

Writing Your Own Torah
Singing Between the Lines
Creative Expression as a Source for Discovery

Andrea Shupack July 27th, 2026

Blessing for Torah Study

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu, la'asok b'divrei Torah.

*Hafoch bah v'hafoch bah, la'asok b'divrei Torah.

*not part of the blessing, added by composer Rabbi Menachem Creditor

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְעִסּוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה.

Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, who has sanctified us with commandments, and commanded us to be engaged with / immerse in words of Torah.

*Turn it and turn keep turning it, immersing in the words of Torah

613th Commandment

“And now, write for yourselves this song, and teach it to the Children of Israel. Place it into their mouths, in order that this song will be for Me as a witness for the children of Israel.”

וְעַתָּה כְּתֹבוּ לָכֶם אֶת-הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת וְלַמָּדָה אֶת-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל שִׁמְרָהּ בְּפִיהֶם לְמַעַן תְּהִיָּה-לִּי וְעַתָּה כְּתֹבוּ לָכֶם אֶת-הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת וְלַמָּדָה אֶת-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל שִׁמְרָהּ בְּפִיהֶם לְמַעַן תְּהִיָּה-לִּי
(Deuteronomy 31:19) הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לְעַד בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

~Rabbi Jonathon Sacks

“The 613th command – to make the Torah new in every generation – symbolizes the fact that though the Torah was given once, it must be received many times, as each of us, through our study and practice, strives to recapture the pristine voice heard at Mount Sinai. That requires emotion, not just intellect. It means treating Torah not just as words read, but also as a melody sung. The Torah is God’s libretto, and we, the Jewish people, are His choir, the performers of His choral symphony. And though, when Jews speak they often argue, when they sing, they sing in harmony, as the Israelites did at the Red Sea, because music is the language of the soul, and at the level of the soul Jews enter the unity of the Divine which transcends the oppositions of lower worlds. The Torah is God’s song, and we collectively are its singers.”

My Process for Text study / Song Writing

1. Soak / Immerse in the text - La'asok
2. Question
3. What's bothering me, or what might I want to reexamine and reframe?
4. Read again imagining the story from a different perspective or lens
5. Pull out words, phrases, and themes from the text that jump out or resonate
6. Look closely at the Hebrew roots I wrote down in the BDB (Brown-Driver-Briggs)
7. Free Write - let the character speak for herself
8. Re-read with commentaries and midrash
9. The rest falls into place, or I leave it for a while and return after it simmers
10. For inspiration read other poets and writings about the characters, but only after my own deep study and free writes.

Trumpets by Abe Mezrich

i

The Cloud of God rests upon the Tent.
When the Cloud lifts up
the people continue the journey,
following the Cloud through the Desert.
*

You would think that this would be the only signal
the people need to wander on.
But Moses is to make two Trumpets
that the priests will blow
to announce the time for the journeying of the camps.

ii

To move following God's Cloud
is to follow a vision of God.
This is a great good.
*

But perhaps it is better
to make God's vision
into your own music.
If you could do this
then to follow God's vision
you must learn to follow yourself.
Perhaps this way of following things is best.

Numbers 9:15-10:10

Revelation Abe Mezrich

the mountain burned in fire up to the
heavens,
and HaShem spoke from within the fire

Not a great light from Heaven
but fire from the Mountain below,
making Heaven bright.

(Deuteronomy 4:11-12)

~ Naomi Graetz

S/He Created Them: Feminist Retellings of Biblical Stories

“For the Bible to be kept alive, it must be remolded on a regular basis. The midrashic process has to continue... Judith Plaskow writes of the midrash’s power to remember, to invent and receive the ‘hidden half of Torah, reshaping Jewish memory to let women speak’... For me the purpose of contemporary Midrash is threefold. It addresses itself to the biblical text, which cries out *darsheni*, interpret me! Secondly, it makes the Bible relevant to an audience that does not overly care about its biblical roots. Finally, it serves my need to relate to a text, which I perceive as flowing over with hidden meanings. I feel that in writing midrash I am continuing to contribute to the work of revelation. If, in the process of my new representation of facts, I help to produce new “facts: or in writing about the text in a new way contribute to determining the text— so be it”. We must avoid speaking in universals in order to avoid committing violence against the particular. It is not one voice that can be transformative, only many voices. And if I play my little part in this then I have succeeded.”

Eve’s Last Dream

Rabbi Jill Hammer

*On one of those autumn nights
when the garden was a memory,
when even your first two children
were a memory,*

*when your hair was as white
as the snow that once had fallen
on your fig leaf cloak,*

*you dreamed of the Tree,
gnarled and green-leaved,
and this time*

*you ate the fruit
without anyone’s advice,
willingly, knowing what it meant,*

*that what you’d waited for
since the first bite
had come at last,*

*and
for a bright moment
the roots of the great Tree
shined*

in welcome.

Aspects of Eve

(Genesis 2:21-22)

Linda Pastan

To have been one
of many ribs
and to be chosen.
To grow into something
quite different
knocking finally
as a bone knocks
on the closed gates of the garden -
which unexpectedly
open.

Eve's Song

She Flows From Eden

By Andrea Shupack

Creation "Let there Be"

In the beginning
From dust of earth
As one being
We were given birth.

Waters split from waters
Bone broke into bone
Severed apart
To make us a home

In that moment
Light cracked the night
Breath swept the seas
Moving into you, moving into me

We are the garden
We are the rains
Taste of what we're from
We're ready to become

CHORUS

Bo dodi, bo dodi, l'gani
Come my beloved
Into my garden

Second Beginning "And there was"

Now is our beginning
I know our worth
Joined as one being
This is our rebirth, we will bring new birth

Look with me eyes open
Hide no more with shame
Clothed in the Divine
There's no need to place blame

In Gan Eden
Day hid from night
Flames stirred within us, but
We were left undone, we had not begun

"And it was Good"

I will bring the garden
I will hold the rain
Stoking up the fire
To lift all we contain

CHORUS

Bo dodi, bo dodi, l'gani
Come my beloved
Into my garden

Text Study Genesis / Bereishit Chapters 1-3

Choose a short segment from one of these chapters to study in Chevruta, or use Sefaria to look at another section from these two creation stories.

Gen. 1:16-1:31

וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-שְׁנֵי הַמָּאֹרֹת הַגְּדֹלִים אֶת-הַמָּאֹר הַגָּדֹל לְמִשְׁשֵׁלֶת הַיּוֹם וְאֶת-הַמָּאֹר הַקָּטָן לְמִשְׁשֵׁלֶת הַלַּיְלָה וְאֵת הַכּוֹכָבִים:

God made the two great lights, the greater light to dominate the day and the lesser light to dominate the night, and the stars.

וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים בַּרְקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהָאִיר עַל-הָאָרֶץ:

And God set them in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth,

וְלִמְשָׁל בַּיּוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָה וּלְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הָאֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי-טוֹב:

to dominate the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that this was good.

וַיְהי-עֶרֶב וַיְהי-בֹקֶר יוֹם רְבִיעִי: {פ}

And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִשְׂרְצוּ הַמַּיִם שָׂרָץ גֹּפֶשׁ תִּהְיֶה וְעוֹף יַעֲוֹף עַל-הָאָרֶץ עַל-פְּנֵי רְקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם:

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

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הַתַּנִּינִים הַגְּדֹלִים וְאֵת כָּל-גֹּפֶשׁ הַתִּיהַ | הָרִמָּשׁוֹת אֲשֶׁר שָׂרְצוּ הַמַּיִם לְמִינֵיהֶם וְאֵת כָּל-עוֹף כָּנָף לְמִינֵהוּ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי-טוֹב:

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.

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים לֵאמֹר פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמִלְאוּ אֶת-הַמַּיִם בַּיָּמִים וְהָעוֹף יִרְבַּ בָּאָרֶץ:

God blessed them, saying, "Be fertile and increase, fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth."

וַיְהי-עֶרֶב וַיְהי-בֹקֶר יוֹם חֲמִישִׁי: {פ}

And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים תוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ גֹּפֶשׁ חַיָּה לְמִינָהּ בַּהֶמָּה וּבְכָל-רֶמֶשׂ וּבְחַיֵּי-הָאָרֶץ לְמִינָהּ וַיְהי-כֵן:

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.

וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-חַיֵּי הָאָרֶץ לְמִינָהּ וְאֶת-הַבְּהֵמָה לְמִינָהּ וְאֵת כָּל-רֶמֶשׂ הָאֲדָמָה לְמִינָהּ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי-טוֹב:

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.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדִמוּתֵנוּ וְיִרְדּוּ בְדִגְתַּת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל-הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל-רֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל-הָאָרֶץ:

And God said, "Let us make humankind 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 that creep on earth."

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים | אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם:

And God created humankind in the divine image,

creating it in the image of God—

creating them male and female.

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמִלְאוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ וּכְבַשְׁתֶּהּ וּרְדּוּ בְּדִגְתַּת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל-חַיֵּי הָאָרֶץ:

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."

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים הִנֵּה נֹתְתִי לָכֶם אֶת-כָּל-עֵשֶׂב | זֶרַע אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי כָל-הָאָרֶץ וְאֶת-כָּל-הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר-בּוֹ פְּרִיעַץ זֶרַע זָרַע לָכֶם יִהְיֶה לְאֹכְלָהּ:

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.

וּלְכָל-חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ וּלְכָל-עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּלְכָל רֹמֵשׁ עַל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-בּוֹ גִּפְשׁ חַיָּה אֶת-כָּל-יֶרֶק עֹשֶׂב לְאֹכְלָהּ וַיְהִי-כֵן:

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 it was so.

וַיֹּרֶא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה טוֹב מְאֹד וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם הַשִּׁשִּׁי: {פ}

And God saw all that had been made, and found it very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

2:4- 2:25 אֵלֶּה תוֹלְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ בְּהִבְרָאָם בְּיוֹם עֲשׂוֹת יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶרֶץ וּשְׁמַיִם

Such is the story of heaven and earth when they were created.

When the ETERNAL God made earth and heaven—

וְכָל יֹשֵׁי הַשָּׂדֶה טָרֵם יְהוָה בָּאָרֶץ וְכָל-עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה טָרֵם וְיִצְמַח כִּי לֹא הִמְטִיר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים עַל-הָאָרֶץ וְאָדָם אֵין לַעֲבֹד אֶת-הָאֲדָמָה:

when no shrub of the field was yet on earth and no grasses of the field had yet sprouted, because the ETERNAL God had not sent rain upon the earth and there were no human beings to till the soil,

וְאֵד גָּעְלָה מִן-הָאָרֶץ וְהִשְׁקָה אֶת-כָּל-פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה:

but a flow would well up from the ground and water the whole surface of the earth—

וַיִּצְרֹף יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם עֹפָר מִן-הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נְשִׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְגִפְשׁ חַיָּה:

the ETERNAL God formed a Human from the soil's humus, blowing into his nostrils the breath of life: the Human became a living being.

וַיִּטֵּעַ יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים גֶּן-עֵדֶן מִקְדָּם וַיִּשֶׂם שֵׁם אֶת-הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר יָצָר:

The ETERNAL God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the Human who had been fashioned.

וַיִּצְמַח יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מִן-הָאֲדָמָה כָּל-עֵץ נָחֵמד לְמַרְאֶה וטוֹב לְמֹאכֹל וְעֵץ הַחַיַּיִם בְּתוֹךְ הָגֶן וְעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וָרָע:

And from the ground the ETERNAL 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.

וְנָהָר יֵצֵא מֵעֵדֶן לְהַשְׁקִיחַ אֶת-הֶגְן וּמִשָּׁם יִפְרֹד וְהָיָה לְאַרְבָּעָה רָאשִׁים:

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

שֵׁם הָאֶחָד פִּישוֹן הוּא הַסּוֹבֵב אֶת כָּל-אֶרֶץ הַחַוִּילָה אֲשֶׁר-שָׁם הַזָּהָב:

The name of the first is Pishon, the one that winds through the whole land of Havilah, where the gold is.

וְהָיָה הָאָרֶץ טוֹב שָׁם הַבְּדֵלַח וְאֶבֶן הַשֹּׁהַם:

(The gold of that land is good; bdellium is there, and lapis lazuli.)

וּשְׁם-הַנָּהָר הַשֵּׁנִי גִיחוֹן הוּא הַסּוֹבֵב אֶת כָּל-אֶרֶץ כּוּשׁ:

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

וּשְׁם הַנָּהָר הַשְּׁלִישִׁי חִדְקֵל הוּא הַהֹלֵךְ קִדְמַת אֲשׁוּר וְהַנָּהָר הָרְבִיעִי הוּא פָּרַת:

The name of the third river is Tigris, the one that flows east of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

וַיִּשְׁקַח יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם וַיַּנְחֵהוּ בִּגְנוֹ-עֵדֶן לְעֹבְדָהּ וּלְשִׁמְרָהּ:

The ETERNAL God settled the Human in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it.

וַיִּצְוֵה יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים עַל-הָאָדָם לֵאמֹר מִכָּל עֵץ-הֶגְן אָכַל תֹּאכַל:

And the ETERNAL God commanded the Human, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat;

וּמִעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וָרָע לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי בְיוֹם אָכְלָהּ מִמֶּנּוּ מוֹת תָּמוּת:

but as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die.”

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לֹא-טוֹב הָיִיתָ הָאָדָם לְבֶדּוֹ אֶעֱשֶׂה-לּוֹ עֹזֵר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ:

The ETERNAL God said, “It is not good for the Human to be alone; I will make a fitting counterpart for him.”

וַיִּצְרֹף יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מִן-הָאֲדָמָה כָּל-חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה וְאֵת כָּל-עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיָּבֵא אֶל-הָאָדָם לְרֹאוֹת מִה-יִקְרָא-לּוֹ וְכָל-אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָא-לּוֹ הָאָדָם גִּפְשׁ חַיָּה

הוּא שְׁמוֹ:

And the ETERNAL 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.

וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שְׁמוֹת לְכָל־הַבְּהֵמָה וְלָעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלִכְלֹל תַּיִת הַשָּׂדֶה וְלָאָדָם לֹא־מָצָא עֶזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ:

And the Human gave names to all the cattle and to the birds of the sky and to all the wild beasts; but no fitting counterpart for a human being was found.

וַיִּפֹּל יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים ׀ תְּרִדְמָה עַל־הָאָדָם וַיִּישָׁן וַיִּלָּח אַחַת מִצַּלְעָתָיו וַיִּסְגֶּר בָּשָׂר תַּחְתָּנָה:

So the ETERNAL God cast a deep sleep upon the Human; and, while he slept, [God] took one of his sides and closed up the flesh at that site.

וַיִּבֹּן יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים ׀ אֶת־הַצֶּלַע אֲשֶׁר־לָקַח מִן־הָאָדָם לְאִשָּׁה וַיְבָאָהּ אֶל־הָאָדָם:

And the ETERNAL God fashioned the side that had been taken from the Human into a woman, bringing her to the Human.

וַיֹּאמֶר הָאָדָם זֹאת הִפָּעַם עָצָם מִעֲצָמִי וּבָשָׂר מִבָּשָׂרִי לְזֹאת יִקְרָא אִשָּׁה כִּי מֵאִישׁ לְקָחָהּ־זֹאת:

Then the Human said,

“This one at last

Is bone of my bones

And flesh of my flesh.

This one shall be called the Woman,

For from the Man was she taken.”

עַל־כֵּן יַעֲזֹב־אִישׁ אֶת־אָבִיו וְאֶת־אִמּוֹ וְדָבַק בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ וְהֵיוּ לְבָשָׂר אֶחָד:

Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh.

וְהָיוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם עֶרוּמִים הָאָדָם וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וְלֹא יִתְבַּשְׁשׁוּ:

The two of them were naked, the Human and his wife, yet they felt no shame.

Rashi on Genesis 2:18:1-2

IT IS NOT GOOD etc. — I shall make an help meet for him in order that people may not say that there are two Deities, the Holy One, blessed be He, the only One among the celestial Beings without a mate, and this one (Adam), the only one among the terrestrial beings, without a mate (Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer 12).

A HELP MEET FOR HIM — (literally, opposite, opposed to him) If he is worthy she shall be a help to him; if he is unworthy she shall be opposed to him, to fight him (Yevamot 63a).

3:1-3:14

וַהֲנִחַשׁ הָיָה עֲרוֹם מִכָּל־תַּיִת הַשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־הָאִשָּׁה אַף כִּי־אָמַר אֱלֹהִים לֹא תֹאכְלוּ מִכָּל־עֵץ הָגֶן:

Now the serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild beasts that the ETERNAL God had made. It said to the woman, “Did God really say: You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?”

וַתֹּאמֶר הָאִשָּׁה אֶל־הַנָּחַשׁ מִפְּרִי עֵץ־הָגֶן נֹאכָל:

The woman replied to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the other trees of the garden.

וּמִפְּרִי הָעֵץ־אֲשֶׁר בְּתוֹךְ־הָגֶן אָמַר אֱלֹהִים לֹא תֹאכְלוּ מֵמֶנּוּ וְלֹא תִגְעוּ בּוֹ פֶּן־תָּמוּתוּן:

It is only about fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said: ‘You shall not eat of it or touch it, lest you die.’”

וַיֹּאמֶר הַנָּחַשׁ אֶל־הָאִשָּׁה לֹא־מוֹת תָּמוּתוּן:

And the serpent said to the woman, “You are not going to die,

כִּי יָדַע אֱלֹהִים כִּי בְיוֹם אֲכָלְכֶם מִמֶּנּוּ וּנְפָקְחוּ עֵינֵיכֶם וְהָיִיתֶם כְּאֱלֹהִים יֹדְעֵי טוֹב וָרָע:

but God knows that as soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like divine beings who know good and bad.”

ותרא האשה כי טוב העץ למאכל וכי תאוה הוא לעינים ונחמד העץ להשפיל ותקח מפריו ותאכל ותתן גם לאישה עמה ויאכל:

When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate.

ותפקחנה עיני שניהם וידעו כי עירומם הם ויתפצרו עליה תאנה ויעשו להם חגרות:

Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they perceived that they were naked; and they sewed together fig leaves and made themselves loincloths.

וישמעו את-קול יהוה אלהים מתהלך בגן לרוח היום ויתחבא האדם ואשתו מפני יהוה אלהים בתוך עץ הגן:

They heard the sound of the ETERNAL God moving about in the garden at the breezy time of day; and the Human and his wife hid from the ETERNAL God among the trees of the garden.

ויקרא יהוה אלהים אל-האדם ויאמר לו איפה:

The ETERNAL God called out to the Human and said to him, “Where are you?”

ויאמר את-קולך שמעתי בגן ואירא כי-עירם אנכי ואחבא:

He replied, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.”

ויאמר מי הגיד לך כי עירם אתה המוהעץ אשר צויתיו לבלתי אכל-ממנו אכלת:

“Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat of the tree from which I had forbidden you to eat?”

ויאמר האדם האשה אשר נתתה עמדי הוא נתנה-לי מוהעץ ואכל:

The Human said, “The woman You put at my side—she gave me of the tree, and I ate.”

ויאמר יהוה אלהים לאשה מה-נאת עשית ותאמר האשה הנחש השיאני ואכל:

And the ETERNAL God said to the woman, “What is this you have done!” The woman replied, “The serpent duped me, and I ate.”

ויאמר יהוה אלהים אל-הנחש כי עשית זאת ארור אתה מכל-הבהמה ומכל חית השדה על-גחנהך תלך ועפר תאכל כל-ימי תיך:

Then the ETERNAL God said to the serpent,

“Because you did this,

More cursed shall you be

Than all cattle

And all the wild beasts:

On your belly shall you crawl

And dirt shall you eat

All the days of your life.

Possible Questions

1. Why did God create the world in this particular order?
2. How do the two creation stories relate and differ? Why are there two, and why does the Torah begin with them?
3. Why is the Tree of Knowledge placed in the Garden if we aren't supposed to eat from it?
4. How does Eve (or any other character) change and develop?
5. What do Eve, Adam, the Tree, the Snake, The Divine, etc. have to teach us here?
6. If Adam were instead singing this song to Eve, would it sound different? How so?
7. Which characters or objects intrigue you in this story that you want to explore further? What draws you to them?

Together in Chevruta, come up with your own questions:

In Chevruta - Spend 2-4 minutes each sharing your thoughts. Speak in first person as one character or object / presence in the story, or a character that isn't here but you sense their voice is needed.

Free Write

Now, imagine yourself as either the same character you spoke as, or another that is coming to your mind. Or you can become an object, or God, etc. Don't deliberate on it, go with the first being that comes to you. Take 5 minutes and free write. Don't think about it, just start writing. Don't be intimidated by the empty lines here, just start writing. Fill as much of the page as you want, don't edit yourself, let the words flow. The key is to keep writing, even if you feel like what you're writing isn't working.

Abraham's Mother

By Yakov Azriel 21st c. Israel

Abraham's mother (let's call her Binah) -

Was it she who taught Abraham

To ask why and why not?

In her lullabies, Rocking him in a simple cradle,

Singing to him of little goats eating raisins and almonds,

Did she also mock the idols, Whisper questions with no answers?

Abraham's mother (let's call her Emunah) -

Was it she who first perceived

Beyond the facade of wind and storm

A greater power blows?

Was it her insight that showed a little boy

Not to bow to stars, But let his own soul shine?

Abraham's mother (let's call her Tikvah) -

Did she smile behind her veil

When the youth smashed his father's icons?

Was it she who supplied the hammer and the ax?

Abraham's mother (let's call her Eema) -

Did she feel pride, or sadness, or triumph

When her son, hearing God's voice and choosing the route to Jerusalem

Packed his belongings and left home?

Did she whisper, "God be with you"? Was this her vindication?

Abraham's mother

Is all we have

Hers?

Sarah's Song

Shema B'Koli

I woke up this morning and you were already gone.
I made you food the day before, and you were up with the dawn
Before I could kiss you and say goodbye. Goodbye.

If I had, I would have seen your face and known.
If I had, you would have seen my face and known.

My heart would have reached to call you home.
My eyes could have pierced to change your mind.
I could make you challenge your God
Resist this false command for your son.
Your favorite son.
For me.

Shema b'koli!
Are these the bonds you want to break?
To walk the narrow straits alone, without a home.

Hineini!
I hear a different call
With vision clear as your form
Coming down the mountain
Isaac's arms linked through mine
Sharing food and stories of our travels
No secrets, no scars.
If God chose me, not you.

Don't you know this was not a test to pass
You'll never know all the blessings that would flow

I was the angel stopping your hand.
I felt you shaking at the altar, and I knew.
Isaac's silent cry broke me in two
My soul fled to the sky to spare my son.
My only son.

If only I had more lives to give for my children.

Legacy

~Alden Solovy

We are the generations of Eve,
Mother of all humanity.

We are the generations of Sarah,
Prophet of laughter and sorrow, minister to the
Hebrew wanderers

We are the generations of Leah, Bilhah, Zilpah, and Rachel,
Competitors and sisters, the mother of tribes.

We are the generations of Tamar,
Standing for truth, the mother of kings.

We are the generations of Shiphrah and Puah,
Midwives, saving children, the defenders of life.

We are the generations of Yocheved,
Mothers of leaders and priests.

We are the generations of Zipporah,
Who circumcised her son and saved her husband.

We are the generations of Miriam,
Prophet of water and song.

We are the generations of the daughters of Zelophehad -
Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah -
Advocates of justice.

We are the generations of Ruth, Esther, Hannah, and Devorah,
Loyal, devoted, risk-takers.

We are the generations of unnamed women,
Noah's wives and his son's wives, mothers of humankind.

We are the generations of unnamed women, the daughter of Pharaoh,
A princess, the adopted mother of a slave-child.

We are the generations of unnamed women,
Cain's wife, Lot's wife, and Seth's daughters,
A widow living in Zarephath, Jephthah's daughter, and an
unnamed Babylonian queen.

We are the generations of named and unnamed women,
Claiming our heritage and our legacy.

Resources

Hebrew Study

1. Sefaria includes some Brown Driver Briggs, which is a wonderful place to start examining the Hebrew and multiple meanings from the shoshanim / roots
2. Alhatorah.org (Jewish site) filled with commentaries, concordance, and so much more

Bibliodrama

Scripture Windows: Toward A Practice of Bibliodrama, Peter Pitzele Ph.D

Poets (there are so many incredible poets creating midrash, these are a few of my favorites)

Rabbi Rachel Barenblat (a.k.a The Velveteen Rabbi)
70 Faces / Torah Poems

Abe Mezrich
Words for a Dazzling Firmament: Poems / Readings on Bereishit Through Shemot

Yakov Azriel
Threads From A Coat of Many Colors: Poems on Genesis

Alden Solovy
These Words: Poetic Midrash on the Language of Torah

Literature

There are two things which most sparked my interest in trying to step into the shoes of biblical characters - in particular the women. These are practicing bibliodrama, and reading novels, which artfully bring their world's vividly to life. There are too many to list here, but they are a few of my favorites to whet your appetite.

1. Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel & Leah: 3 book series by Orson Scott Card
2. The Red Tent - Anita Diamant
3. The Secret Book of Kings - Yochi Brandes
4. Sisters At Sinai: New Tales of Biblical Women - Rabbi Jill Hammer

Music

Alicia Jo Rabins - Girls in Trouble music and curriculum

I saw Alicia Jo Rabins perform at NewCAJE in Portland and was deeply inspired by her music and exploration of women biblical characters. After that the seed was planted. A year later in R. Rachel Barenblat's Sacred Writing class, the flood gates were opened and I haven't stopped.