

In Beginning
Bereshit (Gen. 1:1-6:8)

Introduction:

This is a contemplation in three parts. My intent is to have us consider, collectively, the relationship, the tension between the pull of spiritual yearning to be closer to God, and our earthly selves, with our unthinking drives. Here is the simultaneous existence of the two Adams. We have Adam Kadmon—the original man who could see from one end of the world to the other by the original light created on the first day. This is the undivided being, both man and woman, the heavenly Adam. And then we have the earthly Adam who “God formed of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and [the human] became a living soul.”(Gen 1:7)

We have the constant tension between the expanding universe and the tug of gravity. Here is simultaneous draw of the Divine Unknowable and the equally necessary weight of the earth. Here we are at the intersection of our spiritual yearnings, and our need to learn to walk well on this earth, we air breathers.

I will be reading this material slowly, including periods of silence, so when metaphors move you, there will be time for them to find a place to expand within you. What you do not hear may be absorbed by another in this group. We create understanding collectively, each according to our own needs.

Quoting Philo, who is observing a group of contemplatives:

“For to these people the whole [Torah] (law book) seems to resemble a living creature

with the literal [laws] (ordinances) for its body

and for its soul the invisible mind laid up in its wording.

It is in this mind especially that the rational soul begins to contemplate the things akin to itself

and looking through the words as through a mirror

beholds the marvelous beauties of the concepts,

unfolds and removes the symbolic coverings

and brings forth the thoughts and sets them bare to the light of day

for those who need but a little reminding to enable them to discern the inward and hidden through the outward and visible.”

Philo, translated by F.H. Colson, Vol IX, p. 161

Niggun

Part 1 On creation

From the Zohar:

“With this beginning, the unknown concealed One created the palace. This palace is called Elohim, God. The secret is: With beginning the [ineffable source, the hidden source of emanation] created God.”

Zohar, Vol 1, Daniel Matt, p. 116

And this creation never ceases.

Zohar:

“If [the hidden source of emanation] (it) were completely hidden the world would not exist for even a moment!

Rather, it is hidden and sown like a seed that gives birth to seeds and fruit.

Thereby the world is sustained. Every single day, a ray of that light shines into the world and keeps everything alive, for with that ray the Blessed Holy One feeds the world....renewing every day the act of Creation.”

Matt, Classics of Western Spirituality, pp. 52-53

"In beginning" has no inclusion in the limitations of time.

“In beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was formless and void, and darkness was on the face of the deep; and the spirit of God hovered above the surface of the waters. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

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

Gen 1:1-1:8

All one.

An image:

The silent alef. The bridge between the undivided and the divided, the Divine One, revealing itself through the duality of creation.

The alef is formed by two yuds, one to the upper right and the other to the lower left, joined by a diagonal vav. These two yuds are the higher and lower waters and the [vav the] firmament between them.

The Alef-Beit, Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh, p. 24

The upper yud is the transcendent light, encompassing all, transcending all worlds, the light of Adam Kadom. The lower yud is the Immanent Light, which reveals itself to each individual according to her capacity. The vav that initially differentiates between them, but ultimately connects these two Divine lights, is Understanding, in bearing the paradox of the closeness and the infinite distance of God.

Ibid. pp. 29-30

The Adam of the radiant light, the Adam of the upper waters knows no conflict, and is exposed to no attack. He lives in peace.

Philo translated by F.H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, Vol 1, p. 113

In contrast, the lower waters--

“...the formation of the individual man, the object of sense, is a composite one made up of earthy substance and of Divine breath: for it says that the body was made through the Artificer taking clay and moulding out of it a human form, but that the soul was originated from nothing created whatever, but from the Father and Ruler of all: for that He breathed in was nothing else than a Divine breath that migrated hither from that blissful and happy existence for the benefit of our race, to the end that, even if it is mortal in respect of its visible part, it may in respect of the part that is invisible be rendered immortal. Hence it may with propriety be said that man is the borderland between mortal and immortal nature, partaking of each so far as is needful, and that he was created at once mortal and immortal, mortal in respect of the body, but in respect of the mind immortal.”

Philo, translated by F.H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, Vol I, p. 107

And these mortal bodies with sense perception and drives and compulsions, must work in concert with the mind and heart and spirit, which has its root in the upper waters, the upper yud of the alef. That is our dilemma.

Now, the Sabbath is a deliberate opportunity to reunite the upper and the lower halves of ourselves.

In the poetic images of the Sefat Emet:

“Every thing has its root in heaven, as it has been said: ‘Not even a blade of grass grows without its star striking it and saying: ‘Grow!’ Scripture also tells us that “God separated between the waters that were below the heavens and those

that were above the heavens: [Gen. 1:7]. In this verse we are told that the lower waters wept, saying "We, too, want to be before the King!" But whatever was done with those "waters above the firmament" is not told in the Torah. Neither is the creation of the angels mentioned in the Torah. The reason is that they are the other halves that belong to all the lower creatures. Lower beings are themselves half-creatures. As each thing is created, something is also born in the upper world that belongs to this creature.

On the Sabbath, the power of that upper root comes down, and the two parts are joined together. This is what we mean by God's "spreading out the tabernacle of peace" [or wholeness]; the upper part comes down. That is why we say "Shalom" to the ministering angels on the holy Sabbath."

The Language of Truth , translated by Arthur Green p. 5

Niggun

Silence

Part 2 We are all Cain

Sefat Emet:

There is "...a point that exists within each thing, an imprint or sign that reminds us of its divine origin. It is this force that gives life to all. The person who is joined to this inner point, and all of whose life is drawn to this point, indeed becomes a partner in the act of Creation..."

The Language of Truth , translated by Arthur Green p. 4

Here is our well known story:

Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden after they ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and they had two sons, Cain and Abel. When the two sons brought their offerings to God,

"God paid heed to Abel and to his offering. But to Cain and to his offering He paid no heed.; and Cain was very angry, and his face fell.

And God said to Cain: "Why are you distressed, and why is your face fallen? Surely, if you do right there is uplift. But if you do not do right, sin couches at the door. Its urge is toward you, yet you can be its master." (Gen. 4:6-7)

And with that, when Cain was out in the field with his brother, he killed him.

(silence)

God confronts Cain and he is banished from the presence of God to become a restless wanderer. He is separated from knowing God. He separated himself from knowing the eternal presence of the upper waters.

Philo :

“If it is a difficult thing to remove out of sight of a mortal monarch, must it not be a thousandfold more difficult to quit the vision of God and be gone, resolved hence forth to shun the sight of Him; in other words, to become incapable of receiving a mental picture of Him through having lost the sight of the soul’s eye? Men who have suffered this loss under compulsion, overwhelmed by the force of an inexorable power, deserve pity rather than hatred. But those who have of their own free choice turned away and departed from the Existent Being, transcending the utmost limit of wickedness itself—for no evil could be found equivalent to it—these must pay no ordinary penalties...now no effort of thought could hit upon a penalty greater and more unheard of than to go forth into banishment from the Ruler of the universe.”

Philo Vol II, translated by F. H. Colson and G.H.Whitaker, Vol II, p. 333)

Cain is a wanderer, banished from knowing God's sight of him.

And Cain goes off to build a city. And Philo says:

“Of such a city, every impious man is found to be an architect in his own miserable soul.”

“Cain’s buildings are demonstrative arguments. With these, as though fighting from a city-wall, he repels the assaults of his adversaries, by forging plausible inventions contrary to the truth. His inhabitants are the wise in their own conceit,...self-love, arrogance, false opinion, men ignorant of real wisdom, who have reduced to an organized system ignorance, lack of leaning and of culture...”

Vol II translated by F. H. Colson and G.H.Whitaker, p. 357

These cities we create are fragile, temporary illusions of a permanent structure of self-hood. We build these walled cities out of our defensive delusions. They are brittle and crack easily, exposing our vulnerability, revealing our wandering. These are frightening glimpses into the void our delusions mask.

When we disconnect from remembering the higher waters, we forget the relationship to the Immanent, the indwelling presence of the Divine...which is as close to us as our own breath. And we forget the Transcendent, beyond time and space. We lose our way. We become rootless wanderers, with only the mark of God to protect us, so others might know what we may have forgotten.

Philo

“...He created no soul barren of virtue, even if the exercise of it be to some impossible.”

Philo Vol I translated by F. H. Colson and G.H.Whitaker, p. 169

We are made of matter and blessed with spirit.

We lose and regain the sight of our soul's eye. We forget and we remember. We descend to ascend again. Constant refinement, dismantling of the cities we have created. Our capacity for virtue and contemplation can lead us back. The upper root waits for us to remember to live in relationship with all Being.

Niggun

Silence

Part 3 From wandering to stillness, coming home

Philo

On Cain:

"It is worth while to notice the country also into which he betakes himself when he has left the presence of God: it is the country called "Tossing". In this way the lawgiver indicated that the foolish man, being a creature of wavering and unsettled impulses, is subject to tossing and tumult, like the sea, lashed by contrary winds when a storm is raging, and has never even in fancy has experience of quietness and calm. And as at a time when a ship is tossing at the mercy of the sea, it is capable neither of sailing or of riding at anchor, but pitched about this way and it rolls in turn to either side and moves uncertainly swaying to and fro; even so the worthless man, with a mind reeling and storm-driven, powerless to direct his course with any steadiness, is always tossing, ready to make shipwreck of his life.

I am greatly struck by the perfect sequence of cause and effect in all this. Proximity to a stable object produces a desire to be like it and a longing for quiescence. Now that which is unwaveringly stable is God..."

Vol II, translated by F. H. Colson and G.H. Whitaker, p. 341

As we turn toward the stability of God, then there is the beginning of deconstructing all the habits and drives, the ceaseless longings of the senses that keep us agitated. As we practice remembering, cleaving to God, there is the beginning of the nullification of the dominating ideas of our self. We can begin to dismantle the city of the self we have created. We do this over and over again, in a process of refinement.

(silence)

Philo :

"But the strangest thing of all is, that whereas the heavenly bodies as they go past moving objects are themselves in motion, God who outstrips them all is motionless. Yea, we [declare] (aver) that remaining the same He is at once close

to us and far from us. He takes hold of us by forming and chastening powers which are so close to each one of us; and yet He has driven created being far away from His essential Nature, so that we cannot touch it even with the pure spiritual contact of the understanding.

With the lovers of God, then, in their quest of the Existent One, even if they never find Him, we rejoice, for the quest of the Good and Beautiful, even if the goal be missed, is sufficient of itself to give a foretaste of gladness.”

PhiloVol II, translated by F. H. Colson and G.H.Whitaker, p. 339

Philo :

“Well then, God sows and plants earthly excellence for the race of mortals as a copy and reproduction of the heavenly. For pitying our race and noting that it is compact of a rich abundance of ills, He caused earthly excellence to strike root, to bring succor and aid to the diseases of the soul. It is...a copy of the heavenly and archetypal excellence” which can be called virtue...”just as the sun when it has risen fills the gloom of the atmosphere with light, so virtue also, when it has risen in the soul, illumines its mist and disperses its deep darkness.”

Philo Vol I, translated by F. H. Colson and G.H.Whitaker, p. 175

Zohar:

“The path of the righteous is like gleaming light, shining ever brighter, until full day. (Proverbs 4:18) Happy are the righteous in this world and in the world that is coming, for the blessed Holy One desire to glorify them! Come and see what is written: The path of the righteous is like gleaming light. What does this mean: like gleaming light? Like that radiant light created by the blessed Holy One in the act of Creation, treasured away for the righteous in the world that is coming. Shining ever brighter, for it constantly intensifies, never fading.”

Zohar Vol I, translated by Daniel Matt, p. 336

Philo:

“For how was it likely that the human mind being so tiny, hemmed in by such puny masses as brain or heart, should be able to contain such an immense magnitude of sky and universe, had it not been an inseparable portion of that divine and blessed soul? For nothing is severed or detached from the divine, but only extended. When the mind, therefore, which has received its share in the perfection of the whole, conceives of the universe, it stretches out as widely as the bounds of the whole, for its force is susceptible of attraction.”

Philo of Alexandria, translated by David Winston, p. 26)

And we return to the breath to remind us.

Niggun

Silence

bell

Source material:

Philo Vol I, II, IX, translated by F. H. Colson and G.H.Whitaker

Philo of Alexandria, translated by David Winston

Zohar, Vol I, translated by Daniel Matt

The Alef-Beit, Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh

The Language of Truth, translated by Arthur Green

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