

# After Darwin: Reimagining the Sacred

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Limmud 5770 - 2009

## TWO FACES OF GOD

*Elohim* (אֱלֹהִים) – Nature, blind forces, amoral, that which we cannot change, everything that is.  
*Adonai* (אֲדֹנָי) – Morality, moral consciousness, how we respond to Nature, what ought to be.

### **Bereishit (Genesis) 1:27-28; 31**

And God created humankind in God's image (*va-yivra Elohim et-ha'adam betzalmo*), in the image of God (*betzelem Elohim*) God created them; male and female God created them. And God blessed them; and God said unto them: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and have dominion over it..." And God saw all that God had made, and *behold* it was very good, and it was evening and it was morning, the sixth day.

### **Bereishit (Genesis) 2:5-7**

Now no tree of the field was yet on the earth, neither did any herb of the field yet grow, because the Lord God (*Adonai Elohim*) had not brought rain upon the earth, and there was no one to work the soil (*ve-adam ayin la'avod et ha-adama*). And a mist ascended from the earth and watered the entire surface of the ground. And the Lord God formed humanity out of the dust from the ground, and God breathed into their nostrils the soul of life, and they became a living soul (*nefesh chaya*).

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## REIMAGINING THE WORLD

### **Talmud Bavli, Avoda Zara 54b**

Suppose a person stole a measure of wheat and went and sowed it in the ground; it is right that it should not grow, yet the world pursues its natural course (*olam keminhago noheg*), and as for those who transgress, they will have to render an account. Another illustration: Suppose a man had intercourse with his neighbour's wife; it is right that she should not conceive, yet the world pursues its natural course.

### **Talmud Bavli, Kiddushin 39b**

Now, if the boy's father said to him: "Ascend to the loft and bring me the young birds." If the boy ascends, dismisses the mother bird and takes the young, and on his return falls and is killed, where then is this boy's happiness and where is this boy's prolonging of days? ... Rabbi Eleazar said: "It was a rickety ladder (*solam ra'oah haya*), so injury was likely. Where injury is likely one cannot rely on a miracle (*lo somchin al ha-nes*)."

## REIMAGINING THE HUMAN STORY

### **Midrash Tanchuma, Tazria 5**

The mustard seed needs to be sweetened, the lupine needs to be soaked, the wheat needs to be ground, and even the human being needs to be repaired (*afilu ha-adam tzrichin tikkun*).

### **Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 10a**

Every judge who delivers a true verdict (*kol dayan she-dan emet la-mitato*)... becomes a partner with God (*na'ase shutaf le-Hakadosh Baruch Hu*) in the works of creation (*be-ma'ase bereishit*).

### **Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk, on Pesikta de-Rav Kahana 102b (ca. 11<sup>th</sup> century)**

“You are my witnesses, says the Lord (*Adonai*)” (Isaiah 43:10). God said: If you are not my witnesses, I am not, as it were, the Lord (*Adonai*).’ All my life I have struggled in vain to know what humankind is. Now I know. Humankind is the language of God.

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## REIMAGINING THE STORY OF GOD

### **Shemot Rabba 3.6 (ca. 3<sup>rd</sup> century)**

God said to Moses: “I will be what I will be (*Ehiyeh asher ehiyeh*) in virtue of My creatures (*lefi maasai*).”

### **Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev: Kedushat Levi, Parashat Metzora (ca. 1810)**

“The Lord is your shelter” (*Adonai tzilcha*; Tehillim 121:5). ‘Shelter’ may be read as ‘shade’ or ‘shadow’. For whatever a person does, their shadow does after them, according to their actions. When a person serves the Lord, Creator of all the worlds, then what that righteous person does below – each and every action – is also done on high. Such a person crowns the Creator (*mekater et ha-Boreh*). And this is the meaning of the verse, “The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous” (*eynei Adonai al ha-tzaddikim*; Tehillim 34:16), which is to say, whence comes God to have eyes? You may answer: from the righteous, who do good with their eyes - and thus there are eyes on high.

### **Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907 - 1972)**

“*Der Shem Hamefurash: Mentsh* – The Ineffable Name of God: Humankind.”

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## ALEINU – 'OUR RESPONSIBILITY'

### **Aleinu Prayer (ca. 1<sup>st</sup> century; incorporated into daily liturgy ca. 13<sup>th</sup> century)**

*Al-ken*: Therefore we place our hope in You, Lord our God (*Adonai Eloheinu*) that we may soon see the glory of your power (*lirot mehera betiferet uzecha*), when you will remove immorality from upon the earth (*leha'avir gilulim min haaretz*), and forces of emptiness (*elilim*) will be utterly destroyed, when the world will be repaired (*letaken olam*) under the sovereignty of the Almighty (*be-malchut Shaddai*) ... And it is said, Then the Lord shall be Sovereign (*ve-haya Adonai le-melech*) over all the earth: on that day the Lord shall be One, and His name One (*yihye Adonai echad u-shmo echad*).

## Additional Texts

### ON REVELATION

#### **Vayikra (Leviticus) Rabba 22:1**

Scripture, Mishnah, Halachot, Talmud, Toseftot, Aggadot, and even what a faithful student would in the future say in the presence of their teacher, were all communicated to Moses at Sinai; for it says, “Is there a thing of which it is said: See this is new?” (Kohellet 1:10), and the other part of the verse provides the reply to this: “It has been already” (Kohellet 1:10).

#### **Talmud Bavli, Eruvin 100b**

Rabbi Yochanan said: “Had the Torah not been given, we would have learned modesty from the cat, theft from the ant, chastity from the dove, and good manners from the rooster.”

#### **Midrash Tehillim (Psalms) 117**

Rabbi Tanchum Bar Chiyah said: “A day of rain is greater than the day on which the Torah was given. For the giving of the Torah brought joy to Israel, whereas a day of rain brings joy to all nations and to the entire world, to farm animals, to the beasts and to the birds.”

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### ON UNIVERSAL VALUES

#### **Sifra on Vayikra (Leviticus) 18:5**

Rabbi Yirmiyah says: “How do we know that even a member of the other nations who keeps the Torah is like the High Priest? Because... it is not written, 'This is the Torah of the priests, Levites and Israelites', but rather: “*zot torat ha'adam* - This is the Torah of humankind” (2 Shmuel 7:19).

#### **Tosefta Sanhedrin 13**

Righteous people of all nations have a place in the world to come.

#### **Talmud Bavli, Megillah 16a**

Rabbi Yochanan taught: “Whoever, among the nations of the world, says a wise thing, is called wise.”

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### ON SCEPTICISM

#### **Talmud Bavli, Baba Metzia 59b**

Then Rabbi Yehoshuah rose to his feet and exclaimed: “*Lo bashamayim hi* - It is not in Heaven!” What did he mean by this? Said Rabbi Yirmiyah: “The Torah has already been given at Mount Sinai; and therefore we pay no attention to Heavenly voices.”

#### **Midrash Tehillim (Psalms) 12.4**

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: “Even children living in the days of Shaul and David and in the days of Shmuel could interpret Torah by giving forty-nine arguments by which a thing may be proven clean, and forty-nine other arguments by which it may be proven unclean.”

#### **Avot de-Rabbi Natan B 31**

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai used to say: “If you have a sapling in your hand, and someone should say to you that the Messiah has come, stay and complete the planting, and then go to greet the Messiah.”

## Bonus texts

### **Talmud Bavli, Menachot 37a**

Plimo asked Rebbi: “If a person has two heads, on which head should he place his tefillin?” Rebbi responded: “Either go into exile or accept excommunication.” Meanwhile, a man came to the academy saying that he just begotten a two-headed son and wanted to know how much must be given to the priest for the redemption of the first-born.

### **Talmud Bavli, Baba Batra 23b**

A baby pigeon that is found within fifty cubits of a coop belongs to the coop’s owner. If it is found outside the fifty cubits, then it belongs to the finder. Rabbi Yirmiyah asked: “If one foot of the pigeon is within the fifty cubits and one foot is outside, to whom does it belong?” It was for this that they expelled Rabbi Yirmiyah from the academy.

### **Talmud Bavli, Yevamot 64b**

Rabbi Abba bar Zabda became impotent through the long discourses of Rabbi Huna.

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## Suggested Reading

*www.bookfinder.com*

### **1. Reimagining the World**

David Attenborough, Life on Earth (DVD)

Daniel Dennett, Darwin's Dangerous Idea

Richard Dawkins, The Blind Watchmaker

Richard Dawkins, The Greatest Show on Earth: The Evidence for Evolution

Sam Harris, The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason

David Hartman, A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices Within Judaism

David Weiss Halivni, Revelation Restored: Divine Writ and Critical Responses

### **2. Reimagining the Human Story**

Richard Dawkins, The Selfish Gene

Daniel Dennett, Freedom Evolves

Daniel Dennett, Consciousness Explained

Steven Mithen, The Prehistory of the Mind

David Sloan Wilson, Evolution for Everyone

Jared Diamond, The Rise and Fall of the Third Chimpanzee

### **3. Reimagining the Story of God**

Abraham Joshua Heschel, God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism

Abraham Joshua Heschel, Heavenly Torah: As Refracted Through the Generations

David Hartman, A Living Covenant: The Innovative Spirit in Traditional Judaism

Harold Schulweis, For Those Who Can't Believe: Overcoming the Obstacles to Faith

Yochanan Muffs, The Personhood of God: Biblical Theology, Human Faith and the Divine Image