

עץ חיים

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ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY  
THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM



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## 33

This is the blessing with which Moses, the man of God, bade the Israelites farewell before he died. <sup>2</sup>He said:

The LORD came from Sinai;  
He shone upon them from Seir;  
He appeared from Mount Paran,  
And approached from Ribebboth-kodesh,  
Lightning flashing at them from His right.  
<sup>3</sup>Lover, indeed, of the people,  
Their hallowed are all in Your hand.  
They followed in Your steps,  
Accepting Your pronouncements,

לֹא אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לִפְנֵי

מוֹתוֹ: <sup>2</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר

יְהוָה מְסִינֵי בָא  
וְזָרַח מִשְׁעִיר לָמוֹ  
הוֹפִיעַ מִהַר פָּאֲרָן  
וְאֶתָּה מִרְבַּבַּת קֹדֶשׁ  
מִימֵינוּ אִשְׁדַּת אֵשׁ דָּת לָמוֹ:  
אֵף חֲבָב עַמִּים  
כָּל־קֹדְשֵׁי בְּיָדְךָ  
וְהֵם תָּכֹן לְרַגְלֶךָ  
יֵשָׁא מִדְּבַרְתֶּיךָ:

*Epilogue: Moses' Last Days* (continued)

## MOSES' FAREWELL BLESSINGS (33:1–29)

## INTRODUCTION (v. 1)

**1. man of God** That is, a prophet. This designation suggests that Moses' remarks about the tribes have the power of prophetic predictions.  
**bade . . . farewell** Literally, "blessed."

## THE POEM (vv. 2–29)

**2. The LORD came from Sinai** God is pictured as coming from the southern wildernesses and mountains (Sinai, Seir-Edom, Teiman, Mount Paran) to aid Israel against its enemies. The places mentioned in the verse are located in the Sinai Peninsula and in the Negeb.

**He shone upon them** The Bible depicts God as surrounded by a brilliant radiance. Ancient Near Eastern texts describe deities as enveloped in light.

**approached from Ribebboth-kodesh** In the Negeb or Sinai; it may mean "Ribebboth at, or

near, Kadesh." Kadesh was located in the wilderness of Paran at the western border of Seir-Edom and the southern border of the Promised Land (see Num. 13:26, 20:14,16, 34:4).

**3. Lover . . . of the people** Literally, "Lover of peoples." If "Lover" refers to God, and "peoples" refers to all peoples, it is a startling universal note in a poem that otherwise is about His protection of Israel. If "peoples" (or "people," as in the Greek translation) refers to Israel, the phrase is comparable to the description of God as one "who loves His people Israel" (*ohav ammo Yisra-el*) in Jewish liturgy.

**Their hallowed** Hebrew: *k'doshav*; literally, "its" or "His" hallowed ones. If the last three clauses of v. 3 refer to Israel, then this refers to Israel's holy ones, members of the holy people. God took the Israelites protectively in hand because they followed Him and accepted His authority. If these same clauses refer to God's angelic

## CHAPTER 33

Moses blesses the tribes before his death, prompting the Midrash to put these words into his mouth: "All my life, I have scolded this people. At the end of my life, let me leave them with a blessing" (Mid. P'tirat Moshe). As Genesis concluded with Jacob on his deathbed,

blessing his 12 sons, Deuteronomy concludes with Moses on the eve of his death, blessing the 12 tribes. What was once a single family with a vision of God's plan for them has now become a nation, poised to enter the Promised Land and possessing a blueprint for becoming a special people, a model of how God wants humanity to live.

<sup>4</sup>When Moses charged us with the Teaching  
As the heritage of the congregation of Jacob.

<sup>5</sup>Then He became King in Jeshurun,  
When the heads of the people assembled,  
The tribes of Israel together.

<sup>6</sup>May Reuben live and not die,  
Though few be his numbers.

<sup>7</sup>And this he said of Judah:

Hear, O LORD the voice of Judah  
And restore him to his people.  
Though his own hands strive for him,  
Help him against his foes.

תּוֹרַה צִוְּה־לָנוּ מֹשֶׁה <sup>4</sup>

מוֹרָשָׁה קְהֵלֶת יַעֲקֹב:

וַיְהִי בִישֻׁרוּן מֶלֶךְ <sup>5</sup>

בְּהַתְאָסֵף רְאִשֵׁי עָם

יַחַד שְׁבֵטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

יְחִי רְאוּבֵן וְאֶל־יָמֹת <sup>6</sup>

וַיְהִי מִתְּיוּ מִסְפָּר: ס

וְזֹאת לִיהוּדָה וַיֹּאמֶר <sup>7</sup>

שְׁמַע יְהוָה קוֹל יְהוּדָה

וְאֶל־עַמּוֹ תִבְיָאֵנוּ

יְדִיו רַב לֹ

וְעֹזֵר מִצָּרָיו תִּהְיֶה: שני ס

entourage, then the hallowed ones, or holy beings, are the angels who accompany Him as He comes to Israel's aid (see Zech. 14:5).

**4.** According to some medieval commentators, it is the people who are speaking in this verse. Having accepted God's pronouncements in verse 3, the people declare: "This Teaching with which Moses charged us is the heritage of the congregation of Jacob."

**Teaching** In Deuteronomy, *torah* refers specifically to the teachings of Deuteronomy. However, because this poem probably originated independently of Deuteronomy and was appended to it at a later time, the term may not have so precise a reference here and may be a general allusion to sacred Teaching.

**heritage** Hebrew: *morashah*; literally, property (particularly land) transmitted by inheritance. Here, a metaphor for a spiritual possession, connoting something vital and cherished.

**5.** God became Israel's king after coming to it from the south and delivering it from its enemies. As in the coronation of a human king, it is the acclamation of people or their leaders that legitimates the king's sovereignty.

**Jeshurun** See Comment to 32:15.

#### THE TRIBAL BLESSINGS (vv. 6–25)

Moses now blesses the tribes individually. He begins with Reuben, in whose territory the Israelites are presently encamped.

#### REUBEN (v. 6)

**6.** The tribe of Reuben was allotted territory in Transjordan (see 3:12–17; Num. 32). It once was a strong tribe, leader of the others, as implied by Reuben's status as Jacob's firstborn son. Its preeminence must have ended before settlement in the Promised Land or soon afterward, because it later became a tribe of marginal importance.

#### JUDAH (v. 7)

**7.** The tribe of Judah at first dominated the southern part of the Land. In the days of David and Solomon it dominated the entire country. Its territory was centered in the southern highlands, reaching the Dead Sea on the east and including the Shephelah on the west and the Negeb on the south. The blessing anticipates a time when the tribe will be at war.

**Judah . . . his own hands** Hebrew: *Y'hudah . . . yadav*; in biblical times, these were probably pronounced more alike: *Yahuda . . . yadayu*. Thus the blessing plays on the name.

**Hear, O LORD, the voice of Judah** Onkelos aptly paraphrases: "Accept, O LORD, the prayer of Judah when he goes forth in battle."

**restore him** Onkelos paraphrases: "bring him back safely."

**to his people** That is, bring the tribe's warriors home safely from battle.

**Though his own hands strive for him** Precise translation of this clause is uncertain.

**4.** Traditionally, this is one of the first verses from the Torah a Jewish child is taught.

<sup>8</sup>And of Levi he said:

Let Your Thummim and Urim  
Be with Your faithful one,  
Whom You tested at Massah,  
Challenged at the waters of Meribah;

<sup>9</sup>Who said of his father and mother,  
“I consider them not.”

His brothers he disregarded,  
Ignored his own children.  
Your precepts alone they observed,  
And kept Your covenant.

<sup>10</sup>They shall teach Your laws to Jacob  
And Your instructions to Israel.

They shall offer You incense to savor  
And whole-offerings on Your altar.

<sup>11</sup>Bless, O LORD, his substance,

שְׁנֵי <sup>8</sup> וּלְלוֹי אָמַר

תְּמִיךָ וְאוּרִיךָ

לְאִישׁ חֲסִידְךָ

אֲשֶׁר נָסִיתוֹ בְּמַסָּה

תְּרִיבָהוּ עַל־מֵי מְרִיבָה :

<sup>9</sup> הָאָמַר לְאָבִיו וּלְאִמּוֹ

לֹא רְאִיתִיו

וְאֶת־אָחָיו לֹא הִכִּיר

וְאֶת־בְּנֵי בָנָיו לֹא יָדַע

כִּי שָׁמְרוּ אִמְרֹתֶיךָ

וּבְרִיתְךָ יִנְצְרוּ :

<sup>10</sup> יוֹרוּ מִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ לִיעֲקֹב

וְתוֹרֹתֶיךָ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל

יְשִׁימוּ קְטוֹרֶה בְּאַפֶּךָ

וְכָלִיל עַל־מִזְבְּחֶךָ :

<sup>11</sup> בָּרַךְ יְהוָה חִילוֹ

LEVI (vv. 8–11)

**8.** Moses prays that the Levites enjoy the privilege of serving as Israel's priests, and that God grant them prosperity and protection.

**Thummim and Urim** This reverse order of the terms is found only here. They were an oracular device for obtaining God's decision on important questions. They were kept by the priest who administered them on behalf of the leader or the public for such matters as military decisions, allocation of land, and identifying those chosen by God for an office or convicted by Him of an offense (see Exod. 28:30; 1 Sam. 14:41).

**faithful one** Hebrew: *hasid*, originally meaning “devoted” or “loyal.” Here, the Levites are personified as a single individual.

**tested . . . Challenged** This seems to be about an occasion when the Levites or their representative(s) remained loyal to God and were rewarded with the priesthood. But in none of the incidents at Massah and Meribah (Exod. 17; Num. 20) does God test the Levites; it is the people who test Moses, Aaron, and God. Apparently, this verse refers to an unknown incident at Massah and Meribah or to a different version from what is related in Exodus and Numbers.

**9.** By loyally carrying out God's laws, the Levites showed no favoritism even to their own families (see Exod. 32:27–29).

**10. laws . . . instructions** Refers to the full range of priestly instruction in ritual, judicial, and civil matters, such as worship, division of territory, and distinctions between sacred and profane, pure and impure. Because of the devotion they showed to God's precepts, the Levites shall have the privilege of transmitting His laws to the Israelites as well as conducting His worship.

**incense . . . whole-offerings** Two of the regular components of the sacrificial service. Only the priests could offer them.

**savor** The pleasing aroma rises from the incense offerings of spices burned in the sanctuary as part of the daily morning and evening sacrifices and on *Yom Kippur*, as well as in propitiatory rites.

**11. substance** Wealth. Although the Levites are not given a tribal territory, they receive income in return for their priestly services; and they are given cities, real estate, fields, pastureland, and cattle. Potentially their wealth is considerable.

**8.** The qualities of zeal that led Jacob to condemn Levi (Gen. 49:5) have been sublimated to the service of God and God's altar, so that Moses now can bless the Levites.

And favor his undertakings.  
Smite the loins of his foes;  
Let his enemies rise no more.

וּפְעַל יָדָיו תִּרְצָה  
מִחֹץ מִתְּנַיִם קָמְיוֹ  
וּמִשְׁנֵאָיו מִן־יְקוּמוֹן: ס

<sup>12</sup>Of Benjamin he said:

Beloved of the LORD,  
He rests securely beside Him;  
Ever does He protect him,  
As he rests between His shoulders.

לְבִנְיָמִן אָמַר <sup>12</sup>  
יָדִיד יְהוָה  
יִשְׁכֵּן לְבֶטַח עָלָיו  
חֹפֶף עָלָיו כָּל־הַיּוֹם  
וּבֵין כְּתִיפָיו שָׁכַן: ס

<sup>13</sup>And of Joseph he said:

Blessed of the LORD be his land  
With the bounty of dew from heaven,  
And of the deep that couches below;  
<sup>14</sup>With the bounteous yield of the sun,  
And the bounteous crop of the moons;  
<sup>15</sup>With the best from the ancient mountains,

וּלְיוֹסֵף אָמַר <sup>13</sup> שְׁלִישִׁי  
מִבְּרִכַּת יְהוָה אֲרָצוֹ  
מִמְּגַד שָׁמַיִם מִטָּל  
וּמִתְהוֹם רִבְצַת תַּחַת:  
וּמִמְּגַד תְּבוּאוֹת שָׁמֶשׁ <sup>14</sup>  
וּמִמְּגַד גְּרֵשׁ יְרֻחִים:  
וּמִרֵאשׁ הַרְרֵי־קָדָם <sup>15</sup>

*favor his undertakings* That is, grant him prosperity.

*Smite the loins* Render them powerless. The loins are used as an image for one's strength.

*Let his enemies rise no more* Moses does not ask God to grant the Levites military prowess but to defend them against attackers. As a clerical tribe, the Levites had no military force; and unlike the other tribes, they were defenseless against military attacks.

*BENJAMIN* (v. 12)

**12.** The tribe of Benjamin occupied a small but strategic territory between the lands of Ephraim and Judah and at one time encompassed, on its southern border, at least part of Jerusalem.

*Beloved of the LORD* If this means that God favored Benjamin politically, it could reflect the tribe's prestige when Ehud the Benjaminite was chieftain over all the Israelites during the period of the Judges, when Samuel's leadership was centered in Benjaminite territory, and when the Benjaminite Saul was chosen to be Israel's first king, *securely* That is, in its territory.

*He protect* The subject of the verse has abruptly changed to God.

*as he rests between His shoulders* The verse seems to be once again referring to Benjamin, reflecting the sense of security the tribe enjoys under

divine protection. It seems preferable, however, to take God as the subject, and this may refer to God's dwelling in His sanctuary within Benjamin's borders.

*JOSEPH* (vv. 13–17)

**13.** The tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh are personified in their ancestor Joseph. Historically, Ephraim, occupying the southern part of the central highlands, was the more prominent of the two, although its territory was smaller. Part of Manasseh occupied the northern part of the central highlands, and another part inhabited Bashan and Gilead in Transjordan.

*bounty* Hebrew: *meqed*, which is the leitmotif of this blessing, has the sense of "gift," "blessing," "precious objects," and "choice fruits."

*the deep that couches below* Subterranean waters that rise from springs and wells (8:7) are pictured here as an animal crouching below the earth.

**14. yield of the sun** These are crops warmed and lighted by the sun.

*crop of the moons* If the plural "moons" refers to months, as it usually does, the text means "the bounteous crops of the months," referring to the different months in which various crops ripen.

**15.** The abundant products of the mountains, mentioned frequently in ancient Near East-

And the bounty of hills immemorial;  
 16With the bounty of earth and its fullness,  
 And the favor of the Presence in the Bush.  
 May these rest on the head of Joseph,  
 On the crown of the elect of his brothers.  
 17Like a firstling bull in his majesty,  
 He has horns like the horns of the wild-ox;  
 With them he gores the peoples,  
 The ends of the earth one and all.  
 These are the myriads of Ephraim,  
 Those are the thousands of Manasseh.

18And of Zebulun he said:

Rejoice, O Zebulun, on your journeys,

וּמִמְּגַד גְּבֻעוֹת עוֹלָם :  
 16 וּמִמְּגַד אֶרֶץ וּמִלְאָהּ  
 וּרְצוֹן שְׁכֵנֵי סִנְיָה  
 תָּבֹואתָהּ לְרֹאשׁ יוֹסֵף  
 וּלְקֶדֶד נְזִיר אָחִיו :  
 17 בְּכוֹר שׁוֹרוֹ הַדֶּדֶר לוֹ  
 וְקַרְנֵי רְאִים קַרְנָיו  
 בָּהֶם עַמִּים יִנְגַח  
 יַחֲדוּ אַפְסֵי־אֶרֶץ  
 וְהֵם רִבְבוֹת אַפְרַיִם  
 וְהֵם אֲלֵפֵי מְנַשֶּׁה : ס

רביעי 18 וּלְזְבוּלָן אָמַר  
 שְׂמַח זְבוּלָן בְּיָצְאָתָךְ

ern literature, include wood, stone, precious and nonprecious metals, and foodstuffs. The mountain regions in the territory of the Joseph tribes were richly forested when the tribes first arrived. Later, land was cleared for planting grains, olive trees, and vineyards. The highlands of Bashan and Gilead, where half of Manasseh lived, were also rich in forests and pastures. Their balm, a fragrant resin used for soothing pain or for healing, was famous.

**bounty of hills immemorial** Joseph enjoys fertility like that of those fruitful ancient hills.

**16. the favor of the Presence in the Bush** That is, God's favor, in the sense of blessing. This is the climactic blessing and the ultimate source of the others. By calling God "the Presence in the Bush" (*shokhni s'neh*) in this, his final speech, Moses recalls his first encounter with God at the burning bush at Horeb, the mountain of God (see Exod. 3:1–6).

**On the crown of the elect of his brothers** That is, on the head of the chief brother, Joseph. This depiction accords with the position of Joseph as ruler of his brothers in Egypt and with the preeminent status of the Joseph tribes, par-

ticularly Ephraim, after the conquest of the Promised Land.

**elect** From the root נזר, which presumably means "to separate" or "to single out."

**17. firstling** Ibn Ezra suggests that the firstling is mentioned here to convey an image of great strength.

**horns of the wild-ox** The wild ox goring its foes is a common metaphor for strength in ancient Near Eastern literature.

**ends of the earth** The most distant enemies.

**These . . . Those** Better: "Those [horns] . . . they." Joseph's horns stand for the troops of Ephraim and Manasseh.

#### ZEBULUN AND ISSACHAR (vv. 18–19)

**18.** The heading names only Zebulun, but the blessing includes Issachar as well, reflecting the close association between these tribes, who were assigned neighboring inland territories in the lower Galilee and the Jezreel Valley. Genesis 49:13 locates Zebulun on the coast and implies that it once controlled territory as far west as the Mediterranean in the Haifa Bay area.

**journeys** In view of its onetime coastal loca-

**18.** The tribes of Issachar and Zebulun are joined in a single verse. Rashi (based on the *Tanḥuma*) cites the tradition that the people of the tribe of Zebulun were merchants ("Rejoice . . . on your journeys") whose prosperity subsidized the tribe of Issachar, enabling them to stay home and study Torah ("in your tents"). Maimonides rejects that model in an

unusually sharp comment: "Whoever deliberately sets out to devote himself to the Torah and not work for a living but be dependent on charity has thereby desecrated the divine name, brought the Torah into disrepute, extinguished the light of religion, brought evil upon himself, and forfeited the hereafter" (MT Torah Study 3:10).

And Issachar, in your tents.

<sup>19</sup>They invite their kin to the mountain,  
Where they offer sacrifices of success.  
For they draw from the riches of the sea  
And the hidden hoards of the sand.

<sup>20</sup>And of Gad he said:

Blessed be He who enlarges Gad!  
Poised is he like a lion  
To tear off arm and scalp.  
<sup>21</sup>He chose for himself the best,  
For there is the portion of the revered chief-  
tain,  
Where the heads of the people come.  
He executed the LORD's judgments  
And His decisions for Israel.

וְיִשָּׂשכָר בְּאֹהֶלָיךְ׃  
19 עַמִּים הַרְיִקְרָאוּ  
שָׁם יִזְבְּחוּ וּזְבַחֵי־צֶדֶק  
כִּי שֹׁפַע יַמִּים יִינָקוּ  
וּשְׁפוּנֵי טְמוּנֵי חוֹל׃ ט

20 וּלְגַד אָמַר  
בְּרוּךְ מִרְחִיב גֹּד  
בְּלִבָּיָא שָׁיִן  
וְטָרַף זְרוּעַ אֶפְרָקְדָקֵד׃  
21 וַיִּרְא רֵאשִׁית לּוֹ  
כִּי־שָׁם חֵלְקֵת מַחֲקֵק סָפוּן  
וַיִּתֵּא רֵאשֵׁי עָם  
צִדְקַת יְהוָה עָשָׂה  
וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו עִם־יִשְׂרָאֵל׃ ט חמשי

tion, Zebulun's journeys are most likely maritime trade ventures or fishing excursions.

**tents** Likely the dwellings of herdsmen (see Gen. 49:14).

**19. their kin** Literally, “peoples,” with no pronoun. The verse could mean that the two tribes invite their own kin (fellow Israelites) or members of some other kinship group, i.e., other peoples. Zebulun's maritime location would have brought it into contact with Phoenicians, Egyptians, and others from Mediterranean islands and coastlands.

**to the mountain** The reference to sacrifices in the next clause suggests that the mountain is one with a sanctuary. It could be Mount Tabor, which was the juncture of the territories of Zebulun, Issachar, and Naphtali, or Mount Carmel above the Mediterranean coast.

**sacrifices of success** Zebulun and Issachar will invite others to join them in thanking God for their maritime wealth or to participate in combined sacrificial festivals and fairs at which maritime goods will be traded.

**riches of the sea** Riches drawn from the sea and/or imported by sea, including fish, shells, and murex snails. Only Zebulun is connected to the seacoast in Gen. 49:13. Perhaps members of Issachar worked for Zebulun in maritime commerce, or Issachar profited from the resources of Lake Tiberias, which was not far from its territory. Shells were used for lamps, vessels, and ornaments. Murex snails were the source of the reddish and purple dyes that gave the coast north of Acco

its ancient name, “Phoenicia” (literally, “land of the purple dye”), related to Greek *phoinix* (purple, crimson).

**boards of the sand** Literally, “things concealed in sand.” Perhaps shells and murex snails that wash up from the sea.

GAD (vv. 20–21)

**20. enlarges Gad** By increasing its population.

**Poised is he like a lion** An image of the strength and prowess of a warrior.

**21. best** Hebrew: *reishit*; literally, “the first,” in the sense of prime, best. Refers to Gad's choice of fertile pasturelands in Transjordan as its territory. The clause could also mean that Gad chose the first-conquered portion of land.

**portion of the revered chieftain** Several ancient translations and medieval commentators understood the *m'hokek* (chieftain) to be Moses, so that this phrase refers to his burial plot in Transjordan. To others, this phrase refers to land “worthy” of a chieftain, or to “[Gad's] portion from the lawgiver,” i.e., as assigned by Moses.

**Where the heads of the people come** The Septuagint reflects a different Hebrew text, which combines and reverses two words so as to read: “when they [the heads of the people] gathered.” This could allude to when the Gadites and Reubenites presented their special request for territory to Moses and the assembled chieftains of the community (see Num. 32:2,28).

**He executed the LORD's judgments | And His**

<sup>22</sup>And of Dan he said:

Dan is a lion's whelp  
That leaps forth from Bashan.

חמישי <sup>22</sup> וְלֵדָן אָמַר  
דָּן גֵּוֹר אַרְיֵה  
יִזְקֵק מִן־הַבָּשָׁן:

<sup>23</sup>And of Naphtali he said:

O Naphtali, sated with favor  
And full of the LORD's blessing,  
Take possession on the west and south.

<sup>23</sup> וְלִנְפְתָלִי אָמַר  
נִפְתָּלִי שָׂבַע רְצוֹן  
וּמְלֵא בְרַכַּת יְהוָה  
יָם וְדָרוֹם יִרְשֶׁה: ס

<sup>24</sup>And of Asher he said:

Most blessed of sons be Asher;  
May he be the favorite of his brothers,  
May he dip his foot in oil.  
<sup>25</sup>May your doorbolts be iron and copper,  
And your security last all your days.

<sup>24</sup> וְלְאַשֶׁר אָמַר  
בְּרוּךְ מִבְּנֵי אֲשֶׁר  
יְהִי רְצוֹי אֶחָיו  
וְטָבַל בְּשֶׁמֶן רַגְלוֹ:  
<sup>25</sup> בְּרוּז וְנַחֲשֶׁת מִנְעֻלָּיֶךָ  
וּכְיַמֶּיךָ דְּבִאָּה:

<sup>26</sup>O Jeshurun, there is none like God,

<sup>26</sup> אֵין כָּאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל

**decisions for Israel** Some explain these words as a statement that Gad fulfilled its promise to fight in the vanguard of Israelite troops for the conquest of the Promised Land. Others believe that it refers to Moses, either as the leader who taught and enforced God's laws, or as God's agent during the period of the Exodus and the conquest of northern Transjordan.

DAN (v. 22)

**22.** Dan was originally assigned territory in the Shephelah and the coastal plain, near Philistia. This verse anticipates Dan's later location, after it migrated to the northern extremity of the land, where it conquered the Canaanite city of Laish, settled in it, and renamed it Dan (see Judg. 18).

**lion's whelp** The simile is used of the powerful tribe of Judah in Gen. 49:9.

**Bashan** The mountain range in northern Transjordan, assigned to Manasseh (3:13–14). This phrase is part of the metaphor; the lion leaps from Bashan. (Dan did not control Bashan or attack Laish from there.)

NAPHTALI (v. 23)

**23.** The territory of Naphtali in the upper Galilee was well watered and rich in woods, fruit trees, and many varieties of vegetation. It included the luxuriant western and southern shores of Lake Tiberias.

**with favor** That is, with God's favor.

**on the west and south** On the western and southern shores of Lake Tiberias.

ASHER (vv. 24–25)

**24.** Asher, situated in the rich hills of upper Galilee, between Naphtali and the Mediterranean, is blessed with fertility and security. But it needed strong defenses: An international road traversed its territory and was used as an invasion route by hostile peoples from the north and the northeast.

**Most blessed** The focus on Asher's blessedness was probably inspired by its name, which is connected in Gen. 30:13 with "good fortune" (אשר).

**favorite** The most blessed.

**May he dip his foot in oil** The highlands of Galilee were famous for abundant olive oil.

**25. doorbolts** The bolts on city gates.

**copper** See Comment to Exod. 25:3. This phrase likely means: "May your land be as secure as if it were locked with bolts of iron or bronze."

CODA (vv. 26–29)

Having blessed the tribes individually, Moses concludes by celebrating the good fortune of all Israel under the protection of God.

**26.** Describing God as the incomparable protector of Israel, this verse resumes the theme of verses 2–5.



**34** Moses went up from the steppes of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the summit of Pisgah, opposite Jericho, and the LORD showed him the whole land: Gilead as far as Dan; <sup>2</sup>all Naphtali; the land of Ephraim and Manasseh; the whole land of Judah as far as the Western Sea; <sup>3</sup>the Negeb; and the Plain—the Valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees—as far as Zoar. <sup>4</sup>And the LORD said to him, “This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, ‘I will assign it to your offspring.’ I have let you see it with your own eyes, but you shall not cross there.”

<sup>5</sup>So Moses the servant of the LORD died there,

**לד** וַיַּעַל מֹשֶׁה מֵעֵרְבַת מוֹאָב אֶל-הַר נְבוֹ רֹאשׁ הַפְּסָגָה אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי יְרִיחוֹ וַיִּרְאֵהוּ יְהוָה אֶת-כָּל-הָאָרֶץ אֶת-הַגְּלִלְעָד עַד-דֶּדַן: <sup>2</sup>וְאֵת כָּל-נַפְתָּלִי וְאֶת-אֶרֶץ אֶפְרַיִם וּמְנַשֶּׁה וְאֵת כָּל-אֶרֶץ יְהוּדָה עַד הַיָּם הָאֲחֵרוֹן: <sup>3</sup>וְאֶת-הַנֶּגֶב וְאֶת-הַכְּפָר בְּקֵעַת יְרִיחוֹ עִיר הַתְּמָרִים עַד-צֶעֶר: <sup>4</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלָיו זֹאת הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וְלְיַעֲקֹב לֵאמֹר לְזֶרְעֶךָ אֶתְנַנְנָהּ הָרְאִיתִיךָ בְּעֵינֶיךָ וְשָׂמָה לֹא תַעֲבֹר: <sup>5</sup>וַיָּמָת שָׁם מֹשֶׁה עַבְד־יְהוָה בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹאָב

### THE DEATH OF MOSES (34:1–12)

**1. Moses went up** As commanded in 32:49, and earlier in 3:27.

**steppes of Moab** The eastern part of the lower Jordan Valley, just north of the Dead Sea. This plain extends about 9 miles (14 km) from north to south, and 5 to 7 miles (8–11 km) from the river to the mountains of Moab. This is the plain where the Israelites were encamped while Moses addressed them.

**Mount Nebo** God shows Moses Israel’s future territory from Mount Nebo. Standing atop the mount, Moses would have been able to see: the Gilead range in the north and Dan, to the northwest, about 100 miles (160 km) away; Israel’s western boundary, the Mediterranean, about 65 miles (100 km) away; and to the south and southeast, the Negeb and the plain of the Jordan down to Zoar, some 50 miles (80 km) away.

**Pisgah** A mountain, or mountain chain, in Moab overlooking the southern end of the Jordan Valley and commanding a view of the Promised Land across the Jordan.

**opposite Jericho** East of Jericho.

**Gilead** The Transjordanian hill country captured from Sihon and Og.

**Gilead as far as Dan** Meaning “and beyond Gilead as far as Dan.” Gilead itself does not reach as far as Dan, which is the city of the Danites at the northern end of the Galilee, at the foot of Mount Hermon.

**2. Naphtali** In upper Galilee, north and northwest of Lake Tiberias.

**Western Sea** The Mediterranean.

**3. Negeb** The northern part of today’s Negeb.

**the Plain** That is, of the Jordan, probably the entire Jordan Valley and, apparently, the Dead Sea and Lake Tiberias.

**city of palm trees** Jericho, the first city conquered by the Israelites in the Promised Land, was celebrated for its palms. Despite its desert location and climate, abundant sources of water give it the luxuriant appearance of an oasis to this day.

**as far as Zoar** The Plain extended as far south as Zoar, which probably was located south or southeast of the Dead Sea, where there was a city called Zoar in Second Temple and Rabbinic times. It may, therefore, stand here for the southern tip of the Dead Sea, which is the southeastern limit of the Promised Land according to Num. 34:3 and Josh. 15:2.

**4. but you shall not cross there** God decreed this in 1:37, and reminded Moses of it on several occasions (see 3:27, 4:21–22, 32:52; Num. 20:12).

**5.** Biblical tradition assumes that Moses died early in the 12th month, the month later called *Adar*. Postbiblical tradition fixes the date on the 7th day of that month.

**servant of the LORD** Hebrew: *eved YHVH*, a title meaning “the LORD’s minister.” Moses was God’s representative and agent in governing Israel. As a title for top officials in the Bible and in ancient Near Eastern inscriptions, “*eved*” connotes high status and implies that its bearer is loyal, trusted, and closely associated with his master.

in the land of Moab, at the command of the LORD. <sup>6</sup>He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab, near Beth-peor; and no one knows his burial place to this day. <sup>7</sup>Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died; his eyes were undimmed and his vigor unabated. <sup>8</sup>And the Israelites bewailed Moses in the steppes of Moab for thirty days.

The period of wailing and mourning for Moses came to an end. <sup>9</sup>Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands upon him; and the Israelites heeded him, doing as the LORD had commanded Moses.

**at the command of the LORD** Moses died not of old age or illness but at God's command.

**6. in the valley** The valley below Mount Nebo where Israel was then encamped.

**no one knows his burial place** Because God buried him. Many commentators have conjectured that the gravesite of Moses was concealed to prevent people from turning it into a shrine and using it as a location for a cult of Moses worship.

**7. hundred and twenty years** Moses died 40 years after the Exodus, which took place when he was 80 (Exod. 7:7).

**eyes were undimmed** Biblical and other ancient Near Eastern texts commonly describe the eyesight and other faculties of the aged as a measure of health or frailty.

עַל־פִּי יְהוָה: <sup>6</sup>וַיִּקְבֹּר אֹתוֹ בְּגִל בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹאָב מִזֶּמֶן בֵּית פְּעוֹר וְלֹא־יָדַע אִישׁ אֶת־קְבֻרָתוֹ עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה: <sup>7</sup>וּמֹשֶׁה בֶן־מֵאָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה בָּמָתוֹ לֹא־כָהָתָה עֵינָיו וְלֹא־נָס יָחָה: <sup>8</sup>וַיִּבְכּוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־מֹשֶׁה בְּעֶרְבַת מוֹאָב שְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם וַיִּתְמֹו יָמָיו בְּכִי אָבֵל מֹשֶׁה: <sup>9</sup>וַיְהִי־וַשָּׁע בֶּן־נוּן מֵלֵא רֹחַ חֲכָמָה כִּי־סָמַךְ מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יָדָיו עָלָיו וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֵלָיו בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה:

**his vigor unabated** Literally, “his moisture had not departed,” or “dried up.” Ibn Ezra understood this to mean “he had not become wrinkled.” Moses’ vigor had, in fact, abated (31:2), but despite his years he did not have the appearance of someone very old.

THE PEOPLE’S MOURNING AND JOSHUA’S SUCCESSION TO LEADERSHIP (vv. 8–9)

**8. thirty days** See Comment to 21:13.

**9. was filled with the spirit of wisdom** A divine gift of wisdom to govern Israel.

**laid his hands upon him** A rite of investiture (see Num. 27:18,23).

**the Israelites heeded him** From then on, the people obeyed Joshua.

## CHAPTER 34

**5. at the command of the LORD** Literally, “by the mouth of the LORD.” God reclaimed his soul by kissing him (BT MK 28a). God, who breathed life into Adam in the first chapter of the Torah, reclaims Moses’ life lovingly and painlessly in the Torah’s last chapter.

**6.** Does Moses die unfulfilled, deprived of the opportunity to enter the Land? His life is like those of many people, with soaring triumphs and bitter disappointments, public acclaim and private bitterness. But Moses dies physically healthy, “his vigor unabated,” close to his God and honored by the people he shaped and led. “Moses, the most solitary and most

powerful hero in Biblical history. The immensity of his task and the scope of his experience command our admiration, our reverence, our awe. . . . His passion for social justice, his struggle for national liberation, his triumphs and his disappointments, his poetic inspiration, his gifts as a strategist and his organizational genius, his complex relationship with God and with God’s people, his condemnations and his blessings, his bursts of anger, his silences, his efforts to reconcile the law with compassion, authority with integrity—no individual ever, anywhere, accomplished so much for so many people in so many different domains. *Moshe Rabbeinu*, our Master Moses, incomparable, unequalled” (Wiesel).

<sup>10</sup>Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses—whom the LORD singled out, face to face, <sup>11</sup>for the various signs and portents that the LORD sent him to display in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his courtiers and his whole country, <sup>12</sup>and for all the great might and awesome power that Moses displayed before all Israel.

10 וְלֹא־יָקָם עוֹד בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל כְּמֹשֶׁה  
אֲשֶׁר יָדְעוּ יְהוָה פְּנִים אֶל־פְּנִים: 11 לְכֹל־  
הָאֲתוֹת וְהַמּוֹפְתִים אֲשֶׁר שְׁלַחוּ יְהוָה  
לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְפָרְעֹה וּלְכֹל־  
עַבְדָּיו וּלְכֹל־אֶרֶצוֹ: 12 וּלְכֹל הַיָּד הַחַזָּקָה  
וּלְכֹל הַמוֹרָא הַגָּדוֹל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה מֹשֶׁה  
לְעֵינֵי כָל־יִשְׂרָאֵל: \*\*

למערבאי סכום הפסוקים של הספר 955 וחציו 17:10 v. 12.  
סכום הפסוקים של התורה 5,845 v. 12.

#### EULOGY (vv. 10–12)

**10. Never again did there arise** The verse contrasts Joshua to Moses: Although Joshua succeeded Moses, neither he nor any subsequent prophet was Moses' equal.

**prophet like Moses** Although Moses was far more than a prophet, and is never directly called that elsewhere in the Torah, prophecy was one of his roles. Here the term implies that he remains superior to all other prophets.

**face to face** That God spoke to Moses "face to face" is stated in Exod. 33:11 ("as one man speaks to another"). Here the term is an idiom meaning "in person," "directly," "without mediation." That is, Moses experienced the most direct contact with God of any prophet, and so had the clearest knowledge of Him and His will.

**11. various** Literally, "all." The number of wonders executed by Moses was unparalleled.

**signs and portents** Moses was also incom-

parable in the wonders that God performed through him during the time of the Exodus. No other prophet so convincingly confirmed the credibility of his mission.

**the LORD sent him to display** The Torah here and elsewhere states that all the wonders Moses performed were by means of God's power and at His command, not through his own personal power or any occult skills. However, the next verse emphasizes Moses' role, because it was through those wonders that he established and proved himself as God's emissary.

**12. great might** Literally, "mighty hand." This and the "awesome power that Moses displayed" refer to "the various signs and portents" in verse 11.

**before all Israel** Literally, "in the sight of all Israel." That the Israelites witnessed these wonders is asserted often (e.g., 4:34, 6:22, 29:1–2). The Israelites were, therefore, convinced of the truth revealed by those events: the indisputable authenticity of Moses.

**12. before all Israel** With these words, we complete the reading of the Torah. It began in chaos, and with God imposing order on the chaos. It concludes with a nation of men, women, and children poised on the banks of the Jordan River, ready to begin perhaps the greatest spiritual adventure of all time, the effort to translate God's will into the daily life of a community.

In synagogues, we complete the Torah and proceed in two directions. First we go back to the opening words of Genesis and we begin again, finding new insights on every page, not because the Torah has changed, but because we have changed since we read it a year ago. And then, in the *haftarah* for *Simhat Torah*, we go forward into history, to read of Joshua's leadership of the people after the death of Moses.

#### HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

**34:12.** Upon completing the reading of the entire Torah on *Simhat Torah* with this verse from Deuteronomy, we turn back to the beginning of the Torah and read from the first two chapters of the Book of Genesis to emphasize that the study of Torah is unending. We also indicate the continuity of Jewish tradition by reading the first chapter of the Book of Joshua (the first book in the continuation of the Bible after the Torah) as the *haftarah*. In many synagogues, everyone is called up for an *aliyah* on *Simhat Torah*, even the children (S.A. O.H. 669:1.gloss), to symbolize that the Torah is the legacy of the entire people of Israel.

When God began to create heaven and earth. בְּרֵאשִׁית \* בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ.

v. 1. ב' רבתי לפי נוסחים מקובלים

## CREATION (1:1–2:3)

The Creation narrative in the Bible is a document of faith. In its quest for meaning it gives expression to the fundamental premise of the religion of the people Israel: The universe is entirely the purposeful product of the one God, a transcendent being, beyond nature, and sovereign over space and time.

### INTRODUCTION (1:1)

**1. When God began to create** The conventional English translation reads: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." The translation presented here looks to verse 3 for the completion of the sentence and takes

Time has not diminished the power or the majesty of the familiar biblical account of the creation of the world, nor has familiarity dulled its impact. It still moves us, conveying so much in so few words. What kind of world does the Torah envision God creating? The opening chapters of Genesis are not a scientific account of the origins of the universe. The Torah is a book of morality, not cosmology. Its overriding concern, from the first verse to the last, is our relationship to God, truth about life rather than scientific truths. It describes the world God fashioned as "good," a statement no scientific account can make.

God's world is an orderly world, in which land and water each has its own domain, in which each species of plant and animal reproduces itself "after its own kind." But it is also an unpredictable world, a world capable of growth and change and surprise, of love and pain, of glory and tragedy, not simply replication of what is, because it includes human beings who have the freedom to choose how they will act. And it is an unfinished world, waiting for human beings to complete God's work of creating.

### CHAPTER 1

The Torah assumes the existence and overwhelming power of God. We find here no myth of God's birth, as we find in other cultures' accounts of creation, only a description of God's actions. It seems that the Torah is saying, "This is the premise on which the rest stands. Only if you accept it is everything that follows intelligible." God created the world, blessed it with the capacity to renew and reproduce itself, and deemed it "good." This is the answer to the

basic and inevitable questions: Why is there something instead of nothing? Why is there life instead of inert matter?

The first letter of the first word in the Torah, "b'reishit," is the Hebrew letter *bet*. This prompted the Midrash to suggest that, just as the letter *bet* is enclosed on three sides but open to the front, we are not to speculate on the origins of God or what may have existed before Creation (Gen. R. 1:10). The purpose of such a comment is not to limit scientific inquiry into the origins of the universe but to discourage efforts to prove the unprovable. It urges us to ask ourselves, "How are we to live in this world?" And it urges us to live facing forward rather than looking backward. Jewish theology generally has been concerned with discerning the will of God rather than proving the existence or probing the nature of God. Ultimate origins ("Who made God?") are hidden from view, but all the rest of the world is open to inquiry. The Torah begins with *bet*, second letter of the Hebrew alphabet, to summon us to begin even if we cannot begin at the very beginning.

The Midrash takes the word for "beginning" (*reishit*) as a synonym for "Torah" (as in Prov. 8:22), interpreting the first verse as declaring: "With *reishit* did God create the heaven and the earth." God created the world by consulting the Torah, fashioning a world based on Torah values, or for the sake of the Torah, so that there would be somewhere in the universe where the values of the Torah could be put into practice (Gen. R. 1:1,6).

**1. When God began** The beginning of all knowledge and morality lies in the recognition that God created the world. Akiva taught: "Just

earth—<sup>2</sup>the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water—<sup>3</sup>God said, “Let there be light”; and there was

וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ: <sup>2</sup>וְהָאָרֶץ הִיְתָה תְהוֹ וְבָהוּ  
וְחָשֶׁךְ עַל-פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים  
מְרַחֶפֶת עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם: <sup>3</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים

verse 2 to be parenthetical, describing the state of things at the time when God first spoke. Support for understanding the text in this way comes from the second half of 2:4 and of 5:1, both of which refer to Creation and begin with the word “when.”

**God** The Hebrew term for God used throughout this account of Creation is not the unique sacred divine name *YHVH* but *elohim*, a general Hebrew word for “deity,” which can also refer to pagan gods. Although plural in form, it almost always appears with a singular verb or adjective. The name, connoting universalism and abstraction, is most appropriate for the God of Creation.

**create** The Hebrew stem of the word translated as “create” (ברא) is used in the Bible only for divine creativity. It signifies that the created object is unique, depends solely on God for its coming into existence, and is beyond the ability of humans to reproduce. The verb never means “to create out of nothing.”

**heaven and earth** The observable universe is here specified by the use of the definite article in Hebrew (literally, “the heaven and the earth”). The combination of opposites (“heaven and earth”) expresses the totality of cosmic phenomena, for which there is no single word in biblical Hebrew.

## THE PRIMORDIAL WORLD

(v. 2)

**2. unformed and void** The Hebrew for this phrase (*tohu va-vohu*) means “desert waste.” The point of the narrative is the idea of order that results from divine intent. There is no suggestion here that God made the world out of nothing, which is a much later conception.

**darkness** In the Bible, darkness is often a symbol of evil, misfortune, death, or oblivion. Here it seems to be not just the absence of light

but a distinct entity, the origin of which is left unclear.

**the deep** The Hebrew word for “the deep” (*t'hom*) refers to the subterranean waters that ancient humans believed were beneath the earth. The text says nothing about how or when this body of water came into existence. In Proverbs (8:22–24) it is one of God’s creations. The word is related etymologically to Tiamat, the maritime goddess in the Babylonian creation story. In all of the ancient Near Eastern creation stories, the primal element is water. To the ancients, the formless nature of water seemed to represent the state of affairs before chaos was transformed to order.

**a wind from God** Or, as others suggest, “a mighty wind.” The Hebrew word *ru-ah* means “wind, breath, spirit.” “Wind” is the prevalent understanding of the word here in ancient and medieval Jewish sources. As a physical phenomenon, wind conforms to the picture of primal chaos evoked by this verse.

**sweeping** Movement is the basic idea underlying this Hebrew verb (רחף). Motion, the essential element in change, originates with God’s dynamic presence.

**water** This is either the cosmic ocean believed by the ancients to surround the earth or the water referred to in verses 6, 7, 9, and 10, namely, that which covered the solid mass of earth. These two bodies of water were probably not clearly differentiated in the ancient Hebrew mind.

## THE FIRST GROUP OF CREATED OBJECTS (vv. 3–13)

### DAY ONE

**3. God said** The divine word shatters the cosmic silence and signals the beginning of a

as the existence of a house testifies to the builder and the existence of a garment testifies to the weaver, so the existence of the world testifies to God who fashioned it” (Mid. Tem. 3). “Whoever teaches a child the Torah’s account of Creation is to be considered as having created the world personally.” To shape the moral imagination of a child is to create a new world.

**3. God creates the world with words.** This is the first invocation of the Torah’s belief in the reality of words, their power to create and to destroy.

**Let there be light** Light, the first thing God created, can be seen as symbolizing Judaism’s commitment to clarity rather than mystery, to openness rather than concealment, to study

light. <sup>4</sup>God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup>God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, a first day.

יְהִי אֹרֶךְ וַיְהִי-אֶרֶץ: <sup>4</sup>וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-  
הָאֹרֶךְ כִּי-טוֹב וַיַּבְדֵּל אֱלֹהִים בֵּין הָאֹרֶךְ  
וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ: <sup>5</sup>וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים | לְאֹרֶךְ יוֹם  
וְלַחֹשֶׁךְ קֶרָא לַיְלָה וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר  
יוֹם אֶחָד: פ

new order. “God said” means that God created the world with His words. This signifies that the Creator is wholly independent of Creation. It implies effortlessness and absolute sovereignty over nature.

**Let there be** This instruction (*y’hi*), found again in verses 6 and 14, is reserved for the creation of celestial phenomena.

**light** The first creation by God’s utterance. Light in the Bible serves as a symbol of life, joy, justice, and deliverance. The notion of light independent of the sun (which appears again in Isa. 30:26 and Job 38:19–20) derives from the observations that the sky is illumined on days when the sun is obscured and that brightness precedes the sun’s rising. As in the ancient world generally, light itself is a feature of divinity.

**4. God saw** God perceived.

**was good** This affirms the flawlessness of God’s creation. Reality is imbued with God’s goodness.

**God separated** Separation, or differentia-

tion, is another aspect of creation. Light, like darkness, is viewed here as a separate entity.

**5. God called** Not to possess a name is tantamount to nonexistence in the worldview of the ancient Near East, including Egypt and Babylonia. Name giving was thus associated with creation and domination, for the one who gives a name has power over the object named. In this narrative, God names day and night, the sky, the earth, and the sea. This is another way of expressing God’s absolute sovereignty over time and space.

**evening . . . morning** The Hebrew words *erev* and *boker* literally mean “sunset” and “break of dawn,” terms inappropriate before the creation of the sun on the fourth day. Here the two words signify, respectively, the end of the period of light (when divine creativity was suspended) and the renewal of light (when the creative process was resumed).

**a first day** Better: “the first day.” The Hebrew word “*ehad*” functions as both a cardinal

rather than blind faith. Light, God’s first creation, becomes a symbol of God’s Presence, in the fire of the Burning Bush and the revelation at Sinai, in the perpetual light (*ner tamid*) and the *m’norah* of the tabernacle. For some theologians, light functions as a symbol for God because light itself is not visible but makes everything else visible. “By Your light do we see light” (Ps. 36:10).

**4. God separated** The process of Creation is a process of making distinctions and separating—light from darkness, sea from dry land, one species from another—imposing order where there had been chaos and randomness. Throughout the Torah, we find this emphasis on distinction and separation: sacred and ordinary time, permitted and forbidden foods, rit-

ually pure and impure persons, no mixing of diverse seeds or cross-breeding animal species. Aviva Zornberg suggests that separation, specialization, is almost always achieved with pain and sacrifice, even as there is a sense of sadness in the *havdalah* service that marks the separation of *Shabbat* and weekday, even as there is pain when an infant is born out of its mother’s body, even as there is a sense of painful separation when a child outgrows its dependence on parents. The Midrash (Gen. R. 5:3) pictures the lower waters weeping at being separated from the upper waters, suggesting that there is something poignant in the creative process when things once united are separated.

**5. a first day** Literally, “one day,” taken by the Midrash to mean “the day of the One,” the

#### HALAKHAH L’MA-ASEH

**1:5 there was evening and there was morning** According to Jewish law, the 24-hour cycle begins at sunset. *Shabbat* and holy days, therefore, begin in the evening, with candles lit 18 minutes before sunset, and continue until the following night when three stars can be clearly seen or 25 minutes after sunset if no stars are visible. (On determining the beginning of *Shabbat*, see S.A. O.H. 261:1–4.)

<sup>6</sup>God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the water, that it may separate water from water.” <sup>7</sup>God made the expanse, and it separated the water which was below the expanse from the water which was above the expanse. And it was so. <sup>8</sup>God called the expanse Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

<sup>9</sup>God said, “Let the water below the sky be gathered into one area, that the dry land may appear.” And it was so. <sup>10</sup>God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering of waters He called Seas. And God saw that this was good.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי רָקִיעַ בְּתוֹךְ הַמַּיִם וַיְהִי מְבֻדֵּל בֵּין מַיִם לַמַּיִם: <sup>7</sup>וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הַרָקִיעַ וַיַּבְדֵּל בֵּין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מִתַּחַת לַרָקִיעַ וּבֵין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מֵעַל לַרָקִיעַ וַיְהִי־כֵן: <sup>8</sup>וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לַרָקִיעַ שָׁמַיִם וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם שֵׁנִי: פ

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִקְוּ הַמַּיִם מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם אֶל־מְקוֹם אֶחָד וְתִרְאֶה הַיַּבְשָׁה וַיְהִי־כֵן: <sup>10</sup>וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לַיַּבְשָׁה אֶרֶץ וּלַמְקוֹהַּ הַמַּיִם קָרָא יַמִּים וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים

number (one) and an ordinal number (first) in many texts.

DAY TWO

**6. an expanse** The verbal form of the noun translated as “an expanse” (*raki-a*) is often used for hammering out metal or flattening out earth, which suggests a basic meaning of “extending.” The vault of heaven is here viewed either as a vast sheet of metal or as a layer of solid ice.

**water from water** The expanse was to serve

as a separation between the celestial source of rain and the water on earth.

**7. And it was so** Henceforth this is the standard formula for expressing the fulfillment of God’s command.

DAY THREE

**9. water below the sky** That is, the terrestrial waters.

**the dry land** The terrain that now has become visible.

day on which God, whose name and essence are one, established a world suitable for the divine Presence (Gen. R. 3:1).

**6. expanse** The word traditionally has been translated “firmament,” a shell holding up the heavens. Once science understood that no physical barrier separates heaven from earth and that references to “opening the heavens” to cause rain to fall are poetic and metaphorical, medieval (Ibn Ezra) and modern commentaries (Malbim and this translation) came to understand the word as referring to the atmosphere that encircles our planet.

**8. Sky** In Hebrew: *shamayim*. The Midrash (Gen. R. 4:7) understands the word as a combination of *esh* (fire) and *mayim* (water), that is, the sun and the rain clouds. Were the rain clouds to extinguish the sun or were the sun to evaporate the rain clouds, the world would perish. Therefore, God works a daily miracle. Fire and water agree to co-exist peacefully so that the world can endure. Another midrash (Deut.

R. 1:12) links this idea to a passage in our prayers: “May You who established peace in the heavens [teaching fire and water to get along] grant that kind of peace to us and to all the people Israel.” In other words, we pray for the miracle that both individuals and nations with the power to harm each other will learn to get along in peace—even as fire and water do in the heavens.

On the second day we miss the formula “and God saw that it was good.” The Sages explain this as due to the act of separation on that day, which may be necessary but is never wholly good, or because the process of separating the waters would not be concluded until the third day and one does not recite a blessing over an incomplete project (Rashi). The formula occurs twice on the third day (vv. 10 and 12). This is the source of the tradition that Tuesday (the third day) is a propitious day for weddings and other important occasions.

<sup>11</sup>And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation: seed-bearing plants, fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And it was so. <sup>12</sup>The earth brought forth vegetation: seed-bearing plants of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that this was good. <sup>13</sup>And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.

<sup>14</sup>God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate day from night; they shall serve as signs for the set times—the days and the years; <sup>15</sup>and they shall serve as lights in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth.” And it was so. <sup>16</sup>God made the two great lights, the greater light to dominate the day and the lesser light to dominate the night, and the stars. <sup>17</sup>And God set them in the ex-

פִּיטוּב: <sup>11</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים תִּדְשָׂא הָאָרֶץ  
דְּשָׂא עֵשֶׂב מִזְרִיעַ זֶרַע עֵץ פְּרִי עֵשֶׂה פְּרִי  
לְמִינוֹ אֲשֶׁר זֶרְעוֹבוּ עַל־הָאָרֶץ וַיְהִי־כֵן:  
<sup>12</sup>וַתוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ דְּשָׂא עֵשֶׂב מִזְרִיעַ זֶרַע  
לְמִינָהּוּ וְעֵץ עֵשֶׂה־פְּרִי אֲשֶׁר זֶרְעוֹבוּ  
לְמִינָהּוּ וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־טוֹב: <sup>13</sup>וַיְהִי־  
עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם שְׁלִישִׁי: פ  
<sup>14</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי מְאֹרֹת בְּרָקִיעַ  
הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הַיּוֹם וּבֵין הַלַּיְלָה  
וְהָיוּ לְאֹתוֹת וּלְמוֹעֲדִים וְלַיָּמִים וּשְׁנָיִם:  
<sup>15</sup>וְהָיוּ לְמְאֹרֹת בְּרָקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהָאֵיר  
עַל־הָאָרֶץ וַיְהִי־כֵן: <sup>16</sup>וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־  
שְׁנֵי הַמְּאֹרֹת הַגְּדֹלִים אֶת־הַמְּאֹר הַגָּדֹל  
לְמַמְשַׁלֵּת הַיּוֹם וְאֶת־הַמְּאֹר הַקָּטָן  
לְמַמְשַׁלֵּת הַלַּיְלָה וְאֵת הַכּוֹכָבִים:  
<sup>17</sup>וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים בְּרָקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם

**11. Let the earth sprout** According to the biblical worldview, it is God who endows the earth with generative powers. The forces of nature are not independent spiritual entities.

**seed-bearing** Endowed with the capacity for self-replication.

**of every kind** The various species.

#### THE SECOND GROUP OF CREATED OBJECTS (vv. 14–31)

The creations of days four to six are parallel to those of days one to three. The difference is that the former creations were endowed with motion and the latter were not.

#### DAY FOUR

**14. Let there be lights** This corresponds to

“Let there be light” in Gen. 1:3. The emergence of vegetation (v. 12) before the existence of the sun, the anonymity of the luminaries, and the detailed description serve to emphasize that the sun, moon, and stars are not divinities, as they were universally thought to be in other creation narratives. Rather, they are the creations of God, who assigned them the function of regulating the life rhythms of the universe.

**signs for the set times** The Hebrew terms for “signs” (*otot*) and for “set times” (*mo-adim*) are here a single thought expressed by two words. The “set times” are then specified as “the days and the years.”

**16. two great lights** The general term “luminaries” is more precisely defined. No special role is assigned to the stars.

**12.** In every living thing, plant and animal alike, God has implanted the irrepressible urge to reproduce, to create life out of its own life.

**14.** God creates the sun and the moon on the fourth day. But light was created on the first day! The primordial light created then was so intense that humans would have been able to see everything happening in the world. God realized that humans could not endure seeing reality that clearly. To make the world tolerable

for human beings, God hid the primordial light until such time as humans would be able to stand it, replacing it with the light of the sun (BT Hag. 12a).

**16. the two great lights, the greater . . . and the lesser** The two luminaries originally were equal in size, prompting the moon to ask God, “Can two kings share a single crown?” God responded, “Make yourself smaller!” The moon cried, “Because I presented a proper claim, must

pans of the sky to shine upon the earth, <sup>18</sup>to dominate the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that this was good. <sup>19</sup>And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

<sup>20</sup>God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and birds that fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky."

<sup>21</sup>God created the great sea monsters, and all the living creatures of every kind that creep, which the waters brought forth in swarms, and all the winged birds of every kind. And God saw that this was good. <sup>22</sup>God blessed them, saying, "Be fertile and increase, fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth." <sup>23</sup>And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

DAY FIVE

**20. Let the waters bring forth swarms** In the Torah, water does not possess autonomous powers of procreation, as it does in ancient Near Eastern pagan mythologies. The waters generate marine life only in response to the divine command.

**living creatures** This term in Hebrew (*nefesh hayyah*) means, literally, "animate life," that which contains the breath of life. It is distinct from plant life, which was not considered to be living.

**across the expanse of the sky** Literally, "over the face of." The viewpoint is that of an observer on earth looking upward.

**21. God created** This is the first use of the verb "bara" since verse 1, signifying that these monsters, too, were creatures of God—rather than mythologic divine beings, as the Canaanites believed.

לְהָאֵיר עַל-הָאָרֶץ: <sup>18</sup>וְלְמַשֵּׁל בַּיּוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָה וּלְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הָאֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי-טוֹב: <sup>19</sup>וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם רְבִיעִי: פ

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִשְׂרְצוּ הַמַּיִם שָׂרָץ נֹפֵשׁ חַיָּה וְעוֹף יַעֲוֹף עַל-הָאָרֶץ עַל-פְּנֵי רְקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם: <sup>21</sup>וַיַּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הַתַּנִּינִם\* הַגְּדֹלִים וְאֶת כָּל-נֹפֵשׁ הַחַיָּה הַרְמֹשֶׁת אֲשֶׁר שָׂרְצוּ הַמַּיִם לְמִינֵיהֶם וְאֶת כָּל-עוֹף כָּנָף לְמִינֵהוּ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי-טוֹב: <sup>22</sup>וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים לֵאמֹר פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלְאוּ אֶת-הַמַּיִם בַּיּוֹם וַיְהִי-וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם חֲמִישִׁי: פ

v. 21. חסר י' בתראה

**the great sea monsters** Both the Hebrew word for these creatures (*tannin*) and the word "Leviathan" appear in Canaanite myths from the ancient city of Ugarit, as the name of a dragon god from earliest times who assisted Yam (god of the sea) in a battle against Baal (Canaanite god of fertility). Fragments of an Israelite version of this myth are present in several biblical poetic texts in which the forces of evil in this world are figuratively identified with "Tannin," the embodiment of the chaos that God had vanquished in earliest time. By stating that they were part of God's creation, the narrative deprives them of divinity.

**22. God blessed them** Animate creation receives the gift of fertility through the divine blessing of sexual reproduction. Plant life was not so blessed, because it was thought to have been equipped with the capacity for self-reproduction by nonsexual means.

the moon's plea and compensated for its diminution by promising that only the moon would be seen by both day and night. It also would be accompanied by an honor guard of stars, and the Jewish people would calculate months and years according to its phases (BT Hul. 60b).

**20.** God adds a new dimension to the world of plants and streams by creating life.

**22.** God blesses the animals, giving them the power to produce new life even as God creates new life. The birth of any living creature is an instance of God's continuing creative power.

<sup>24</sup>God said, “Let the earth bring forth every kind of living creature: cattle, creeping things, and wild beasts of every kind.” And it was so. <sup>25</sup>God made wild beasts of every kind and cattle of every kind, and all kinds of creeping things of the earth. And God saw that this was good. <sup>26</sup>And God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים תּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה <sup>24</sup>  
 לְמִינָהּ בְּהֵמָה וְרֶמֶשׂ וְחַיְתוֹ-אָרֶץ לְמִינָהּ  
 וַיְהִי-כֵן: <sup>25</sup>וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ  
 לְמִינָהּ וְאֶת-הַבְּהֵמָה לְמִינָהּ וְאֶת כָּל-  
 רֶמֶשׂ הָאֲדָמָה לְמִינֵהוּ וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי-  
 טוֹב: <sup>26</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם  
 בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ וַיְרִדוּ בְדִגְתַּת הַיָּם  
 וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל-הָאָרֶץ  
 וּבְכָל-הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל-הָאָרֶץ: <sup>27</sup>וַיְבָרָא

#### DAY SIX

**24. Let the earth bring forth** This image of the earth producing animals may be related to the ancient concept of “Mother Earth,” or it may simply be a figurative way of expressing the normal habitat of these creatures.

**25. creeping things** A general term for creatures whose bodies move close to the ground. Here it seems to encompass reptiles, creeping insects, and very small animals.

**26. Let us make** The extraordinary use of the first person plural here evokes the image of a heavenly court in which God is surrounded by an angelic multitude. This is the Israelite version of the assemblies of pagan deities prevalent in the mythologies of the ancient world.

**man** The Hebrew word *adam* is a general term for humankind. It encompasses both man and woman (as shown in vv. 27–28 and in 5:1–2). It never appears in the feminine or in the

plural. In the first five chapters of Genesis, it also serves as the proper name Adam.

**in our image, after our likeness** In the ancient Near East, the ruling king was often described as the “image” or the “likeness” of a god, which served to elevate the monarch above ordinary mortals. In the Bible, this idea became democratized. Every human being is created “in the image of God”; each bears the stamp of royalty. Further, the symbols by which the gods are generally depicted in ancient Assyrian royal steles (Asshur by the winged disk, Shamash by the sun disk) are called “the image (*tzalamu*) of the great gods.” Thus the description of mortals as “in the image of God” makes humankind the symbol of God’s presence on earth.

**They shall rule** In the prevailing beliefs of the ancient world, the forces of nature are gods with the power to enslave humankind. The

**26.** So far, the account of Creation has alternated between activities on high (the heavens, the sun and moon, the birds) one day and activities on earth (the waters, the plants) the next. The Torah now turns to the creation of human beings, who will be a combination of the heavens and the earth, the sublime and the physical (Vilna Gaon).

**Let us make man in our image** Commentators in every generation have puzzled over the plural language in this verse. The Midrash envisions God consulting with the angels, perhaps hinting at a measure of divine ambivalence. Truth and Peace oppose creating humans on the grounds that such creatures would surely be deceitful and contentious. Love and Righteousness favor their creation, for without humanity, how can there be love and righteous-

ness in the world? God sides with those favoring creation (Gen. R. 8:5).

Or perhaps God was speaking to the animals: Together let us fashion a unique creature in our image (yours and Mine), a creature like an animal in some ways—needing to eat, to sleep, to mate—and like God in some ways—capable of compassion, creativity, morality, and self-consciousness. Let the divine qualities manifest themselves in this culmination of the evolutionary process. Albo sees each animal species contributing its choicest quality to this new creature (*Ikkarim*, pt. 3, ch. 1).

**They shall rule** Animals and insects expand horizontally—to “fill” the earth. Humans grow vertically—to “master” the earth and serve as its custodians, by changing, controlling, and improving their environment (Zornberg).

that creep on earth.”<sup>27</sup> And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.<sup>28</sup> God blessed them and God said to them, “Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.”

<sup>29</sup>God said, “See, I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food.<sup>30</sup> And to all the animals on land, to all the birds of the sky, and to everything that creeps on earth, in which there is the breath of life, [I give] all the green plants for food.” And

אֱלֹהִים | אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצַלְמֵ אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם: וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וּכְבֹשׁוּהָ וּרְדוּ בְּדִגַּת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל־חַיָּה הַרְמִשָּׁת עַל־הָאָרֶץ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים הִנֵּה נֹתַתִּי לָכֶם אֶת־כָּל־עֵשֶׂב | זֶרַע זֶרַע אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי כָל־הָאָרֶץ וְאֶת־כָּל־הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר־בוֹ פְּרִיעַץ זֶרַע זֶרַע לָכֶם יִהְיֶה לְאֹכְלָהּ: <sup>30</sup> וְלִכְל־חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ וְלִכְל־עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלִכְל | וּרְמִשׁ עַל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־בוֹ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה

words of this verse, in contrast, declare mortals to be free agents with the God-given power to control nature.

**27. male and female** Sexual difference is not noted regarding beasts in the Creation narrative. Human sexuality is a gift of God woven into the fabric of life.

**28. God blessed them and God said to them** God addresses the man and the woman directly. The transcendent God of Creation becomes the

immanent God, the personal God who enters into communion with human beings.

**Be fertile and increase** These words are uttered as a blessing, not a command. Only when repeated in 9:7, after the depopulation of the earth by the Flood, are they a command.

**30. for food** God now makes provision for sustaining human and animal life. It is a reminder that the man and the woman are entirely dependent on God's benevolence.

27. Every human has irreducible worth and dignity, because every human is fashioned in the image of God. The Second Commandment (Exod. 20) forbids fashioning an image of God. We do not need one because every person represents the divine. “A human king strikes coins in his image, and every one of them is identical. God creates every person with the die of the first human being [i.e., in the divine image], and each one is unique” (BT Sanh. 38a).

**male and female** The Midrash (Gen. R. 8:1) alludes to a legend, also found in Plato's *Symposium* and in other ancient traditions, that the first human being was actually a pair of twins attached to each other, one male and one fe-

male. God divided them and commanded them to reunite, to find the other person who will make each of them complete again, in order to reproduce and attain wholeness. (The Midrash takes the words “and God blessed them” to mean “God presided over their wedding ceremony” [Gen. R. 8:13].) This would imply that Eve was not fashioned out of Adam's rib as an afterthought but was created at the same time as Adam, as half of the first human creature. (The word translated “rib,” *tzela*, in 2:21-2, means “side” in Exod. 26:20 and elsewhere in biblical Hebrew.)

29. According to the Torah, humans were meant to be vegetarians. Eating meat would be

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

**1:28 Be fertile and increase** According to the Mishnah, each married couple must have at least one son and one daughter to fulfill this commandment (M Yev. 6:6). However, Jewish law and historical practice urge Jews to have as many children as possible (BT Yev. 62b). Couples who cannot have children through their own sexual intercourse are, of course, exempt from this commandment. They may pursue fertility treatments, but they are not obligated to do so.

it was so.<sup>31</sup> And God saw all that He had made, and found it very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

אֶת־כָּל־יִרְקַע עֵשֶׂב לְאֹכְלָהּ וַיְהִי־כֵן׃  
 31 וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה  
 וְהִנֵּה טוֹב מְאֹד וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם  
 הַשְּׁשִׁי׃ פ

**2** The heaven and the earth were finished, and all their array.<sup>2</sup> On the seventh day God finished the work that He had been doing, and He ceased on the seventh day from all the work

ב וַיִּכְלֹ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל־צְבָאָם׃  
 2 וַיִּכַּל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְלַאכְתּוֹ  
 אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִכָּל־

**31. very good** A judgment on the totality of Creation, now completed.

**the sixth day** The definite article in Hebrew, used here and with the seventh day, points to the special character of these days within the scheme of Creation.

#### THE SEVENTH DAY (2:1–3)

The account of Creation opened with a statement about God; it now closes with a statement about God. The seventh day is the LORD's day, through which all the creativity of the preceding days achieves fulfillment.

**1. all their array** The word translated as

“array” (*tzava*) usually applies only to heaven. In this phrase, it is extended to apply to the earth as well.

**2. On the seventh day** That is, Creation was completed with the act of cessation from work.

**God finished** See Exod. 40:33, which suggests a parallel between the completion of the tabernacle in the wilderness and the completion of the creation of the world.

**He ceased** This is the primary meaning of the Hebrew verb שבת. The idea of resting is secondary. The use of the verb anticipates the later establishment of *Shabbat*.

a later concession to their willful appetites (cf. Gen. 9:3).

**31. very good** According to the Midrash, this includes the egocentric drive, the *yeitzer ha-ra*, sometimes described as the “evil impulse.” Without it, no one would build a house, establish a business, marry, or raise a family (Gen. R. 9:7). According to Meir, “very good” (*tov m’od*) even includes the inevitability of death: *tov mot*, “death is good” (Gen. R. 9:5). Knowing that our days are numbered invests our deeds and choices with greater significance. Although the death of someone we love is searingly painful, we can recognize that a world in which people die and new souls are born offers the promise of renewal and improvement more than a world in which the original people live forever.

As the chapter concludes, God surveys with satisfaction the newly fashioned world, teeming with life in all its variety, culminating in the creation of that unpredictable creature, the human being.

#### CHAPTER 2

The opening verses of chapter 2 belong thematically to chapter 1. The division of the Torah into chapters is a late development, by non-Jewish authorities. Jewish tradition divides the Torah into *parashiyot*.

**1. were finished** A talmudic passage reads, “They (that is, people) finished the heavens and the earth.” God left the world a bit incomplete so that we might become God’s partners in the work of Creation. We complete God’s work

#### HALAKHAH L'MA-ASEH

2:1–3 *The heaven and the earth* The Rabbis include these verses in the Friday evening *kiddush* recited over wine. In refraining from creative or constructive work on *Shabbat*, we emulate our Creator, who ceased from all the work of creation.

that He had done. <sup>3</sup>And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation that He had done. <sup>4</sup>Such is the story of heaven and earth when they were created.

מְלֵאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה: <sup>3</sup>וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים  
אֶת-יּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ כִּי בּוֹ  
שָׁבַת מִכָּל-מְלֵאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר-בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים  
שְׁנֵי לַעֲשׂוֹת: פ <sup>4</sup>אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם  
וְהָאָרֶץ בְּהִבְרָאָם\*

ו. 4. ה' זעירא לפי נוסחים מקובלים

**3. God blessed . . . declared it holy** Unlike the blessings in Gen. 1:22,28, which are specific and relate to living creatures, this blessing is undefined and pertains to time itself. God has already established sovereignty over space; here God is perceived as sovereign over time as well.

**holy** This first use of the biblical concept of holiness relates to time. This is a striking con-

trast to the view of the Babylonians, whose creation epic concludes with the erection of a temple, thereby asserting the sanctification of space.

**all the work of creation that He had done**

The Hebrew words read, literally, “all His work that God created to do.” Ibn Ezra and Radak took the final verb (*la-asot*) as connoting “[for man] to [continue to] do [thenceforth].”

## EDEN AND THE EXPULSION: THE HUMAN CONDITION (2:4–3:24)

The narrative turns from the God of Creation to the wretched condition of humankind. What disrupted the harmony between God, man, and nature? How are we to explain the harsh, hostile workings of nature, the recalcitrance of the soil to arduous human labor, and the existence of evil?

**4. Such is . . . when they were created** This first half of the verse completes the first story of Creation. Note in this verse the inversion of the phrases “heaven and earth” (*ha-shamayim v'ha-aretz*) and “earth and heaven” (*eretz v'shamayim*). It signals a shift in focus between the two creation stories.

of imposing order on chaos when we process wheat into bread, find cures for disease, sustain the poor, strengthen families. “One who recites these verses (1–3) on Friday night (*leil Shabbat*), acknowledging God as the Creator, helps God complete the work of Creation” (BT Shab. 119b).

**3.** The true conclusion of the work of Creation was not the fashioning of the first human, but the institution of *Shabbat*, imposing on the world a rhythm of work and leisure, changing and leaving alone. There could not have been *Shabbat* before there were human beings, for animals are controlled by time; but humans have the ability to order time, to impose their purposes on time, to choose to set days aside for special purposes, to celebrate holy days and anniversaries.

“To set apart one day a week for freedom, a day on which we would not use the instruments which have been so easily turned into weapons of destruction, a day for being with ourselves, a day of detachment from the vulgar, a day on which we stop worshipping the idols

of technical civilization, a day of armistice in the economic struggle with our fellow men—is there any institution that holds out a greater hope for human progress than the Sabbath?” (A. J. Heschel).

In verse 3, God is described as “blessing” *Shabbat*. “To bless,” or to sanctify, is to set something apart as special. It means partaking of a higher level of spiritual worth. This concept could be invoked only when there were human beings in the world.

The Vilna Gaon suggests that God ceased work on the seventh day, even though the world was still somewhat incomplete, as an example to us to put aside our unfinished business on Friday afternoon and leave the world as it is on *Shabbat*.

Legend has it that God created other worlds before this one, but was not pleased with any of them. One world was based on the principle of strict justice; anyone who did wrong was punished. Every righteous person who gave in to temptation was struck down. Rejecting that world, God fashioned a world based on the

teen yearling lambs, without blemish; <sup>33</sup>the grain offerings and libations for the bulls, rams, and lambs, in the quantities prescribed; <sup>34</sup>and one goat for a purification offering—in addition to the regular burnt offering, its grain offering and libation.

<sup>35</sup>On the eighth day you shall hold a solemn gathering; you shall not work at your occupations. <sup>36</sup>You shall present a burnt offering, a gift of pleasing odor to the LORD; one bull, one ram, seven yearling lambs, without blemish; <sup>37</sup>the grain offerings and libations for the bull, the ram, and the lambs, in the quantities prescribed; <sup>38</sup>and one goat for a purification offering—in addition to the regular burnt offering, its grain offering and libation.

<sup>39</sup>All these you shall offer to the LORD at the stated times, in addition to your votive and free-will offerings, be they burnt offerings, grain offerings, libations, or offerings of well-being. <sup>1</sup>So Moses spoke to the Israelites just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

שְׁנַיִם כְּבָשִׂים בְּנֵי־שָׁנָה אַרְבַּעַה עֶשֶׂר  
 תְּמִימִים: <sup>33</sup> וּמִנְחֹתָם וְנִסְכֵיהֶם \* לַפָּרִים  
 לְאֵילִם וְלִכְבָּשִׂים בְּמִסְפָּרָם כְּמִשְׁפָּטָם:  
<sup>34</sup> וְשֹׁעִיר חֲטָאת אֶחָד מִלֵּבֶד עֲלֹת  
 הַתָּמִיד מִנְחָתָהּ וְנִסְכָּהּ: פ  
<sup>35</sup> בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי עֲצַרְתָּ תִהְיֶה לָכֶם כָּל־  
 מְלֶאכֶת עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ: <sup>36</sup> וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם  
 עֹלָה אִשָּׁה רִיחַ נִיחֹחַ לַיהוָה פֶּר אֶחָד  
 אֵיל אֶחָד כְּבָשִׂים בְּנֵי־שָׁנָה שִׁבְעָה  
 תְּמִימִים: <sup>37</sup> מִנְחֹתָם וְנִסְכֵיהֶם לַפָּר לְאֵיל  
 וְלִכְבָּשִׂים בְּמִסְפָּרָם כְּמִשְׁפָּט: <sup>38</sup> וְשֹׁעִיר  
 חֲטָאת אֶחָד מִלֵּבֶד עֲלֹת הַתָּמִיד וּמִנְחָתָהּ  
 וְנִסְכָּהּ:  
<sup>39</sup> אֵלֶּה תַעֲשׂוּ לַיהוָה בְּמוֹעֲדֵיכֶם לְבֹד  
 מִנְדְּרֵיכֶם וְנֹדְבֹתֵיכֶם לְעֹלֹתֵיכֶם  
 וְלִמְנַחֲתֵיכֶם וְלִנְסֻכֵיכֶם וְלִשְׁלֵמֵיכֶם:  
 וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּכֹל  
 אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה: פ

מפסיר

חסר י v. 33.

**EIGHTH DAY** (vv. 35–38)

Although *Sukkot* is a seven-day festival (v. 12), an eighth festival day is added. Its offerings, however, are not the same as those of the preceding festival; rather, they are the same as those of the 1st and the 10th of this month.

**35. On the eighth day** This, the eighth day, is an independent celebration, unconnected to

the preceding festival. Work is prohibited on this day, thereby making it a “sacred occasion,” as is the first day of *Sukkot* (v. 12).

**39.** Personal offerings may be presented in addition to the public offerings stipulated above.

**30:1.** This verse tells us that Moses informed the Israelites about the religious calendar before addressing them on the next subject.

**35.** On *Sh’mini Atzeret* (the Hebrew name of the festival cited), the day immediately after *Sukkot* week, the offerings are more restrained. The Talmud pictures God as a host, welcoming representatives of all nations who

come to pay homage on *Sukkot*; then, as the festival ends and the other nations depart, God says to Israel: “Stay here with Me a while longer for a more intimate celebration” (BT Suk. 55b).

# הַפְּטָרָה לְשִׁמְחַת תּוֹרָה

## HAFTARAH FOR SIMḤAT TORAH

JOSHUA 1:1–18

This *haftarah* is taken from the opening of the Book of Joshua. It thus picks up the thread of the story after the death of Moses (at the end of the Torah). God addresses Joshua as Moses' successor, commanding him to bring the people into their ancestral land. Further, as a sign of spiritual continuity, the Torah (presented by Moses "as the heritage of the congregation of Jacob," Deut. 33:4) is enjoined upon Joshua for observance and study. The passage also contains Joshua's orders and exhortations that prepare to fulfill the command of conquest.

The *haftarah* is charged with the anxiety of continuity amid new beginnings. "My servant Moses is dead," says God to Joshua at the outset. "Prepare to cross the Jordan." Repeatedly God exhorts Joshua to be courageous, declaring that He will be with him as He was with Moses (vv. 5,9). Echoing these concerns, the Transjordanian tribes exhort Joshua to be courageous and express the hope that God will be with him, as He was with his master (vv. 17–18).

Success in battle is conditioned on faithfulness to the divine teaching (1:7–8). Physical courage alone is insufficient. Only scrupulous study and fulfillment will ensure divine favor in the campaigns to follow. This is hardly the language of a military exhortation and reflects later notions of Torah piety.

The theology in Josh. 1:6–9 echoes values enjoined elsewhere on the whole covenant community. God informs the people in Deut. 11:8 that observance of the divine commandments will enable them "to enter and take possession of the land." More broadly, Ps. 1 proclaims study of the Torah to be a transformative activity. In precisely the same terms as found in Josh. 1:8, the psalmist says that one who studies (*yehgeh*) the Torah "day and night" will "succeed" (*yatzli-ah*) in "all" that he does (vv. 2–3). The Lord enjoins Joshua to

combine two ideals: action and contemplation, asking him to be at once a man of power and of piety. Becoming in effect a "new Moses" through study makes Joshua also the first "keeper of Tradition." Joshua must learn and recite the divine revelations received by his master, Moses, "face to face" (Deut. 34:10). For this reason, Joshua is not called a "prophet"—but rather one "filled with the spirit of wisdom" (Deut. 34:9). Revelation sets the tasks that tradition must realize.

### RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE CALENDAR

The choice of Joshua 1 as the *haftarah* for this holiday may have arisen from an ancient custom of reading the Prophets and the Writings concurrently with the Torah cycle. Communities following this practice concluded all three sections of the Bible together. (The last of the prophets, Malachi, declares near the end of his book, "Remember the Torah of Moses," which makes sense in this larger liturgic context.) On *Simḥat Torah*, it is customary to follow the conclusion of Deuteronomy immediately with the opening portion of Genesis. We may presume a similar old *Simḥat Torah* custom of following the conclusion of the Prophets immediately with the opening verses of its first book, Joshua. Accordingly, this *haftarah* was intended to parallel the reading from Genesis 1:1–2:4, rather than being seen as related to the end of Deuteronomy.

Meanwhile, reading Joshua 1 after the end of the Torah highlights the shift from revelation to tradition. Moses received God's teaching directly, but his successor received it via study and interpretation. Joshua recited the divine words, and in so doing he renewed their instruction for future generations. He was thus the first to extend the authority of Moses beyond the latter's lifetime.

**1** After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' attendant:

<sup>2</sup>“My servant Moses is dead. Prepare to cross the Jordan, together with all this people, into the land that I am giving to the Israelites. <sup>3</sup>Every spot on which your foot treads I give to you, as I promised Moses. <sup>4</sup>Your territory shall extend from the wilderness and the Lebanon to the Great River, the River Euphrates [on the east]—the whole Hittite country—and up to the Mediterranean Sea on the west. <sup>5</sup>No one shall be able to resist you as long as you live. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you.

<sup>6</sup>“Be strong and resolute, for you shall apportion to this people the land that I swore to their fathers to assign to them. <sup>7</sup>But you must be very strong and resolute to observe faithfully all the Teaching that My servant Moses enjoined upon you. Do not deviate from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. <sup>8</sup>Let not this Book of the Teaching cease from your lips, but recite it day and night,

**א** וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי מוֹת מֹשֶׁה עֶבֶד יְהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן־נֹון מִשְׁרַת מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:

<sup>2</sup> מֹשֶׁה עֶבְדִּי מָת וְעַתָּה לָקוּם עֲבַר אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה אַתָּה וְכָל־הָעָם הַזֶּה אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי נֹתֵן לָהֶם לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: <sup>3</sup> כָּל־מְקוֹם אֲשֶׁר תִּדְרֹךְ כַּף־רַגְלֶיךָ בּוֹ לָכֶם נִתְּנוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתִּי אֶל־מֹשֶׁה: <sup>4</sup> מִהַמְדְּבָר וְהַלְּבָנוֹן הַזֶּה וְעַד־הַנָּהָר הַגָּדוֹל נְהַר־פָּרַת כָּל אֶרֶץ הַחִתִּים וְעַד־הַיַּם הַגָּדוֹל מִבּוֹא הַשָּׁמֶשׁ יִהְיֶה גְבוּלְכֶם: <sup>5</sup> לֹא־יִתְיַצֵּב אִישׁ לְפָנֶיךָ כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר הָיִיתִי עִם־מֹשֶׁה אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ לֹא אֶרְפֶּךָ וְלֹא אֶעֱזֹבְךָ:

<sup>6</sup> חֹזֶק וְאַמֵץ בִּי אַתָּה תִּנְחִיל אֶת־הָעָם הַזֶּה אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לְאֲבוֹתֶם לָתֵת לָהֶם: <sup>7</sup> רַק חֹזֶק וְאַמֵץ מְאֹד לִשְׁמֹר לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּכָל־הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר צִוָּךְ מֹשֶׁה עֶבְדִּי אֶל־תָּסוּר מִמֶּנּוּ \* יָמִין וּשְׂמֹאל \* לְמַעַן תִּשְׁפִּיל בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר תֵּלֵךְ: <sup>8</sup> לֹא־יָמוּשׁ סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה הַזֶּה מִפִּיךָ וְהִגִּיתָ בּוֹ

v. 7. סבירין ומטעין "ממנה"

v. 7. מלא ו'

**Joshua 1:1. After the death** The first Hebrew word (*va-y'hi*, literally, “And it was . . .”) is untranslated here. Its conjunction “and” (*va-*) links the opening phrase to the end of Deuteronomy (Rashi).

**2. Moses is dead** According to rabbinic tradition, Moses died on the 7th of *Adar* (see BT Kid. 38a).

**3. Every spot upon which your foot treads** A technical phrase for taking possession.

**4.** These ideal boundaries of the Land are limited only by geographic barriers (river, sea, desert wilderness, mountains). This description follows Deut. 11:24, which it cites (v. 3) while adding a summary: “the whole Hittite country.” That phrase is identical to the term “Hatti land” used in Assyrian sources to indicate the Syro-Palestine region. (For similar delineations of ideal bound-

aries, see Gen. 15:18–21, Exod. 23:31, and Deut. 1:7–8.)

**6,9. Be strong and resolute** The old language of military exhortation (Deut. 31:6) now encases the ideal of Torah piety—transforming a charge of physical might into one of spiritual devotion.

**8. recite it day and night** A religious ideal of perpetual focus on God (via preoccupation with His teachings) lies beyond the immediate utilitarian motivation of God’s word to Joshua. Here the national leader is enjoined to follow the ideal of perpetual study and recitation. In Ps. 1:2, this is an ideal for all who delight in Torah and would be righteous. And Deuteronomy reflects both goals: It exhorts a leader (the king) to ever study Torah and be humble and pious (17:18–20); and it articulates the well-known na-

so that you may observe faithfully all that is written in it. Only then will you prosper in your undertakings and only then will you be successful.

<sup>9</sup>“I charge you: Be strong and resolute; do not be terrified or dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”

<sup>10</sup>Joshua thereupon gave orders to the officials of the people: <sup>11</sup>“Go through the camp and charge the people thus: Get provisions ready, for in three days’ time you are to cross the Jordan, in order to enter and possess the land that the LORD your God is giving you as a possession.”

<sup>12</sup>Then Joshua said to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, <sup>13</sup>“Remember what Moses the servant of the LORD enjoined upon you, when he said, ‘The LORD your God is granting you a haven; He has assigned this territory to you’: <sup>14</sup>Let your wives, children, and livestock remain in the land that Moses assigned to you on this side of the Jordan; but every one of your fighting men shall go across armed in the van of your kinsmen. And you shall assist them <sup>15</sup>until the LORD has given your kinsmen a haven, such as you have, and they too have gained possession of the land that the LORD your God has assigned to them. Then you may return to the land on the east side of the Jordan, which Moses the servant of the LORD assigned to you as your possession, and you may possess it.”

<sup>16</sup>They answered Joshua, “We will do everything you have commanded us and we will go wherever you send us. <sup>17</sup>We will obey you just as we obeyed Moses; let but the LORD your God be with you as He was with Moses! <sup>18</sup>Any man who flouts your commands and does not obey every order you give him shall be put to death. Only be strong and resolute!”

tional ideal of discussing Torah at all times—when seated at home, walking on the way, lying down, and getting up (6:7).

יוֹמִם וְלַיְלָה לְמַעַן תִּשְׁמְרוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּכָל-  
הַכְּתוּב בּוֹ בַּיּוֹם אֲזוֹ תִצְלִיחַ אֶת-דְּרָכְךָ וְאֲזוֹ  
תִשְׁפִּיל: <sup>9</sup> הֲלוֹא צְוִיתִיךָ חֲזַק וְאַמֵּץ אֶל-  
תַּעֲרֹץ וְאַל-תַּחַת כִּי עִמָּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ  
בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר תֵּלֵךְ: פ

<sup>10</sup> וַיִּצְוֵה יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֶת-שׂוֹטְרֵי הָעָם לֵאמֹר:  
<sup>11</sup> עֲבְרוּ | בְּקֶרֶב הַמַּחֲנֶה וְצִוּוּ אֶת-הָעָם  
לֵאמֹר הִכִּינוּ לָכֶם צִידָה כִּי בַעֲדוֹ | שְׁלֹשֶׁת  
יָמִים אַתֶּם עֹבְרִים אֶת-הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה לְבוֹא  
לְרִשֶׁת אֶת-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם  
נָתַן לָכֶם לְרִשְׁתָּהּ: ס

<sup>12</sup> וּלְרְאוּבֵנֵי וּלְגָדֵי וּלְחֻצֵי שִׁבְט הַמְּנַשֶּׁה  
אָמַר יְהוֹשֻׁעַ לֵאמֹר: <sup>13</sup> זְכוּר אֶת-הַדְּבָר  
אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה אֶתְכֶם מֹשֶׁה עַבְד־יְהוָה לֵאמֹר  
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם מְנִיחַ לָכֶם וְנָתַן לָכֶם  
אֶת-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת: <sup>14</sup> נְשִׁיכֶם טַפְּכֶם  
וּמִקְנֵיכֶם יֵשְׁבוּ בְּאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לָכֶם  
מֹשֶׁה בְּעֶבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן וְאַתֶּם תַּעֲבְרוּ חֲמֹשִׁים  
לִפְנֵי אַחֵיכֶם כָּל גְּבוּרֵי הַחֵיל וְעֲזַרְתֶּם  
אוֹתָם: <sup>15</sup> עַד אֲשֶׁר-יִנְיַח יְהוָה | לְאַחֵיכֶם  
כַּכֶּם וַיִּרְשׁוּ גַם-הַמָּה אֶת-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-  
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם נָתַן לָהֶם וּשְׁבַתֶּם לְאָרֶץ  
יְרִשְׁתֶּם וַיִּרְשְׁתֶּם אוֹתָהּ אֲשֶׁר | נָתַן לָכֶם  
מֹשֶׁה עַבְד־יְהוָה בְּעֶבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן מִזְרַח  
הַשָּׁמֶשׁ:

<sup>16</sup> וַיַּעֲנוּ אֶת-יְהוֹשֻׁעַ לֵאמֹר כָּל אֲשֶׁר-  
צְוִיתָנוּ נַעֲשֶׂה וְאֶל-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁלַחֵנוּ  
נִלְךָ: <sup>17</sup> כְּכָל אֲשֶׁר-שָׁמַעְנוּ אֶל-מֹשֶׁה בֶּן  
נִשְׁמַע אֵלֶיךָ רַק יְהוָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ עִמָּךְ  
כְּאֲשֶׁר הָיָה עִם-מֹשֶׁה: <sup>18</sup> כָּל-אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר-  
יִמְרָה אֶת-פִּיךָ וְלֹא-יִשְׁמַע אֶת-דְּבָרֶיךָ  
לְכָל אֲשֶׁר-תִּצְוֶנוּ יוֹמָת רַק חֲזַק וְאַמֵּץ: פ

**10. thereupon** The time is unspecified. Rashi suggests that this took place after the period of mourning for Moses.