

Midrash on the Creation of Humanity (*Bereshit Rabbah*)

“And God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness...’ (Gen. 1:26)

R. Yohanan opened: “*After and before You formed me, and You lay Your hand upon me.*” (*Psalms 139:5*).¹ R. Yohanan said: if a person is worthy, he enjoys [the fruits] of both worlds, as it says: “[for] *later* [i.e. the world to come] *and before* [this world] *You formed me.*” And if not, he must come and give a full account [of his misdeeds], as it says, “*and You lay Your hand upon me.*”

Said R. Yirmiya ben Elazar: When the Holy Blessed One created the first person, He made him/her an hermaphrodite, as it is written: “*When God created Adam, in God’s image He created him; male and female He created them...and called their name Adam*” (Gen. 5:1-2).

Said R. Samuel bar Nachman: When the Holy Blessed One created the first person, He made him double-faced, and sawed him [in half] and made for him two backs—a back here and back there. To this there was an objection: Isn’t it written, “[God] *took one of his ribs...*” (Gen. 2:21)? He responded, it means one of his sides, as it says: “*and for the second side of the sanctuary...*” (Ex. 26:20).²

R. Tanhuma in the name of R. Banayah and R. Berakiah in the name of R. Elazar said: A *golem* (i.e. shapeless lump) God created him, and he extended from one end of the world to the other end, as it is written: “*Your eyes saw my unformed substance (galmi)*” (Ps. 139:16). R. Joshua ben R. Nehemia and R. Judah ben R. Simon in R. Elazar’s name said: God created him filling the whole world. How do we know [that he extended] from east to west? Because it is said, *after and before You formed me.*³ And from north to south? It says, “*Ever since God created humanity on earth, from one end of the heaven to the other...*” (Deut. 4:32). And how do we know he filled the empty spaces of the world [i.e. between the ground and the sky]? As it says, “*and You placed upon me your hand.*”⁴

Said R. Elazar: “after” means the last of the works of the last (sixth) day, and “before” means the first of the works of the last day, as he explained: “*God said [at the beginning of the sixth day], let the earth bring forth the soul of every living thing*” (Gen. 1:24), this refers to the spirit of the first person. R. Shimon ben Lakish said: “after” means the last of the works of the last day, and “before” means the first of the works of the first day, as he explained: “*And God’s spirit hovered on the face of the waters*” (Gen. 1:2), this refers to the spirit of the Messiah. If a person merits, it can be said of him, “You preceded the angels of the heavens,” and if he does not merit, it can be said of him: “The fly came before you, the mosquito came before you, the worm came before you.” (Bereshit Rabbah 8:1)

¹ This is a play on the verse from Psalms, which literally reads “You close me in (*tzartani*) before and behind,” reading “*tzartani*” as from the root “*yatzar*,” to form or create.

² The word for “rib” in Genesis is “*tzela*,” and the same word is used in the Exodus text about the sanctuary.

³ The word for “before,” *kedem*, also means “east.”

⁴ This might be an image of Adam lying on ground and filling the space, so God rest a hand on him, or a play on the word for “your hand,” *kapecha*, which sounds like *kippah*—i.e. the heavens were Adam’s *kippah*. This might also refer to another midrash, in which Adam was large enough to reach the heavens, but after he sinned, God placed God’s hand on his head and reduced his size.

Bereshit Rabbah, cont'd

“*And God said, let us make humankind...*”: With whom did God consult? R. Joshua in the name of R. Levi said: with the works of the heavens and the earth He consulted, like a king who had two advisers, without whose counsel he did nothing. R. Samuel ben Nachman said: He consulted the work of each day, like a king who had an adviser, without whose counsel he did nothing. R. Ami said: With His own heart he took counsel. This may be compared to a king who had a palace built by an architect, but when he saw it, it did not please him. With whom is he displeased--with the architect!?! Thus, “*Then YHWH was sorry that He had made humankind on earth, and it pained Him in His heart*” (Gen. 6:6). R. Yosi said: This may be compared to a king who did business through an agent and suffered loss. With whom is he displeased--with the agent!?! Similarly, “*and it pained Him in His heart.*”¹ (8:3)

R. Simon said: When the Holy Blessed One decided to make the first person, the ministering angels formed themselves into groups and parties, some of them saying: “Let him be created!” and others saying, “Do not let him be created!” as it is said: “*Lovingkindness and Truth meet, Justice and Peace kiss*” (Ps. 85:11).² Lovingkindness says: “Let him be created, because he will do acts of love,” and Truth says, “Do not let him be created, because he is all lies.” Justice says, “Let him be created, for he will do acts of justice,” and Peace says, “Do not let him be created, for he is all strife.” What did the Holy Blessed One do? He took Truth and cast it to the earth (to the ground), as it is written: “*It hurled truth to the ground*” (Daniel 8:12). The angels said to the Holy Blessed One: Master of the Universe, do you disgrace your own seal? Raise up Truth from the earth/ground, as it is written: “*Truth from the earth will spring up*” (Ps. 85:12) ... R. Huna the Elder of Sepphoris said: As the ministering angels were arguing and disputing with each other, God created him [Adam], and said to them: “Why are you arguing! Adam has already been created.”³ (8:5)

¹ This phrase—“*v'yitatzev el libo*”—could be read “he was grieved at his heart.”

² There seems to be a play here on the verse from Psalms, understanding the word “met” as in met in battle, and the word for “kiss”—*nashaku*—as deriving from the word *neshek*, meaning military arms.

³ This is a play on the word “*na'aseh*”—“let us make”: if the vowels are changed slightly, it means “is made.”