and not as the philologists of Goethe divide it up into biographical strata and spiritual and historical influences." For Rosenzweig, Bible studies relate to problems that arose "from the point of view of the final editor, or, in other words, from the point of view of the first reader" (Rosenzweig, "On the Science of Bible," 1929, as quoted in the volume entitled *Naharayim*, and see Cassuto on Genesis and Greenstein on the study and translation of the Bible).

In our opinion, the sentence that begins the book, **In the beginning Elohim created the heaven and the earth,** expresses the gaze of *Elohim the creator*, who creates, as we have mentioned, the world as Other, and thereby, he actualizes himself as a subject, whereas here, the emphasis is on the *viewpoint of the created object*, its experience, for **these are the generations of the heaven and the earth.** Thus, we do not necessarily have two different traditions, but two different points of view on the same creation. This time, we encounter the story of the world or the earth (which, no sooner than it is created, is also cursed by YHWH Elohim). The emphasis is on **when they were created,** as if the reader almost does not know for a moment that indeed someone created them, until the following words indicate this almost incidentally: **on the day YHWH Elohim made the earth and the heaven.** Elohim is also a *tool, a means*, for the work of creation, while the earth, the world, is a partner with Elohim in this work.

> when no bush of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up for the YHWH Elohim had not made it rain on the earth, and no man was there to till the ground; but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground. (2:5–6)

The earth existed beforehand, and vegetation existed in anticipation of its actualization. It was created from the earth, and God and man together will be partners in the actual implementation of this creation, because the **bush of the field** did not yet exist, in contrast to **herb of**

the field, of which it is said that it **had [not] yet sprung up**—meaning that it existed but had not yet been actualized in the full sense of the word, but as seed. This is all seen from the viewpoint of the earth. Furthermore, in contrast to the first story of creation, trees are not yet mentioned, but only those plants that grow close to the earth: bush and herb of the field.

It is possible to make this picture of creation contrast even more with that in the first story. In the first account, Elohim creates the world, which is Other, in order to make himself exist, since at first, he exists only as spirit, as a partial substance. By contrast, in the second story, it may be said that, from the earth's point of view, it exists first. Womblike, it requires the paternal fertilizing seed. Seen in this way, YHWH is the object created as an Other. He is the Other reflected in the face of the (female) earth, which by causing YHWH's erection and fertilization, irrigation, exists and sustains him.

If there is some act of irrigation *in the interim* at the beginning of the world, it is the mist, which does not belong to God, as if God were not active in the world at all, meaning that he does not exist. That which flows on the surface of the earth might be parallel to the spirit of God, which hovers in the first story. Here, the mist is not divine but rather part of nature, meaning that the first subject to exist is the earth, and what comes afterward is God, who is actualized by means of his phallic act of fertilization. One might even add that if there is a parallel between what is said about God and what is said about man—**Elohim had not made it rain on the earth, and no man was there to till the ground**—then to a certain degree, God was not there either.

> Then the YHWH Elohim formed man dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. (2–7)

Man is the first thing that God creates in this story of creation, which does not contradict the earth's point of view, since man is the product of the earth. Hence, there is also a linguistic closeness between *adam* [man], *adama* [earth], and *dam* [blood].

At this stage of the story, we begin to encounter constantly increasing tension between God, the creator, and the earth, which is also a partner in the work of creation. The earth may not be an independent entity, but as a passive, feminine entity, she receives a healthy dose of curses from God after the acts of her son—man— who was born, as stated here, from the materiality

of the earth (and this is her image and figure). This man, her son, will completely fulfill her potential and cause her (along with God) to flourish.

From here, the question is borne into the skies of scholarship: is there mythology in the biblical text? Yes.* Here, we have the story of a latent struggle between **God, Adam, Earth**, and, later, **Eve**, who is an extension of the earth, as well. In the parallel myths of the Ancient Near East, the god's colleagues are active, whereas here, the earth is passive, and God applies his forcefulness to it and his desire to control. This is how masculinity, the author of the book, grasps maternity.

* What is the definition of *mythology* for us? Many commentators propose a view of myth in an effort to differentiate it from the content of the Bible. We do not necessarily accept that definition, except now, for the sake of the dispute, we concede that myths contain the stories about gods, their births and lives, including the power struggles among them. The Bible does not contain such a story, as it were, since it does not tell about God as someone controlled by an external fate, and we are not told of a struggle between him and other divine or supernatural powers. Having accepted this definition of myth, let us say that there is also a hidden dimension of the story about God, the story of his existence and birth to a certain degree, and also the story of his struggle against other powers, especially the earth, as we shall now point out. This is not a struggle between two willful and conscious powers, because earth-nature here does not possess a knowing consciousness, but, in that it is an existing factor, within the interior of God it creates the drama of a counter-struggle, and God envies and imagines himself to be its enemy. This enemy is threatening because of its fertility, a capacity that will occasionally be stifled by the punisher's punishment.

To a certain degree, this hidden dimension, which is revealed, is the *repressed* aspect of the Bible (in the Freudian-Lacanian sense of the word). While the Bible represses this dimension on the surface level, it does not do so in the depths of its apparent sources. In fact, the focus of our work with the text prefers the conception of the repressed dimension as something that is revealed *retrospectively*—in the wake of what the text will later recount, as we scurry about on the field of words.

> And YHWH Elohim planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he placed the man whom he had formed. And YHWH Elohim made to grow from the earth every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, and the tree of life in the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (2:8–9)

Here, from the perspective of the earth or its representative, who tells the story of creation here, God is no longer the omnipotent creator. Rather, he is like a gardener. He plants in the earth, he serves it, he makes things grow from the earth. We readers forget for a moment that the beauty and pleasantness of the trees cannot be credited solely to God, but also to the earth itself, and we attribute this creation to God, who thereby filches from the earth, from the mother, its connection to the act of creation, stating that there is a factor external to nature, which creates it, acting on it from the outside. However, the earth's story hints to us that matters might be different, that the earth already contains the seed of creation and needs stimulants: God and Adam. God senses this and therefore works to develop the earth, but at the same time, also to oppose it and and its children, human beings [*bnei Adam* in Hebrew] who are sons of the earth [*bnei haadama* in Hebrew].

In fact, the uniqueness of the act of creation here is not the creation of the trees themselves, but the creation of specific trees: the tree of knowledge and the tree of life. The God who competes, the God of speech, comes to the world, to nature, and to the earth, with the word, with consciousness of good and evil, and with the principle of eternity that language promises, as against the extinction of nature.

> And a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four heads. The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one which flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good; crystal and onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one which flows around the whole land of Cush. And the name of the third river is Hidekel [Tigris], which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is Frat [the Euphrates]. (2:10–14)

The rivers were not created by God. They existed before creation. They surround the earth and irrigate it. Like God and Adam, they are partners in the work of creation (which is fertilizing and irrigating, and not creation ex nihilo).

> And YHWH Elohim took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden to work it and guard it. And YHWH Elohim commanded the man, saying, You may surely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die. (2:15–17)

To work it and guard it. Could there be three dimensions here? Two of them are connected to "to work it." The first dimension is action in relation to the earth, changing its nature, tilling the soil; but the verb *la'avod* can also be translated as "to worship," as if the earth were God, the second dimension. The third possible dimension is related to "and guard it," not in the active sense, but in the conservative sense of protecting its rights.

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die. Good and evil are connected to the question of knowledge. God knows, and his knowledge is of the relation between good and evil, but it also includes the possibility of learning evil and doing it (see Rashi on 2:25: "[Adam] was not imbued with the evil inclination until he ate of the tree"). After the serpent tempted Adam and Eve, **YHWH Elohim said, Yes, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever** (3:22). God is upset because man might already be like him, and he might become more and more like that, because eating of the tree brings man close to him. Closeness to God with regard to life and death is not possible because Adam's is finally put at a distance from the tree of life, but from now on, the tree of knowledge that is planted in man will disturb God because of the potential of equality between the two. This detail brings us back to the hypothesis that good and evil are, by definition, dependent on the interest of God.

> And YHWH Elohim said, It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helpmate as against him. (2:18)

As in the first story of creation, here, too, God emphasizes that the man's isolation is not good, just as before the creation, his own isolation was not good. As opposed to this not-good, we have **that it was good**. It was good in the sense of being good for God and his Other, the earth, and here, it is good for the man to be with his woman Other, Eve. Eve will be the mother *of all living things*, just like the earth. That is, if God will not supply us with information about his essence, we can learn it from the essence of the human being, who started off alone and became a couple, as did God. This is the helpmate as against him, the helpmate by his side, and as against him in the sense of being opposite him, like a mirror image. The woman *comes after* God's self-creation.

> So out of the ground YHWH Elohim formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living soul, that was its name. The man gave names to all beasts, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helpmate as against him. (2:19–20)

The helpmate is connected here to the dimension of the action of language upon the objects in the world and naming them. The helpmate, the object, must be present opposite the subject-creator, like God and the man, to be present *as if* against, and then, the word finally creates it, the object, differentiating it from other objects. In this way, Eve will also be named by Adam, in that he found a helpmate for himself, and he gives her the word, the name.

> So YHWH Elohim cast sleep upon the man, and he slept, and he took one of his ribs and closed flesh upon it; and YHWH Elohim built the rib that he took from the man into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, This time it is a bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; and she shall be called Woman, for she was taken out of Man. Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his woman, and they are one flesh. (2:21–24)

And they are one flesh. See Rashi: "*The holy spirit says so to forbid incest to the sons of Noah (Sanhedrin 57)*." This, in fact, is God's principal commandment, his reference to human family relations, and from now on, God's anger in the Book of Genesis will mainly be directed at this aspect.

It does not say that the woman will leave, because she has no place as an active, creative subject, but rather she is passive, until, with the serpent and the fruit, she rebels against the masculine dimension of God plus Adam. She is the Other who comes afterward, and therefore, retroactively, we also attribute the dimension of femininity to the earth versus the linguistic-masculine God, who struggles against her.

> And both of them were naked, the man his woman, and they were not ashamed. Now the serpent was more subtle than all the beasts of the field that YHWH Elohim made. (2:25–3:1)

Naked. It says that the man and his woman were **naked** [*'arumim* in Hebrew], and immediately afterward, it says of the serpent that he was *'arum*, the same word, which is traditionally translated as "subtle" or "cunning." The serpent transports the minds of the children of God—Adam and Eve—into his mental field, that of cunning. Discouraged, God knows that from now on, each and every one of the children of God, the children of Adam, is naked: **the impulse of man's heart is evil from his youth** (8:21).*

* In the encounter with Abram, God will know this human cunning, which is so contrary to God's (technical) innocence, for God created Adam and Eve in his image, and this image was innocent and naked, not knowing shame. But Abraham is totally endowed with the cunning of life, and perhaps this and none other is the reason why God wants to make Abraham submit to his innocence: **I am El-Shadday, walk before me and be blameless** (17:1). Why Abram in particular? Are cunning people scarce? Perhaps it is because God had a golden opportunity, which is connected to Abram's frustration because Sarai is barren, and also because of his wanderings, which had already begun to the land of Canaan, as discussed below.

> And he said to the woman, Did Elohim say, Do not eat of any tree of the garden? And the woman said to the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree inside the garden, Elohim said, Do not eat of it and do not touch it, lest you die. And the serpent said to the woman, You surely will not die. For Elohim knows that on the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like Elohim, knowing good and evil. (3:2–5)

This is an attribute of God: knowing good and evil, meaning that he is *a knowing consciousness.* This consciousness is concerned with the dualistic tension between evil and good, between the primal *tohu vavohu* and that which was created and separated from it and is subject to God.

> And the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave to her man, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew they were naked; and they

> sewed fig leaves together and made themselves belts. And they heard the voice of YHWH Elohim walking in the garden in the wind of the day, and the man and his woman hid from the presence of YHWH Elohim among the trees of the garden. And YHWH Elohim called to the man, and said to him, Where are you? And he said, I heard you voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid. He said, Who told you that you were naked? From the tree I commanded you not to eat from did you eat? And the man said, The woman you put with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate. Then YHWH Elohim said to the woman, What is this that you have done? The woman said, The serpent led me astray, and I ate. And YHWH Elohim said to the serpent, Because you have done this, cursed are you of all beasts, and above all animals of the field; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. (3:6–14)

The import of the punishment both here and for man is cursed proximity to the earth. Therein we have the reviling of the earth, because it is cursed. Man, too, upon his death, will return to mother earth, the womb.

> I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. To the woman he said, I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bear children, and your desire shall be for your man, and he shall rule over you. And to Adam he said, Because you listened to the voice of your woman, and you ate of the tree of which I commanded you, You shall not eat of it, cursed is the ground because of you; in sorrow you shall eat of it all the days of your life. (3:15–17)

There is a similarity between Eve's punishment and that of the earth (for the man: the punishment for Adam refers to the earth, refers to its being cursed), and from this, we may conclude retroactively about relations between God and the earth, his spouse. The earth becomes difficult for the production of fruit. The divinity blocks its womb. This punishment will persist in the rest of the Book of Genesis, when he blocks the wombs

of men's wives. Thus, starting with Eve, whose punishment is that her womb will cause her suffering, and birth will not be easy, her womb is slightly impaired, because of the masculine God's desire to completely block the womb and his envy of the other creative agent. Is this YHWH's unconscious?

God emphasizes to Eve, from which we may conclude something about the earth, the archetype of the earth, that **your desire shall be for your man,** meaning that her desire will be for the masculine factor, and the masculine "he" will rule over her. This, in fact, is God's own desire. The earth suffers for man, meaning that it is cursed for him, but thereby it is cursed in itself, in relation to itself. It suffers, and so, the flood will appear, not only because of man but also because of all animals and plants. The earth itself is inundated. It will receive sorrow like its sister in femininity and womb-bearing, because she is also "the mother of all living."

As for the man: He is no longer the crown and peak of creation, but the end of creation, in which God reaches the created being most distant from the first object of creation, the earth. Thus, he is the creature farthest from the earth, as it were, though he actually emerged from its dust. He has a consciousness that will force him to distance himself from it. Otherwise, he will receive the paternal punishment of YHWH.

> Thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; because you are dust, and to dust you shall return. The man called his woman's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. And YHWH Elohim made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them. (3:18–21)

Eve is the mother of all living, mother earth. Her name in Hebrew, *ḥava*, is related to the root of the verb "to live." The earth is also the mother of the man; the man comes from its dust and returns to it; and he also comes from the mother's womb and his desire is for it.

> Then YHWH Elohim said, Yes, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he send his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever. Therefore YHWH Elohim sent him from the

> garden of Eden, to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man and to the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and the flame of the whirling sword to guard the way to the tree of life. And Adam knew Eve his woman. (3:22–4:1)

And Adam knew Even his woman. To know one's fellow, and also thus: **Then YHWH said to Cain, Where is Abel your brother? And he said, I do not know; am I my brother's keeper? (4:9**) I know him and her in my body, and I include my fellow in my body, knowing it not in the realm of the spirit, but in the area of the physicality of the flesh and the area of vision, because God always sees the good and the evil, and thus he knows: **And Elohim saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good (1:31**). This is also true of Adam and Eve after eating from the tree of knowledge: **Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew they were naked (3:7**). The eye and the body know, and this is a pleasurable knowledge.

> ... and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, I have acquired a man with YHWH. And she gave birth again to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. After some days had ended, Cain brought fruit of the ground as an offering to YHWH. And Abel also brought, the first born of his flock and of their fat portions. And YHWH favored Abel and his offering, but Cain and his offering he did not favor. And Cain was very angry, and his face fell. And YHWH said to Cain, Why are you angry, and why did your face fall? For if you do well, you will be accepted, and if you do not do well, sin crouches at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it. And Cain said to Abel his brother, and when they were in the field, Cain rose against his brother Abel and killed him. And YHWH said to Cain, Where is Abel your brother? He said, I do not know; am I my brother's keeper? And he said, What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the soil, it shall no longer yield to you its strength; you shall be a nomad and wanderer on the earth. (4:1–12)

The story of Cain and Able appears as an extension of what was said about God's envy of the earth: envy between one person and another, between an elder son and his brother *who comes after him*, is, in fact, a consequence of the more primeval envy between God and the earth, *which comes after him*. This might be an explanation of why the divinity did not respond to Cain and accept his gifts from the earth. Hence, the punishment (which is somewhat similar to Adam's expulsion from the garden of Eden): "cursed is the ground because of you; in sorrow you shall eat of it all the days of your life" (3:17). Cain's punishment extends to the creation of a barrier between him and other people, and between him and mother earth. He must wander on earth, without resting on it, without embracing it: "And he said, What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the soil, it shall no longer yield to you its strength; you shall be a nomad and wanderer on the earth" (4:10–12). This results from the abomination of sending human blood back to the earth.

Here, the divinity plays the innocent with technical self-righteousness, as if he does not understand why Cain is envious of Abel before the physical act of murder, and he reproaches him: "And YHWH said to Cain, Why are you angry, and why did your face fall?" (4:6) He even strives to teach him how to control his desire, whereas he himself, God, finds it difficult to control the desire of his envy of the earth.

There is something puzzling about the following words: "And YHWH said to Cain, Why are you angry, and why did your face fall? For if you do well, you will be accepted, and if you do not do well, sin crouches at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it. And Cain said to Abel his brother, and when they were in the field, Cain rose against his brother Abel and killed him" (4:6–8). For the Bible does not tell us what Cain said to Abel.* Perhaps the phrase, **For if . . . crouches**, is not spoken by God, *for they might be Cain's words to Abel*, that is to say, what **Cain said to Abel his brother** refers to what was said before, when Cain addressed Abel. But let us leave that idea alone, because many readers will say that it is not logical, and they are right. However, if we persist in this illogicality, perhaps it can be said that the words of Cain and those of God are a bi-directional reflection of the envious desires of both of them regarding *the other who comes afterward*.

* Incidentally, according to the Septuagint and the Samaritan text, Cain says, originally, as it were, "let us go to the field," but we do not recognize sources other than the final source, *as it is*, in its encounter with the reader. The addition of information about historical lacuna is an important scholarly anecdote, but it has nothing to do with the present position of the reader's encounter, any reader, with what is written.

> Cain said to YHWH, My sin is too great to bear. Behold, you have driven me this day away from the face of the earth and from your face I shall be hidden; and I shall be a nomad and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will slay me. Then YHWH said to him, Therefore anyone who slays Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And YHWH put a mark on Cain, so anyone who found him would not strike him. Then Cain went away from the presence of YHWH and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden. And Cain knew his woman, and she conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. To Enoch was born Irad; and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael the father of Methushael, and Methushael the father of Lamech. And Lamech took two women; the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have cattle. His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. Zillah bore Tubal-cain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron. The sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah. And Lamech said to his women: Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; you women of Lamech, heed what I say. I have slain a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. If Cain is avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold. And Adam knew his woman again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, Elohim has given me another seed instead of Abel, for Cain slew him. To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time men began to call upon the name YHWH. This is the book of the generations of Adam. When Elohim created man, he made him in the image of Elohim. (4:13–5:1)

This is the book of the generations of Adam. God creates Adam in his image and likeness, and Adam gives birth to his son in his image and likeness, in close proximity, in father–son relations, proximity that grows stronger sometimes, as in **and Enoch walked with Elohim (5:24**), and like Nimrod and the sons of God, who represent the possibility of an intimate relationship between man and God.

> Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Adam [Man] when they were created. When Adam had lived a hundred and thirty years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. The days of Adam after he fathered Seth were eight hundred years; and he fathered sons and daughters. Thus all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years; and he died. When Seth had lived a hundred and five years, he fathered Enosh. Seth lived after the birth of Enosh eight hundred and seven years, and fathered sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years; and he died. When Enosh had lived ninety years, he fathered Kenan. Enosh lived after the birth of Kenan eight hundred and fifteen years, and fathered sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Enosh were nine hundred and five years; and he died. When Kenan had lived seventy years, he fathered Mahalalel. Kenan lived after the birth of Mahalalel eight hundred and forty years, and fathered sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Kenan were nine hundred and ten years; and he died. When Mahalalel had lived sixty-five years, he fathered Jared. Mahalalel lived after the birth of Jared eight hundred and thirty years, and fathered sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Mahalalel were eight hundred and ninety-five years; and he died. When Jared had lived a hundred and sixty-two years he fathered Enoch. Jared lived after the birth of Enoch eight hundred years, and fathered sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Jared were nine hundred and sixty-two years; and he died. When Enoch had lived sixty-five years, he fathered Methuselah. Enoch walked with Elohim after the birth of Methuselah three hundred years, and fathered sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. Enoch walked with Elohim; and he was not, for Elohim took him. (5:2–24)

Enoch is said to have walked with God. The same is said of Noah, and one is not to understand from this that he was going to commit evil before his death, as Rashi claims. It is said of Enoch that he **walked with Elohim** after fathering Methuselah, from the time of his first son's birth, and this walking was in step with the following births: **Enoch walked with Elohim after the birth of Methuselah three hundred years, and fathered sons and daughters.** Thus, the walking is connected to the births, and this might also lead us to an understanding of Abraham's going, walking along the path to which the divinity wants Avram to keep, a path connected to paternal fertility. However, with Enoch, the story does not end with, "and he died," as with the rest, because of that walking.

> When Methuselah had lived a hundred and eighty-seven years, he fathered Lamech. Methuselah lived after the birth of Lamech seven hundred and eighty-two years, and fathered sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred and sixty-nine years; and he died. When Lamech had lived a hundred and eighty-two years, he fathered a son, and called his name Noah, saying, this one will console us from our acts and from the sorrow of our hands from the earth that YHWH has cursed. Lamech lived after the birth of Noah five hundred and ninety-five years, and fathered sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Lamech were seven hundred and seventy-seven years; and he died. (5:25–31)

Of God's doings with Noah and of his doings with the men of Babel—which continue with the logic of destruction of the earth—we learn in the following chapters, after which we learn about Abram and Abraham.

Chapter Three: The Sons of God

> After Noah was five hundred years old, Noah fathered Shem, Ham, and Japheth. When man began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them, the sons of Elohim saw that the daughters of men were good; and they took women for themselves from all they chose. Then YHWH said, My spirit shall not contend with man forever, for he is flesh, and his days shall be a hundred and twenty years. The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of Elohim came to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men that were from all time [famous] men [lit., "men of the name"]. And YHWH saw that the badness of man was great on the earth, and that every impulse of the thoughts of his heart was only bad all the day. And YHWH regretted that he had made man on the earth and was sorry to his heart. So YHWH said, I will erase man whom I have created from the face of the ground, from man to beast to creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them. But Noah found favor in the eyes of the YHWH. (5:32–6:8)

Before entering into the account of the dreadful flood, a brief, enigmatic story is offered to us about the supposedly transgressive deeds of humanity at the time of Noah and before him, in order to justify God's spiteful

I. Benyamini, *A Critical Theology of Genesis*,
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action that follows. Therefore, Noah and his sons are mentioned, and—at length—mankind, whose dispersal upon the face of the earth includes the dispersal of the daughters of Eve. In contrast to the genealogical lists that mention only sons, here, the daughters are mentioned because of the principle of procreation, which exists in them and because of the desire for them.

The desire of the sons of God for the daughters of man touches upon the single God's desire for the principle of men's natural increase throughout nature, so that they will rule over his various creatures in his name. For from the beginning, God's demand had been for man to propagate himself on the earth, and indeed, he did so by means of the female, and by means of reproducing the females. The feminine principle brings daughters into the world, which is to say that it reproduces itself, both as a goal and also as a means for continuing reproduction. In this sense, these two paths are the same, because dispersal, the population explosion, spreads by means of the feminine principle (*the acceleration* of this dispersal also threatens the creator of the world).

The daughters of man wish to continue proliferating. The sons of God intervene. They lust after the women's beauty and their fertility. Though God had no sons before this, they are suddenly mentioned here. Previously, the principle was that of a single God versus a single Adam, but now, these sons of God desire to mate with the daughters of Adam, and thus to participate in the commandment of dispersal issued by the father, God—for there is certainly desire. The daughters of Adam are good, both in the sense of being beautiful and also in the sense of being good as what they are. This implies that Adam as such was good, and so were his daughters (despite the slip-ups that have occurred so far, in the Garden of Eden, in the vengeful types such as Cain, and in the apparently arrogant Enoch, mankind does continue to disperse according to God's plan, and this is his main task). The dispersal is being carried out properly. The problem begins with God's dealings—in the figure of his sons—with the lower, feminine powers among mankind. God the father cannot abide the involvement and mingling of his sons on the earth and with its children, man, and man's daughters. Here, in fact, is the source of evil.

Assuming that here, we accept the identity of YHWH with Elohim, that both appellations refer to the same God, and we reject the hypothesis that the sons of Elohim are not necessarily sons of YHWH, who then are the sons of Elohim? Beyond the question about their *identity*, there is the structural relationship of the sons of God, or the angels, or the members

of the retinue toward the single God. For that reason, we must discuss other passages in our interpretation: the sons of God bring home to us the principle of multiplicity within the single divinity, which is split into various voices, so that it is characterized simultaneously (and paradoxically) both by inner multiplicity and inner unity. While the desire for unity demands of mankind that they depend only upon him, the One, the principle of multiplicity demands the dispersal of the sons of Adam throughout the world, and these two principles do not necessarily contradict one another. Rather, they are complementary.

Unlike the writers of Midrash, who interpret the expression, **they took women for themselves from all they chose,** to mean rape, as if the sons of God had violated the daughters of Adam, we take it in the simple sense of choice: they chose *among the daughters of Adam*, for example, the best-looking of them. This is the origin of sin from the viewpoint of the detached paternal God: not the ostensibly *forced and violent* choice, but *the very act of choosing* the daughters of Adam below, choosing them and mingling with them. Hence, we accept the traditional exegetical hypothesis that the action of the sons of God is sinful, but we suggest that this sinfulness is embodied in the very connection with the daughters of Adam.

Indeed, God prefers to have men to disperse on their own, without involving divine forces, without bringing in the sons of God or the angels, as if he were the transcendental God, along post-biblical lines, who observes from the sidelines or from above, even if he sometimes comes down for a visit. The purpose of the visits is to continue to supervise what transpires down below, especially when something happens or is whispered of in secret—as in the case of the Tower of Babel, discussed below. God has no wish to mingle with the objects he first created, but rather, to use them to supervise the creatures *he has just created*. The intervention of the sons of God goes against this principle.

Therefore, God expresses his complaint and his disgust: **My spirit shall not contend with man forever, for he is flesh, and his days shall be a hundred and twenty years.** God states that, in the light of events, this situation, in which his spirit imbues the sons of Adam, and their lives are very long, almost approaching eternity, will no longer exist. His spirit will not dwell in man forever, because he is also a creature of flesh, one of the animals in nature. Therefore, his days will be limited to only one hundred and twenty years (the traditional Jewish phrase of congratulation, "till one hundred and twenty," testifies to this ideal). Man is mortal.

Certainly, one may accept this interpretative position, but it prevents us from acknowledging the wrath of God because of the acts of the sons of God. This, of course, assumes that there is some flaw in their action, and, indeed, there is a flaw, because this tiny story precedes the story of the Tower of Babel, and it is meant to clarify why the deity acted as he did. Therefore, we now present an interpretative position that does not necessarily contradict the idea that God is acting to preserve the principle of separation, but offers another direction of interpretation as well.

The deity's words do not, in fact, contain a promise, but rather, a declaration of self-control and self-reproach: his spirit will not dwell (taking the Hebrew *tadun* to mean that rather than "to contend") in man and will not intervene in him, in man who is flesh, who belongs to the world of the earth. Here, God expresses his revulsion from the dimension of the fleshly, the bodily, the earthly. Now, however, we must ask what is the spirit of God? For in the beginning of our interpretation of Genesis, we said that the spirit of God hovers (there the word *ruaḥ* [spirit] is feminine in gender) over the water, and it is a primal component of the divinity, before God becomes God in the full sense. Before the creation, God was a primary element that was mingled chaotically with the earth, and now, he suddenly fears that this spirit will once again return and mingle with the earth. Therefore, we have a declarative expression of promise: **My spirit shall not contend with man forever**—in the sense of *anymore; it will never be as it was, before the moment of creation*. Or, to put it differently, in a more ordinary way: *this will not be, in any way. I will never be mingled with human flesh. I refuse!*

Then, the Nephilim are mentioned, whose name derives from the root *N-P-L*, to fall, and who are connected with the dimension of the falling, the descent of the sons of God. Ancient writers understood this as the revolt of the angels against the single God (the Nephilim are reminiscent of the ancient Titans in Greek mythology). These are gigantic heroes, who act in parallel to the connection between the sons of God and the daughters of Adam, and in addition to their intermingling, these heroes are connected to the dimension of fame, for their name is known and famous (though it is not entirely clear whether they are the sons of the sons of God. For we may infer from the text both that they already existed before the union of the sons of God and the daughters of Adam and also that they are apparently the offspring of this union; perhaps the reference to them reverberates with the problem of the union of the sons of God with the daughters of Adam, in the sense that the racial barriers between

the Nephilim, the sons of Adam, and the sons of God collapse, and God, on the contrary, desires this racial separation).

The Hebrew word *me'olam* (literally: from the world), translated above as "from all time," in relation to the Nephilim contrasts with the word *le'olam* (literally: to the world), translated as "forever," spoken decisively by God, as if the Nephilim promise themselves eternal life, that their name will spread into eternity, as opposed to the self-propagation of God as the dominant figure. These creatures, whose goal was to rule over the other creatures, suddenly, whether by virtue of being heroes or because of their intermingling with divine forces, become competitors of the single, isolated God himself.

Only against this background can one understand God's sudden words about the malice of mankind. What did man do? It isn't stated clearly. Badness derives from man's overpowering God by means of his strengths as man, strengths that became volatile during his mingling with the divinity itself. Hence God expresses his revulsion against himself, against the spirit within him, which dwells too much with the lower powers, too much intermingled with them. *This is to be remembered: you Israelites, of whom God will later demand that you become holy, and that his spirit will dwell within you. You must know that the matter has another aspect. God is apprehensive about this evil, which derives from too much involvement of his spirit with human flesh, which makes man into someone of renown (like the Nephilim) on his own account.*

The evil of the human heart is characterized by existing **all the day**: persistence, consistency—nothing sporadic. This is the principle of the human **heart**. That is, here we have a proto-Protestant principle, according to which, the impulses of the human heart refer to man's intentions, and in this sense, man's very intention, his plotting, his consciousness, and especially his being mingled with the divine dimension, threaten God because this intention, since it is directed at a goal beyond multiplying in this world—to possess a good name like God—decidedly challenges him. The heart of man opposes the heart of God. The former addresses the future, and the latter, the past, in that he regrets, is full of sorrowful thought, cries in his heart. Some commentators interpret **every impulse of the thoughts of his heart** as the creativity that derives from human thought, thus, man's very actions. However, one must not underestimate the heart here, or thought, from which actions derive, for these are the result of human intentions, consciousness, as against God's heart and consciousness.

The Hebrew words that begin verse 7, *vayinaḥem YHWH*, are usually translated as "and YHWH regretted" or "repented," but the noun derived from the same verb, *neḥama* means consolation. YHWH's *neḥama*, in terms of the language, is regret and remorse, but in substance, it also implies consolation, relief, in the sorrow itself, in the anger itself, in the remorse itself. In fact, the consolation lies in the *intention* of feeling remorse for having created Adam, remorse that immediately calls for the cleansing and destruction of man and nature, and this cleansing extends to the destruction of nature itself and its creatures. Moreover, this regret is connected to the earth: **YHWH regretted that he had made man on the earth**—both in the sense that he created man on the face of the earth and also in the sense that he created him out of the earth, for human action is closely connected to the earth and to its meaning for God, for here, it is emphasized: **the badness of man was great on the earth and YHWH regretted that he had made man on the earth**. God did not necessarily regret only *that he created such a man*, but that he created him *on the earth*, that he created man from and into the dimension of flesh and corporeality. Therefore, the punishment will be wiping him off the face of the earth, and the one that will be punished for this is the earth, which nourishes man from its goodness, mingles with him, instead of his mingling with God (although, as we stated above, God also opposes that intermingling).

The wiping out of all the other creatures on earth derives particularly from man's sin. The structural relationship between the multitude and the individual species because of whom the many suffer is the opposite of the relation between the single God and the multitude of the sinful sons of God, who sin and cause the one to punish. Later on, choice of the single person, Noah—as a reflection of the single God—will counterbalance the ruin of the multitude in nature.

Only Noah finds favor in God's eyes, and he is the only one, always the single one, who prevents the general destruction, who blocks God's desire to get rid of the entire set of toys after the child has built with Lego, to break them into pieces and create the world and its hero, Adam, anew.

From this point of view, the mention of Noah makes clear to us the inner drama that takes place within the divinity and reveals to us that even in the confusion of the desire for destruction, another side of the divinity is suddenly mentioned, a specific side, in Noah, to struggle against the other, dominant side of removal and destruction. This little story opens and closes with Noah, before the more extended story about Noah, for

the purpose of clarifying the instance of the flood, as presently, we will have a description of the way the two opposing sides of the divinity perform two contradictory actions and simultaneously wreak total destruction and renew creation with the rescue of Noah and the chosen animals with him, like the inner conflict between the desire to promote the dispersal of humanity versus the desire to prevent humanity from rising above itself, or that it should yet ascend . . .

Chapter Four: The Flood

> These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generations; Noah walked with Elohim. And Noah fathered three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. And the earth was corrupt before Elohim, and the earth was filled with robbery And Elohim saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth. (6:9–12)

Noah was a simple, good man, in relation to his period (or perhaps to all generations). He walked with God, walking in his ways. This was his custom before God, as it says below: **for I have seen that you are righteous before me** (7:1). However, something else stands before God: **the earth was corrupt before Elohim** (6:11). Perhaps this is the reason why walking before God is an ambivalent expression, from which commentators have concluded both the greatness of Noah's righteousness before God and also his great hubris toward him, as in the case of Enoch, who also walked with God. But perhaps there is no contradiction between the two. We walk upon a very narrow tightrope before this king, walking away from him submissively, walking toward him to gain inspiration, but also taking care not to approach him too closely, because the divine *Thing* might be frightened that people are coming to take its place. The secret is apparently blamelessness before God.

Later, when God addresses Noah, he emphasizes his last words, **for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation** (7:1),

I. Benyamini, *A Critical Theology of Genesis*,
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in order to restrain the self-importance that might arise in this good man. Yes, he is righteous, but in relation to that generation, as we see in the opening verse above: **Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generations** (below we shall wonder where Abraham stands in relation to this blamelessness).

As in the preceding chapter about the sons of God, it is mentioned that Noah fathered three sons, and again, that the earth was bad in the eyes of God because of man's actions, or, to be more precise, as we stated above, because of the mingling of divine powers in man. The earth is cursed because of a human action. Nature cannot fulfill the divine commandment of procreation: the corruption of man affects the corruption of animals, both in the conceptual sense that this corruption attaches itself to all flesh and to everything that is material, and also in the sense that the punishment is given to them. However, in the present verses, the whole earth is full of robbery, all its creatures are in thievery, meaning that this sin is not attributed especially to man, and it is emphasized that the dimension of *corporeality* corrupts creatures, defined as **all flesh**. For that reason, we are told that this flesh dwells *on the earth*. What an abomination! Flesh upon flesh, matter upon matter. This encounter of flesh with the earth can produce nothing but robbery, thievery, sin.

However, God must find a righteous man so that, by means of him, he can still achieve the birth of nature, continuation of the act of creation: thus Noah is both the purpose and the means. He must be saved both as a righteous man and also to save the rest of the living creatures of nature. Yet still, along with the desire to preserve nature, God has another desire—that of destruction and suspicion toward the very earth that he wants to nurture. The flood expresses his ambivalence not only in the aggression against nature but also in the very act of obsessive speech, in the commandment to build the ark and seal it hermetically, to prepare a protective receptacle against nature—the water.

> And Elohim said to Noah, the end of all flesh comes before me for the earth is filled with robbery because of them; behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its breadth fifty cubits, and thirty cubits its height. Make a window for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above; and place the opening of the ark on its side; make two and

> three lower decks. For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the spirit of life from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall die. And I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. (6–13–18)

The sovereign designs the ark for Noah, in which the survivors will cruise, protected. A detailed construction plan is written down, so it would not be exaggerated to say that this blueprint teaches us about the plans for creation itself, since the ark will contain the entire world, in miniature. The Hebrew word for existence is *yaqum*, which, as we learn from the words of God below, is connected to the word *qayam* (existing). It is that which is made to exist by virtue of the act of its creation. The ark is the momentary substitute for the substrate of existence, until it arises again after the flood. Thus, not only does the ark float on the surface of the water, but existence itself also floats on the primordial *tohu vavohu*, an existence that awaits the salvation of God, who has hidden his face, salvation from the brutality of the earth, as it were.

So we see that the act of creation was also constructed according to God's blueprint, in which all the objects are organized in their correct place, in a structural relation to one another, and this also applies to the substrate on which the created objects act, the substrate of earth and heaven, and to the basic pattern of couples, as we shall see below (with an exception, so that God creates the world on the basis of couples, and at the same time he introduces as flaw in it, the element of the exceptional One, who inserts the dimension of sanctity into the world of couples).

> And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of them all into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the birds of their kinds, and of the animals of their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground of its kind, two of them all shall come in to you, to keep them alive. Also take with you every sort of food that is eaten, and gather it to you; and it shall serve as food for you and for them. Noah everything as Elohim commanded him, thus he did. (6:19–22)

As part of this plan, Noah is commanded to bring pairs of all the animals. The couple structure will make continued propagation possible, for, despite God's desire to destroy, he also has another desire—to sustain,

to perpetuate, and he chooses to cooperate with sexuality. The couple receives sanctifying respect as part of God's plan to maintain the world. However, this coupling will also be a fertile ground for the growth of the various abominations that will anger God.

> Then YHWH said to Noah, Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation. Of all the pure animals, take seven, seven male and his mate; and a pair of the animals that are not pure, the male and his mate; also of the birds of the sky seven, seven male and female, to keep their seed alive upon the face of all the earth. For in seven days I will send rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights; and I will wipe out all existence that I made from the face of the earth. And Noah did all that YHWH commanded him. (7:1–5)

Then. However (under his second name, YHWH), God addresses Noah again about the actual entry into the ark, speaking especially about the seven pairs of animals, and not only the couples. For this reason, proponents of the documentary theory, *who abuse the text*, are convinced that the editor of the text made a rough combination of two different passages of different schools here (the Priests versus the Jahwists). While it is apparently possible to identify the rough patching together of several passages in the story of the flood, it is also possible to explain it differently. For example, that the two different addresses to Noah are complementary. In the first address, God proposes the building of the ark, and Noah builds it, while in the second address, God tells Noah to enter it. This time, he responds differently. Is he forbidden to change his mind? In fact, he changes his mind several times in the present text. Now he is interested in organizing the animals according to two principles, not just as couples, although simple coupledom is important, but it does not make possible the place of the single holy one, as a parallel to the single God facing the multitude (as we saw above, in the early chapters, the divinity contains an *internal* relationship between multiplicity and the One, which is beneath that multiplicity).

The impure animals belong to the simple principle of natural coupledom, whereas the pure animals, who are destined for sacrifice, to feed God, belong to the complex principle of sevenths. These sevenths are the number of days of creation, and, as Cassuto showed, they are a series

made of 2 + 2 + 2 + 1 = 7 (i.e., a system of three pairs of days and another left over day, which is exceptional and defines the entire group). In this respect, the number seven makes possible the placement of the uniquely sanctified, like God, in opposition to the multiplicity of the divine powers and also the contrast between the Sabbath and the six days of creation (and to a certain degree, the opposition of the single Noah to the sinners around him). So, too, with the animals, we have six pure animals and another one.

And what about the pairing? What will the seventh animal do? With whom will it pair?* This apparently expresses the closeness of the death of the sanctified object to its sanctity (as Freud, the anthropologist, explains about the totem in *Totem and Taboo*). That is why Rashi comments on 7:2: "**seven seven**—so that he can offer one of them as a sacrifice when he leaves." Perhaps he means that "seven seven" refers, as most traditional commentators have it, to seven pairs, but perhaps not, because he says that he will sacrifice one of them upon leaving, that is, a single sacrifice. In Breshit Raba (32:4), regarding the seven seven of the birds, we read: "if you say that it is seven of every kind [of bird], we find that one of them has no mate—but rather seven males and seven females." That is to say, one may truly wonder whether the expression **seven, seven male and female** means seven pairs of pure animals, so that no single animal would be left over, as claimed here. However, it also says, **two two, male and female, went into the ark with Noah** (7:9), which does not mean two pairs of every kind of animal, as if there were two pairs of elephants. Rather, it means one pair of elephants, bull and cow. So, in reference to the cattle, it could mean three cows and four bulls, or four cows and three bulls.

* By the way, it could be that humans were also placed under the principle of the one as opposed to the ideology of coupledom, since the woman was taken from the man's rib. That is to say, Adam and Eve are a couple based on a divided one, by means of a superfluous rib, but not two equal parts. Is the differentness found with the woman, because she deviates from the original one and emerged from the encounter with the man? Or is it the single man from whom the couple was created? It appears that both the man and the woman, each in turn, are single as opposed to coupledom. But this might only be in the case of humanity, so that mankind can rule the world of nature under the principle of the one versus the couple: Sabbath, sacrifices, marriage. Conversely, the animal might act only according to the principle of coupledom.

Incidentally, the number seven is repeated: the flood will come in seven days.

> Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of water was upon the earth. And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him went into the ark, to escape the water of the flood. Of pure animals, and of animals that are not pure, and of birds, and of everything that creeps on the ground, two and two came to Noah to the ark, went into the ark with Noah, male and female, as Elohim commanded Noah. And after seven days the water of the flood was upon the earth. In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of abyss burst, and the flues of heaven were opened. And rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights. On the very same day Noah and his sons, Shem and Ham and Japheth, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them came into the ark, they and every beast of its kind, and all cattle of its kind, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth of its kind, and every bird according to its kind, every bird of every sort. And they came to Noah to the ark two, two of all flesh in which there was the spirit of life. And they that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as Elohim had commanded him; and YHWH shut him in. The flood was forty days upon the earth; and the water increased and bore up the ark, and it rose above the earth. And the water grew stronger and increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark went on the face of the waters. And the water grew very very strong upon the earth and all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered; fifteen cubits from above the water grew stronger and the mountains were covered. And all flesh perished that moved upon the earth, birds, cattle, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm upon the earth, and every man; everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. And he blotted out all existence that was on the face of the earth, from man to animal to creeping things and to birds of the sky; they were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark. And the waters were strong upon the earth a hundred and fifty days. (7:6–24)

The flood descends from the threatening sky, heaven throws down the oversupply of destructive water, and the miserable ark is caught between the upper and lower water, so that the sky is the far and near limit, which the ark can approach when it is higher than all the mountains, after they are submerged. This might be God's dwelling. The story of the flood could be the story of excess, the story of the good thing that became too good, as if God wished to teach man a lesson, to show him the terrible side, the too-good, of mother earth. This is the message to mankind: that it is best to join with God, the founder through the word, and not with the earth, the ground, which so easily slips into disaster. For not only does the sky cast down the horror of its water, but so also does the earth, which is not only inundated from above but also floods itself from its belly: **and the fountains of the abyss were dammed** (8:2). Only God, the heavenly, is capable of defending his chosen reference group, the group that establishes existence anew, in a single ark. God, who is close, in the sky, protects it and them, but this situation is also very fragile: the miserable ark drifts on stormy water. It must be admitted that there is a certain deception here. The poor inhabitants of the ark assume that the evil flows from the earth and the sky, from the stormy forces of nature, and not from God, the savior. This is his method of divide and rule: to cause a conflict between man and the creatures of existence and nature and the earth, to make man suspect unpredictable nature, and to look to God for rescue, the very God who pulls the strings of punishment.

> And Elohim remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark. And Elohim made a wind pass over the earth, and the water subsided; the fountains of the abyss were dammed and the flues of heaven were closed, the rain from heaven was imprisoned, and the water receded from the earth back and forth. And the water abated at the end of a hundred and fifty days; and the ark settled in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on the mountains of Ararat. And the water abated further until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen. (8:1–5)

Now, at the beginning of Chapter Eight, God suddenly remembers Noah, who is drifting in the ark. He remembers in the throes of his enthusiast destruction and ruin. He remembers Noah the way he remembers his need

to restrain himself. Otherwise, his single-minded desire to eliminate the object will do away with the satisfaction of his other desire, to give birth to the object and sustain it. He cannot do without these two desires. Only between both of them does he recognize himself as God: not only as the one who gives birth to the world of nature and to man, but who also persistently corrects him and restrains him, so that man will not control him or feel superior to him. Similarly, there is a need for these objects to exist, for without them, or, to be precise, without controlling them, *he is not God*, he is not the subject. These verses bring us back in the most concrete manner to the first moments of the birth of God as such: **And Elohim made a wind pass over the earth, and the water subsided; the fountains of the abyss were dammed and the flues of heaven were closed, the rain from heaven was imprisoned.** From this, it can be learned that creation derived from the removal of the water from the dry land, as opposed to the flood-like *tohu vavohu*, where the earth is mixed with the threatening water. Now the spirit of God, which is mingled with the water, as in the days of *tohu vavohu*, turning about in the world, just when the divine spirit that was given to the animals and to man is destroyed: **everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died.**

> At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made, and sent forth a crow; and it went to and fro until the water dried up from the earth. And he sent a dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground; but the dove found no rest for her foot, and she returned to him to the ark, for the water was still on the face of the whole earth. So he sent his hand and took her and brought her into the ark with him. And he waited another seven days, and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark; and the dove came back to him in the evening, and lo, in her mouth a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth. Then he waited another seven days, and sent the dove; and she did not return to him anymore. In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters dried from off the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and behold, the face of the ground had dried. In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry. And Elohim spoke to Noah, saying, Leave the ark, you and your wife, and your

> sons and your sons' wives with you. Every living thing that is with you of all flesh – birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth – let them out so they can breed abundantly on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply upon the earth. So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. And every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves upon the earth, went forth by families left the ark. And Noah built an altar to YHWH, and took of every pure animal and of every pure bird, and offered sacrifices on the altar. And YHWH smelled the pleasing odor, and YHWH said in his heart, I will never again curse the earth because of man, for the impulse of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will not again destroy every living creature as I have done. All the days of the earth, sowing and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease. (8:6–22)

I will never again curse the earth—Here is the expression we were waiting for so much, to strengthen our argument about the creator's aggressiveness toward the earth, each time with a different excuse.

With his body, like almost all the gods of antiquity, God smells the burnt offering, and he addresses his heart, which dwells in the body, in pain. He forms a covenant *with himself*, though still it might be a covenant with Noah, since it comes in response to his offering. Either way, there are two stages—first, God addresses himself while enjoying the fragrance, and then, he addresses Noah and the animals who remain in the world, in the ark. The sign of the covenant not only reminds God to observe that which has been signed, but it also protects the earth from destruction, just as the mark of Cain protects him from killers. We may add that God forms a covenant with himself but needs the human impetus, the fragrance that rises from below, to reach this conclusion.

It is almost insulting that God, who smells the odors of Noah's offerings, pays heed to these odors in a slightly strange way. He is entirely given over to the spirit of pessimism and fatalism because it is impossible to change mankind, because he is dealing with a one-dimensional creature, all of whose specimens are identical, whereas truly beneath him sits a righteous man who spoils this unequivocal picture of **the impulse of man's heart is evil from his youth.** For God likes to feel that way, to be sure of what he is confronting, as if man were not so changeable, with conflicting

desires and caprices (whereas he, God, is, as it were, stable and decisive). **The impulse of man's heart** is a fatalistic expression: the direction of man's intentions is clear and unidirectional, toward evil. While this is a discouraging situation, at the same time, it also makes possible pleasurable feelings of anger. Of course, if man was indeed created that way, whose fault is it?

God promises himself not to produce another similar holocaust in nature, **because of man**, for the destruction was because of man, for his sake, to make him improve. Miserable nature is stuck between God and man, suffers violence because of the unrealized fantasies of the one and the other, one upon the other, and it is caught in the middle. Perhaps one may say that there is a veiled threat here, a promise not to wreak destruction again, *because of man*, but what about destruction *that is not* because of man?

> And Elohim blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every bird of the air, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are given. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. Only you shall not eat flesh with its soul, that is, its blood. For your blood of your souls I will demand from the hand of every beast I will require it and from the hand of man; from the hand of every man's brother I will require the soul of man. Whoever spills the blood of man, by man shall his blood be spilled; for Elohim made man in his own image. And you, be fruitful and multiply, bring forth abundantly on the earth and multiply in it. (9:1–7)

Man is commanded to rule over the animals, over their flesh, with no possibility of ruling over their souls, because that is God's domain (henceforth man can eat meat, and not only vegetables). The divinity simultaneously enlarges and restricts the ability of his agents in nature to rule. Therefore, it is forbidden to eat meat together with the living soul, which is embodied in blood. Perhaps the prohibition against eating blood also derives from the closeness of blood to the earth, and from the horrifying possibility of mingling with the earth by means of the blood. That admixture would also be liable to take place with the spilling of human blood on the earth

and the mingling of that blood with the earth, as in the murder of Abel. Therefore the prohibition against killing people is combined with it, for such murder is also threatening to God himself, an effort to kill his agent and weaken him.

> And Elohim said to Noah and his sons with him, saying, And behold I keep my covenant with you and your seed after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast, of the earth with you, of all that came out of the ark beasts of the earth. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth. And Elohim said, This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for eternal generations: I gave my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I make it cloudy over the earth with clouds and the bow is seen in the clouds, and I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living soul in all flesh; and the water shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. [When] the bow is in the clouds, and I see it to remember the eternal covenant between Elohim and every living soul in all flesh that is upon the earth. And Elohim said to Noah, This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth. (9:8–17)

Regarding the rainbow, every time rain falls, when the rainbow appears in the sky, God will look at the colors of the rainbow, and this beautiful sight will restrain his destructive mechanism, and the rain will not degenerate into a flood. This sight is also intended for man: he will see what God is looking at, he will look with the inner divine gaze, which reflects upon his desire for cruelty that must be overcome. He might also have to be weaned from his intention of making the flood wreak destruction not only upon nature and mankind, but also upon God himself, because the deluge brought him back to the terrible moments of *tohu vavohu*, terrible to him as well, before he was entirely the divine, sovereign king.

The primeval, non-temporal time of *tohu vavohu*, which came back to him during the flood, contained the lack of separation between summer

and winter, between day and night, and therefore, God promised to himself and also to man not to slip into that again: **All the days of the earth, sowing and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.** Nature, created, will return to its cycles, for it is the nature of nature to have inner differences, cycles that prevent it from returning to chaos. They will never cease again. There will only be the divine and human cessation of the Sabbath days, the pause that establishes the moment of quiet and causes man to revolve around annual and holiday cycles, through the single exception of the Sabbath.

Chapter Five: The Curse of the Son

> The sons of Noah who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham was the father of Canaan. These three were the sons of Noah; and from these the whole earth was dispersed. And Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard and he drank of the wine, and became drunk, and lay uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it upon both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; their faces were turned backward, and they did not see their father's nakedness. And Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, and he said, Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers. And he said, Blessed be YHWH the Elohim of Shem and let Canaan be his slave. May Elohim beautify Japheth, and may he dwell in the tents of Shem; and let Canaan be his slave. After the flood Noah lived three hundred and fifty years. All the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years; and he died. (9:18–29)

Noah is a renewed Adam, the first man after the deluge, and with his sons, he will rebuild humanity, according to God's fantastic plan, which is engraved in the covenant. Since Noah was created in the image of

I. Benyamini, *A Critical Theology of Genesis*,
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Adam, who was created in the image of God, who could be a kind of father, we may ask what is similar about his status as a father in this story to the status of God as the father of human beings? Incidentally, what does God's status as a father have to do with his being ambivalent when he sees the maternal function of the earth, which creates the world from its womb, the faculty of mercy (*raḥamim* in Hebrew, connected etymologically to the word for womb, *reḥem*) and not the faculty of judgment (to use terms from the Kabbalah). In her book, *Vayoled* [and he fathered], the biblical scholar Pnina Galpaz-Feller suggests that Noah is trying to recreate the status of God the father without success, and for that reason, he falls. But we emphasize that God, too, is a failed representation of this lost status.

Noah, the man of the soil, plants a vineyard, drinks his wine, gets drunk, and takes off his clothes. His consciousness is altered. His mind is blighted, and the escalation of this fragility finds expression in the baring of his nakedness, the father's nakedness. One of the sons, the father of Canaan—providing the Israelites with an opportunity to curse him and his seed—Ham, sees Noah, and he also sins by inviting his brothers to gaze on their father's nakedness, a gaze which in the end is refused. This is literally the baring of nakedness, *gilui 'arayot*, an expression that means incest in Hebrew.

According to the Sages, an act of incest took place here, sodomy, or else of emasculation, as Rashi says: "Some say he castrated him (Sanhedrin 70), and some say he committed sodomy (Breishit Rabba)." Modern scholars also believe that behind this text lies an ancient story that supposedly contains these abominations. However, as shown by one of the greatest Bible scholars of modern times, Umberto Cassuto, the problem is in the gaze itself, and the literal text offers no room for understanding any action graver than that (and we add that even if sodomy took place, that act would be less grave than looking at the shattered father). In fact, the father is already emasculated in the sense of being imperfect, and the blow to him is in Ham seeing his imperfection, his nakedness, in the gaze at the father's not knowing. After awakening, the father realizes his injury, from being seen, in that it deprives us of the possibility of denying the imperfection of reality, as opposed to our fantasy of perfection. It could be that this story also illuminates the vulnerability of God in relation to human beings, in his revealing of himself as imperfect in the face of their fantasy of seeing him as perfect. To put it more precisely: non-not-perfect (as it were), but knowing perfectly.

This is one way of grasping this little story. We will now add another stratum of interpretation, which will not cancel out the earlier stratum. The attitude of the Sages, of modern scholars, and our own interpretation as presented here, all focus on Noah's point of view and agree with the assumption that a sin took place, either in the act of looking or in an act of sodomy described euphemistically. However, it is also possible to propose Ham's point of view, that of the *subaltern* or of *the one who comes after*, and not of the superior (to a certain extent, this presentation is an extension of our conception in earlier chapters of the envy of *those who come after*, which God, Adam, and Cain feel: envy of the earth, of Eve, and of Abel—and the objects of this envy are sacrificed).

Let us take it step by step:

> The sons of Noah who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham was the father of Canaan. These three were the sons of Noah; and from these the whole earth was dispersed. And Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard and he drank of the wine, and became drunk, and lay uncovered in his tent. (9:18–21)

Noah leaves the ark to till the soil, he and his sons. His first significant act, after offering a sacrifice to God, is connected to the earth: henceforth, his identity is **man of the soil.** This is important. In this short story, God is not active as a character, but he is merely mentioned later on in the framework of the curse. However, the earth is indirectly active as a character here. Noah plants a vineyard. We suggest that the superior protagonist here is the earth, and the subaltern one is Noah. He serves it, plants a vineyard for it. While the vineyard is the work of man, it derives from nature, from the earth. The consequences of the planting become clear immediately, and the Sages emphasize the immediacy. They see Noah as a sinner here, but we take him to be *sinned against*, led into sin but not by his own fault.

In fact, the superior is vulnerable, for it contains the root of the problem; and here, the earth is the superior, and it contains the dimension of wine and drunkenness. Apparently, Noah is not aware of this, and he falls into drunkenness, not by his own fault. There is a hole in the superior Other, and the subaltern encounters it in innocence and falls into it. Thus, he **became drunk, and lay uncovered in his tent** (but neither party is guilty of anything; both parties, in fact, are subaltern and vulnerable).

To a degree, the tent replicates ironically the defense that the ark was meant to provide, but not here. Noah, who was supposed to be protected, since he is vulnerable, is seen to be drunk and laid bare, in the sense of nakedness, with his sexual organ visible.

Let us now take our second step, as we see Noah changing from subaltern to superior. If we read the verses closely, without infusing them with the anger of the superior Noah that follows, we will learn something.

> And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it upon both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; their faces were turned backward, and they did not see their father's nakedness. (9:22–23)

Ham, the subaltern, sees his father's nakedness. It is hard to uncover what we see as Ham's real story as a victim, an innocent victim, because the narrator identifies with Noah's point of view and reminds us that he is **the father of Canaan**. However, when we shed this attitude, we can posit that the intention of the young Ham, the youngest son, was innocent. He entered the tent, to his own undoing. He might have heard his father and come to help him. He enters and is harmed. He saw his naked father without intending to.*

* Here, we can learn from Lacan, in Seminar 11 on the Real, traumatic dimension of the gaze directed at us, which we do not recognize until we encounter it and see IT.

Now, having seen what he saw, the nakedness looking at him, he went out to call his brothers in great alarm. True, as certain scholars argue, in ancient traditions, as expressed in the Ugaritic story of Aqhat, the son is supposed to save his father from himself when he is drunk. Who says that Ham, the subaltern, did not do so? His help is in calling to his elder brothers. Perhaps, as the youngest, he is afraid to deal with his omnipotent father, who has just saved them and left the ark. Indeed, as proof, this is what the brothers do. They do not see the nakedness that looks at them: they already know something is there, because poor Ham has told them.

Let us say, therefore, that if Ham's position is innocent, then that of Shem and Japheth is one of dissembling, of knowing that something is lacking in the Other but pretending that one has not noticed it. The father

likes this. He likes not having his nakedness displayed publicly, and when it is revealed, he accuses the poor son, the innocent one, of a terrible sin.*

* In response to our remarks, some scoffers will say, justifiably, that this presentation of matters snacks of nihilism, because it does not acknowledge sin committed with evil intention.

We have said that the earth, the superior party, injures Noah, the subaltern party. Now Noah, the superior party, in turn, injures Ham, the subaltern party. Ham, the subaltern, unwillingly, is exposed to the hole, to the vulnerability of the supreme Other, and he is injured because of it. He absorbs the blows of the superiors: **And Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him.** One may ask: how did Noah know what the young son had done? Ostensibly, those who say there was a rape are right, because if such a grave physical action had been done, the injured father would immediately understand, in his pain, that it was caused by the son who raped him. But this appears very unlikely in light of the three brothers' actions toward the father. It is not logical that, if the youngest son had committed sexual aggression toward his father, he would immediately go and call his brothers, so they could see the result of his actions. The appeal to the brothers appears to be a call for support for the father. In covering the nakedness, they are responding to the son's request to conceal the shame, and not, as it were, to conceal some criminal act committed by the young son.

Ham, the subaltern, quickly becomes superior to his son Canaan, when the curse is hurled upon him by the irate Noah:

> And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers. And he said, Blessed be YHWH the Elohim of Shem and let Canaan be his slave. May Elohim beautify Japheth [Japheth (Yafet) is derived from the same root as the word for beauty. trans.], and may he dwell in the tents of Shem; and let Canaan be his slave. (9:26–27)

In this light, we suggest that superiors become subalterns, and the highest of all, God, precedes the earth, which, as we showed in our analysis of the story of creation, is the main victim of the revelation of God's vulnerability. Perhaps the extreme injury to Ham is expressed here in that the text does not present the superior Ham to us but immediately goes on to his son, the subaltern Canaan. The author immediately places both Ham

and Canaan beneath the subaltern. This pattern, in this short story, can inform us about father–son relations and about superior–subaltern relations between God and the earth and, later, between God and Abram. Nevertheless, we will note that Abram will detach himself from the chain of victimhood in relation to God. He does not situate himself as an inferior, innocent person. Rather he takes the place of dissembler, person who knows that God is vulnerable, but who copes in his own way, through laughter.

The innocents, who are the true victims of the stories, are destined to be inferior brothers, slaves, to their superior, dissembling brothers. God, the supreme, instead of encountering his own vulnerability, accuses the subalterns of happening upon something of his. However, like Noah, the drunken man is to blame for his own fall, though perhaps he might not be guilty, because the superior is also inferior to something. What is superior to the supreme God? Perhaps the very idea of creation, which God cast before himself in the moments of creation.

This supreme supremacy is revealed time after time, in moments of crisis, and all that remains for man is to step aside, with a dissembling smile, or to experience the filial fall into God's failure.

Chapter Six: Babel

We now approach the last chapter in Genesis before the story of Abram, and thence that of his people, Israel. The present story is about Babel (Babylon), the city and the tower, and a great deal has been written about it, in philosophical and linguistic contexts, including work by Walter Benjamin and Jacques Derrida. We will only direct the reader's attention to a few matters in the story, which are extensions of the themes in the previous chapters. The story of Babel concludes the account of God's work of creation.

> The sons of Noah who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and Ham was the father of Canaan.
> These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth; sons were born to them after the flood. The sons of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. The sons of Gomer: Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah. The sons of Javan: Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim. From these the islands of the nations spread. These are the sons of Japheth in their lands, each with his own language, by their families, in their nations. The sons of Ham: Cush, Mitsrayim, Put, and Canaan. The sons of Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca. The sons of Raamah: Sheba and Dedan. (9:18–10:7)

I. Benyamini, *A Critical Theology of Genesis*,
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The flood destroyed nature and all of humanity and created them anew, and these are the descendants of the survivors in the ark. When they left the ark, Noah and his sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, provide us with a short story about drunkenness and the revealing of nakedness. After that story about Noah in his tent, we read lists of the descendants of those sons, up to Abram. However, at the end of these lists, suddenly the story of Babel emerges, and after it comes another slightly different list of the sons of Shem, and from there straight to Abram's "Go for Yourself." For the moment, we should point out that the various ethnic groups that came out of the descendants of Noah's sons spoke different languages, as if linguistic separation were not the result of divine intervention, as in the Tower of Babel, which will be mentioned immediately, but in the nature of things.*

* Perhaps this is the tension between an ideology that tells about the "natural" state of things, as it is, and a critique of ideology that directs us to the moment of the birth of a certain situation and also to the rift from which the ideological story is created. In this respect, the story of the Tower of Babel does not necessarily correspond to a historical situation. Rather, it indicates the possibility of a critique of the ideological division into ethnic groups. The story is placed in the heart of the lists of ethnic divisions, and it stands alongside them. This is not simply a parody of these lists, but an indication of the possibility of seeing the repressed moment of their birth in a different way. Therefore, perhaps, it is not clear at the beginning of the story of the Tower of Babel whether it is about all of humanity or about certain descendants of Shem, though it hints that, in fact, it is about some of the descendants of Shem. This description is not metaphorical, nor is it a parable; it takes itself to be factual in order to describe the state of affairs in which the division into ethnic groups is actually the result of an unnatural, artificial event, which might have come out differently. In their vagueness, these sons of Shem, in their claim to be all of humanity, take upon themselves the meaning of humanity's being an artificial act of divine creation, which characterizes all of humanity, and it is not the product of an act of the natural earth. From this vagueness, the Hebrew nation will be born, constantly raising suspicion regarding the naturalness of nature, with all that is positive and negative therein.

> Cush fathered Nimrod; he began to be a mighty man on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before YHWH; therefore it is said, Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before YHWH. The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, and Accad, all of them in the land of Shinar. From that

> land came out Ashur, and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city. (10:8–12)

Here, the sons of Cush are named, prominent among whom was Nimrod, the mighty hunter. For our purposes, it is relevant that he built Babel, as well as, apparently, the great city Nineveh (if we understand **from that land came out Ashur** to mean that he went to Assyria from that land, and not that a man named Ashur came out of that land). Nimrod became a model to be imitated, inspiring a proverbial expression: **Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before YHWH.** There is no reason to accuse Nimrod of being a rebel against God, because that is not the literal meaning of the text. On the contrary, according to the divine plan for human beings, they are supposed to rule over nature and its creatures, so Nimrod seems to be implementing this plan very well, doubly: both in hunting animals and also in building cities, which spread mankind over the face of the earth. However, perhaps his acts are excessive, too successful, and thereby arouse God's envy. So, we wonder whether Nimrod is connected to the Tower of Babel. For, as we have already seen, closeness to God sometimes actually arouses apprehension about too much closeness in God.*

* This brings us back to our earlier surprise regarding the story of Noah, when the sin committed by the innocent subaltern, with a good intention, which is excessively good, brings punishment upon him. For, when Ham saw his father's nakedness, he went too far in his desire to help his father by calling his brothers, and he was punished for that!

Moreover, this mention of Babel contrasts in another way with the story about that city, to be presented later, a story that, in fact, describes the violation of the divine decree of dispersal upon the face of the earth. Perhaps humanity also violates the command of King Nimrod thereby, for he had gone to Ashur with the aim of building Nineveh, and they march in place, settle in Babel, and do not set forth to disperse themselves farther.

The author continues to list the sons of Ham:

> Mitsrayim became the father of Ludim, Anamim, Lehabim, Naphtuhim, Pathrusim, Casluhim (whence came the Philistines), and Caphtorim. Canaan fathered of Sidon his first-born, and Heth, and the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, the Arkites, the

> Sinites, the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and the Hamathites. Afterward the families of the Canaanites dispersed. And the border of the Canaanites extended from Sidon, in the direction of Gerar, as far as Gaza, and in the direction of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha. These are the sons of Ham, by their families, their languages, their lands, and their nations. (10:13–20)

The Hamites, whom the biblical author views with contempt, bring the families of the Canaanites into the world. These Canaanites will be privileged to host Abraham and his children, and they include Sodom and Gomorrah, which are even more contemptible, to the point of destruction. The innocent sons of Ham are struck by the angry arm of Noah = the author = God, and they are represented by the sons of Canaan, who later threaten the uniqueness of the Israelites. They are threatening in that they are men of the earth who are welded to it.

> To Shem was also born, the father of all the children of Eber, the elder brother of Japheth, children were born. The sons of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram. The sons of Aram: Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash. Arpachshad fathered Shelah; and Shelah fathered Eber. To Eber were born two sons: the name of the one was Peleg [= section, part], for in his days the earth was divided, and his brother's name was Joktan. Joktan fathered Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, Obal, Abimael, Sheba, Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab; all these were the sons of Joktan. And their settlement was from Mesha in the direction of Sephar to the hill of the east. These are the sons of Shem, by their families, their languages, their lands, and their nations. These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, in their nations; and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood. (10:21–32)

Now we have the sons of Shem, and we may assume that the people of Babel came from them, perhaps because one of the sons of Eber was Peleg, meaning part or section, **for in his days the earth was divided** into parts, referring to the dispersal after the Tower of Babel, and perhaps also because it is said of his son Joktan and his descendants, that they lived

near **the hill of the east**, and the east is mentioned later on in the story of the Tower of Babel. After all of this precise presentation of the division of the generations, we suddenly reach a distilled story about the gap between people's desire and that of God.

> And the whole earth was one language and few words. (11:1)

The whole earth—Does this refer to the whole world or perhaps to a certain land, the region of Babel? Does this refer to all of humanity, or only to a certain part of it, the sons of Shem, who have just been mentioned? Can it be determined, since the story explains the dispersal of the various languages and peoples in the world, that therefore it refers to the entire primal world and to all of primal humanity? If it is merely the sons of Shem, perhaps they define humanity in their own image.

This humanity, this group, in any event has a single language, perhaps as Walter Benjamin sought to reimagine it in his essay, "Language as Such and the Language of Man." Is it the language that Adam used to call the animals by name? Is it, as Rashi said, "*The holy tongue*"? Can we conclude that it is Hebrew (and if so, we are left with the primal, magical language)?

What is the meaning of the expression, **few words**? In Hebrew, the expression literally means something like "one things." According to Cassuto, this expression is parallel to **one language**, not "words" in the plural but as a rhetorical figure meaning *one* word. We also suggest that **few words** refers to the number of things that were said, a limited number. Not only do human beings have **one language**, but their (primitive, childish) use of it is also limited. Very few words are spoken, and consequently, people understand one another: **And they said to one another, Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar.** They say it and it is done. They speak **to one another**, and they are in agreement.

> And as men traveled from the east, they found a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there. (11:2)

As noted, we do not know whether these are the sons of Shem, who were mentioned above in connection with **the hill of the east**. In any event, they find a level place to settle. They wish to stop wandering, to rest. These are the wanderings to which God condemned the sons of Cain,

their punishment that they must wander and keep moving, for people yearn to find a home, a single home. This home is connected to the earth in one place, to making the earth into the home's spouse, to loving the earth, to living alongside it without fearing it. Unlike the recent flood, in which the earth went mad, and water came out of it, and from the sky above it, and inundated everyone.

> And they said to one another, Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. (11:3)

In the previous chapters, we proposed regarding God as the creator of the world, the Other, the earth and its creatures, who at the same time wishes to rule over his creatures (because God envies the earth for its independent creative capacity). Control over *that which has just been created* is exerted by various factors, especially man. Human creatures are agents for the control of nature and the earth. Therefore, God commands man to be fruitful and multiply, but at the same time, he also curses him and condemns him to wander. His desire is for their dispersal over the face of the earth. Remaining in the city of Babel would have left most of the earth at liberty and prevented people from being fruitful and multiplying by the coupling of male and female, for aside from the first stages of humanity, they were supposed to approach each other from a distance, from the other side of the river (in the words of Levi-Strauss), from different kinship groups (later on, we discuss the case of Abram and Sarai, who were closely related).

But the earth is a partner in this human action of liberation from it. It offers its material, the clay and the mortar, from which they make their houses. It offers this so that men will not take building stones from it directly, but only raw material, the intermediate material. Moreover, the earth offers its materials to man, and by means of them, he succeeds to a certain degree in freeing himself from wandering on it and in settling in one place, attached to one earth. This perhaps is one kind of rule over the earth, not by means of wandering, but it does not satisfy God's old yearning, which cannot adapt—his self-interested desire for horizontal control, rather than vertical control. In contrast, man's desire for control is vertical: the tower.

> And they said, Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower, and its head in the sky, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered over the face of the whole earth. (11:4)

The appeal here expresses once gain the unity of speech: **let us**. Everyone calls out loud together, and the thing is done immediately! This **let us**, when the plan for the city is raised, is now for building a tower whose top reaches the sky. The meaning of the name of the city in Babylonian is Bâb-ili, which means god's gate; a tall tower rose in the center of historical Babylon, and on it was the inscription: *the house of the foundation of heaven and earth*. However, the final goal of the human beings in this story was not to reach heaven physically. This tall tower was to serve for them as a monument that united them all into a single community and prevent its dispersal. This communal unity of an autistic humanity that spoke to itself with few words is something that God is not willing to accept.

> And YHWH came down to see the city and the tower, which the sons of men had built. And YHWH said, Behold, they are one people with one language to them all; and they have begun to do this, and now nothing they propose to do will now be impossible for them. (11:5–6)

While they seek to ascend, he descends and meets them down below. This is not merely irony. It is the fact of God's being not entirely omniscient regarding people. Not much earlier, they had wandered through primeval forests and fields, exposed to God's view, but now, in the interior, something is hatched, especially their independence, in the city. They will satisfy all their own demands, both physical and spiritual, without him (this independence includes the ability to meet God, but according to the rules and times set by men in temples and rituals, not according to his capricious wishes).

Therefore, he comes down to see what is going on, and he is disturbed by the one: one nation, one language, few words (lit., "one things"). This is in contrast to his oneness, to his being one and alone (cf. Rashi on this matter). God is one in contrast to the many. He finds the mirror image of the one versus the one insufferable. True, God created Adam in his image, and that image is single, but Adam expanded to the dimension of many by means of coupling, by extending, whereas God sets up the one (as one versus the many and as one that contains the many) as his sole property, as the single thing that defines him in contrast to the rest. Therefore, he detaches man from subjection to the dimension of oneness. God believes that as long as they persist in unity, their plans will succeed, and then

perhaps it will be too late, because might they be liable to become gods? The tall tower also expresses human desire for the single divine knowledge, for the place of one truth and reality. Humanity is already conscious. Humans are already close to the truth because they ate of the fruit of knowledge. Now people are acting in order to increase this closeness even more, not to leave a gap between God, the vast domain, and themselves. Therefore, we do not see this text as a parody of a certain historical situation. Rather, we seek to grasp the text at the height of its seriousness and its relation to itself as true (without any connection to whether it is factually true). What stands out here is God's fear of the very possibility that human beings will persist and succeed in their actions. For then, they will draw too close to him and resemble him too much, not in the sense of reaching heaven with the tower, but by organizing around oneness and making it a characteristic of themselves. In that way, they would compete with God in his (cognitive) unitary isolation versus the world. They must detach themselves from oneness, strip themselves, do what is incumbent upon them: by means of procreation—to rule over the earth.

But something is confusing here, an apparent self-contradiction in God's desires. He is prepared to create one kind of confusion (scattering people by changing their language and dispersing them among many lands) in order to prevent a different kind of confusion, the primal *tohu vavohu*.

Indeed, there is a contradiction between them: Let us define the primal confusion as bedlam, chaos, in which there is no distinction between one thing and another, there is neither one nor many (including God, who is not one, and only the creation makes him one, one versus multiplicity), except in the mixture of things (as in the preverbal stage). However, that which is created after the Tower of Babel is a jumble. This confusion is not chaotic, it is not disorder, not bedlam, but rather, the multiplicity of individuals, in which every individual exists in his or her own right, but not in contrast to multiplicity as a total One (like God), but as a union of units. From now on, this is how human beings (and existence as well) will be (within language). In chaos, there are no distinctions, whereas the jumble is based on the principle of distinction among individuals, so they will be separate from one another, one by one by one, and each individual is separate from the multiplicity but not in absolute opposition, the way God is, but rather, as unequal in value. Existence within language creates speaking monads, which somehow maintain connection with each other, but this is a weak connection, which still preserves the singularity of each individual.

> Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, so they do not understand one another's speech. (11:7)

God, this time in the guise of *the many*, proposes descent in the first person plural, and commentators wonder why. The dimension of multiplicity in the divine unity (as we suggested in our explanation of the creation) projects the dimension of multiplicity upon mankind, and it is what creates the jumble of individuals versus individuals. This jumble and separation separates speech from hearing. The **few words** were actually speaking=hearing until now. These were the few words that were uttered and immediately understood. Now they are detached: speech becomes something that splits into many words in many languages, and each act of speech on its own receives different meaning, splits (radically) versus various acts of hearing.*

* Could it be that God does all this mischievously, in the spitefulness of *even more*? Perhaps, in response to man's desires and intentions, Elohim descends and presents himself as the God of laughter, irony, mischief, spitefulness. Jewish humor? Does God say to himself: *this is their hope, and it will not happen, because!* There is no sin, no emphasis on the tower that reaches heaven, only mankind's desire for unity. Cf. Jacques Derrida's (in "Tours de Babel") comment on the twisted ways of Babylon that God is breaking everything apart here, including himself.

> And YHWH scattered them from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there YHWH mixed up the language of all the earth; and from there YHWH scattered them over the face of all the earth. (11:8–9)

God does indeed scatter human beings over the face of the whole earth so that they will persist in their rule over the earth. This is his goal: they must stop building the city. The city is the source of troubles, though it is a kind of seizure of the earth, of ostensible control over it. For at the same time, it also prevents dispersal as well as overly sanctified clinging to a single place: God is not interested in permanent settlement.

> These are the descendants of Shem. Shem was a hundred years old and he fathered Arpachshad two years after the flood; and Shem lived after fathering Arpachshad

> five hundred years and fathered sons and daughters. And Arpachshad had lived thirty-five years, he fathered Shelah; and Arpachshad lived after the birth of Shelah four hundred and three years, and fathered sons and daughters. And Shelah lived thirty years and fathered Eber; and Shelah lived after fathering Eber four hundred and three years, and had other sons and daughters. And Eber lived thirty-four years and fathered Peleg; and Eber lived after fathering Peleg four hundred and thirty years and fathered sons and daughters. And Peleg lived thirty years and fathered Reu; and Peleg lived after fathering Reu two hundred and nine years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And Reu lived thirty-two years and he fathered Serug; and Reu lived after fathering Serug two hundred and seven years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And Serug lived thirty years and fathered Nahor; and Serug lived after fathering Nahor two hundred years, and he fathered sons and daughters. And Nahor lived twenty-nine years and fathered Terah; and Nahor lived after fathering Terah a hundred and nineteen years and fathered sons and daughters. (11:10–25)

Here is the chronology of Shem's sons again, more detailed this time, with mention of their ages, and it leads us to the story of Abram, and here, we halt. In summary, this chapter describes how humanity is born, *in the full sense*, as comprising many individuals countering other individuals, one by one, each one. In the chapters up to now, God worked on two of his tasks: creation of himself and creation of the world, of humanity. Later, he will be left with the task of guiding the path of humanity by means of a specific man or nation within humanity.

The Theological Unconscious: Concluding Remarks on Part One

"Now what?"—Well, what has not yet been done? In general, today, we do too much. We are deep in the trap of overdoing. In our desire to prevent the overheating of our world, if we manage it at all, at most, we will slightly slow up the capitalist smoke machines, or else, if we manage to find a substitute, like biofuel, it will only cause a different kind of environmental damage. Thus we are moving toward a final collision with the world that has sustained us until now, in a fatalistic scenario, a one-way ticket.

Perhaps we should ask whether these motors advance only out of the logic of capitalist development, or whether there is an even deeper drive that moves them. That drive stands not only on the foundation of the Western subject (including derivative subjects—the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim) but also, in fact, on the (non-Western) other, who has been reciting mantras for a long time through the Western television screen. This, let us say, is the theological unconscious,* which one can find well-formulated in the account of God's creation in the Book of Genesis.

* The term "theological unconscious" is a paraphrase of Fredric Jameson's "political unconscious." But it also refers to Walter Benjamin's apocalyptic theses of history, arguing that the *theological* is prior to the Western *political* and drives it. The meaning of theological for us is the pushing of the principle of the *alterity* between man and nature and its creatures.

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We return to these verses, which we have read and interpreted so many times, but have avoided encountering them. The exegetical consciousness we have encountered so far conceals the theological unconscious of the Signifier of Genesis, of the Word, the unconscious that has constantly revealed itself to us in secret.*

* The concealment of knowing, which, ironically like gnosis, speaks about tension between the divine divinity and the corporeal divinity, but it places that tension within the story, not between one story and another, which supposedly preceded it.

But we are met with a question: What about *belief* in that God and his story? After all, our great desire is for it to be possible to believe in him and in his deeds in an innocent and religious way, as if they were real. Our answer would be that we believe, but not in a religious way, or that we believe that he is a signifying God, a living and breathing text. Consequently, our belief expresses support for the traditional position but not identification with it, acknowledgment of God as a voice of hope for the future, but not taking the myth to be factual.

Recently, optimistic "green" readings of this Jewish source have sought to derive an eco-ethic from the text. We, however, argue first of all that a close reading shows that matters are much more complex, and generally contrary to the "green" reading. Second, because we are poised on the brink of the abyss, it is preferable to avoid adopting the optimistic view that something can be done (which mainly leads to damaging action and salves our consciences, allowing us to continue in our routine), but rather, to adopt an attitude of despair and melancholy. In a preliminary return to the primordial chaos that awaits us, we plunge deep into the abyss of profound despair before bringing forth from within us any rescue at all from that chaos. Awareness of this deep despair will open up our subjectivity to speaking about itself as, in fact, profound desire for that enormous destruction: Finally, nature will be destroyed, that innocent thing, which does not belong to the signifying world. The living being that existed but cannot report its existence will disappear from before us and dispel the embarrassing confusion between the signifier and nature, the mediation between silent nature and speaking human. What, until now, was the representative of liberation from this immanent, animal nature, if not God—(perhaps Bataille, in his theory of religion, also thinks so)—the God who created the world, nature?

The ruin and destruction of nature is also nature's way of fulfilling its deep logic: nature's way to behave in the most natural way, which deviates from self-preservation. The greenhouse effect is therefore a natural action of nature, unlike the "nature" that we observe through our landscape spectacles, which is merely a painting, a signifier: unlike the nature of nature reserves, which is not protected from our damage. Rather, we are protected from it. The moment before the death of nature will be the truest moment of nature, when it is freed from the world of civilization and even betrays it.

As for the authors of books about the dialectics of enlightenment, who stated that man sought to exploit nature only instrumentally (before he began to exploit other people), we argue below, upon laying bare the theological unconscious of Genesis, that the exploitation of nature contains a more basic goal: The elimination of everything that is not human, of all that stands before me so mysteriously that I can only overcome it by destroying it, or by preserving it, by placing it in quotation marks as "nature." This is the desire for a world of signifiers alone, so that in the end, there will be no dialectics of signifier versus nature, desire that the signifier will no longer need nature and that God, as the signifying principle of "let there be light" will no longer need the Other, nature, the world, to be himself. And this is also true of us.

From the analysis of the two stories of creation in the Book of Genesis, we tried to show that God, who created and who rules over his creatures (this is one of our definitions of God), wants to create order in chaos by separating things. He does not have the ability to rule directly over reality. He can do so only by means of agents such as the sun, the moon, the animals, and man (which sometimes have wills of their own and sometimes are merely means, but in any event, their desires are manipulated by God). They are agents of God's control of nature, of the creatures he has just now made. They rule over nature, which is earth-the world, constantly appearing to revert to *tohu vavohu*, because this is the creative womb, which recalls the amorphous mingling of mother and son.

The instructions of the voice of hope for the future (our second definition of God) promise man that he may be fruitful and multiply. This is not only both a hope and a promise, but it is also a hidden command: disperse yourself on the face of the earth to rule over it and prevent chaos.

God knows that, paradoxically, the means for creating agents of control is the maternal womb, the womb of Eve and her daughters, the womb of Mother Earth. Human beings must effectuate this according to God's

laws of survival, as opposed to incest. The danger of incest is the renewed union of the mother and the earth, the revocation of difference in the encounter of incest. Whenever man does not behave accordingly, he is defined as a dreadful sinner. Then punishment enters, the dimension of God's autonomy, and it is usually directed at the human womb: blocking the womb, as with the women of Abimelech (see below on "Go for Yourself"). Autonomy is the other and less pleasant side of God's voice of hope. The voice of hope for the future, that is, God, guides man, but this guidance also entails a hidden commandment and a warning. Indeed, the hope is demanding, because it charges us human beings with fulfillment of the divine desire to disperse ourselves over the face of the earth by enlarging the family unit, assuming that this is our hope.

However, God is ambivalent about the womblike earth: It fertilizes and disperses its progeny, but at the same time, it arouses dread of mixing with the primordial chaos. Furthermore, it arouses the envy of God the signifier, because it creates naturally from its womb, from its earthliness, and not by means of the abstract word. God moves in confusion in relation to the womb. All of this creates a feeling of confusion in man as well, because God is not decisive. This also creates the dimension of laughter in Abraham and Sarah's reaction to him, a joke.

PART II

The Binding of Laughter

Chapter Seven: Go for Yourself

In this chapter, we read two non-sequential scenes from Genesis that touch upon the beginning of the complex relationship between Abram and God, which partakes of intimacy (attributed to the first generations in their contact with the creator). This chapter includes a distinction: *faith*, which places the concept of God above life, in contrast to *tradition*. Abraham is the key to the traditional man and not the man of faith, meaning that Abram and Abraham are not knights of faith. Rather, they act with cunning toward God.

> And Nahor lived twenty-nine years, and he fathered Terah; and Nahor lived after fathering Terah a hundred and nineteen years and fathered sons and daughters. And Terah lived seventy years and he fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Now these are the descendants of Terah. Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot. (11:24–27)

In the chain of descent, Adam indirectly gave birth to Noah, who fathered Shem, and thus Eber, and thus the Hebrews, from Eber to Nahor, Abram's grandfather. Nahor's son is Terah, who fathered Abram, Nahor II, and Lot, who is Abram's nephew. And the story continues:

> Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans. And Abram and Nahor took women; the name of Abram's woman was Sarai,

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> and the name of Nahor's woman, Milcah, the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and Iscah. Now Sarai was barren; she had no child. And Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan; and they came to Haran and settled there. And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran. (11:28–32)

Haran, Abram's brother, Lot's father, dies. Abram and his brother Nahor take wives: Nahor marries Milcah and Abram marries Sarai. The meaning of their names is similar. The name Milcah is connected to the word *melekh*, king, and the name Sarai is connected to the word *sar*, a minister, an official in charge of something. Immediately, we are told that Milcah is the daughter of Haran, meaning that after Haran's death, his brother makes sure his line continues: Abram adopts Lot, and Nahor marries Haran's daughter, his niece, and this is not incest.

So who is Iscah? It is not clear. Perhaps she is Sarai, as Rashi claims, meaning that there is no suspension of the law, and this becomes even more complicated later. After all these stories of giving birth, we are told that Sarai, Abram's wife, is barren. The chain of descent, the genealogical line, is broken. This is where God enters the story. The holy drama is driven by this interruption. Here and in the rest of the book, God is connected to lines of descent. He might be the paternal essence, that which signifies the continuation of descent, but he is not the womb. Rather, he is the one who opens and closes the womb. However, this is premature, because God has not yet entered the picture. Immediately after the mention of the barren Sarai, we are told that the band leaves Ur of the Chaldeans and heads for Canaan. God does not intervene. The family takes on a mission connected to its barrenness, perhaps in hope that the change in place will lead to a change in fortune. However, on the way, the family stops in Haran, and there, the grandfather, Terah, dies, and the story breaks off.

In fact, however, it does not break off, because it immediately continues with God's words at the beginning of the next chapter:

> And YHWH said to Abram, Go for yourself from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great,

> so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you. (12:1–3)

We generally read these verses as a kind of slogan or cliché. We cling to the expression, "Go for yourself," but we become blind to it—and to the message it contains—because we ignore the verses that precede it.

For Abram and his biblical progeny, there is no question regarding belief in God, in the sense of recognition that he exists. The only question is about going in his ways, which are the path laid out in advance, which a person has set for himself but cannot accomplish, the path connected with family continuity. Before God sends him to the Land of Canaan, Abram's family was supposed to go there anyway, apparently because of a fertility problem. The task was interrupted.

God does not command. Rather, he suggests to Abram that he should fulfill his family mission, and he takes the opportunity to tempt Abram, showing that the family mission depended only on Sarai's barrenness; for God sends Abram to Canaan with a promise connected to giving birth to a great nation, which will come from him, despite his wife's barrenness. Thus, God is the path of life for Abram the Jew—sorry, Abram the Hebrew—for he could be the prototype of the Jew living his daily life and clinging to God, not in theological categories, but in continuous family contexts.*

* This is how my father Joseph speaks about God: may he give us a good livelihood and health. There is no doubt as to whether he does or does not exist, there is no deep discussion. Joseph is a simple man. At the end of the Sabbath meal, he recites grace with great emphasis, intended to attract the attention of those sitting at the table, especially me, the eldest, attached to the table, while my brothers are free, to strengthen our desire to observe the commandments of God, because "he is merciful, he will supply our needs with honor and not contempt, with permission and not with prohibition, with ease and not with sorrow. The merciful one will make peace among us. The merciful one will send blessing and profit and success to all the deeds of our hands. The merciful one will make our way successful" (the blessing after meals in the version of Oriental Jews). He recites this after what we murmured submissively, "blessed be [he] of whose [food] we ate and in his great goodness we have always lived." At the end of the meal, our father goes among all of us, collects the skullcaps from our heads, and puts them back in the cupboard with the tattered prayer book until the next Sabbath, laughing a little about the playfulness of his son Oren, my brother, who avoided keeping the skullcap on his head during the ceremony.

Thus, "Go for yourself" and not only "Go" as a command, but *for yourself*, so that you can fulfill the path of your life. This is one of the keys for understanding the figure of the God of the Bible, along with the additional key of "I will be what I will be" from the Book of Exodus in the revelation to Moses at the burning bush: "He said, For I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought forth the people out of Mitsrayim, you shall serve Elohim on this mountain. And Moses said to Elohim, Behold, [what if] I come to the people of Israel and say to them, the Elohim of your fathers has sent me to you, and they ask me, What is his name? What shall I say to them? And Elohim said to Moses, I will be what I will be. And he said, Say this to the people of Israel, I will be has sent me to you" (Exod. 3:12–14). Here, instead of reaching for the depths and the metaphysical level first, and therefore straying from the essence, we must stick to the text on its most literal level, which will bring us the deepest.* Thus, we must let the written word speak to us in full, without overloading it with fanciful exegetical meaning too soon. What Elohim says is: it will be all right, whatever happens will happen; **go**, do your job. For the Hebrew this is *the voice of promise for the future*, always the future, because the present does not exist in the fraction of a second that splits into before and after, and the past is already dead; this voice says that in the future something will assure the existence of my family unit in prosperity and health. It promises success of the family unit, no more and no less. In the story of Job, God specifically violates this family order. Job is deprived of the feeling that hope exists. God is hope for the future. The evil in God is none other than the death of hope and the fall into the depths "of this evil age" (Gal. 1:4).

* One possible objection to this interpretation would be that the reason for the transition from Ur of Chaldeans to the Promised Land (or Canaan) was not Sarai and Abram's frustration because they were childless, but the desire of the father, Terah, which Abram set out to fulfill. Nevertheless, following Lacan's advice (as can be found in his discussion of Poe's "Purloined Letter" in his *Écrits*) to analysts to read the speech of the analysand as a surface of signifiers that manifests the truth of the unconscious rather than as a "deep" truth, I suggest reading this biblical story as driven not only by the figures but also by the (textually mediated) desire of the reader toward them. Thus, the reader is only concerned with the desire of Terah, the father, inasmuch as it is connected to the suffering of those whom the reader perceives as the main

figures around whose desire the story involves, namely Sarai and Abram. The text encourages the reader to subsume Terah's desire under that of the other two protagonists by emphasizing Sarai's barrenness, thereby regarding Terah as an extension or spur of the other figures.

This does not mean that the traditional Jew, the father who heads his family, is necessarily pious, obsessive, and decisive. On the contrary: he lives (God), and God does not live (him). God does not issue commands, but rather, directs ways of living, which fit together in a living continuum, which say to life, Go for yourself, persist, and they do not cut it off. The Pauline Christian path of faith is not that of the day-to-day Jew. On the contrary, the Jew is not tight, rigid. He lives and acts in connection with his God's actions with him and recognition that this is a God to whom one does not always have to respond, who does not enforce his rabbinical injunctions immediately and constantly. He not only lives with day-to-day customs that honor Jewish law, but he also knows how to be flexible with and within the law, and he recognizes the imperfection of God in the humoristic connection between God and man, recognition that this is a jocular, mischievous God (even going so far as abuse).*

* This is true at least among quite a few Jews stemming from Islamic culture (who live in Israel under the rubric of "Mizrahim"—Oriental Jews). Nothing unifies them except that their God lives not as an external commandment, not as a religion, but as a paternal tradition, as a way of life. My father as well as my uncles and my late grandfather, and my mother, and perhaps I, too, observe the Sabbath: we do not light fires, we ride on the Sabbath, we wear skullcaps in the synagogue and during the Kiddush on Friday nights, but the rest of the time, we take them off, and in no way do we feel less Jewish than those defined in Israeli society as "religious." What can be said about Abraham's living in a pre-Mosaic age? Moses and Mount Sinai are a new stage, which takes the tradition and makes it into an external, rabbinical commandment of the elite, which imposes countless laws and obsessive derivative rulings on the subject, and he cannot escape them. This is perhaps Freud's neurotic, obsessive religious person, not our father Abraham, who must maneuver versus the God who imposes his desire on him. Moses, from this point of view, is a later solution, who maneuvers God by self-control over fate, by our being autonomous, with a detailed law for ourselves. This control over our fate is, in fact, also self-control. Thus, we impose God's obsessiveness upon ourselves, upon the text. We are consoled because the law is clear, whereas the God of creation laughs, confuses, deludes (so it is not actually clear to us what were the sins of the people of creation).

It should also be said that this Abraham lived before the consolidation of the nation in Egypt and in Sinai, and my father Joseph comes from a Jewish culture that precedes Zionist nationalism. That is, he comes from a pre-collective tradition, a tradition that acts within a continuum of life and family connections. Hence, worship of God in Abraham's beginnings, as he passes through the land and builds altars to God, is natural, personal, familial, that of a man with abundant property like Job, and who is apprehensive about losing it, and perhaps it is a folk religion, in that it is not under the burden of a collective teleology.

The Persian Jewish subject, the merchant, who knows how to bargain, keeps the tradition, but does not necessarily submit to institutions and ideologies aside from the dimension of family success, aside from organizing the family unit, keeping the religious laws, the ceremonies of Sabbath, holidays, kashrut, not with extremism, and not with a meat sink versus a dairy sink, but by simply not eating meat with milk, sometimes building a succah and sometimes not, with a smile, with irony, with the whim of the family member who presents himself in rabbinical guise: "Mullah!" as my mother calls my father, when he occasionally decides to draw a little closer to the tradition. In the same way, my late grandmother Shoshana Ahdut, my mother's mother, who used to go to the neighborhood synagogue to pray every day, every Sabbath, was shocked to hear that her granddaughter intended to live as a pious religious woman. No outsider can understand this. She also complained about preachers of the Sephardic Torah Guardians (an Israeli political party and religious movement) who pestered her once with severe restrictions about lighting her stove on holidays. It was not that way in Persia. They did not overdo things.

Perhaps the members of my family were not alone in behaving in this way over the generations. Probably most Jews in the world, in various communities, were not strict about dotting every "i" and crossing every "t" but flowed into their lives with the law. They conducted themselves within the rabbinical ideology without establishing ideological Reform institutions, but at the same time, they always subverted absolute rabbinical decrees. One can fantasize about all the Jews of Europe until the advent of the Jewish Enlightenment movement, which led to the modern invention of the ultra-orthodox counter-revolution. But it need not be that way. There is no Protestant Kierkegaardian anguish in either Abram or Abraham. There is hope. And what about the Binding of Kierkegaard?

> [**Supplement to this Supplement**: I wonder what led me to write this way about my father, without asking his permission, without inquiring into his anguish, with the fantasy that my father feels no anguish. What does this have to do with my name being Isaac? Am I trying to establish my proper place as a father in the (Ashkenazic?), settled, bourgeois city

of Givataim, like the domesticated Isaac of the Book of Genesis, who is concerned only with the needs of his household and does not set out on long journeys of Binding? Are we not always subject to apprehension here in this holy land, which places itself on the edge of destruction? And also regarding my nostalgic fantasy of traditionalism, I have to admit that it is slightly pathetic, in that it might be a movement of self-protection against the constantly innovating outside world toward a secure place, especially since, as I learned in my youth, this traditionalism can also become obsessive, as when my father demanded the minimum of the Sabbath laws in maximalist terms. I must also acknowledge that, maybe not my father, but quite a few Oriental Jews who became followers of the Sephardic Torah Guardians show that traditionalism also has a tendency to drift beyond its own threshold into subservience to ultra-orthodox absolutism. Also, what is the category of "Oriental" versus the category of "Ashkenazic" and Western for me, among the fragments of Israeli identity in which I exist and seek to set a path of identity and perhaps of identification for myself? I do so perhaps through the father and perhaps in order to free myself from the father, and also perhaps to formulate an attitude different from the Western one regarding the Other, seeing it as mingling rather than as removal. I seek an Orientalism that comprises existence within the other, constantly gazing outward and playing the innocent inwardly. Beyond this, I would say that there is a certain similarity between the manner of response to the great Other, God, which I attribute to my father and to Abraham, and the way that I attribute defensiveness to myself against the academic demand as well as the orthodox one to be subservient to earlier exegesis, or at least to argue with it. Therefore, perhaps, for fear of Harold-Bloomian or bulimic influence, I seek to present an aboriginal reading of Genesis, with knowledge of commentaries, but playing with them as a non-obligatory order.]

We now return to the story of Abram:

> So Abram went, as YHWH told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions which they had acquired, and the souls they had gotten in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan, and they came to the land of Canaan. And Abram passed in the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then YHWH appeared to Abram, and said, To your seed I will give this land. So he built there an altar to

> YHWH, who had appeared to him. From there he moved to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the sea side and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to YHWH and called on the name of YHWH. And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb. Now there was hunger in the land. So Abram went down to Mitsrayim to sojourn there, for the hunger was heavy in the land. And it happened when he was close to coming to Mitsrayim, he said to Sarai his wife, I know that you are a woman beautiful to behold; and when the Mitsrim see you, they will say, This is his wife, and they will kill me and keep you alive. Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and my soul will live because of you. (12:4–13)

Not long after arriving in the land of Canaan, because of the famine, Abram leaves for Egypt. He employs his cunning, which is the embodiment of divine hope in the ways of this world, meaning that hope is fulfilled after a person overcomes the frustrating situation in his mind and acts, despite imperfection. Abram's solution is to present the very relativity of falsehood versus the truth, by speaking a half-truth that is not a lie but the constant state of human existence in the world that is alien to him.

> When Abram entered Mitsrayim, the Mitsrim saw that the woman was very beautiful. And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken to Pharaoh's house. And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, he-asses, menservants, maidservants, she-asses, and camels. But YHWH afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. And Pharaoh called Abram, and said, What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say, She is my sister, and I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife, take her, and go. And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him; and they set him on the way, with his wife and all that he had. (12:14–20)

Compared to human cunning, here, God acts like an automaton that does not grasp the complexity of human life and does not understand the frivolity in the situation, so he attacks poor Pharaoh, though he has done no

misdeed. Here, God is artificial intelligence: very stupidly logical wisdom, which cannot read between the lines of evasion or of poetry.

We understand why this if a half-truth from a very similar scene later in the Book of Genesis. Abraham decides to use the same trick, but this time with Abimelech:

> "And Abraham said to Sarah his wife, She is my sister. And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. But Elohim came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, you are a dead man, because of the woman whom you have taken; for she is a man's wife. Now Abimelech had not approached her; so he said, Lord, will you also slay a righteous innocent people? Did he not himself say to me, She is my sister? And she herself said, He is my brother. In the innocence of my heart and the cleanliness of my hands I have done this" (20:2–5).

Abimelech has a better connection with God than Pharaoh had (or else, God is more merciful to him). God appears to Abimelech in a dream, something he, as an automaton, does not do for Pharaoh. Indeed, he warns Abimelech:

> "Then Elohim said to him in the dream, Yes, I know that you did this in the innocence of your heart, and I, too, spared you from sinning against me; therefore I did not let you touch her. Now restore the man's wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you, and you shall live. And if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you, and all that are yours" (20:6-7).

Here, God acts to keep Abimelech from offending God himself, because of the automatic punishment mechanism that is within him. Here, as it were, after the earlier experience, God deviates from his wise technicality, but this time, too, the automatic dimension is not entirely neutralized, since God, *not* being omnipotent, can barely control himself and asks a man to act to keep his mechanism of punishment and destruction from being applied to him (also by means of Abraham's prayer, which is a manipulation of the divine mechanism).

Abimelech is obedient and enables God to act justly, while reproaching Abraham for his ingratitude, the ingratitude of someone who acts with

cunning toward most people, and even toward God. Here is Abraham's response: "Abraham said, Because I thought, Only there is no fear of Elohim in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife. Besides she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. And when Elohim caused me to wander from my father's house, I said to her, This is the kindness you must do me: at every place to which we come, say of me, He is my brother" (20:11–13).

Abraham mentions two things to explain his ungrateful and half-lying behavior: one is his apprehension lest there be no fear of God in that place, and the other, his personal history. The motif of Elohim is mentioned in both of the statements, which suddenly reminds us of the need to understand who this Elohim is.

Importantly, Abraham mentions Elohim in his history and indirectly attributes responsibility to him: **when Elohim caused me to wander from my father's house**. Elohim, in the plural, caused Abraham. This returns us to the invocation: **Go for yourself**. Elohim caused him to take a new path. Now we have confirmation that proceeding along this path is connected to Sarai, because here, too, marriage to Sarai precedes the leaving. At any rate, the two are connected, because Abraham immediately says **when Elohim caused me to wander from my father's house, I said to her, This is the kindness you must do me: at every place to which we come, say of me, He is my brother**. Perhaps the wandering from his father's house is connected to the fact that he is married to a half-sister, his father's daughter.

She is his father's daughter, not his mother's daughter, meaning that she did not come from the same womb, which would have been a more significant degree of closeness. Later, the abstract element of fatherhood will enter and become even more significant, or at least, of identical significance. Hence, there is a prohibition in the Bible connected to what is said here: **The nakedness of your sister, either your father's daughter or your mother's daughter, whether born at home or born outside, do not uncover their nakedness** (Lev. 18:9).

Abraham's marriage to his half-sister is a sin, or at least it is problematic, and only God saved him. How? By separating him from his father's house, he made him a patriarch, a new Adam, and in that sense, Abram and Sarai are no longer brother and sister, which rescues both the marriage and also fertility.

(Does our argument here not contradict our earlier claim, that the departure from Ur of the Chaldeans and separation from the father's

house were not connected to God? First, the house of the father does not have to be identified with Ur of the Chaldeans rather than to the family principle, and in this sense, God freed Abram from paternity in the form it took in Haran. Second, this reflects the tension between subjectively basing the divinity within oneself and presenting it as an external object. Hence, it is also possible to interpret the departure from Ur of the Chaldeans as departure after listening to the inner voice, the call of the future, and later, in Haran, for example, this voice receives an external, "objective" representation of the divinity that speaks to man, Abram).

This is connected to the dimension of automatism in God, meaning the mechanism that blocks the womb when there is a sinful, bad action, in which humanity does not act properly in relation to the kinship customs that he permits. Proof of this is found in that, earlier, it is said that God had blocked the wombs of Abimelech's family:

> Then Abraham prayed to Elohim; and Elohim healed Abimelech, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children. For YHWH had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife. (20:17–18)

This is the precedent for Sarah's divine pregnancy.

The sin, in this sense, is people's failure to obey God's will, which is for his creatures to remain dependent on him like infants, and his desire that they should always obey him, especially in contexts of kinship.

The text here raises the question of whether the sin of incest was committed, leaving us very uncomfortable. Is it possible that our forefather acted that way, even though he married Sarai while he still belonged to an ostensibly pagan culture? If she was his sister, this denies us the possibility of enjoying a comfortable interpretation (moreover, in ancient myths, leaders are often born in questionable circumstances). Rashi's interpretation, which is based on the Sages, an interpretation that is also accepted by traditional commentators, is highly logical: "A father's daughter is permitted to a Noachide person, because there is no paternity among idol worshipers, which is how [the Sages] responded in order to confirm his words." Indeed, many aspects of the text reinforce this assumption. Rashi's commentary continues: "[instead] you may say she was his brother's daughter, [because] grandchildren are like children, so she can

be called the daughter of Terah; similarly, he says to Lot, we are brothers." Earlier, consistent with the second view, Rashi claims that Iscah (11:21), the daughter of Haran, is actually Sarai, so in fact Abram married his brother's daughter because the daughter of his brother, his father's son, can be called his sister. This is because the words "brother" and "sister" have to be taken in a broader sense, as shown by the reference to Lot, the son of Haran, Abram's brother, as **Lot his brother** (14:16).

In the way that anthropology understands kinship relations, as expressed in Levi-Strauss and even before that in Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, the terms father, mother, son, brother, and so on in early extended families were broader than in the modern biological sense of the family unit based on the couple. However, in those ancient frameworks, the prohibitions against incest are broader and even more complicated than those in the modern family unit. In any event, the matter remains rather vague, and even if this hypothesis is good, it only reinforces the vagueness. This is also because, in the end, the text does not state explicitly that Sarai was Abram's brother's daughter, and we are left to understand that she was his paternal half-sister, not born to the same mother (this is also why Cassuto rejects the apologetic orthodox interpretations of the subject that assert a connection between Sarai and Iscah).

Sarai is also mentioned in connection to Terah, the grandfather. She is spoken of as **Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife** (11:31) and no more than that. Perhaps, as suggested by Rabbi Baruch Epstein, the author of *Torah Temima*, based on BT Sanhedrin 58b, regarding **but not the daughter of my mother,** "this shows that a maternal sister is forbidden to a Noachide man." That is to say there is a problem here of which the biblical author is aware, and the prohibition against incest is in the background.

Moreover, the verse that introduces the scene with Abimelech is slightly puzzling: **And Abraham said to Sarah his wife, She is my sister. And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah.** Why is the preposition "to" used? Why did Abraham speak to Sarah that way? Perhaps this can be understood by taking note of the fact that later (in verse 16), Abimelech says **your brother** to Sarah, whereas the author speaks of **Sarah his wife** (20:14). In other words, according to the characters in the story, Sarah is Abraham's sister, and outwardly, as the author presents it, she is his wife. There is textual tension between the word "sister" and the word "wife." Perhaps in the time of Abraham as a historical figure (if he was such), or in the time of the composition of the text, this was not incest in the later

sense. On the textual level, this tension exists because of the confrontation between Abraham and Abimelech, because of his dual status of brother and husband, a situation that the textual Elohim (i.e., Elohim as a word that is revealed to the reader, not necessarily in the religious sense, but in the sense of the encounter with the words, the Elohim who appears in the text and lives there), as it turns out, cannot bear.

Incidentally, this vagueness is also present in the marriage between Isaac and Rebekah, who are relatives too (this was accepted in the Ancient Near East, and it is not incest in the biblical sense). It is expressed in the encounter between Isaac and Abimelech, when Isaac uses the same trick as his father Abraham. In the encounters of both Isaac and Abraham with Abimelech, the latter represents the desire to dispel this vagueness and attain the truth. As Abimelech says to Abraham after he has been tricked by him: **and now swear to me here by Elohim that you will not lie to me and my son and grandson.**

God, as he has appeared until now, tries to prevent confusion, but in fact, he also creates confusion, as in the Tower of Babel. Abimelech represents the first aspect of God, a single God, with one meaning, who wants unequivocal information with one meaning, the truth—the automaton that blocks the womb; and opposite him, his other side, is the God of confusion, the womb element in God. Abimelech is his reflection in the facing mirror; his name means either "father of a king" or "my father is a king."

It appears that God permitted marriages within the family, as in the first generations after creation—because the proliferation of humanity had not taken place—like Cain, who, we may assume, married his sister. Abraham, who, like Adam, founds a special human sub-species, is told not to mingle with the Canaanites, as if they were not part of this new sub-species. For his sons, Abraham must take only women from his original extended family from Ur of the Chaldeans (at the next stage will come the internal Israelite demand to destroy the Canaanites—anything that is not myself does not belong, and what belongs to me is only the cynical use of the Canaanite—perhaps like that Elohim who creates his Other and rejects it at the same time?).

It should also be said that here, we see God in movement toward the law. Although at the moment of his encounter with Abram, no law restricts marriage to the daughter of a common father, God is heading toward establishing that law, and Abram is in the process of becoming Abraham, who will be subject to the law. This moment precedes the imposition of the law, an intermediate stage in which there is a primal vagueness of a

law, and one can still work against it. God acts through the law to prevent confusion and to battle against the confuser within him, to unite with humanity toward a single significance, the prevention of confusion.

This is also true regarding kinship relationships—a woman cannot be *both* a wife and *also* a sister. The author of Genesis is also a witness to the problematic nature of this possibility, which is also expressed in the blurring of falsehood and truth in the meeting between Abraham and Abimelech, a blurring which is a *conceptual incest*: both sister and wife, both falsehood and truth. For the God of confusion, who becomes the God of paternity, the abomination is incest, the lack of separation between family categories. Therefore, in fact, Abraham *does* sin, while he is still functioning under the order of the confused God and not under the order of the God of single paternity and of the law.

The God of the future law does not sever Abraham from the customs of the paganism of the ancient world in the sense of belief in the gods. Rather, he severs him from their customs of incest, those of the first human beings. God wants to break off the first stage of confusion. But still, within the second, Hebrew stage, at the beginning, there is no alternative to inbreeding. This is a struggle within God between the desire for confusion, the desire for uniformity, and the desire for new creation. In this respect, the Binding of Isaac will represent the severance of relations between father and son as they existed until then, slaughtering the son as another type of incestuous, deviant sexual relations with a family member. The old relations are cut off to make Abraham a new man, to avoid confusion and prevent forbidden mixtures such as that of wool and linen. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob respond with "here I am." Usually, it is the son responding to the father, or Abram the son responding to God the father, a response to the paternal law of significance and discipline. In the face of this "here I am," God and Abimelech demand of Abraham—and afterward of Isaac—that he desist from his cunning.

Abraham as the arch-patriarch thus detaches himself from the father who preceded him and becomes the first father in accordance with God's fantasy of re-establishing a special human sub-species, the people of Israel, and this matter is also connected to the fact that the encounter with the matriarch Sarah includes both abomination of contact with maternity itself and also contact with sanctity, the sanctity of the origin.*

* From this, one can interpret the word "kindness" in Abraham's words: "**I said to her: This is the kindness [Hebrew: hesed] you must do me: at**

> **every place to which we come, say of me, He is my brother.** Let us compare this to Leviticus 20:17: **If a man takes his sister, his father's daughter or his mother's daughter and sees her nakedness and she sees his nakedness, it is a disgrace [the same Hebrew word: hesed]; and they shall be cut off in the sight of the sons of their people. He has uncovered his sister's nakedness; he bears his guilt.** Rashi explains: "the Aramaic word for shame is hasuda (Sanhedrin 58), and the Midrash is that if Cain married his sister, the Place [God] did a kindness to build his world from him, as it is said (Psalms 89:2), **kindness [hesed] will be built up forever.**" We find Freudian ambivalence here, for incest is both an abomination and sacred.

In making Abraham the first father, God eliminates the dimension of fatherhood that had been above him, that of Terah, and thereby, he eliminates Abram and Sarai's status as siblings and neutralizes their sin. Then God the automaton is not forced to afflict Sarai with barrenness, so the birth of Isaac becomes possible, meaning that, as in the case of Abimelech, God restrains himself from punishing a sinner automatically, under his kinship principles.*

> * To a certain degree, every man and woman who marry detach themselves from the earlier succession of paternity/maternity and become the patriarch and matriarch of a new family tree, giving birth to humanity in the world once again, and thereby they make God happy, because at last, humanity will be created anew, as *the voice of the future* promised itself, for **therefore a man will leave his father and mother and cling to his wife, and they will be one flesh** (Gen. 2:24). In this way, every couple that unites recreates the act of creation in mating (procreating). God's fear of the people of Sodom might derive from their deviation from this heterosexual economy, which he created in the Garden of Eden.

If so, the entire purpose of "Go for yourself" is none other than to ensure God's self-restraint. How so? When he eliminates the paternal status of Abraham's father for him, he thereby makes Sarai and Abram not siblings but people who are permitted to marry and produce children. Hence, apparently, Sarai was barren because she was Abram's sister, and her barrenness is what motivated the family to leave for Canaan (why did it have to be Canaan? There is no answer to this except a tautology of faith: the land is holy because it is the HolyLand).

The moment this kinship obstacle is neutralized, Sarai is capable of bringing a child into the world. Ostensibly, before her pregnancy with Isaac, the question of barrenness was no longer relevant to her, because **Now Abraham and Sarah were old and long in days; and it had ceased**

to be with Sarah the way of women (18:11). But God also removes her from old age, from this kind of unequivocal barrenness.

God halts the automatic action of sealing the womb, just as he had done for Abimelech's women in the same story, and the narrative continues: "and YHWH visited Sarah as he had said, and YHWH did to Sarah as he had promised. And Sarah conceived, and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which Elohim had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac" [Hebrew *yitsḥaq* = he will laugh] (21:1–13. God, in the sense of power, visits Sarai and can, despite the prohibition against incest, fulfill for Abram the holy coupling with his sister, the daughter of *his former* father. Beyond this, we must not ignore the status of Abraham-Abram as being "*av-ram*" [= a high father], a primal father who founds the community. As such, he bears the function of the exalted father. He is like the figure of God himself, and he almost has the possibility of deviating from the paternal law, like the father in *Totem and Taboo*, who is the source of the figure of God. Regarding God, the appellation of "father" is anachronistic, but he serves as the primal father to whom the law of paternity does not apply, and he is capable of achieving the surplus pleasure. Abram's role in this story is to establish a community of believers who are subject to the law of God the father, while serving as an intermediary father figure, who not only lays down the law after himself but also has the momentary possibility, before the breach is sealed, to experience the pleasure of mating with his sister Sarai, the daughter of Terah.

It follows from this that the miracle of being rescued is not expressed in halting the mechanism of nature, but in stepping over the divine mechanism of destruction, as in the case of the destroyer in the ceremony of "blood groom" (Exod. 4:25) and the slaying of the first born (Exod. 11:5). Hence, the miracle is halting the mechanical process of punishment that is applied by the divinity. God, after the creation of the world, the creation of the Other, does not let it remain as the Other, and at all times, he demands that it should constrict and return to him as a perfect object of creation. God prevents the world from acting in its own way, but the good happens only when things proceed naturally from themselves, without being disturbed by him.

The supreme good, the miracle, is, in fact, God's not disturbing events in the world, when he refrains from punishing or neutralizes the punishment that is about to take place, after a person is reconciled and mends his ways, returning to the arms of God. And what is Satan in the

following parts of the Bible? Perhaps it is God's automatic mechanism, which we take to be evil, the blind bureaucratic mechanism, which itself is the destroyer (the name of the agency that kills the firstborn Egyptians, Ex. 12:13, and passes over the houses of the Israelites), just like the evildoers on the face of the earth: "And the earth was corrupt before Elohim, and the earth was filled with robbery And Elohim saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth. And Elohim said to Noah, the end of all flesh comes before me for the earth is filled with robbery because of them; behold, I will destroy them with the earth" (6:11–13). In this sense, God's laugh exemplifies the drama within him, between the warm, good, forgiving voice and the mocking, Satanic voice, as an evil power that fights against that which God grasps as evil, against that which has not acted according to the divine plan from the very beginning.

How can we weave together all the traits of the character of God that we have so far presented: *the voice of promise for the future, the automaton, the fatherhood of single meaning, the womb-mother, and the position of Adam and Abraham regarding all these traits*? Could the laugh, like that of Abraham and Sarah, be first of all a response to this mechanical nature, to its absurdity? Mechanical nature appears to be the hidden side of the voice of promise, because that voice is an imaginary projection of man upon the figure of God, a projection of his hope for the future onto an agency, and this external agency, so man hopes, will be good enough to bestow his bounty on man and do certain good things. Man also hopes there is law and order, logic, in this chaotic world.

God does not always respond to this logic; his mechanical side, which is also a projection of man's interior, does its own thing toward man, and all that remains to him is to laugh. Abraham's laughter and flexibility join with man's hope for God's gentleness. One can summarize it this way: Abraham's laugh upon hearing God's promise that he will father Isaac is a response to the divine combination of technical innocence and the promising voice of the future. This technical innocence is also threatening here, because along with hope, it also gives these old people a surprising future of taking care of an infant while they are on the verge of the tomb.

Chapter Eight: The Excess of Sodom

So Abram went up from Mitsrayim, he and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the Negeb. And Abram was very weighty in cattle, in silver, and in gold. And he walked on his journeys from the Negeb until Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place where he had made an altar at the first; and there Abram called on the name of YHWH. And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, and the land could not support both of them dwelling together; for their possessions were great and they could not dwell together, and there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and the herdsmen of Lot's cattle. And the Canaanites and the Perizzites dwelt in the land then. And Abram said to Lot, Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen; for we are brother-men. Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you go to the left I will go to the right; and if you take the right I will go to the left. And Lot lifted up his eyes, and saw that the Jordan valley was all watered before YHWH destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, like the garden of YHWH, like the land of Mitsrayim, in the direction of Zoar; So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan valley, and Lot journeyed east; thus one brother separated from the other. Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, while Lot

I. Benyamini, *A Critical Theology of Genesis*,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-59509-6_10

> dwelt among the cities of the valley and tented as far as Sodom. Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against YHWH. (13:1–13)

First, we must ask about the verse, **now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against YHWH.** What evil did the people of Sodom do? We are told they are wicked sinners, but it is not yet clear *exactly* why they are bad. Later, it is mentioned that they want to know the men/angels who are Lot's guests (and here, too, we may play the innocent and ask what is the meaning of "to know"), but the matter of noise is also mentioned later: **Then YHWH said, the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah, because it is great, and their sin, because it is very weighty. I will go down and see whether all they have done is like the cry that has come to me; and if not, I will know** (18:20). This means that their overdoing of pleasures disturbs God's rest, just as the constant noise of the men of Babel disturbed the gods in the ancient extra-biblical myth (perhaps we may conclude from this that the request to know the angels appears to be evil because it shows a desire to know too much about the angels' bodies, that it shows overflowing, transgressive desire). See also the angels' words to Lot about the great outcry of the people of Sodom (19:14), and this is an extension of earlier instances in Genesis where man is called sinful: mention is made of badness, but nothing specific is said about evil deeds. Perhaps this is because sin is not to be understood as doing something bad to one's fellow, as a true (human) moral problem, but rather, as failure to stick to God's plan, as annoying *excessiveness*. **Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against YHWH.** We claim that the emphasis is on "**great**."

God, viewing himself as *the absolute* good, signifies Sodom as the *absolute* bad, which must be destroyed, to make room for the nation of absolute goodness, which Abraham is going to organize for him. However, as we shall see, Abram will not cooperate completely with this dichotomous procedure. Perhaps, as a human creature, as a living creature, he knows the travails of life and its compromises, that whoever marks a certain object as absolute evil places himself as absolutely good, and then he himself, in the energy of his violence, becomes in fact absolute evil, like the imperialist dimension of conquest (as seen in the powerful kings of the East, who will conquer the peoples in the Jordan Valley and eliminate them and those who stand in their way).

Sodom and Gomorrah stand for the place where there is not only a human excess, but also an excessiveness of the earth. God cannot be silent.

He cannot tolerate a fertile, uncursed earth, which will always be that way, even if it is his garden, or like his garden: [and he] **saw that the Jordan valley was all watered before YHWH destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, like the garden of YHWH**. For God, Sodom and Gomorrah, regions of natural abundance, are reflected in the human excessiveness of the people of Sodom, and vice versa. The people of Sodom live on fertile land in the Jordan Valley, even more fertile than Canaan, truly like the Garden of Eden, and for God, they recreate the human condition, in which a garden is irrigated by a river (and let us recall here that the garden is truly the garden of God, but it is in fact irrigated by the earth).

The motive of the excessiveness of the people of Sodom and of the earth of Sodom is also reflected in the motive of the excessiveness of the connection between Abram and Lot. Let us recall that Abram adopted Lot, made him a member of his household, took the identical Other as a member of his family into the closest family unit of Sarai and himself, in a kind of melding of distance and closeness that now must be split up. After the strife between their herdsmen and following Abram's appeal, Lot asks to live in the Jordan Valley and parts ways with Abram. The author apparently hints that Lot was corrupt or not entirely admirable in that he chose such a fine place.

Abram and Lot both belong to the category of *rich*, *very* rich (and in relation to the *great* evil of Sodom). This being *very rich* might be burdensome for the earth: **And Abram was very weighty in cattle, in silver, and in gold/ And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents**. By separating, Abram and Lot fulfill God's desire to disperse humanity on the face of the earth, and they free the earth of their being superfluous upon it. **The land could not support both of them dwelling together**—the land cannot bear human excess, excessiveness that causes tension among people and between land and land: **and there was strife.**

> And YHWH said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, Raise your eyes, and see from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your seed forever. I will place your seed as the dust of the earth; so that if a man can count the dust of the earth, he can also count your seed. Rise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you. So Abram moved his tent, and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron; and there he built an altar to YHWH. (13:14–18)

After the Abram–Lot excessiveness is split, God burdens Abram with an excess of promise, a promise of very much, of a large, broad land. But it is not actually excessive; rather, it is *precision*. God is looking for the man upon whom he can base his special new human sub-species, in which the single person will belong to the single God, and this unity will become a multitude, but in a specified territory (although large, it is defined by boundaries), and this One will act against the multiplicity of the nations, against them (not mingling with them). It will also become a vast multitude, just as in the single God, there is a vast (perhaps infinite) multiplicity. Abram does not respond directly to this gesture of God's, beyond walking through the length and breadth of the land. This expresses neither agreement nor opposition, and certainly, this is not a trial. His response is in building an altar to God. Abram does not understand why he is *One,* single and unique. He acts in his familial, political, and geographical context, *and no more, without any addition* (whereas God urges him to extend this addition, which will be called faith).

> In the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim, they made war with Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). And all these joined together in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Salt Sea). Twelve years they had served Chedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled. In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him came and subdued the Rephaim in Ashterothkarnaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Emim in Shavehkiriathaim, and the Horites in their Mount Seir as far as Elparan on the border of the wilderness; then they turned back and came to Enmishpat (that is, Kadesh), and subdued all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites who dwelt in Hazazontamar. Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) went out, and they joined battle in the Valley of Siddim with Chedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goiim, Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar, four kings against five. Now the Valley of Siddim was full of bitumen pits; and as the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some fell into them, and the rest fled to

> the mountain. So they [the enemy] took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their food, and went; they also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed. Then an escapee came, and told Abram the Hebrew, who was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and of Aner; these were allies of Abram. And Abram heard that his brother had been captured, and he led forth his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. And he divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and routed them and pursued them to Hobah, to the left of Damascus. Then he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his brother Lot with his property, and the women and the people. After the king of Sodom came out to him after his return from striking Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, to the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of the supreme El. And he blessed him and said, Blessed be Abram to the supreme El, the owner of heaven and earth; and blessed be the supreme El, who has delivered your enemies into your hand, and he gave him a tenth of everything. And the king of Sodom said to Abram, Give me the persons, and take the property for yourself. But Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have raised my hand to YHWH, the supreme El, the owner of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal-thong or anything that is yours, lest you should say, I have made Abram rich. Only what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me; let Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre, let them take their share. (14:1–24)

As a result of the earlier division between Abram and Lot, Lot got involved with the people of Sodom, and as a result of their wars, he was captured. Now Abram must rescue the poor man, and therefore, he goes to war.

The reader might be somewhat confused between the king of Sodom, who is said to represent the wicked, and Melchizedek, the high priest-king who performs an exalted and simple ceremony for Abram, giving him bread and wine. The exalted and the wicked are mingled here: the king

of Salem and the king of Sodom speak by turns, one after the other. The one who knits together Melchizedek and the king of Sodom is Abram, for Melchizedek says, **Blessed be Abram to the supreme El, the owner of heaven and earth**, and afterward, the words of the king of Sodom are presented, to which Abram responds with the motive of the supreme El [*El 'elyon* in Hebrew]: **I have raised my hand to YHWH, the supreme El, the owner of heaven and earth**.

Abram's joining together, in contrast to God's separation (and the separation by the author, who identifies with God's position), is connected to his grasp of the situation of life not as movement at the edge, not at the extreme, but as movement with generosity and compromise. This is not the generosity of excess, which conquers and takes over so as to impose itself on the Other. His military campaign is not aimed at conquest but only at rescuing the prisoner.

From the author's perspective, Melchizedek might represent the side of Abram, while the king of Sodom represents the side of Lot. In the end, everything comes out well, and the separation is re-established. Abram returns what belongs to the king of Sodom, without taking for himself any of the excessiveness of Sodom, which might be impure, in contrast to Lot, who takes willingly. The author presents Abram to us as a generous man, someone whose bounty is translated into excessiveness of giving and not just into excessiveness of attaining, as expressed earlier in his offer to Lot, to choose the direction he wished to take. Therefore, God will reward him by giving him a land of his own.

In his gift to Abram, God transfers a miniature of the world onto a miniature of humanity, which will be established in the future. In this sense, God might be giving up control over the whole earth. He is discouraged now and concentrates on a specific land, Canaan. Beyond the borders of that land, he is rather helpless.

Chapter Nine: The Covenant

> [15:1] After these things the word of YHWH came to Abram in a vision saying Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward is very great. But Abram said, Adonai Elohim, what will you give me, for I walk childless, and the son of my household is Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, you have not given me seed, and here the son of my household will be my heir. And behold, the word of YHWH came to him, This man will not inherit you; but one who will come from your insides will inherit you. (15:1–4)

Now Abram has a vision of revelation, an apparition—apparently not a dream, because later, it says that he fell asleep. This is an actual revelation that cannot be dismissed as the imagination of a dream. God says to Abram, **Fear not**, meaning, do not be apprehensive about your childless state, and less, do not fear *me*: **Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward is very great.** These are give-and-take relations, despite all the aspirations of spiritual people to see more than this in Abram. The reward is very great, far beyond that which Abram gives to God, completely out of proportion. But Abram balks and asks what God will give him, since he is childless to a shameful degree, and his only heir is his assistant.

It is interesting to compare Abram's *childless* situation to the *unique* situation of God, at whose side are only his angels, with no heir on his level. Perhaps God clings to this single Abram because he finds in him a reflection of his own distress as one versus the many, God versus the world

I. Benyamini, *A Critical Theology of Genesis*,
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(which does not understand him?). But still, to attain Abram's belief, trust, and love, he must play the seducer because despite everything, Abram is human, and as such, he has *consciousness*, a mind that vexes him with questions. Hence, God functions here as a voice for the future, as a voice that promises the future, because this is apparently what remains to him to control humans: hope, on the one hand, and intimidation, on the other—both of which are directed at the future.

> And he brought him outside and said, Look at the sky and count the stars, if you are able to count them. And he said to him, So shall your seed be. And he believed in YHWH, and he reckoned it to him as righteousness. And he said to him, I am YHWH who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess. And he said, Adonai Elohim how am I to know that I shall possess it? (15:5–8)

Here, we have the inner and outer voices at the same time because this is the real voice of the revelation of God, but it is also the voice needed by Abram's interior, which creates it out of his wishes, in a dream or in thoughts. Indeed, soon this revelation will slip into the realm of dream (see Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, on God's revelation to Abraham, including the Binding of Isaac as an expression of Abraham's misunderstanding, of a strange vision).

The voice says that something will take place, but always with exaggeration, far beyond simple expectations, as if to compensate for not fulfilling the promise until now. Now this voice of the future tells how it will exist as the voice of the future for Abram's descendants, who are actually the fulfillment of the promise of fertility for him. However, there is a *leap* here: instead of describing an imminent birth, it jumps many generations to the future, and immediately afterward comes the impressive ceremonial demonstration of the animals cut into half. This response can be interpreted by the voice's addressee as God's inability to deal with his vexing question, as flight into the distant future instead of coping with the disappointing present (for the moment).

This voice of the future expresses itself in rhetoric identical to that which the descendants of Abram, the Israelites, will hear: **who has taken you from the land of Mitsrayim**, but now it is **from Ur of the Chaldeans**. Although the departure from Ur of the Chaldeans was only a human

action, as we showed above, here God appropriates that departure from Ur of the Chaldeans, mentioning it as if it were a place of slavery parallel to Egypt. In this way, God shows his desire to appear as a savior *in any event*, to win the love of at least some people.

Perhaps contrary to expectations, in the covenant of the split animals, Abram is not so very submissive. True, we know how Paul, in the Epistle to the Romans, makes the biblical words, **and he believed in YHWH, and he reckoned it to him as righteousness,** into an expression of absolute faith in God. Nevertheless, immediately after receiving this promise from God, the doubting Abram asks, **how am I to know that I shall possess it?** These words, in fact, make it impossible to understand **righteousness** as the absolute cleaving of faith.

> He said to him, Bring me a heifer three years old, a she-goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon. And he brought him all these, cut them in the middle, and laid each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. And when vulture came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away. (15:9–11)

As part of his answer, God grants Abram a ceremony of making a covenant by cutting some pure, three-year-old animals in two. Later, we read: **When the sun had gone down and dark came, behold, a smoking furnace and a torch of fire passed between these pieces. On that day YHWH made a covenant with Abram.** It is as if God himself passed between the pieces, thereby placing himself in a situation of danger between the pieces of the animals, danger also symbolized by the vulture that swoops down on the dead animals. God is prepared to endanger himself in order to form a covenant with a human being, a covenant that will remove Abram, but no less, God himself, from his isolation.

> As the sun went down, a deep sleep fell on Abram; and lo, a dread and great darkness fell upon him. (15:12)

A dread and great darkness falls upon Abram, and Rashi says this is a hint about what is to come. This is the only prominent occurrence of fear in Abraham, but it is also part of the vision, *as a prophecy of the future, belonging to his progeny and not to him*. It is also possible to understand **dread** as darkness, as **great darkness**, also in comparison to *'alata*, the

word for darkness that appears in 15:17. This means that Abraham did not necessarily experience dread before the Other, in stark contrast to the opinion of Luther, Kierkegaard, Rudolf Otto, Rashi, Lacan, and others.

> And he said to Abram, Know for certain that your seed will be a sojourner in a land not their own, and they will serve them, and they will be oppressed for four hundred years; and the nation they will serve I judge, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. And you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall return here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete. And the sun went down and there was darkness, behold, a smoking furnace and a torch of fire passed between these pieces. (15:13–17)

The voice of the future, which is about to invade the lives of Abraham's children, who, as noted, are the embodiment of God's desire for fertility (in our commentary on the first chapters, we said that God is envious of the earth's maternal fertility, and here, perhaps we find God's paternal response, in that he nevertheless fertilizes the seed), tells how they will receive a cruel, cyclical fate of redemption and consolation. God's purpose is to feel that he belongs, that he has a family, which he will get beyond being alone. Thus, in distress, he can always promise the future.*

* This is also found in God's words in the poem known in Hebrew as Haazinu [= Give Ear], Chapter 32 of Deuteronomy, spoken by Moses, who, while inspiring dread, describes the cyclical history of the Israelites for them: *they are redeemed → they sin → they are punished by other nations → they are saved → and so on . . .*

As noted, God is amusing himself here. He desires relations with a nation that he will bring low so he can save it, so that he can reinforce his own self-assurance: *Yes, you are God!* Thereby, because of yearning for the moment of creation, he will once again feel like the creator of the world, once again as huge and mighty, though with a small and weak nation, but one of great faith, faith in God's self-image. Lack of faith among the faithful endangers God's self-image in relation to his own perfection. Perhaps there is nothing behind the image, only a vacuum.

Here, *ideology* enters. The implicit conception that fate controls human beings camouflages the situation that beyond the word *God,* there is not really mighty power, and then, this cycle of redemption and punishment leaves it to the sons of God to formulate hope again in a theological way: their misery does not result from the absence of God, but from their sin; if he is absent, hides his face, his absence is justified by their sin.

In a non-critical way, it can be said that a mechanism of fate is operating here (like the Greek *moira* that even rules over the acts of the gods), similar to what we found in the punishment mechanism in the chapter on "Go for Yourself." This mechanism is above God and activates him and the creatures below him, but (and thus, we nevertheless return to the matter of ideology) at the same time, it also assures that God will continue to be seen as the voice of the future, after each catastrophe. This voice is important to people in their continued existence in the ancient world, which is incomprehensible to them (without modern science, etc.). Thus, God's helplessness is camouflaged (it can perhaps be said that the cyclical mechanism itself is God, God as a machine, an automatic mechanism, which cannot stop itself).

If we turn now to Abram—what does he have to lose? He has no sons, and if a God comes along and makes an infinite promise to him, why should he object? He says to himself, *we will give it a try, come what may.*

> On that day YHWH made a covenant with Abram, saying, To your seed I give this land, from the river of Mitsrayim to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites. (15:18–21)

These are the borders with the two evil empires of the Ancient Near East: Babylonia and Egypt, empires that conquered small nations and crushed them, as with Israel and Judea later on. Or else, they enslave the Israelites, as in Egypt. Moreover, God identifies with the power of their imperial logic: (1) as future punishers of the Jewish people; (2) as standing on the borders of the Israelites' future empire; (3) when the logic is transferred into the future actions of the Israelites, who conquer the unwitting peoples of Canaan. Beyond this mechanism and this logic stands the desire (of Abraham, of the author, of God) to grasp the empire, to rule over others (or is it to attain territorial independence?).

Chapter Ten: Sarah's Laugh

Hagar's Weeping

Now we return to the female side of humanity, represented by Sarai, Abram's wife. The discussion below will sharpen the tension between the masculine, paternal aspect, and the feminine, maternal aspect, which we discovered in the stories of creation, between God and the earth. We have already spoken about the way this divinity deals with the females of the world (the earth and the women) by blocking their wombs. Moreover, the author of this text collaborates with the tendency to compete against the feminine by presenting God the father as the one who engenders and creates, and, in the various chronologies, by bringing out the place of the fathers in producing children. Now, however, salvation will come from Abram's wife, but with a demand for submission and innocent simplicity toward God.

> And Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children, and she had an Egyptian slave woman whose name was Hagar; and Sarai said to Abram, Behold now, YHWH has prevented me from bearing children; go in to my slave woman; perhaps I will be built by her. And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. (16:1–2)

Sarai is still barren, as we left her in the chapter on "Go for Yourself." The maternal principle is still faulty, and, as we know of ancient times, a woman who does not produce sons is held in contempt and regards herself

I. Benyamini, *A Critical Theology of Genesis*,
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as worthless, because she is always taken to be someone's wife. The text emphasizes not only that she has not given birth, but also that she had borne no children *to him, to Abram*. Sarai has no son, but she has a slave woman, Hagar.

This failure to give birth to sons leads Sarai to a creative solution, by which a son will be born by means of Hagar, and this will enhance Sarai's reputation, and thereby, Abram's as well. Sarai, in her personal wish to enhance herself, unwittingly serves the world spirit (see Hegel's concept of historical irony), and, in fact, she serves the will of God, who wishes to enhance his name. **Perhaps I will be built by her**—God could say the same thing about himself. He wants to build up his reputation by regulating the desires and fears of human beings, by means of Abram, and by his progeny, who have not yet been born, but who will be born. Sarai promotes this initiative, unwittingly, and we should not introduce something here that does not belong, that she is supposedly a saintly woman in the spiritual sense. No—she is righteous in relation to her family, just as Abraham is righteous in his relation to his family and his concern for it. Therefore, Abram heeds Sarai's pragmatic voice, which offers a solution of some kind, though not a perfect one.

Moreover, it may be suggested that Sarai's voice opposes God (but not God's voice), because Sarai protests against God for closing her womb and hopes for salvation from a human woman, meaning that Sarai's voice opposes the presence of God as an omnipotent *image*, who makes promises for the future, but she does not oppose *the voice of the future* as an inner dimension of hope. Abra(ha)m stands against these voices, which offer him a possibility for the future. This does not mean that his obedience to the divine voice of the future and to Sarai's voice show him to be merely a pragmatic opportunist. Similarly, this is not a way of condemning his faith in God as exploitative, demanding a reward for faith. This is the simplicity of a human way of life, not of a theological way of life. That is to say, a person lives his life, which, especially in ancient times, revolved around the dimension of family, around the members of the family who had come into the world and about those whose arrival was expected, and their failure to arrive is, in fact, a heavy presence. Faith in God arises and flourishes from this way of living.*

* What we describe here is not a primary search for faith in the chronological sense, but an investigation of the primacy of faith in a person, its non-temporal primacy, meaning its primacy in the sense of being a

basic aspect of a person's life. After this true basis comes into being, the exploitative aspect faith arises, that of the theologians. As they bend over the primary faith, which is involved with God, they create a conception of innocent faith that neither depends on anything nor expects a reward. Paradoxically, this innocent faith is taken as primary, existential, and existentialist, etc. But this is not the case, because it is an artificial theological attitude, which is so radical that it is barren, because it is separated from life itself and from family life. People are eager to know, and here, to know means to experience now what is going to happen in the future, so that family existence will persist and continue to establish itself. This projected existence stands against ignorance of the future, which is immediately upon us and is entirely a mystery. We stand against infinite possibility, against this infinity, this eternity, which arises from the single moment and is about to arrive right away, and so we create an image of (divine) eternity, eternity that offers the reply, "things will be all right."

This, in fact, is also the source of the *conservative* aspect of religion in general and particularly of faith. There is a feeling of dread that the good reality will disappear at the hands of the *bad infinity,* which is open to all kinds of disastrous possibilities, while preferring the *good infinity,* which invites good possibilities. Hence, the *Utopian* aspect of religion and also its *apocalyptic* aspect: on the one hand, hope for infinite good, which will triumph over infinite evil, and on the other hand the great conservatism, the fear of changing original orders.

If you say, what about faith that comes to a person from the disaster that was caused to him? We answer that this is no contradiction. The death of a relative intensifies the presence of his absence and thereby his presence in the past. Therefore, it recreates hope retroactively, the hope for the late relative's continued existence. Like the fantasy of nullifying the past, an illogical and unrealistic hope exists that the future will change, as if the present had not been, and the dead person will return. That is: the voice of the future also translates itself into the voice of the conservative past.

> And Sarai, the wife of Abram, took Hagar the Egyptian, her slave woman, at the end of ten years of Abram's dwelling in the land of Canaan, and she gave him to Abram her man as a wife to him. And he came to Hagar, and she conceived; and she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was light in her eyes. And Sarai said to Abram, the wrong done to me is upon you. I put my slave woman in your bosom, and she saw that she had conceived, I was light in her eyes. May YHWH judge between you and me. (16:3–5)

Sarai, as the arch-mother, alongside the arch-father, knows how to be saintly in her aggressiveness. She, who gave Abraham and Hagar to each other, finds herself shunted to the side. Hagar conceives immediately: the maternity principle is fulfilled right away (Rashi says "from the first coitus"), as if the encounter between Hagar and Abram embodies successful conjugal sexuality, arousing Sarai's envy. For that reason, Sarai places God between her and Abram as a judge who will decide in her favor, because, as we mentioned before, she collaborates, unwittingly or knowingly, with God in his plan for Abram. God needs a womb to create, just as during the creation of the world, he needed the contribution of Mother Earth.

> And Abram said to Sarai, Behold, your slave woman is in your power; do to her what is good in your eyes. Then Sarai tormented her, and she fled from her. (16:6)

Abram's response is indifference toward Hagar, on the one hand, though he had had intimate contact with her, and she had conceived by him, and, on the other hand, submission to Sarai, the matriarch who is not yet a mother, the first wife, the closer wife, the wife who was a half-sister. Sarai continues to show herself as cruel and vengeful. She torments Hagar, who flees, helpless.

> And an angel of YHWH found her by a spring of water in the desert, the spring on the way to Shur. And he said, Hagar, Sarai's slave woman, where have you come from and where are you going? And she said, I am fleeing Sarai from my mistress. And the angel of YHWH said to her, Return to your mistress, and suffer under her hands. (16:7–9)

God's angel also responds by making Hagar submit to the control of Sarai, the total arch-mother. The voice of paternity appears to be unable to control the maternal womb, whose barren anger is unbearable. The angel can only make another promise for the future, but this time, at the expense of the present, a future that will compensate for the present, once again under the principle of fertility:

> The angel of YHWH also said to her, I will so greatly multiply your seed that they cannot be counted for multitude. And the angel of YHWH said to her, Behold, you

are pregnant, and shall bear a son; you shall call his name Ishmael [= El will hear] because YHWH has heard your affliction. And he shall be a wild ass of a man, his hand on every man and every man's hand on him; and he shall dwell over against all his brothers. And she called the name of YHWH who spoke to her, You are El of seeing; for she said, Here, too, did I not see after being seen? Therefore the well was called Beer-lahairoi [= the well of the living who sees me]; here it is between Kadesh and Bered. And Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. And Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram. (16:10–16)

Abraham's Laugh

And Abram was ninety-nine years old YHWH appeared to Abram, and said to him, I am El Shadai; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will give my covenant between me and you, and will multiply you very very much. And Abram fell on his face; and Elohim said to him, saying: Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you very very fruitful; and I will give you to nations, and kings shall come forth from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your seed after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be Elohim to you and to your seed after you. And I will give to you, and to your seed after you, the land of your dwelling, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their Elohim. And Elohim said to Abraham, And you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your seed after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your descendants after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He

> that is eight days old among you shall be circumcised; every male for all your generations, whether born in your house, or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your seed, both he that is born in your house and he that is bought with your money shall be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant. And Elohim said to Abraham, Sarai your wife, do not call her name Sarai, because Sarah is to be her name. I will bless her, and also I will give you a son by her; I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall come from her. (17:1–16)

God wants to make Abram the first man of a new human sub-species, to be **Abraham**, but to that end, Abram must shed his cunning and become the father of truth and unity: **walk before me, and be blameless** [*tamim* in Hebrew, which can have the sense of "naive"]. God summons Abram to make a covenant with him, changing his name from Abram to Abraham, **for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations**, a name that represents and is the inclusive principle of paternity (like God, Abraham will be the one who bears within him the possibilities of engendering a vast multitude). Similarly, Sarai becomes Sarah.

Perhaps a **blameless** man can achieve spiritual perfection, and the foreskin that is removed can lead to the union of the body with God, according to Rashi and Maimonides; however, the word *tamim*, translated here as **blameless**, means submissive to God. Indeed, we have here an expression of the slave's submission to his master, whom he will serve faithfully, and here, God the master will reward him through fertility. Hence, this submission means that he must not be complex or cunning, but simple and straightforward: **walk before me**.

This great fertility, this great proliferation, is accomplished by the actual penis, which *penetrates*, but a part of it is also *sacrificed*, part of its flesh: the blood of the covenant is a sacrifice to God and also a sign of the covenant in the flesh.

This is the same flesh that penetrates and ejaculates semen, which is disgusting and sanctified, and thereby God the father becomes a partner in the act of sexual intercourse, when the missing part, which has been conveyed to God, is present in its absence, and thereby it *is* present in

spirit and also a partner in penetrating the womb of the future mother, as well as in the ejaculation of semen.

> And Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, give birth? And Abraham said to Elohim, If only Ishmael might live before you. (17:17–18)

After God's long, promising, and grandiose speech, Abraham falls on his face again, but this time in a kind of *parody of the way he had previously fallen on his face*, of his previous act of absolute fidelity, as it were. Abraham's logic wants fulfillment of the promise in the framework of true, empirical reality, of life, and not God's grandiose fantasies. But God insists and tries to conciliate Abraham. This is a God whom Abraham puts to the test (and not the other way around).

Abraham's spontaneous response is laughter, and this testifies to doubt as to whether the promise can possibly be fulfilled (even though God already proved himself when the elderly Abraham managed to impregnate Hagar). He does not share God's self-assurance. Whereas God sees far into the future, imagines the uterine fulfillment of his promise, and already demands something in return, Abraham is not so hasty and wants to size up this God of promises for the future. This means that this Hebrew traditionalist, who accepts the principle of hope for a better, fertile future, always relates to it with doubt and laughter, experiencing the gap between the materiality and difficulty of this world and hope, which is the divinity, and the gap between the present here and now and the future, divine there and then, a gap that makes possible *the laughter of a joke*.

Rashi, and, following him, Nachmanides, says that **[he] laughed** here is different from Sarai's mocking laughter, that it is a laugh of joy. But we suggest that it is not entirely joyful, nor is it entirely mocking toward God, but rather, astonishment or self-irony in the sense of *yes, yes, sure, just so* . . . and this, in fact, is the meaning of the small difference between the words spoken in Abraham's heart and what he says to God with his mouth. Outwardly, Abraham complains about Ishmael's fate, a complaint that shows no surprise about the possibility of fulfilling the promise, but rather, apprehension about its fulfillment. Neither in his mouth nor in his heart is there any joy about that future. Moreover, he has a sense of discomfort about the future. This somewhat reduces the inconsistency between heart and mouth.

> And Elohim said, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac [yitshaq = he will laugh]. I will keep my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his seed after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him and make him fruitful and multiply him very very much; he will father twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But I will keep my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year. And he finished talking with him, and Elohim rose up above Abraham. And Abraham took Ishmael his son and all the slaves born in his house or bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very day, as Elohim had spoken to him. Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. On that very day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised; and all the men of his house, those born in the house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him. (17:19–27)

Ishmael is the by-product of the early test-firing of God and Sarah. But Sarah did not persist in the experiment. Something human enters her: desire and envy.* Therefore, God tries to start everything afresh with Sarah, and this time, he entrusts the task to her. That is, this God cannot overpower the maternal womb. Though he has the power to block the mother's womb, he is also submissive to her voice, her outcry.

* What is the connection between "human" envy and divine automatism? God's enormous, oppressive envy, of the earth, for example, is uncontrolled. Thus, it explains the automatic character of the divine punishment mechanism.

Sarah's Laugh

> And YHWH appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. He raised his eyes and saw, and behold, three men stood over him. And he saw and he ran toward them from the tent

> door and he bowed to the earth, and said, My lords, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass from over your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and lean under the tree, and I will take a loaf of bread, that you may restore your hearts, and after that you may pass on – since you have passed to your servant. And they said, Indeed, do as you have said. And Abraham hastened to the tent, to Sarah, and said, Quickly knead three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes. And Abraham ran to the cattle, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the lad, and he hastened to prepare it. Then he took butter, and milk, and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate. And they said to him, Where is Sarah your wife? And he said, She is in the tent. and he said, I will surely return to you at this time of life, and Sarah your wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard at the tent door behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in days; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. And Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I have been worn out, shall I have pleasure, and my lord is old? And YHWH said to Abraham, Why did Sarah just laugh, and say, Shall I indeed give birth, and I am old? Is anything too wonderful for YHWH? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time of life, and Sarah shall have a son. But Sarah denied, saying, I did not laugh, for she was afraid. And he said, No, for you did laugh. (18:1–15)

Laughter is not solely for the man of long days but also belongs to the arch-matriarch. Three men, who are God and two of his angels (or three, who are one, YHWH), come to Abraham's tent. They are the bearers of hope, and their purpose is, first of all, to meet the uterine factor, Sarah, as we see from their question: **Where is Sarah your wife?** But Sarah's inner voice (she is no longer barren but blocked in a natural way; see our commentary on "Go for Yourself") reverberates and answers God, who is insulted to the depths of his inner self-image, because she has no confidence in his power. This inner laughter of Sarah's cannot escape God, and he tries to block it.

The joke is funny not only because of the tempting proposal to bring children into the world, but also because of its fulfillment. Sarah is

embarrassed by the anticipated response of her gossipy women neighbors to the amusing sight of an old woman with a huge belly, as she says below: "And YHWH visited Sarah as he had said, and YHWH did to Sarah as he had promised. And Sarah conceived, and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which Elohim had spoken to him. Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac. And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as Elohim had commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. And Sarah said, God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh about me" (21:1–6). Some commentators, as we have said, understand the laughter here as joy, although a few verses later, Ishmael's mocking laughter is mentioned, as Sarah had feared. This is not joyous laughter, but ironic and hurtful laughter, and this can be seen in God's insulted reaction to Sarah's inner laughter.

God decided in advance that Abraham's son would be called "He will laugh," as a *critical* gesture in response to the chuckle of Sarah and Abraham regarding his promise: the harming God chisels Sarah's laughter on her son, and the name Isaac, "he will laugh," is ironic, embossed as a future punishment (as in the carving apparatus of the death penalty in Kafka's "Penal Colony," as if God were a punishment apparatus, a mechanism that almost cannot be regulated).

God will yet find a way to make Abraham's ironic self-assurance submit to him and to eliminate the last remnant of his independence, so that he will be blameless once and for all. He will attempt this with the Binding of Isaac, when Isaac's name will be the ironic reminder of the circumstances of his birth, which now is liable to be nullified by the same One who occasioned his birth by a miracle

In any case, it must be clarified here that God, too, is being tested, not just man. See Genesis, Chapter 28, on Jacob's dream, when Jacob suggests a bargain: YHWH will be God for him if he passes the test and helps him on his way: "Then Jacob made a vow, saying, If Elohim is with me and keeps me in this way that I go, and gives me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then YHWH will be my Elohim, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, will be the house of Elohim, and of all that you give me I will give the tenth to you" (Gen. 28:20–22). God, constantly being tested by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, must prove himself without letup and defend himself against Abraham's skepticism. This is the reason why God equalizes things between him and Abraham by the test of the Binding of Isaac, to make him submit, to make him less assertive or ironic.

Chapter Eleven: The Destruction of Sodom

> And the men rose up from there, and they looked toward Sodom; and Abraham went with them to set them. And YHWH said, Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, and Abraham shall surely be a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by him? For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of YHWH by doing righteousness and justice; so that YHWH may bring to Abraham what he spoke about him. (18:16–19)

God does not want to conceal his thoughts and future actions from Abraham, similar to the interesting way of his not concealing Sarah's inner laugh from him. This is connected to the ethical matter that Abraham will promote: **doing righteousness and justice**. This morality exists when the same rules apply to highborn and lowborn, to poor and rich, and all are equal before the law, and all the nations are included in this. That is to say: the multitude. This implies that morality here is not subject to the pagan principle of *many gods corresponding to many people,* but on that of *the one God in relation to many people*, making everyone altogether equal before the law. The question is: can the one God place himself within the many and not only contain the many?

Abraham appears to side with the pagan multiplicity of Sodom and to try to rescue it. But, you may wonder, what about the Binding of Isaac, when Abraham accepts the command issued by the One to sacrifice his son

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and sets out to implement it with precision, according to God's instructions? I contend that he is doing the opposite then, undermining his submission by putting the One God within the logic of multiplicity (of human beings). This is if we understand the Binding of Isaac as a test that God himself must pass. We will get to this.

> And YHWH said, for the outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, I will go down to see whether or not they have done altogether according to the outcry which has come to me; I will know. So the men turned from there, and went toward Sodom; but Abraham still stood before YHWH. (18:20–22)

God still stands before Abraham, and the other two angel-men turn toward Sodom. Incidentally, it is not entirely clear what the sin of the people of Sodom is. Two matters are presented here:

1. A jarring noise rises from Sodom, which does not let God rest: **the outcry of Sodom** (18:20); **according to the outcry** (18:21); f**or their outcry has become great before YHWH** (19:13).
2. Not only are they bad hosts, as we shall see, but apparently, they also want to rape their guests, to know them, even while giving up intercourse with women, Lot's daughters, who are offered to them in compensation: **Bring them out to us, so we can know them** (19:5).

One might say that the outcry, whether of the sinners or of their victims, is only an external symptom of the sins themselves, that it is not really what bothers God. But it seems that the noise is not merely an outward sign of something else. Even if it represents the actions of the Sodomites, it also signifies their excessiveness, their power, their extremism, and this is what disturbs God even more. Similarly, as we mentioned earlier in our commentary, there is something extravagant about Sodom which disturbs God, and we should not be so unequivocal and assume in advance that Sodom is objectively evil. Here, for the sake of argument, we present a *relativistic* attitude and suggest that the people of Sodom *do not find favor in God's eyes* (*which are those of the author*), which is why he wants to remove them from the world, because of their corrupt ways, their excessive sexuality, which is *perhaps*: their pleasure from homosexual intercourse, from incestuous sex, from orgies, and from carousing in noisy parties that do

not suit divine restraint. From Abraham's words later on, we understand that the categories of righteous and wicked are relevant, but here, one must also understand "wicked" in the sense of someone who does not behave according to God's moralistic principles because sometimes, the boundary is blurred here between doing good to one's fellow and what is defined as good with respect to sexual morality.

> And Abraham approached, and said, Will you even destroy the righteous with the wicked? (18:23)

God, who refrained from the general destruction of mankind with the flood, is now content with destroying a miniature world, with wiping out Sodom and Gomorrah, in parallel with establishing a miniature human species: Israel. It is as if he gave up on trying to satisfy himself with general destruction, but now, this elimination of noise can be satisfying, at least partially, by means of a splendid display of lightning and thunder in response to the noise and noxiousness of the people of Sodom.

But Abraham opposes the human principle to the divine principle of unity in destruction. This must be emphasized: God, or he who acts in the name of the divine principle, is usually drawn to general destruction under the pretext of sanitation, aggressive cleansing. In contrast to this stands the human dimension, which opposes God's ideological radicalism in his desire to correct humanity and elevate it to the supreme good. This ideological radicalism is prepared to destroy everyone, because when you chop down trees, the chips fly, meaning that some unfortunates will suffer along with the rest, and there is no alternative to this, for the sake of reforming humanity, for the sake of engineering it. Therefore, Abraham's greatness is in his refusal to the divinity.

Similarly, God's obsessive urge to destroy the righteous together with the wicked, only in order to cope with what is seen as bad, is actually an effort to satisfy the primal desire to destroy the barrier, the difference between one thing and another, and move toward non-differentiation, as in the time of *tohu vavohu*. Although at first, God wanted to distance himself from non-differentiation, sometimes, the effort to combat evil as something that abolishes differentiation actually nullifies differentiation because of the divine punishment mechanism that wants to destroy everything completely, large and small. Thus, the unity of nothingness comes into being, the wasteland (and this wasteland then brings about *multiplicity* within the single God—a multiplicity of zeroes).

> Perhaps there are fifty righteous within the city; will you then destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous are as the wicked. Far be that from you. Shall not the judge of all the earth do judgment? And YHWH said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake. And Abraham answered, Behold, I have taken upon myself to speak to Adonai, and I am dust and ashes. Perhaps the fifty righteous will lack five, will you destroy the whole city for five? And he said, I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there. And again he spoke to him, and said, Suppose forty are found there. He answered, For forty I will not do it. Then he said, Let not Adonai be angry, and I may speak. Suppose thirty are found there. And he said, I will not do it, if I find thirty there. And he said, Behold, I have taken upon myself to speak to Adonai. Perhaps twenty are found there. He answered, I will not destroy for the twenty. And he said, Let not Adonai be angry, and I will speak just another time. Perhaps ten are found there. He answered, I will not destroy for the ten. And YHWH went his way when he had finished speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place. (18:24–33)

50, 45, 40, 30, 20, 10.

The bargaining between Abraham and God falls into two sub-series:
50, 45, 40,
with a difference of five between the numbers, and then
40, 30, 20, 10,
with a difference of ten between the numbers.
But the first series can also be included in the second one: 50, (45), 40, 30, 20, 10, because the expression, **Perhaps the fifty righteous will lack five, will you destroy the whole city for five,** represents an intermediary stage of half the difference of ten as a miniature step in the larger-scale bargaining. Thus, we have two interwoven series of bargaining. Abraham uses a double manipulation with God: one series with steps of ten, and within it, a series with steps of five, from fifty to forty-five, and from forty-five to forty (and it should be emphasized that the larger series stops at ten, which is the size of the step).

Does this tell us how discouraged Abraham is in the face of God's omnipotent desire to destroy? Abraham's greatness derives from his not letting one series of maneuvering do its work, but he applies a second one in parallel, perhaps to confuse the One, to plant an error in him, to break the automatic mechanism of destruction. Indeed, God responds to this maneuver, to bargaining with Abraham, as though he enjoys playing with him, because the purpose of bargaining in the market is not only to obtain something at a lower price. It is also a cultural practice, a game between people, seeking the common denominator between a person and the other, a common denominator that will satisfy both of them, with enjoyment of a cultural dialogue with clear rules, which include not crossing certain boundaries of courtesy between people.

Strangely, it is not clear what Abraham gained from this bargaining, because it is not told whether God *really* counted the ten. Did God trick Abraham? Did Abraham fall into a trap and become an innocent, despite his cleverness versus God? Perhaps this is Abraham's way of acting against God's black sense of humor. It is possible to see Abraham's action as a prank, a humorous trick, a satirical rejoinder to God, in the sense of moving down a series of differences of ten or five (while there is also an increasing series of differences from five to ten), in the direction of zero. This parodic game echoes God's desire for zero, for a multitude of zeros, for a sea of zeros, in destruction like that of the flood. That is why Abraham offers a series of differences that move in the direction of zero, in the direction of nullity, in order to deflect God's desire to obtain his wish.

Perhaps this is the key to understanding the Binding of Isaac, when Abraham's confrontation with God's desire for a victim is not submissive acceptance, but a parodic mirror image in which, with a provocative gesture, Abraham shows God his desire for the non-differentiation of nothingness (*tohu vavohu*), a gesture that says: *You want death? Here you are! Here's the nullity of death.* This is Abraham's cunning, his facetiousness, which is not total belief in totality, but humanity that bargains with (the one who presents himself as) the infinite, who does give people hope for the future, but also threatens constantly to take that future away toward zero.

> And the two angels came to Sodom in the evening; and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. And Lot saw them and rose toward them, and bowed with his face to the

> earth, and he said, behold please, my lords, turn aside, please, to your servant's house and spend the night, and wash your feet; and you may rise early and go on your way. And they said, No; we will spend the night in the street. And he urged them strongly; and they turned aside to him and entered his house; and he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate. (19:1–3)

As earlier commentators said, and Nehama Leibowitz sharpened the insight in her book on Genesis, there is something ridiculous about Lot, who tries to act like Abraham, from his waiting outside to the manner of his hospitality, insisting upon hosting the men. Perhaps this makes it clearer to us that the story of Sodom contains an element of parody, as noted above.

> Before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, from the young to the old, all the people to the last. And they called to Lot, saying to him, Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them. And Lot went out to them to the entrance and closed the door behind him, and he said, Please, my brothers, do not act wickedly. Behold, I have two daughters who have not known man; I will bring them out to you, and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shadow of my beam. (19:4–8)

The men of Sodom are interested in knowing the guests, and we assume that they had a sexual interest in them (Rashi: "that we may know them—homosexual intercourse"). **From the young to the old**, meaning all the males who want to do something to the guests (who are apparently men, though they might have appeared feminine to the people of Sodom, since they are objects of desire). In response, Lot offers them women, his daughters. The sin of the men of Sodom is apparently double: (1) they do not give up on the guests, on their behinds; (2) they choose to give up heterosexual relations, even in the horrifying form of rape. However, it is possible to understand **to know** [lada'at] in an innocent way: to familiarize. The men of Sodom realized that Lot's guests were unusual, unexpected, a special kind of extra-terrestrial attraction, which has to be known from close up, since it is not clear whether they are divine. This is perhaps

the excessiveness of the men of Sodom (in relation to the excessiveness of the angels), who, besides being brutal (for all excess appears brutal to a puritan), are also curious, seeking to transgress the ordinary. In any case, clearly there is a mighty, powerful desire here, the object of which disturbs God (to seize the men, etc.), as does the urgency and obsessiveness of their behavior, its loudness.

> And they said, Go away, and they said, Someone comes to dwell, and he insists on judging. Now we will deal worse with you than with them. Then they pressed hard against the man Lot and drew near to break the door. (19:9)

From these words, we may understand another stratum in the desire of the Sodomites: the fear that the men have come to impose order, judgment, in their carousing, in their excessive hedonism.

> But the men sent their hands and brought Lot into the house to them, and shut the door. And they struck with blindness the men who were at the door of the house, from the small to the great, so that they wearied themselves groping for the door. (19:10–11)

The angel-men protect Lot and his family and dazzle the Sodomites with powerful, overwhelming light. This is a material metaphor of light as opposed to darkness: the light blinds the person who sees himself as superior to darkness, the light that was created to dispel evil and darkness, because evil is, as it were, not intrinsic but rather the lack of light, the lack of goodness, and also *the lack of differentiation between light and darkness.* But this light, which sets itself up as the defender of the world against darkness and evil, in its great goodness also blinds; it is so powerful in its great violence that, amazingly, it is dazzling *to the point of blindness, creating darkness-evil.*

> And the men said to Lot, Have you any one else here? Son-in-law, sons, daughters, and everyone that is yours in the city, take them out of the place; for we are destroying this place, because there is great outcry before YHWH, and YHWH sent us to destroy it. And Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law, the takers of his daughters, and he said, rise, leave this place; for YHWH is destroying the city. But he seemed to be jesting to his sons-in-law. (19:12–14)

Jesting here means taking it easy, joshing—and that is the insulting meaning of the root "to laugh" (*tsadi-ḥet-quf*) in Genesis: jocular laughter bears the sound of irony, insulting God (as with the laughter of Abram and Sarah), insulting Sarah, and annoying Lot's sons-in-law with its tone. This laughter bears within it the threat of great danger for the future, and it cannot be borne, so it is freed with threatening energy, either in the one who laughs or the one laughed at.

> As the dawn rose, the angels urged Lot, saying, Rise, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you perish in the sin of the city. (19:15)

Lot, his wife, and his two daughters are a total of four souls, fewer than the difference of five, which is half the difference of ten, which was also the final number at which Abraham settled with God. This also went wrong when Lot's wife was transformed into a pillar of salt. In any case, the three remaining figures complicate the matter of couples, man and wife, aside from the fact that the father lies with his two daughters later on.

> And he lingered; so the men seized him by the hand and by his wife's hand and the hand of his two daughters, in the mercy of YHWH, and they brought him forth and set him outside the city. And when they had brought them out, they said, Flee for your soul; do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley; flee to the hills, lest you perish. And Lot said to them, Oh, no, my lords; behold, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have shown me great kindness in saving my soul; but I cannot flee to the hills, lest the evil overtake me, and I die. Behold, yonder city is near enough to flee to, and it is little. Let me escape there, is it not little? And my soul will be saved. He said to him, Behold, I raise your face on this thing, too, not to overthrow the city you spoke of. Hurry, escape to there; for I can do nothing until you arrive there. Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar. The sun rose on the earth and Lot came to Zoar. (19:16–23)

Lot is held in contempt by a number of commentators because he does not know how to fulfill the Abrahamic principles, but in fact, he embodies the average man, the ordinary man, everyman, one of the people, whose

life most of us lead, trying to avoid all sorts of ideologies and institutions. Abraham was also like that at first, but he encountered the domineering presence of God, who cast him into history as someone who shapes his own fate, someone who does not live only day-to-day.

> And YHWH rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from YHWH out of heaven; and he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and the growth of the earth. And Lot's wife looked from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt. And Abraham rose early in the morning to the place where he had stood before YHWH, and he looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and toward all the land of the valley, and beheld, and lo, the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace. So it was that, when Elohim destroyed the cities of the valley, Elohim remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out from the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelt. (19:24–29)

At last, God is satisfied (and then, he suddenly remembers Abraham, the way he remembered Noah after the flood, waking up from the sweat of enjoyment of the orgy of destruction). And we advance toward Lot, the miserable father.

> And Lot went up out of Zoar, and dwelt in the hills with his two daughters, for he was afraid to dwell in Zoar; so he dwelt in a cave, he and his two daughters. And the first-born said to the younger, Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of all the earth. Let us go and make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may make seed live from our father. So they made their father drink wine that night; and the first-born went in, and lay with her father; he did not know in her lying down and her rising. And on the next day, the first-born said to the younger, Behold, I lay last night with my father; let us make him drink wine tonight also; then you go in and lie with him, and we will make seed live from our father. And they made their father drink wine that night also; and the younger rose and lay with him; and he did not know her lying down and her rising. And both the

> daughters of Lot were pregnant by their father. The first-born bore a son, and called his name Moab; he is the father of the Moabites to this day. The younger also bore a son, and called his name Ben-ammi; he is the father of the Ammonites to this day. (19:30–38)

As in the story of Noah and his sons (with a retrospective satirical gesture one might make the absurd suggestion that the story of Noah and his young son is a parody of what comes later, about an offspring who assumes that the outside world has been destroyed, and there are no more women, and he, Ham, lies with his father to produce offspring from him, and here, too, the father is drunk and does not know at first what has been done to him), so, too, in the story of Lot and his daughters, and once again, the injured father is helpless in his sexual potency. His erect phallus is actually his vulnerability, his nakedness. The women who were supposed to be the object delivered to those evil men of Sodom become vengeful against male-paternal activeness. The women who were offered—just as Sarah was offered to Pharaoh and to Abimelech by Abraham, and like Hagar, who was offered to Abraham by Sarah, and Rebekah, who was offered to the same Abimelech again—the object of delivery is, in fact, the source of the world, and this object assumes that Sodom is the world, and that the whole world has once again been destroyed by God, and therefore, it refuses to be passive.

Let us emphasize here as well that the older daughter encourages the younger one to share the booty and even to enjoy herself, in an act of sisterhood, in contrast to the *primal* envy of *that which comes afterward*: Cain and Abel, God and the earth, Sarah and Hagar.

We go on to another sexual incident, discussed above in our commentary on "Go for Yourself," regarding the encounter of Abraham and Sara with Abimelech.

> From there Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Negeb, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur; and he sojourned in Gerar. And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister. And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. But Elohim came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, you are a dead man, because of the woman whom you have taken; for she is married to a man. Now Abimelech had not approached her; so he said, Adonai, will you slay an innocent people?

Did he not himself say to me, She is my sister? And she herself said, He is my brother. In the innocence of my heart and the cleanliness of my hands I have done this. Then Elohim said to him in the dream, Yes, I know that you have done this in the innocence of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me; therefore I did not let you touch her. Now restore the man's wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you, and you shall live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you, and all that are yours. So Abimelech rose early in the morning, and called all his servants, and told them all these things in their ears; and the men were very much afraid. Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said to him, What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done. And Abimelech said to Abraham, What did you see, that you did this thing? And Abraham said, I did it because I thought, There is no fear of Elohim in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife. Besides she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. And when Elohim caused me to wander from my father's house, I said to her, This is the kindness you must do me: at every place to which we come, say of me, He is my brother. And Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male and female slaves, and gave them to Abraham, and restored Sarah his wife to him. And Abimelech said, Behold, my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you. To Sarah he said, Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver; it is your vindication in the eyes of all who are with you; and before every one you are righted. And Abraham prayed to Elohim; and Elohim healed Abimelech, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children. For YHWH had surely closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife. (20:1–18)

Chapter Twelve: The Birth of Isaac

That which takes place now between God and Sarah is the height of the confrontation between the male-God factor and the feminine factors around it. This confrontation is dialectical and multifarious, and it includes cooperation in giving birth to the world and to progeny, but also envy on the part of God, and the blocking of women's wombs. Now God, in his great bounty, will grant a child to the woman, though she is very old (perhaps to prove that he, too, is a partner in the work of giving birth), and she is grateful to him, because for years, she had suffered from barrenness and the contempt of the people around her, although now too, she will suffer from mockery for having a baby at such an advanced age. The Binding of Isaac will put an end to this high point: God, who assumes that the arch-matriarch is ungrateful, will demonstrate the strength of his arm and try to take back the child, to whom he relates as the one who brought him into being, and he does so without informing Sarah, as he had done up to now.

> And YHWH visited Sarah as he had said, and YHWH did to Sarah as he had said. (21:1)

As Rashi said: he impregnated her. God enters Sarah and brings Isaac into being. That is, the paternity principle intervenes in the world and inseminates the arch-father's wife. This motive will evolve into the Virgin Mary, when God the father, via the spirit, brings Jesus into the world, formerly Isaac, and later, his desire will be to reclaim the promised son, who belongs to him, and perhaps, as we have hinted, as technical remorse for

I. Benyamini, *A Critical Theology of Genesis*,
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not implementing the autonomic punishment for the incest of Sarai and Abram and to take back the fruit of the womb.

> And Sarah conceived, and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which Elohim had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac. (21:2–3)

As we mentioned, giving the name "He will laugh" is especially significant, for naming inscribes the newborn's fate upon him. This fate is connected by the umbilical cord to the laughter of Sarah and Abraham, who, upon hearing God's promise of the child's future birth, responded with a laugh of surprise toward God, who was trying. Isaac was therefore bound at birth with his name.

> And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as Elohim had commanded him. (21:4)

The carving of Isaac's body began at his birth. He is the first baby boy to be marked both with his name and with the covenant at his birth, unlike the earlier Ishmael and Abraham, who performed the commandment when they were older.

> And Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. (21:5)

Abraham's son was born at such a round-numbered age, when the count begins again, as at the age of zero.

> And Sarah said, Elohim has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me. And she said, Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would suckle children? For I have borne him a son in his old age. (21:6–7)

Sarah brings up the matter of laughter again. The commentators claim this is an expression of joy, as Rashi says: "*They will be happy for me, and there is a Midrash: many barren women were visited along with her, many sick people were cured on that day, many prayers were answered with her, and there was great laughter in the world*." But perhaps Sarah is still apprehensive about the response of her women neighbors: **[they will] laugh over me**, in the

sense of laughing at her. One must simply imagine an old woman bending over to suckle at the foot of her grave. If so, this can actually be understood as an aggressive expression: *God laughed at me, and so will the people who hear about it.* God is a joker, making her into an object of laughter. Or else, there is an intermediary stage here between the positive and the negative, between joy and mockery, like the laughter itself, which contains both positive joy and laughter at Sarah's expense. Therefore, the laughter Sarah is talking about is the laughter of embarrassment, which comes from a mixed feeling: embarrassment that also contains joy because, despite everything, a son was born, but also recognition that the situation is ridiculous, the birth of a son to an old woman. Thus, one must read **Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would suckle children? For I have borne him a son in his old age** as *who would believe such a thing would happen? Good God, it is unbelievable, and rather embarrassing.*

Sarah, as in her struggle with Hagar, is represented here as an assertive woman, not necessarily submissive to a man. She will be punished for this. Sarah's heroism does not lie in her being righteous before God, but in her being assertive toward the masculine God, in her being alert and clearheaded, seeing reality for what it is without prettifying it: Hagar mocks her and is driven away; God makes a joke at her expense, and she responds immediately:

> And the child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, joking. (21:8–9)

What Sarah had been most apprehensive about actually happens: Ishmael jokes around, mocks (in Hebrew: *metsaḥeq*, from the same root as "to laugh"). Sarah senses that this mockery is directed at her.

> So she said to Abraham, Expel this slave woman and her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit with my son Isaac. And the thing was very bad in Abraham's eyes on account of his son. And Elohim said to Abraham, Let it not be bad in your eyes for the lad and for your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, listen to her voice, for through Isaac shall your seed be named. And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your seed. (21:10–13)

God accedes to Sarah's demands, as it was when Hagar was driven out of the house earlier. In the head-on collision of the masculine and feminine factors, the male factors represent a vain vision, in which it ostensibly appears that they control the fate of the world, including the feminine factors, but in fact, they envy the female ability to give birth, which is truly an occult ability, not comprehensible to them; women drive the actions of man and nature in a quiet, confident manner, without acting with masculine violence and bullying. The male agents, including the patriarchs and God, are made to realize that they have no alternative to submission to women's demands. In her weakness, her delicacy, woman rules over the men of creation: over God, over Adam, over the angels, over Lot, and over Abraham.

> And Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. And the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. And she went, and sat down over against him at about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And as she sat over against him, and she raised her voice and wept. And Elohim heard the voice of the lad; and an angel of Elohim called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, What is with you, Hagar? Fear not; for Elohim has heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him fast with your hand; for I will make him a great nation. Then Elohim opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the lad a drink. And Elohim was with the lad, and he grew up; he lived in the desert and became a great archer. He lived in the desert of Paran; and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt. (21:14–21)

We hereby part with Hagar and Ishmael and turn to Isaac, to his fate. Before this, we read of another encounter between Abraham and Abimelech, about which we have commented in the chapter on "Go for Yourself":

> And at that time Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army said to Abraham, Elohim is with you in all that you do; now therefore swear to me here by Elohim that you will not deal falsely with me or

> with my offspring or with my posterity, but as I have dealt loyally with you, you will deal with me and with the land where you have sojourned. And Abraham said, I will swear. When Abraham complained to Abimelech about a well of water which Abimelech's servants had stolen, Abimelech said, I do not know who has done this thing; you did not tell me, and I have not heard of it until today. And Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a covenant. Abraham set seven ewes of the flock apart. And Abimelech said to Abraham, What are these seven ewes that you have set apart? And he said, These seven ewes you will take from my hand, that you may be a witness for me that I dug this well. Therefore that place was called Beer-sheba [the literal Hebrew meaning of the place name is Seventh Well, or, alternatively, the well of the oath]; because there both of them swore an oath. So they made a covenant at Beer-sheba. Then Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army rose up and returned to the land of the Philistines. Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beer-sheba, and called there on the name of YHWH, the eternal El. And Abraham sojourned many days in the land of the Philistines. (21:22–34)

* *

His power is apparently great, as people learn especially at times of birth or destruction, both of which are forms of God's joking. When God is capable of promising old people that they can bring children into this world, this is a pleasant joke, but he is also capable of destroying by means of his sense of humor, which occasionally destroys without killing, as with the Tower of Babel. Sometimes, it is very destructive, eliminating most living animals, as in the flood. Until, against God's black humor, as he amuses himself with his creatures, a man arises, who does not partake of the mocking plan but presents the principle that the divinity is not perfect in his justice, or even worse, that in his perfection, he is not just, because this total perfection demands the implementation of a sanitary discourse that does not allow for human existence at all. Therefore, we have Abraham's cunning, the cunning of hope for the future, which is expressed in his conduct in the world, in his way of addressing the choleric, nasty jesting aspect of

the divinity and in paying him back in his own coin. Abraham amuses himself with God, and God already cooperates with the amusement-evasion in the bazaar before the destruction of Sodom. And this joke has remained with us since then.*

* In *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, Freud stated that there is something special about Jewish humor, in that it is democratic and critical of everyone, from the lowest to the most exalted and holy, God. This joke is also connected to the Jews' suffering from the gap between God's constant promise and the alien present.

Chapter Thirteen: The Binding of God

Until now, most scholarship on the figure of Abraham has taken the Binding of Isaac as a point of departure. First, commentators studied the Binding of Isaac, and then, they extended Abraham's apparent submissiveness to his character in general. We wish to reverse the order: we read the story of Abraham step by step, each verse on its own, as if there were not yet anything afterward. Only now have we reached the Binding of Isaac, coming to this story with the information we have so far absorbed.

Is it possible to read the biblical text differently, to sever oneself from the Christology of the Binding of Isaac as a stage toward the crucifixion? Generally, from the Sages to modern commentators, Abraham is presented as entirely faithful to God. In contrast to the self-sacrificial emphasis of Christianity, the Jewish attitude might perhaps be summarized in Levinas' words, when he criticized Kierkegaard's view of the Binding of Isaac: he emphasized Abraham's response to God, to the absolute Other: "Here I am." That is to say, obedience out of love for God (moreover, for Levinas, the power of the biblical story lies in the moral victory over the sacrificial attitude). The Jewish attitude of obedience was pushed to an extreme in certain periods by commentators who raised the possibility that Isaac was actually sacrificed by God, killed, or that at least Abraham and also Isaac responded to God's demand with joy. This complex shows how hard it is to extricate these Christian and Jewish attitudes from each other's embrace. The Christian idea of the sacrificial victim is sunk deeply in Jewish soil, waiting to burst out.

I. Benyamini, *A Critical Theology of Genesis*,
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Both in Jewish and Christian commentary, Abraham is usually represented as submissive to God, and among most commentators, this supposed submissiveness in the scene of the Binding of Isaac is projected upon the image of Abraham throughout the Book of Genesis. Incidentally, another apologetic possibility found in Judaism is that Abraham did not understand God's words correctly, as in Maimonides, or that he heard a voice that did not necessarily represent God, as in Heschel.

The matter of representing Abraham as submissive or not is of particular importance because the figure of Abraham was a model of submission in the Jewish and Christian religions (and later on, in Islam), which still are the foundation of Western culture. A vigorous summary of this submissiveness is found in Kierkegaard's "Fear and Trembling", but the most prominent source is in Paul's Epistles to the Galatians and the Romans, in which Abraham is presented as the model of faith in God, as the author of the epistles creates the obsessive, conscientious superego for us (and thus, in fact, he creates the modern anxiety-prone subject, at least according to Lacan, as in Seminar 7).

Following in the footsteps of Martin Buber, we may ask what the meaning is of the word "faith." Should it be taken in the Christian sense of dogmatic belief in the existence of God? Or is it to be taken in the Jewish sense of dependency and loyalty? We try to avoid both of these alternatives by suggesting that Abraham in the text of the Bible is not necessarily a believer in God in the dogmatic sense, nor even in the dependent-submissive sense, but rather, more in the sense that we take to be traditionalist. This refers to the traditionalism found today among quite a few Jews in Israel, many of whom come from Muslim countries, and some of whom are Ashkenazi (and of course, many ordinary Christians and Muslims, as opposed to the theological elites, are also *traditional* in our sense of the term).

We argue that this traditionalism is not necessarily the result of a discourse of *loyalty*. It is distinguished by vacillation as to whether it believes and whether it is indeed loyal. Therefore, we define it as *soft faith*. It is a faith of dependency: not rigid, extreme, or absolute dependency, but rather, functional and sober dependency. It is a faith that has resort to the divine as it develops within the conditions of family existence, within the desire for a future of good health and affluence, which will come tomorrow. It is a faith that begins with an inner desire for that tomorrow, deriving from an inner voice, a delicate voice that is not sure of itself. However, this inner voice cannot subsist on its own, and in the course of human history, this voice always loses ground to a threatening, outer voice, the

representation of God, a representation defended aggressively by religious institutions.

Moreover, this non-institutional traditionalism contains a cunning, pseudo-innocent relationship to the Other, that great Other, especially when embodied in religion, the state, the army, and so on. It is not a revolutionary attitude of non-conformism, but one of seemingly loyal and flexible existence within the framework, with small subversions of the external demands of the institution: like going to the synagogue on the Sabbath and driving a car afterward, though this is forbidden by orthodox rabbis. There is literal fulfillment of the Other's commandments, but without deep willingness to do so. To a certain degree, the words of de Certeau on the *Practice of Everyday Life* in the capitalist world describe this subjective position.

This traditionalist conception, from which one can still extricate the inner voice of the future from the whirl of bombastic religious obsessiveness, is what we wish to project upon the figure of Abraham in the Book of Genesis.

The figure of God in the Book of Genesis can be presented, as we have done throughout the present book, as someone who creates the world for it to be Other for him when he creates himself as God, as One who rules over the Other, the world. The creation of the various objects served God in his desire to rule over this Other, the world, so that it would not slip out of control. Therefore, it is characteristic of the six days of creation that hardly anything is created as a simple, static object. Rather, things are created as active essences with a purpose, which is usually to be a supervisor, an agent, like a vassal to God the king, to rule over the lower elements that have been created beforehand. Thus, God proceeds from the creation of light, which rules over darkness, the creation of the heavenly bodies, which rule over light and darkness and prevent them from reuniting, to the creation of man, the purpose of whose existence and whose definition is to rule over the earth and its creatures.

As a male-paternal agent, who creates by means of words and speech, God harbors aggressive envy of the uterine factor in the world, because of its fertility, which competes with him. This can be proven retrospectively by assembling the instances in which God acts aggressively against the earth. Every time he wants to punish man for his sins, the one who is actually punished is the earth, the womb: **cursed be the earth for you**. In parallel, we see how God shows his ambivalent attitude toward the human womb, which he blocks, from Eve to Sarah and the wives of Abimelech.

In fact, the main subject of the Book of Genesis is human kinship relations, the issue of incest. God's primary struggle is the creation of the Other as an object, while, until the creation, God was an integral part of it. The creation of God and the world, as well as of the objects in the world, is an act of separation, so that sins can be understood neither as non-human nor immoral acts. Rather, they oppose the principle of separation. This explains God's obsession with incest as a doubly bad action: it nullifies the differentiation of children born from different wombs and it also prevents the dispersion of the family unit throughout the earth. As noted, God's desire in the Book of Genesis is for man to be fruitful and multiply and spread across the face of the earth in order to rule over it.

Now we come to Abram and Sarai. We argue that one cannot understand the commandment, **Go for Yourself**, as an external demand addressed to man by the absolute Other. In our reading of the biblical text, we saw that the departure of Abram and his family from Ur of the Chaldeans for the Land of Canaan did not come from an external command, but rather, from a simple, domestic family decision. Perhaps the assumption that a change in location would bring an improvement in fortune brought the family to move, hoping that the situation of barrenness would end. This means that Abram moved because of an inner voice. Thus, it is possible to take God's speech to Abraham as the imposition of an outer voice on that inner voice. Abram and his family move in the direction of Canaan but stop in Haran, tarrying on the way. Only then is God revealed to Abram, when he asks Abram to persist in the family mission. He makes great promises whose meaning is unblocking Sarai's womb. One may conclude from this that the original movement toward Canaan derived from that barrenness.

The rest is familiar—Sarah and Hagar and Ishmael—until the miraculous birth of Isaac. God is willing to unseal Sarah's womb after she has become barren for ordinary biological reasons, as an elderly woman: his spirit enters her womb. Isaac is born. But as his name hints, "He will laugh" is born in a context that is problematic for God: both Abraham and Sarah react with mocking laughter at God and his plan of action.

True, Ishmael is the firstborn son to his father, but Isaac is firstborn to his mother, and in the cultures of the Ancient Near East, as in the ancient Israelite religion, the birthright belonged to the gods. Here, in God's inner drama of creation versus aggression toward the fertile womb, God acts belligerently toward the human womb, demanding the return of his son Isaac to it. The start of the scene does not include the matter of faith, but rather, the commandment to restore to God what belongs to him.

The conclusion of the episode can be justified, including the angel's words about faith, as God's renunciation of this apparently capricious demand.

Why capriciousness? Does it come from the depths of God's soul? Not necessarily. It can be argued that there is no spiritual or psychological depth here, but rather, retaliation against a competitive action. But God's action is also *not* capricious. On the contrary: it is automatic, mechanical. As can be proved from the reading of the Book of Genesis, God's destructive actions are part of an automatic mechanism within the divinity, an urge to eliminate and destroy, an urge against which God himself is nearly helpless against the mechanism. Elohim might also be a machine. Thus, it is in the story of the flood and also in the story of Abimelech, when God seals his wives' wombs: when God wants to unseal them, he asks Abimelech to act in such a way that the automatic curse will be lifted.

What about Abraham and the Binding of Isaac? Must we understand Abraham's silence the way the biblical author presents it to us, as containing a deep truth, which is how Erich Auerbach presents it in *Mimesis*, as does Derrida, in *The Gift of Death* (Derrida, while opposing Kierkegaard's reading, persists in the logic of seeking the secret behind the Binding of Isaac)? Not necessarily. We can remain with the silence as one that need not be interpreted, one with no secret behind it. The silence is what it is: silence. It is an action. The truth of the text is found in what is explicit, not what is occult. Here, the truth of the text is the presentation of Abraham's automatic action in response to the automatic commandment of God.

Abraham's action can be understood as retaliation against God. He puts God to the test. He is not necessarily submissive to the demand, and there is neither discomfiture nor deep fear here, rather presence: **here I am**, a mirror image that is directed back at God. Abraham measures out the action of implementation precisely in response to the precise demand of bringing the son as a sacrificial victim, assuming that someone will give in first. Abraham is neither a sucker nor a god. Someone must break first, and it will be God. God passes the test. He gives up on taking back what had been promised—the future. He agrees to return to the dimension of the inner voice.

Now let us read these dreadful verses closely.

> And it was after these things and Elohim tested Abraham, and he said to him, Abraham! And he said, Here am I. (22:1)

God tests Abraham after making the promise, as the voice of the future, but now he revokes the dimension of hope for a while. Abraham's answer, **Here am I**, does not necessarily convey readiness, but simply: *You were looking for me? Here I am*. God seeks, and usually, up to now in Genesis, he has been looking for sinners, Adam and Eve chewing on the flesh of the fruit of the tree of knowledge with gusto, and Cain the murderer, and he descends to examine the people of Babel and of Sodom. But here, he asks in order to test, and the test relates only to the future.

> And he said, Please take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go for yourself to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you. And Abraham rose early in the morning, and he saddled his ass, and he took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. And Abraham said to his young men, Stay here with the ass; I and the lad will go over there and bow down, and return to you. And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. And they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, My father! And he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold, the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, Elohim will see for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son. And the two of them went together. And they came to the place of which Elohim had told him. Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and he bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. And Abraham sent his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. (22:2–10)

Abraham is not a Kierkegaardian or Leibowitzian knight of faith. That is God's fantasy, which we have learned to internalize. God roams the earth in search of the one who will rescue him from the rest of humanity in his hour of trouble, because God knows his own desire for destruction, but his mischievous desire for destruction cannot stop there, with this one per-

son. He also torments that person a little, while promising him the future, and it is all done in a half-serious way, because his mind is not perfect the way we human beings, ever since Adam, have fantasized about this God.

However, Abraham tests God as well. Abraham is only an automaton in relation to his wife, the arch-matriarch, the totally threatening, an automaton that listens to her about Hagar. But he is never an automaton in relation to God. Why in the world should he be that way, since by now, he knows God's jocular ways. So when God calls to him, he answers, *I am here, God, what do you want?* God reveals his wish, merely another of his laughs, a black laugh, a mocking laugh, as we know from good laughter, that always has an evil side: "And Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. And Sarah said, Elohim has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me. And she said, Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would suckle children? For I have borne him a son in his old age. And the child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, joking" (21:5–9). As noted, from the language about Ishmael, we have learned that this joking is what we would call chilling out in our current vernacular.

Maybe Abraham is only the knight of laughter, a knight in that he knows how to behave in response to the divine command, which seeks to test him, and from his experience with God, it seems that he will play the game of the automaton here, so as to determine how far God is willing to go with him, how far Abraham will allow that to God, or: how far God will allow that to Abraham, like a child who tests his parents. The actions are ostensibly automatic, as a response to God's precise demand, like a parodic imitation of the Yahwist automatism: **Please take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go for yourself to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.** God emphasizes: Take your son, your only son. What about Ishmael? And Go for Yourself, a reference to **Go for yourself to the Land of Canaan**. But there, it was the expression of a supposedly earlier test, a test that was not capricious but a demand upon Abraham to fulfill the family mission, while here, in ironic fashion, the Go for Yourself is supposed to destroy precisely that family hope, which had just now been fulfilled. But here, too, in this precision, God reveals and conceals, sends Abraham to the broad land of Moriah, where God will indicate the exact

location for him as a guide. Now God is the guide, and the joke is that the God who had guided him up to now is using the act of guiding to destroy the voice of guidance.*

* God's rhetoric is an effort to persuade so as to plant the feeling in the kernel of subjectivity that this is Abraham's will. This rhetoric expresses a dimension of softness—"Please take," "Go for yourself"—as if it were your action, for your sake, like the witty repetition of the first "Go for yourself," to Canaan, which really was a subjective action taken over by the external force. But here, God's external action tries to make the subject believe that it is his will.

And what about Abraham? **And Abraham rose early in the morning, and he saddled his ass, and he took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.** He does give the appearance of implementing the order with precision. He rises early. That is to say, he obeys the command in the most literal way possible, even with enthusiasm. He saddles his ass, and this is not the messiah's ass, but an ordinary donkey, and he takes the two young men with him and Isaac, and Isaac here is like an object, like another item. Abraham splits the wood for the burnt offering, rising and doing. The silence of Abraham (and the author) need not be interpreted as silence indicating oppression, dread, but as Abraham's refusal to respond to God's facetiousness, a refusal expressed in obedience, with knowledge that the divinity is not necessarily perfect, and it only wants to confuse man, because it is also confused within itself, and all that remains for man in the face of such a power is to test it back, within the test itself. That means showing God the scene he fantasizes in an imitative mirror: *Here, this is how it looks, if you want it. Let us see who will break first, how far you will keep playing the game, when you will stop me.*

Then, **On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from far away. And Abraham said to his young men, Stay here with the ass; I and the lad will go over there and bow down, and return to you.** Abraham sees the place, and he tells the lads, so that Isaac can hear, that they are going to bow down and return, both of them, and this is because he knows that this will happen, not just to deceive Isaac. Could it be that the father's cruelty lies only in that he is willing to take the risk that the sacrifice to God will take place?

And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. And they

went both of them together. Abraham remains as cunning as he was, like God in his cunning, and he performs the task, walking with his son. Isaac's whole being is in his name. He was born from laughter, and therefore, his death will also be in laughter, God says to himself, also in laughter, perhaps in revenge against Sarah for laughing. Here's a joke for you!

And Isaac said to his father Abraham, My father! And he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold, the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, Elohim will see for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son. And the two of them went together. Isaac, the son who was born of laughter itself, does not know what laughter is. Rather, he is innocent, unlike Abraham and in contrast to God, and he is not aware of the arm-wrestling laughter between them. In his innocence, he asks his father, who answers him, not with a white lie, but in speech between them that is hidden from God's voice, intimate speech between them, only between them, and God supposedly does not hear, but with the intention that he will hear and know that Abraham knows about the power game between them. What is this driving at in the end? **Elohim will see for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.**

And they came to the place of which Elohim had told him, Abraham built the altar there, and arranged the wood, and he bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. And Abraham sent his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. This is the fateful moment, when Abraham, the author of the Book of Genesis, and we, the readers, know the end of the story. Abraham performs the mission with precision till the last moment, with one eye looking upward, to see when the divine automaton will break down. The knife does not manage **to slay his son**, because Abraham waits a moment, for a tiny bit of time, to enable God to intervene and break down.

> And the angel of YHWH called to him from heaven and said, Abraham, Abraham! And he said, Here am I. And he said, Do not send your hand to the lad and do nothing to him, for now I know that you fear Elohim, and you did not withhold your son, your only son, from me. (22:11–12)

Abraham, who knows that his God hesitates, laughs, desires, is confused and confusing, is angry, rushes to seize the ram, to slaughter it quickly

instead of his son, so that God's desire for sons, God's desire for dark jokes, will not suddenly be satisfied. Therefore, he sacrifices the animal instead of his son, as though he had sacrificed his son to satisfy God.

> And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place YHWH will see; as it is said to this day, On the mount of YHWH it will be seen. (22:13–14)

Abraham, the knight of laughter, calls the place **YHWH will see**, because God revealed himself as an angel of God without the cunning of concealment and with a final promise that indeed Abraham's future and that of his descendants will be brilliant. God has passed the test.

Genesis Continues . . .

Abraham's sending to his former home to take Rebecca as a wife for Isaac is a "Go for Yourself" in reverse, movement in the opposite direction, to the old homeland, to the family. So, too, are the stories of Jacob when he marries Rachel and Leah, who are family relations, the daughters of Laban, from the paternal family in the broad sense, and not from the Canaanites, and of Isaac, who has learned to tell a truthful lie about Rebeka, his sister-wife, his sister in the broad sense, from his father, in his behavior toward Abimelech. Also: Jacob and Rebeka, his mother, deceive Isaac, the blind father, and in contrast to the moralism of the Gospels, steal the birthright from Esau, so that Isaac, the father, cannot bless Esau, the firstborn. He is like an automaton, because he has already blessed Jacob, who will meet God, who is called "the fear of Isaac" (Gen. 42:31, 53), in the sense that the fear of Isaac is the God of the Israelites, not Abraham's God, a fear that has grown stronger over the generations, whereas the arch-patriarch could prevail against God, making him given in, as it were. Then, hatred for the Canaanite other grew stronger, as did the battle against idol worship Then, too, the aspect of fertility, maternity, laughter, confusion died within God, and only the tyrant was left, the tyrannical father of the law, the One, who, in order to be One, must first of all set himself off from the many; he must invent the multitude and then demand its elimination. However, with regard to the first laugh, the members of his nation would continue, despite his demands, to wage

I. Benyamini, *A Critical Theology of Genesis*,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-59509-6_16

a jocular and tortuous struggle with him, even though the rabbis always came and declared that one must do such and such, and even though modern times brought with them the discomfiture of formulating sharp definitions in relation to the other—believer/heretic, religious/secular—which was at first so strange to ordinary Jews. Their way was not **the fear of Isaac,** but rather, **the laugh of Abraham.**

What is the Divine?: Concluding Remarks to Part Two

Now that the work of interpretation has been done, we are left with the question: Is it possible to epitomize the understanding that has been reached regarding man's conception of God and in relation to the characterization of the Other in the Book of Genesis? What follows is one among the many possibilities of such a formulation:

What is the divine? Things happen, are done, in human reality, in the life of a man who is concerned about his family, like Abraham. Things happen, life moves, and one can accept this as good, the way God saw his creation as good. Or one may assume that something else moves them, something that might be the great source of energy that moves the entire universe, but that source is not entirely external to what happens. It is what happens, and therefore, it is immanent as well. Hence, the immanent and the transcendent are indistinguishable. This source cannot be known rationally, but only intuitively, as a feeling that comes because there will be a tomorrow and also from the hope that there will be a tomorrow for the family.

Now there are various religions, which formulate speech about that source, address it by name, attribute stories to it, sometimes divide it into various gods, sometimes concentrate it into a single body, as in monotheism—and all of these are only pretty stories in the Maimonidean sense. This source cannot speak, nor does it know how to do anything in the sense of responding, but it does move the world, moves toward tomorrow, makes certain that there will be a tomorrow, tomorrow morning,

I. Benyamini, *A Critical Theology of Genesis*,
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that the sun will shine. This source might be influenced by prayer, but more like an animal (or an infant), that senses when it is spoken to, and not like a person who understands and responds. Maybe. But the energy does not belong to it, it is not its property. This entity is energy, it is *time* moving forward. The very term of property is a mythical attribution of a trait. This is an energy that also cannot be defined as a source, but it is the reality *that happens*, it is what happens, flowing forward to tomorrow.

Mysticism is an effort to pursue the sense that feels this happening, as is religion, which, to make speech easier, calls this thing, for example, God. But this is a breakdown of the very feeling of hope for the future, because it gives a name and a definition and a story and a direct connection of a person to something that is entirely unclear and that will never be entirely clear, because the whole point of it derives from *intuition combined with hope*—the hope for tomorrow.

There is always a *gap* between this intuition combined with hope and the rigorous statement that this is God, and the sense of holiness comes to fill that gap, imposing the definition of this source as God upon the hope for the future, upon the fear of the future, the apprehension of the breakdown of the (familial) present. The idea of holiness was born from the effort to fix this intuition as an idea that comprehends the source that moves life, the source of reality, as a source of great importance in sustaining the universe, but in a contradictory way from now on, it will be considered something above reality.

Consequently, religion, and not only as an institution, but also as religious experience, including mysticism, is a betrayal of the primary feeling of reality of the *traditional* family person. This traditional person experiences religion not as a written commandment, but as a living, continuous tradition, with which he or she has had prolonged and cunning relations, along with clinging to hope that God will respond to his or her prayers, which touch upon the conditions of family life. But the traditional person also suffers from the reproaches of the priest, the scholar, the theologian, who preach to him, saying that he does not understand the divine, sanctity, and that he only wants to exploit God for the benefit of his family's existence. However, after the family feeling came into the world, the feeling that assumes the existence of a supreme power, as mentioned above, the religious idea has steadily expanded and become established and independent, and it has also mixed with this primary feeling, and as such, it became an existing reality of emotions and ideas.

And perhaps the error also lies with the author of the present words in the very effort of words to describe the *feeling* of the reality of him who speaks them.*

* Here are several clarifications and reservations:

- The feeling of concern for the family is, from our point of view, a basic experience, which, phenomenologically, can be presented as the source of the religious feeling, from which spiritual and religious ideas grew and grow, because the feeling of closeness to the family unit is primary for a person, and after it come the isolated individual, the group, the nation, humanity, the universe, and so on. And the other spiritual experiences flow from it.
- We do not seek to determine whether or not there is a great source of energy in the universe, but to point to a human assumption regarding that determination.
- It should be emphasized that there are other aspects to the figure of God that have been described throughout this book, which are not clarified here in this summarizing epilogue, and the reader is invited to look for them. Nevertheless, in what way are those other aspects connected to the ones here? They portray God as an authority, whose entire definition is creator of the universe, which also creates itself and its great desire to rule over its creatures by means of other creatures, especially man; and they are the aspects that portray man as he experiences God as the voice of the future, which gives him hope for tomorrow. However, God is also revealed as an automatic mechanism of punishment, against which man must defend himself. These things are connected to one another in the following way: the aforementioned human intuition is consolidated into a story about this energetic force, and this source and the figure that is produced mix with the inner voice of promise. The promise then becomes hope, but it also contains a risk for man, because the promise becomes a commandment, something man must obey so as not to disappoint the inner voice, which has suddenly become external: God.

Books in the Background

Here, I list the readings that accompanied me in writing the commentary. I agreed with some of what I read, and opposed some of it. I internalized some of it consciously and also unconsciously. I mentioned some of them above and omitted some of them.

First, the writings of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, which I have studied in the past decade, and which have shaped my way of thinking,* such as Freud's book about humor and Lacan's lectures on the names of the father, where he discusses Abraham's discomfiture and his desire to spill some blood, and also his Seminar III on the psychoses, which discusses God as a deceiver. Second, Cassuto's book on Genesis, in which I found a wise, humane, and logical guide. Third, our traditional commentators, especially Rashi and Nachmanides, who carry with them many teachings of the Sages as well. Fourth, Hegel's *The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate*, especially the chapter on the spirit of Judaism, in relation to the figure of Abraham as alien to the world and cunning.

* The interpretative approach here mainly continues the psychoanalytical ethic, especially the school of Jacques Lacan, but not necessarily in the adoption of the doctrinaire principles and rigid terms (presence of the signifier, the name of the father, the mirror stage, etc.), but more in accepting the analytic ethic of openness to the speech of the analysand, who is embodied here as the biblical text (speech that also circles around what cannot be spoken).

I. Benyamini, *A Critical Theology of Genesis*,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-59509-6

I also became acquainted with Yeshayahu Leibowitz on the weekly Torah portion, with the book on Genesis by Nehama Leibowitz, and various writings of Buber and Rosenzweig on the Bible and its translation, Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of religion and his discussion of the dialectic of master and slave, Emanuel Levinas' *Difficile liberté*, Jung's book on Job, and Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, which is widely known, as well as the works of Derrida, Lacan, and Yeshayahu Leibowitz, about Abraham's discomfiture. I also read discussions of Maimonides' conceptions of creation and faith in books by Sarah Klein-Braslavi, Aviezer Ravitzky, and Alexander Even-Hen, as well as Edward Greenstein's books on Job and Genesis, Pnina Galpaz-Feller on the sacrifice of sons in Judaism and Christianity, as well as the books by Meir Buzaglo and Yakov Yadger on traditionalism.

* *

However, what is written here derives especially from reflections on the ways of my father, who never wrote a book or even a line, except for recording the sums that his cheap customers had to pay him when they came to his store, which was simply named, "Children's Shoes," in Neve Shaanan, near the Central Bus Station of Tel Aviv, and today as a house painter, who insists at his advanced age on working alone, without hired workers, and he is never too tired to go to the synagogue for evening prayers after many hours of work, because *it is a blessing*.

Gratitude

I am grateful to my family, because their delicate manners take precedence over the Torah and enables a different reading of it. Special thanks are due to Professor Edward Greenstein, who guided this research of mine, and who brought to my attention many of the pitfalls of the Bible, to Professor Yehodaya Amir, Dr. Tal Zessler, and Dr. Tamar Yagur, for reading the manuscript in its entirety and benefiting me with their comments. I am also grateful to Oded Wolkstein, Dr. Dror K. Levi, Dr. Yotam Hyotam, Ofra Shai, Professor Avi Sagi, Dr. Devora Silbersheid, Yoav Shiber, Dr. Hanokh ben Pazi, Dr. Semadar Bustan, Dr. Elad Lapidot for reading parts of the book, for opening my eyes, and for encouraging me to continue writing. I am also grateful to my students in the courses on the Binding of Isaac that I gave at Tel Aviv University and at Ben Gurion University in the Negev. The encounter with them was very fruitful for me and contributed to the development of this study. Finally, sweet thanks to Tamar, my dear wife, for her meticulous and profound editing of the Hebrew text. As it is customary to add, the final responsibility for what is said here rests with me.

I. Benyamini, *A Critical Theology of Genesis*,
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Epilogue

Abraham might be a model only of a Hebrew who knows about jokes, God's jokes, like many Jews over the generations, Jews for whom the fear of God was also knowledge of God's partial knowledge, with all its playful transformations. The simple Jew, like my father Joseph, tends to go to synagogue on Friday night and Sabbath morning, full of joy in praying to the playful God, without acknowledging the Holocaust on the other side of God, the vindictive side of the Fear of Isaac, whose laughter becomes mockery and destruction: **He that sits in heaven laughs, Adonai mocks him** (Ps. 2:4).

I. Benyamini, *A Critical Theology of Genesis*,
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