Introduction to Genesis Chapter 2:4-24

[FOX] From the perspective of God in Chap. 1, we now switch to that of humankind (note how the opening phrase in 2:4b, "earth and heaven," reverses the order found in 1:1). This most famous of all Genesis stories contains an assortment of mythic elements and images which are common to human views of prehistory: the lush garden, four central rivers located (at least partially) in fabled lands, the mysterious trees anchoring the garden, a primeval man and woman living in unashamed nakedness, an animal that talks, and a God who converses regularly and intimately with his creatures. The narrative presents itself, at least on the surface, as a story of origins. We are to learn the roots of human sexual feelings, of pain in childbirth, and how the anomalous snake (a land creature with no legs) came to assume its present form. Most strikingly, of course, the story seeks to explain the origin of the event most central to human consciousness: death.

[RA] In this more vividly anthropomorphic account, God, now called YHWH 'Elohim instead of 'Elohim, as in the first version, does not summon things into being through the mere agency of divine speech, but works as a craftsman, fashioning (*yatsar* instead of *bara*', "create"), blowing life-breath into nostrils, building a woman from a rib. Whatever the disparate historical origins of the two accounts, the redaction gives us first a harmonious cosmic overview of creation, and then a plunge into the technological nitty-gritty and moral ambiguities of human origins.

[REF] A second account of creation starts here. What is the relationship of the two creation accounts: In the scholarship of recent centuries, the two creation stories have come to be attributed to different authors.…[P]lacing the cosmic conception first creates the impression of the wide camera view narrowing in. This feeling of narrowing in will continue through the coming stories, contributing to the rich-in-background feeling that will persist through the rest of the Bible.

[The Torah: A Women's Commentary] Genesis is unique in ancient Near Eastern literature in giving special attention to the formation of woman. In Greece, however, Hesiod (8th century B.C.E.) claimed that the first woman, Pandora, was created to ensnare men to their death. In contrast, Genesis 2 envisions the creation of woman and man for mutual benefit: "It is not good for the adam to be alone" (2.18). In contrast to Genesis 1, here the gender identity of the first adam is ambiguous; therefore, the status of woman in Genesis 2 remains open to different interpretations.

Many Jews and Christians over the centuries have interpreted the early portions of Genesis to mean that woman was secondary and thus subordinate, created merely for man's benefit. Three factors argue against such interpretations. (1) The term *adam* is generic, not specifically "a man," complicating the notion of the gender identity of the first person. (2) Even if one interprets this particular *adam* as male, last does not mean least. (Indeed, in Genesis 1 human beings are created last, a sequence that some interpreters consider a sign of superiority.) (3) God creates human partnership, not hierarchy, in Genesis 2.

Regarding the ambiguity with respect to the first person's gender, on the one hand, it can be presumed that early readers understood *ha-adam* to designate the first human being as male: all patrilineages originated in this first human being, and in biblical genealogies, the typical initiator of any lineage is male. This presumption works well with the narrative flow—in which even after the creation of woman, the term *ha-adam* continues to be used to refer to the man.

Guide to the Translators and Commentators used here

FOX & EF: Everett Fox **REF:** Richard Elliott Friedman **RA:** Robert Alter **NS**: Nahum Sarna
SRH: Samson Raphael Hirsch **RASHI:** Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzchak **CS**: Chaim Stern
The Torah: A Women's Commentary, published by the URJ Press **OJPS**: Old Jewish Publication Society version

According to this view, woman—in terms of lineage, but only in those terms—is indeed presented as second and derivative. Nonetheless, this story presents, as Phyllis Bird notes, "a portrait of humankind in which the two sexes are essential to the action and are bound together in mutual dependence" *(Phyllis Ann Bird is a feminist biblical scholar. She is Professor Emerita of Old Testament Interpretation at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary and McCarthy Professor of Biblical Studies at the Pontifical Biblical Institute.)*

On the other hand, when viewing the individual designated by the term *adam*, the usual inclusive meaning of that term cannot be ignored. A gender-neutral or non-gendered progenitor was not unknown in the ancient world; it appears, for example, in Sumerian literature and in the work of Plato.

Through this gender ambiguity, the text seems to be expressing complex ideas about the position of female and male in God's plan, and about the tension perceived in cultural reality.

[NACHUM SARNA] While God the Creator was the primary subject of the previous chapter, the focus of attention now shifts to humankind….The almost unique expression “earth and heaven” suggests pride of place for terrestrial affairs. Information about the physical world is offered only to provide essential background for the understanding of the narrative, which seeks to explain the nature of man and the human condition.

Chapter 2 is not another creation story. As such, it would be singularly incomplete. *In fact, it presupposes a knowledge of much of the preceding account of Creation.* Many of the leading ideas in the earlier account are here reiterated, though the mode of presentation is different. Thus, in both narratives God is the sovereign Creator, and the world is the purposeful product of His will. To human beings, the crown of His Creation, God grants mastery over the animal kingdom. In chapter 1, this idea is formulated explicitly; in the present section it is inferred from the power of naming invested in man. Both accounts view man as a social creature. Both project the concept of a common ancestry for all humanity. The notion that the human race was originally vegetarian is implied in 2:16-17, as in 1:29. Finally, one of the most serious questions to which the present narrative addresses itself—the origin of evil—would be unintelligible without the fundamental postulate of the preceding cosmology, repeated there seven times: the essential goodness of the divine creation.

The startling contrast between this vision of God’s ideal world and the world of human experience requires explanation. How did the pristine harmony between God, man and nature come to be disturbed? How are we to explain the harsh, hostile workings of nature, the recalcitrance of the soil to man’s arduous labors? If God ordered man and woman to procreate, why then does woman suffer the pangs of childbirth in fulfilling God’s will? If God created the human body, why does nudity in the presence of others instinctively evoke embarrassment? In short, how is the existence of evil to be accounted for?

The biblical answer to this fundamental question, diametrically opposed to prevalent pagan conceptions, is that there is no inherent, primordial evil at work in the world. The source of evil is not metaphysical, but moral. Evil is not transhistorical, but humanly wrought. Human beings possess free will, but free will is beneficial only insofar as its exercise is in accordance with divine will. Free will and the need for restraint on the liberties of action inevitably generate temptation and the agony of choosing, which only man’s self-mastery can resolve satisfactorily. The ensuing narrative demonstrates that abuse of the power of choice makes disaster inescapable.

Genesis Chapter 2:4-24—Translations and Commentary

4 Such is the story of [the generations of—OJPS; the begettings of—EF; the tale of—RA; the records of—REF; the chronicle of—CS] heaven and earth when they were created. When the Lord God made earth and heaven—

5 when no shrub [bush—EF; produce—REF] of the field was yet on earth and no grasses [plant—EF/RA/CS; vegetation—REF] of the field had yet sprouted, because the Lord God had not sent rain upon the earth and there was no adam/human [not a soul—CS] to till the soil,

6 but a flow would well up from the ground [a mist from the earth—OJPS; a surge would well up—EF; wetness would well from the earth—RA; a river had come up from the earth—REF] and water the whole surface of the earth—

[NS] 4. Such is the story The *'eleh toledot* formula is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Book of Genesis. In each of its other 10 occurrences, it introduces what follows, invariably in close connection with someone already named in the narrative. Its use indicates that a new and significant development is at hand. Deriving from the verb *y-l-d*, "to give birth," the noun form would mean "begettings" or "generations," and in usually precedes genealogies that are sometimes interspersed with narrative material. In 25:19 and 37:2, where no family tree follows but only stories of subsequent events, the formula is used figuratively for "a record of events." This is its meaning here. In this sense, the entire verse may be understood as a unity referring to what follows.

[NS] the LORD God This combination of the personal divine name YHVH with the general term 'elohim appears twenty times in the present literary unit, but only once again in the Torah, in Exodus 9:30. It is exceedingly rare in the rest of the Bible. The repeated use here may be to establish that the absolutely transcendent God of Creation ('elohim) is the same immanent, personal God (YHVH) who shows concern for the needs of human beings. Admittedly, however, the remarkable concentration of the combination of these divine names in this narrative and their virtual absence hereafter have not been satisfactorily explained.

[REF] 4 records. This verse is sometimes taken to be the conclusion of the preceding seven-day account. That is wrong. The phrase "These are the records" always introduces a list or story. It is used ten more times in Genesis to construct the book as continuous narrative through history rather than as a loose collection of stories.

[FOX] 5 human/adam ... soil/adama: The sound connection, the first folk etymology in the Bible, establishes the intimacy of humankind with the ground (note the curses in 3:17 and 4:11). Human beings are created from the soil, just as animals are (v.19). Some have suggested "human . . . humus" to reflect the wordplay.

[NS] no man to till the soil Agriculture is considered to be the original vocation of man, whose bond to the earth is an essential part of his being.

[NS] 6. a flow The idea seems to be that the primordial, subterranean waters would rise to the surface to moisten the arid earth, thereby making it receptive to the growth and survival of vegetation and providing the raw material with the proper consistency for being molded into man.

7 the Lord God formed *ha-adam*/the human from the dust of the earth/*ha-adamah* [humus from the soil—EF]. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the human became a living being.

8 The Lord God planted a garden in Eden [Land of Pleasure—EF], in the east, and placed there the human whom He had formed.

[NS] 7. Nothing was said in 1:27 of the substance from which man was created. Here it is given as "dust," a word that can be used synonymously with "clay." The verb "formed" (Heb. *va-yitser*) is frequently used of the action of a potter (*yotser*), so that man's creation is portrayed in terms of God molding the clayey soil into shape and then animating it. This image is widespread in the ancient world. Mesopotamian texts, in particular, repeatedly feature this notion. The same is found in the Greek myth about Prometheus, who created a man, and about Hephaestus, who molded the archetypal woman Pandora from earth.

The poetic imagery evoked by the Genesis text is graphically explicit in the Book of Job: "Consider that You fashioned me like clay" (10:9); "You and I are the same before God; / I too was nipped from clay" (33:6). The human body is a "house of clay," and human beings are described as "those who dwell in houses of clay, / Whose origin is dust" (4:19). Here in Genesis, the image simultaneously expresses both the glory and the insignificance of man.

[NS] the breath of life The uniqueness of the Hebrew phrase *nishmat hayyim* matches the singular nature of the human body, which, unlike the animal world, is directly inspirited by God Himself.

[FOX] 7. the human, humus. The Hebrew etymological pun is 'adam, "human," from the soil, 'adamah.

[REF] 7. a human, dust from the ground. A pun: The word for human in Hebrew is *'adam* (sometimes translated in English as "Adam"), and the story reports that he is formed from the ground (Hebrew *'adamah*). And this in turn began with a river (*'ed*) coming up. So we have in vv. 6-7 the sequence אד, אדם, אדמה.

[FOX] 8 Eden/Land-of-Pleasure: The usage here may be a folk etymology. For another use of the Hebrew root [ע-ד-נ], we have Gen. 18:12: "And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "Now that I am withered, am I to have enjoyment [ednah עדנה]—with my husband so old?"

[NS] a garden The Greek version, the Septuagint, translated this word by *parádeisos*, a term that originated in the Old Persian *pairi-daeza*, meaning "an enclosed park, a pleasure ground." The translation was taken over by the Vulgate version and so passed from Latin into other European languages. Because Hebrew *'eden* was interpreted to mean "pleasure," "paradise" took on an exclusively religious connotation as the place of reward for the righteous after death. Such a meaning for *'eden* is not found in the Hebrew Bible. Other biblical references indicate that a more expansive, popular story about man's first home once circulated widely in Israel. Ancient Near Eastern literature provides no parallel to our Eden narrative as a whole, but there are some suggestions of certain aspects of the biblical Eden. The Sumerian myth about Enki and Ninhursag tells of an idyllic island of Dilmun, now almost certainly identified with the modern island of Bahrain in the Persian Gulf. The Gilgamesh Epic likewise knows of a garden of jewels. It is significant that our Genesis account omits all mythological details, does not even employ the phrase "garden of God," and places gold and jewels in a natural setting.

9 And from the ground the Lord God caused to grow every tree that was pleasing to the sight and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and bad [evil—OJPS/EF/RA; of all knowledge—CS].

[NS] 9. The verse tells nothing about the greening of the earth in general, only about the garden, which is pictured as a tree park. The idea is that man's food was ever ready at hand. The attractive, nutritious, and delectable qualities of the fruit are stressed with the next episode in mind. The human couple will not be able to plead deprivation as the excuse for eating the forbidden fruit.

The two special trees are brought to our attention in a deliberately casual manner; their significance will become obvious later on. The "tree of life" is mentioned first, the "tree of knowledge" second. Only the first is given prominence in the garden, while the second gives the appearance of being an appendage to the verse. Yet as the narrative unfolds, the sequence is reversed. Only the "tree of knowledge" comes into focus, only its fruit is prohibited, only it is mentioned in the subsequent dialogues. This shift in emphasis signals another breach with the central pagan theme of man's quest for immortality, as illustrated, for example, in the Mesopotamian Gilgamesh Epic. It is not the mythical pursuit of eternal life, but the relationship between God and man that is the main concern.

the tree of life It is clear from 3:22 that the fruit of this tree was understood to bestow immortality upon the eater. The text presupposes a belief that man, created from perishable matter, was mortal from the outset, but that he had within his grasp the possibility of immortality.

the tree of knowledge of good and bad The interpretation of this enigmatic designation, which is unparalleled anywhere outside the present narrative, hinges upon the definition of "knowledge" and the scope of "good and bad." Ibn Ezra, followed by many moderns, understood carnal knowledge to be intended since the first human experience after eating the forbidden fruit is the consciousness of nudity accompanied by shame; moreover, immediately after the expulsion from Eden it is said, "Now the man knew his wife Eve." Against this interpretation is the fact that at this stage woman is not yet created, that sexual differentiation is made by God Himself (cf. 1:27), that the institution of marriage is looked upon in verse 24 as part of the divinely ordained order, and that, according to 3:5, 22, "knowledge of good and bad" is a divine characteristic. Thus, it will not do to take "good and bad" as the human capacity for moral discernment.

Aside from the difficulty of understanding why God should be opposed to this, there is the additional argument that a divine prohibition would be meaningless if man did not already possess this faculty. Indeed, from 3:3 it is clear the woman knows the meaning of disobedience—she is already alert to the difference between right and wrong, which can have no other meaning than obedience or otherwise.

It is more satisfactory, however, to understand "good and bad" as undifferentiated parts of a totality, a merism meaning "everything." True, man and woman do not become endowed with omniscience after partaking of the fruit, but the text does seem to imply that their intellectual horizons are immeasurably expanded. It should also be noted that "good and bad," exactly in the Hebrew form used here (*tov va-ra'*), occurs again only in Deuteronomy 1:39: "Moreover, your little ones who you said would be carried off, your children who do not yet know good from bad…." There, the context leaves no doubt that not to know good and bad means to be innocent, not to have attained the age of responsibility. In the present passage, then, it is best to understand "knowledge of good and bad" as the capacity to make independent judgments concerning human welfare.

[REF] 9. tree of life. Ancient Israelites believed in an afterlife, but it is not part of the creation account. Even in the combined picture of the two parts of the creation account there is no reference whatever to the creation of a realm for afterlife—no heaven or hell. On the contrary, there is a tree of life in the garden which enables one to live forever. Humans are not forbidden to eat from this tree. (Only the tree of knowledge of good and bad is prohibited.) So death, life after death, heaven and hell, eternal reward and punishment are not yet elements of the account. After the humans are expelled from the garden, and thus cut off from the tree of life, death will enter the story. But there still will be no account of the establishment of any realm of afterlife.

9. tree of knowledge of good and bad. Not good and "evil," as this is usually understood and translated. "Evil" suggests that this is strictly moral knowledge. But the Hebrew word (*ra*') has a much wider range of meaning. This may mean knowledge of what is morally good and bad, or it may mean qualities of good and bad in all realms: morality, aesthetics, utility, pleasure and pain, and so on. It may mean that things are good or bad in themselves, and that when one eats from the tree one acquires the ability to see these qualities; or it may mean that when one eats from the tree one acquires the ability to make judgments of good and bad. The meaning is not clear to us in the text of the narrative. The only immediate consequence of eating from the tree is that before eating from the tree the humans are not embarrassed over nudity and after eating from it they are. This is not sufficient information to tell us what limits of "good and bad" are meant, nor does it tell us if absolute good and bad are implied, or if it is the more relative concept of making judgments of good and bad. The wording, "the eyes of the two of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked," may imply awareness of an absolute value. On the other hand, great numbers of commandments, as articulated in later accounts in Genesis and especially in the following four books of the Torah, suggest that few things are treated as good or bad acts in themselves in these texts. Rather, there is only that which God commands or God prohibits.

[SRH] The Tree of Knowledge Some suggest that only by partaking of the fruit of this tree was man enabled to know good and evil. Man knew only theoretical differentiation—truth from falsehood; but the concepts of "good" and "bad," which belong to the realm of practical reason, were foreign to him. This interpretation, however, cannot be correct. Freedom of choice distinguishes man as man; man would not be worthy of his name, without the concept of good and bad. Had he been unaware of the concept of good and bad, God could not have assigned him a prohibition; and once man had violated the prohibition, God could not have punished him. It must be, then, that he could distinguish between forbidden and permitted—and this is none other than the knowledge of good and evil, knowledge that belongs to the realm of practical reason, not to the realm of theoretical reason.

It appears, then, that the tree's name derives from its subsequent role: Through it, knowledge of good and evil will be acted upon and decided; through its fruit, man will choose what is good or bad in his sight.

Moreover, it appears this tree derives its name based on its initial role in shaping man's knowledge of good and evil. For this tree taught man how he should distinguish good from bad. As we shall see later, this tree appealed to man's taste, imagination, and contemplative mind, thus drawing him to this tree and tempting him to eat of its fruit. Nevertheless, God forbade man to eat of its fruit. In other words, partaking of this fruit was defined as being bad for man. This tree, then, was to remind man of that teaching on whose observance man's whole eminence depends. A person's senses, imagination, and intelligence may lead him astray. From this tree we learn that in judging what is good or evil, man should not rely on his own senses, his own imagination, or his own intelligence; rather, he should obey the revealed Will of God and follow the lead of His wisdom. Only then will he fulfill his purpose on earth and be worthy of having the world shaped into a paradise for him.

10 A river issues from Eden to water the garden, and it then divides and becomes four branches.

11 The name of the first is Pishon [Spreader—EF], the one that winds through the whole land of Havilah, where the gold is.

12 The gold of that land is good; bdellium is there, and lapis lazuli [onyx stone—OJPS/REF/CS; camelian—EF] *[NOTE: camelian is a semi-precious brownish-red gemstone.]*

13 The name of the second river is Gihon, the one that winds through the whole land of Cush.

14 The name of the third river is Tigris, the one that flows east of Asshur [Assyria—EF/REF/CS]. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

[**NS]** The story of the first human is abruptly interrupted by a description of the geographical setting of the garden. This pause functions as a tension-building device, for the reader is left wondering about the role of the two special trees. The identical literary stratagem is employed in the story of Joseph, where the digression of chapter 38 heightens the reader's suspense at a critical moment in the development of the plot.

10 A single river "issues from Eden." Its source appears to be outside the garden, which it irrigates as it passes through. The garden is independent of the vagaries of seasonal rainfall. Somewhere beyond the confines of the garden the single river separates into four branches that probably represent the four quarters of the inhabited world. In other words, the river of Eden also nourishes the rest of the world with its life-giving waters. While the Tigris and the Euphrates are well known, the other two names defy positive identification. They may stand for another great river civilization corresponding to that of the Mesopotamian plain, perhaps the Nile Valley.

11-12. Pishon is an unknown name. It is said to be a meandering river associated with "the land of Havilah." If this latter name is Hebrew, it means "sandy land." There are two biblical sites identified by the name Havilah, one within the Egyptian sphere of influence, the other in Arabia. Here, the place is described as a source of gold and precious materials.

As far as Egypt is concerned, its primary sources of bullion and jewels were the mines of Nubia, a region south of Egypt that corresponds roughly to present-day Nilotic Sudan. In fact, the name Nubia is derived from Egyptian *nb*, meaning "gold." The term "good gold"—that is, high-grade ore—was used in Egyptian commercial transactions. It is also possible the mention of gold in connection with the river refers not to lode or vein mining, but to alluvial gold and reflects the ancient method of washing gold-bearing sands and gravel deposited by streams and rivers. The description in verses 11–12 might also fit an Arabian location. In 10:29, Havilah is stated to be a "brother" of Ophir, which is the name of a country celebrated for its gold. It is not certain, however, that Ophir was in Arabia.

Bdellium is mentioned again only in Numbers 11:7, where it is assumed to be a well-known substance. From ancient times, opinion has been divided as to whether it was a precious stone or a much valued aromatic resin called bdellion by the Greeks and mentioned in Akkadian sources as budulhu, which corresponds to Hebrew bdolah. This product was an important export of Nubia.

13. Gihon is the name of a spring in a valley outside of Jerusalem. The stem *g-y-h* means “to gush forth.” No river of this name is otherwise known. The association with “the land of Cush” complicates the identification because in 10:6-10 Cush is a “brother” of Egypt, and is also connected with South Arabia and with Mesopotamia. There also seems to be another Cush in Midian on the northeastern shore of the Gulf of Akaba. Generally in the Bible, Cush refers to Nubia. If this is the case here, too, then Pishon and Gihon may be terms for the Blue Nile and the White Nile. These two rivers unite at Khartoum to form the mightiest river of Africa, which finally empties into the Mediterranean Sea.

[REF] 13. Gihon. The name is a pun, because later the snake will be cursed that it (and all snakes) must crawl on its "belly," which in Hebrew is gehon (Gen 3:14). The names of the other rivers may contain puns as well, for the letters of Euphrates (Hebrew פרת) occur in the next words of the snake's curse: עפר תאכל; Pishon (Hebrew פישון) contains the same root letters as the word that describes the human's becoming "a living being" (Hebrew נפש); and the letters of Tigris (Hebrew חדקל) occur in a similar jumble (a metathesis) at the end of the story: יד ולקחו (3:22). So the rivers that all derive from Eden both convey geography and hint at the coming events there.

[NS] 14. east of Asshur Hebrew *kidmat* means literally “in front of,” that is, eastward, from the vantage point of one facing the rising sun, which is the standard orientation in the Bible. “Asshur” may be either the city of Ashur, which lay west of the Tigris, or the larger region of Assyria, to which it gave its name. The parallel with “the land of Cush” would favor the second possibility, but the Tigris actually bisects Assyria, so here the city itself, not otherwise mentioned in Scripture, is more likely intended.

Euphrates To an Israelite, this was the river par excellence and, therefore, required no topographical description.

Continued on the next page

15 The Lord God took the human and placed him in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it [to dress it and keep it—OJPS; to work it and to watch it—EF; to till it and watch it—RA; to work it and watch over it—REF; to work it and keep it—CS]. *[Note: Hebrew has no neutral pronoun—Shammai]*

16 And the Lord God commanded the human, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat [you may surely eat—RA; you may eat, yes eat—EF];

17 but as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad [good and evil—OJPS/EF/RA/; Tree of All Knowledge—CS], you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die [doomed to die—RA/CS]."

18 The Lord God said, "It is not good for the human to be alone; I will make a fitting helper [ezer k'negdo] for him [a help meet for him—OJPS; a helper corresponding to him—EF; a sustainer beside him—RA; a strength corresponding to him—REF; a help-mate—CS]."

[RA] 18. sustainer beside him. The Hebrew *`ezer kenegdo* (King James Version "help meet") is notoriously difficult to translate. The second term means "alongside him," "opposite him," "a counterpart to him." "Help" is too weak because it suggests a merely auxiliary function, whereas `ezer elsewhere connotes active intervention on behalf of someone, especially in military contexts, as often in Psalms. [Also, consider these two texts: (1) Exodus 18:4 — "And the other was named Eliezer, meaning, 'The God of my father was my help [lit. my *ezer—Shammai*], and He delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh.'" (2) Deuteronomy 33:7 — "…Hear, O Lord, the voice of Judah, and restore him to his people. Though his own hands strive for him, help him [lit., be an *ezer* to him] against his foes."]

[REF] 18. a strength corresponding to him. Woman is usually understood to be created as a suitable "helper" (Hebrew *'ezer*) to man in this account. The Hebrew root, however, can also mean "strength." (See cases of *'ezer* in parallel with *'oz*, another word for "strength," as in, for example, Ps. 46:2.) The Hebrew phrase *'ezer kenegdo* therefore may very well mean "a corresponding strength." If so, it is a different picture from what people have thought, and an intriguing one in terms of recently developed sensitivities concerning the sexes and how they are pictured in the Torah. In Genesis 1, man and woman are both created in the image of God; in Genesis 2, they are corresponding strengths. However one interprets subsequent stories and laws in the Torah, this essential equality of worth and standing introduces them.

[NS] 18ff The present narrative is therefore unique. curiously, the literature of the ancient Near East offers no other account of the creation of woman. Moreover, whereas the human's creation is told in a single verse, the creation of woman is described in six verses. This detail is extraordinary in light of the generally nondescriptive character of the biblical narrative and, as such, is indicative of the importance accorded this event. With the appearance of woman, Creation is complete.

18. It is not good The emphatic negative contrasts with the verdict of 1:31 that everything was "very good," this after the creation of male and female. The idea here is that the human is recognized to be a social being. Celibacy is undesirable. Genesis Rabbah 17:2 expresses this point as follows: "Whoever has no wife exists without goodness, without a helpmate, without joy, without blessing, without atonement..., without well-being, without a full life…; indeed, such a one reduces the representation of the divine image [on earth]." [continues on the next page]

19 And the Lord God formed out of the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky, and brought them to the human to see what he would call them; and whatever the human called each living creature, that would be its name.

20 And the human gave names to all the cattle and to the birds of the sky and to all the wild beasts; but for the human no fitting helper was found. [a help meet for him—OJPS; helper corresponding to him—EF; sustainer beside him—RA; a strength corresponding to him—REF; help-mate—CS]

21 So the Lord God cast a deep sleep upon the human; and, while he slept, He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot.

a fitting helper Literally, "a helper corresponding to him." This term cannot be demeaning because Hebrew *'ezer*, employed here to describe the intended role of the woman, is often used of God.

[SRH] 18 *ezer k'negdo*. Even looked at quite superficially, this designation expresses the whole dignity of Woman. It expresses no idea of subordination, but rather complete equality, and on a footing of equal independence. Woman stands to Man *k'negdo*, parallel, on one line, at his side.

[REF] 20. the human gave names. The human, who is created in the image of the creator, is now given a function that the creator performed in Genesis 1: bestowing names on parts of the creation.

[NS] 20. The Bible offers no hint about the origin of language, only a theory about the diversity of languages, which is presented in chapter 11. Here the first man is assumed to have been initially endowed with the faculty of speech, with a level of intellect capable of differentiating between one creature and another and with the linguistic ability to coin an appropriate name for each.

Adam The Hebrew vocalization le-'adam makes the word a proper name for the first time, probably because the narrative now speaks of the man as a personality rather than an archetypal human.

no fitting helper was found The review of the subhuman creation makes the man conscious of his own uniqueness, of his inability to integrate himself into that whole biological order or feel direct kinship with the other animate beings. At the same time, by observing the otherwise universal complementary pairing of male and female, he becomes aware of his own solitariness.

[SRH] 20. Thus Man tested all living creatures in their characteristics and listed them in his mind according to what they impressed him as being, and so gave them names…, [but] for an "*Adam*…," God's vice-regent on earth, none could parallel himself, none could share his obligations with him.

[SRH] 21. *Tsela* does not occur elsewhere in Tanach as a "rib", *but always as a "side."* With Woman, the material for her body was not taken from the earth, as it was with the first human. God formed one side of the human into Woman, so what was previously one creature was now two, *and thereby is the complete equality of women forever attested.* Our sages also ascribe all the special characteristics of the female voice, the female character and temperament, as well as the earlier spiritual and mental maturity of women, as being connected with this formation of Woman out of the already feeling, sensitive living body of the first human, whose body was created out of earth.

[RASHI] "'The rib' — …the meaning is that of side [rather than the anatomical definition of rib], as in 'the second side of the Tabernacle (Exodus 26)….He divided him [the adam] into two, for he was male on one side and female on the other." *[Comment to BT Eiruvin 18a]*

22 And the Lord God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the human into a woman; and He brought her to the human.

23 Then the human said, "This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called Woman [*ishah*] for from man [*ish]* was she taken."

24 Hence [*al ken*] a man [*ish*] leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife [*ishah*], so that they become one flesh.

[REF] 23. [NS] shall be called Woman The terminology used here differs from that employed in verse 20 for naming the animals. Here the man offers a generic, not a personal, name, and that designation is understood to be derived from his own, which means he acknowledges woman to be his equal. Moreover, in naming her *'ishah*, he simultaneously names himself. Hitherto he is consistently called *'adam*; he now calls himself *'ish* for the first time. Thus he discovers his own manhood and fulfillment only when he faces the woman, the human being who is to be his partner in life.

Woman. . . man Hebrew 'ishah…'ish, though actually derived from distinct and unrelated stems, are here associated through folk etymology by virtue of assonance.

man. Now, after woman has been formed, the word "man" occurs for the first time instead of "human."

[SRH] 24. *Al ken,* Therefore. Because as long as the human was alone it was not yet "good," and because once the division had been made, it was no longer at all possible for the *ish* to fulfil his calling by himself, because his wife was to be *ezer k'negdo*; without her he was only half a human, and only together with her did he feel himself a whole being. Therefore, an *ish* leaves his father and his mother and attaches himself to a wife, and they become one single body. Just as before the division, originally, the man's body subordinated itself under one spirit and under one Divine Will, so after the reunion Man and Woman become one single body. *But that can only take place if at the same time they become one mind, one heart, one soul, and this again is only possible if they subordinate all their strength and efforts, all their thoughts and desires to the service of a Higher Will.* But herein lies the great difference between the sexual life of all other living creatures and that of human marriage. All the rest of the living world is also divided into sexes. But in their case both sexes sprang at the same time independently from the earth. They do not require each other for the fulfillment of their lives' calling, and only for the purpose of breeding, and for the time necessary for perpetuating the species, do they seek and find each other. But the human female is a part of the human male, is *ezer k'negd*o. The man is helpless and lacking independence without his wife. Only the two together form a complete human being. Life in its entirety, in every phase, demands their union. Only of men does it say "cleave unto his wife."

[NS] 24. *'al ken* introduces an etiological observation on the part of the Narrator. In this case, some interrelated and fundamental aspects of the marital relationship are traced to God's original creative act and seen as part of the divinely ordained natural order. The fashioning of the woman from the man's body explains why a man's bond to his wife takes precedence over his ties to his parents. It accounts for the mystery of physical love and the intense emotional involvement of male and female, as well as for their commonality of interests, goals, and ideals.