

Circle, Arrow, Spiral — Part V

It's a Man's World (But It Should Be a Woman's)

By refusing to obey God's command in the Garden of Eden, humanity chose not to live in a world of love, unity, and equality. We insisted on asserting our (pseudo) independence and moved into a world where paradise had to be built again, brick by painful brick.

Perhaps Adam and Eve did not realize the sky-high price humanity would have to pay. But there is no going back in time. We had set out on a lonely journey to correct the world. We would have to play God—and be busy doing, progressing, fixing, and creating—and that could only be done in a hierarchical world—the world of the arrow—that would keep us focused on the top of the mountain.¹ The plan was that amidst all that movement we would keep our eyes on the ball and remember that the purpose of all this action and all this progressing and striving and doing was to be in relationship with God.

And who would remind us that this desire for self-expression—for progress, action, accomplishment—could be most intensely expressed through a relationship with someone else, and ultimately with God? When we became addicted to power and influence, who would remind us that real power is the ability to be vulnerable to love? Who would remember that independence is only a prerequisite to relationship—we need to differentiate and delineate ourselves in order to have someone to bring to the relationship—but that in the end this is all about connection and interdependence?

The mission of reminding humanity what life was all about was handed to woman. The raft to hold onto in this divisive world is the female voice.

The story of her life is the story of the voice of truth in a world of falsehood—banished, diminished, cast aside, yet ever agitating under the surface. In this section, we will see how this plays out.

¹ See chapter 27 for an elaboration on why progress and hierarchy are related.

Chapter 20

Woman as “Other”

The Midrash, in a section that is not that great for public relations, tells us that the very first time that the Hebrew letter *samech* is used in the story of Creation is in the word *vayisgor*, in the verse “And He closed the skin under it”²—referring to when God removed Adam’s side and created woman.³ This, the Midrash says, hints to us that the creation of woman is synonymous with the entrance of the Satan (who is referred to also as the *sitra achra*, literally, “the opposing force,” which starts with the letter *samech*) into the world.⁴

This is not the kind of Midrash that makes for warm, fuzzy feelings, yet at its deepest level it speaks beauty. In Christianity, the Satan is the source of all evil in the world, but in Judaism, the day that the *yetzer hara* (the evil inclination), makes its appearance is the day that God says that Creation is “*tov meod*—very good.”⁵ The rest of Creation was good, but when evil made its entrance to the world, God called that “very good.”⁶

Why is evil very good? Because evil is not really evil. It is the possibility for good, for love.ⁱ Otherness is the prerequisite for relationship.ⁱⁱ God created us so that we could leap across the chasm that separates us and enjoy the exquisite pleasure of

² Genesis 2:21.

³ Bereishit Rabbah 17:6.

⁴ The basic understanding of this Midrash is that the original androgynous being was connected back to back. When woman was separated from him, man was left with a “back.” The face always symbolizes connection and light; the back, darkness and lack of connection. True, now the man and the woman both would have a front and a back, but her creation was the introduction of the concept of “back”—the back being representative of evil.

On another level, the feminine circle is representative of the Garden of Eden as well as the World to Come—it is symbolic of an ideal world. But in the meantime we are in a male world that requires action, progress, and conquest. True, the female voice is a sort of compass to keep the male voice on track, but if the world would move into an entirely female mode right now that would be devastating for the progression that is still necessary.

Interestingly, the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer describes the horror of a world made up only of the circle mode: “Willing and striving are its whole essence and can be fully compared to an unquenchable thirst.... If, on the other hand, it lacks objects of willing because it is at once deprived of them by too easy a satisfaction, a fearful emptiness and boredom comes over it, in other words, it’s being and existence become an intolerable burden for it. Hence, its life swings like a pendulum to and fro between pain [striving] and boredom, and these two are in fact its ultimate constituents. This has been expressed very quaintly by saying that after man had placed all the pain and torments in hell, there was nothing left for heaven but the boredom” (Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne, vol. 1, bk. 2, sec. 23).

⁵ Genesis 1:31.

⁶ As the Midrash says: “‘Very good’—this refers to the *yetzer hara*, for without it, one would not build a house, marry, beget children, or engage in business” (Bereishit Rabbah 9:7).

love and unity with Him. God separated man and woman so that they could leap across the chasm that separates them and revel in the exquisite pleasure of love and unity. It is the other alternative to God that makes coming close to Him so precious and beautiful. Our free will, manifested in the choice the physical world places in front of us, is what, in the end, defines our union.

The creation of woman as an “other” to man was a real-time metaphor for our life in this world—humanity, too, is “other” to God. But what is important to remember is that “otherness” is not the goal. Connection is. Otherness is just a prerequisite.

The story of woman as other is the story of the human experience: A yearning for unity was embedded into our soul, by having once experienced that oneness before the separation caused by creation. Man and woman experienced that oneness through starting out androgynous, and we experience it with God because our soul is “a portion of God above.” Then we are thrust into a world of separation and disparity and have to establish our own separate identity—all the while remembering that the goal is union. And through it all, there is that still, small voice running under the surface that keeps reminding us how far away we are.

It is the woman, cast biologically, emotionally, and socially into the role of receiver, who is lower down in the pecking order. It is she who yearns the most for the unity experienced in the Garden of Eden.⁷ And it is she who holds the key to the Final Redemption in her hands. Like Mack in Yertle the Turtle’s stack, she who suffers most from the distance created by this hierarchical world is the one who yearns most passionately for a return to that ideal state.ⁱⁱⁱ

Woman is the metaphor for all of humanity, who yearns to reestablish the equality and reciprocity of a mature love relationship. Yet, all the yearning in the world can at most create tiny little pockets of love. And those pockets are buffeted here and there, attacked and challenged by a world that speaks a different language. Through it all, it is she—the secret agent—whose job it is to make sure that the world does not stray from its course.

⁷ Aside from the unity of the original androgynous being, the Garden of Eden also represented the idea of unity because there was just one man and one woman. In the fifth blessing of the seven wedding blessings, we ask God to “gladden the hearts of the couple getting married, just as He gladdened their hearts in the Garden of Eden.” See chapter 17 for more on this topic.

THE ROOTS OF THE INEQUALITY OF WOMEN

In the many-layered parallel that is this world, this powerful and painful push and pull between otherness and togetherness was built into every layer of creation. Rabbeinu Bechayei tells us that each day of creation, starting from day two, had its own minidrama that was an expression of this dynamic.⁸

The first day of Creation was not called the “*first* day,” but “day *one*” (*yom echad*).⁹ This is because *first* connotes a second, whereas *one* stands completely on its own. The first day of creation represented the concept of One and Only One. The second day—*yom sheini*—was the day that otherness entered the world—and from that moment on the struggle began. Being separate may be the prerequisite for union, but it also brings in its wake the pain of loneliness.

In a steady foreshadowing leading up to the tragic denouement, the stage was being set for the push and pull of creation: a burning desire for independence, which would require separation, followed by a yearning for unity in a world that ultimately could never completely deliver.

DAY TWO: SEPARATION OF THE WATERS

On the second day of Creation, God separated between the lower waters and the higher waters.

And God said, “Let there be a firmament between the waters that would separate between the waters.” And God made a firmament and He divided between the waters below the firmament and the waters above the firmament, and it was so.¹⁰

From the moment the separation between these waters occurred—the lower waters would remain below, while the higher waters remained in the heaven above—the tension between the drive for separation and the drive for unity entered the world. Indeed, the lower waters are called “weeping waters” because of their pain at being cast below.^{iv}

And it is the pain that causes these waters to roil and surge, bursting forth from the ground in wellsprings, which earns them a second name. They are not only

⁸ See his commentary on Leviticus 2:13.

⁹ Genesis 1:5.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6–7.

“weeping waters,” they are also *mayim chayim*—living waters. It is the very surge towards love, towards connection and oneness—despite the distance and the relegation to below—that defines them as living waters. *Life* is defined as dissatisfaction with separation and yearning for connection.¹¹

The rain falling from the heavens, the waters below evaporating and refilling the clouds above, reflect the symbiotic relationship, the weaving back and forth of togetherness and separateness. From the moment that the waters were cast below, life in this world would be an endless trial of separation, loneliness, yearning for union, and occasional moments of reconnection—followed by separation yet again.

DAY THREE: TREES AND FRUIT

On the third day, the earth rebelled against creating a tree that would be subsumed into the fruit. God had commanded the earth to produce “a fruit tree that would produce fruit” (*etz pri oseh pri*), yet what came forth was only “a tree that produces fruit” (*etz oseh pri*).¹² Rashi there explains that the original command was that the tree have the taste of fruit as well (and not just produce fruit), but in the first act of “rebellion,” the earth refused and produced only a fruit-producing tree.¹³

If the tree and the fruit would have had the same taste, this would have symbolized unity, since in a unified world the process and the result would both be equally valued—unlike in a world of hierarchy where all that is important is who is higher up on the mountain. The tree (the bark, the leaves, the twigs, the trunk) represents the process, while the fruit represents the ultimate purpose of the tree—the result. If the tree would have had the taste of the fruit, the tree would have exemplified the unity of process and result—where each moment of process would be infused with the taste of the result. But the tree wanted a separate identity. It did not want to be an extension of the fruit.

While the male force—the arrow—is focused on the end goal, the female force, within the circle, revels in the being, in the day-by-day process.¹⁴ In a world of

¹¹ In fact, Hebrew is the only language in which the word for *life* is in the plural. The word *chayim* actually means *lives*, not life. Just like we say *yad* for one hand, and *yadayim* for two hands, one life should really be *chai*. *Chaim* means a plurality of lives. Life is only life in the context of another life (Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, *Alei Shur*, “*Nochach*”).

¹² Genesis 1:11.

¹³ As a result of this “act of rebellion,” the earth was later punished together with Adam and Eve.

¹⁴ For example: “Traditionally, women have been involved in child raising, which offers a powerful example of the importance of the complete inseparability between means and end.... However closely an outcome resembles an original goal—a child asleep or in school—a method that damages a child has failed. Drugging a child to sleep or

truth, it is not the end goal that is important, but the process that brought you there.¹⁵ Ideally, the process of producing the fruit is itself the fruit. When the tree chose to have its own identity, process and result were rent asunder. The tree, in acquiring its separate identity, also strengthened the case for separation and distance.

DAY FOUR: THE SUN AND MOON

On the fourth day, the moon was created as a big light and was subsequently diminished.¹⁶

The moon, even when she was a great light, was a receiver. She would have received all of the sun's light, and she would have reflected that light into the parts of the world that were inaccessible to the sun. Together they would have lit up the world and removed darkness.

The moon, the symbolic receiver, realized that in a world of hierarchy, there could never be equality. Two kings cannot rule with one crown because in a world of hierarchy, the two would constantly be jockeying for supremacy.¹⁷ The moon sensed the intrinsic unsustainability of an equal relationship in a physical world, protested the lack of equality, and was relegated, like the lower waters, to a state of inferiority and diminishment. Monthly, we pray for her restoration, in the knowledge that the moon being big enough to reflect the entire glory of the sun will be a harbinger of that time when we too will completely reflect His presence in this world and love and unity will result.^v

DAY FIVE: THE LEVIATHAN

dragging her into a school room is not a means to but a perversion of the end...as [some] put it: 'the process is the project'" (Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, 170).

¹⁵ Often, people higher up on the hierarchy perpetuate the "myth of individual achievement"—they see their accomplishments as their very own, and ignore the process that got them there—the entire network of relational support activities are "disappeared" in order to maintain this myth. For more on this propensity, see Joyce K. Fletcher, *Disappearing Acts: Gender, Power, and Relational Practice at Work* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1999).

¹⁶ See part IV for further elaboration.

¹⁷ "The symmetry of connection is what creates community: if two people are struggling for closeness, they are both struggling for the same thing. And the asymmetry of status is what creates contest: two people can't both have the upper hand, so negotiation for status is inherently adversarial" (Deborah Tannen, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* [New York: HarperCollins, 1990], 29).

On the fifth day, the Leviathan was created.¹⁸ The Hebrew word *livyatan* shares the same root as the word *levayah*, accompaniment.^{vi} The two Leviathans created on the fifth day, one male and one female, in some symbolic form epitomized the idea of mirroring—of two separate creatures accompanying each other through life.

But on this same fifth day, the female Leviathan is killed.¹⁹ The partnership she personifies—the complete togetherness that the term *levayah* connotes—cannot have a viable existence in this world. She is preserved for the World to Come, which is her kingdom—the type of world she is naturally attuned to.^{vii}

The Talmud tells us that not only is the female Leviathan killed,^{viii} but the male Leviathan is castrated.²⁰ When the receiver is diminished, the bestower is limited also. You can only give what can be received. When humanity limited itself, God, too, had to control the amount of bounty that He bestows on us. Though He would like to shower us with all good, for our own good, He, as it were, restrains Himself.^{ix}

We, in this world, are left with the faint knowledge of the Leviathan waiting in the wings for a period of time that will be more conducive to its message.^{21x}

DAY SIX: MAN AND WOMAN

And on the sixth day, (androgynous) Man was created as the conduit through which God’s light would shine out into the world.

We are told that Adam once contained the entire world—he “stretched from one end of the world to the other.”²² He was the one and only perfect match between God and the physical world.²³ But humanity chose to assert its independence by disobeying God’s command. Adam and Eve cemented the great divide foreshadowed on each day of Creation.

THE LOSS

¹⁸ See Genesis 1:21: “And God created the great sea giants, and all the living soul that creeps....” Rashi, commenting on the fact that the text says “*the* great sea giants,” instead of just “sea giants,” explains that this refers to the Leviathan—a creature with metaphysical connotations (as will be explained).

¹⁹ See Rashi, Genesis 1:21.

²⁰ Tractate Bava Batra 74b.

²¹ We are taught that at the end of days, righteous people will “dine” on the Leviathan (Yalkut Shimoni, *Iyov* 40, among other places). See Maharal, *Chiddushei Aggadot, Masechet Tamid*, where he explains that since the World to Come is a spiritual world, this cannot refer to literal consumption; eating refers to the actualization of a concept.

²² Tractate Sanhedrin 38b.

²³ See note 153 above.

The undercurrent flowing through the six days of Creation was about this mismatch between the bestower and the receiver—the desire of the receiver for independence and the resultant inability of the receiver to receive all of the abundance being offered. This mismatch had many ramifications, some of which we will discuss here.

1. The first and most important ramification is that humanity, though created in the Divine image, cannot reflect all of God’s light. In fact, human beings often betray their Divine essence completely.

2. Second, the physical no longer completely reflects the spiritual. Instead of the physical world reflecting God’s unity in every minute facet, it stands in defiance—as a counterpoint to the spiritual.

3. Third, there is a short circuit between mind and heart—between logic and emotion.²⁴ One can have the most advanced intellectual knowledge and yet have no relationship with God, and conversely, a person can have deep emotional feeling and yet have limited knowledge, which can lead to terrible distortions of the truth.

All of these mismatches would come to their expression most profoundly in the mismatch between man and woman. Man and woman would no longer be equal partners; in some way, woman would be diminished.²⁵ In the great, cosmic parable, man and woman would reflect this distortion of what should have been. They would reflect humanity’s yearning for change, experience separation in real time, and they would reflect the brief moments when unity is achieved in this world.

The seemingly insurmountable wall that separates the upper and lower worlds, the upper and lower waters, the sun and the moon, the tree and the fruit, man and woman, us and God, is in reality permeable and broachable. But it is still a wall, a wall that became the defining reality of this world and of our existence in it.

IT MAY BE GOOD, BUT THAT DOESN’T MEAN IT ISN’T PAINFUL

Even as otherness is termed “very good” (because it is the separation that leads to the highest level of union—union through free choice), it is still the source of much

²⁴ See chapter 12.

²⁵ See above, chapter 13.

of the agony of this world. The further away we move from God and from each other, the more we feel alienated and alone, and the sharper the pain of the human experience.

Like the waters below, which weep to be reunited with the waters on high but were cast down to remain here on earth; like the moon, who was made into the small light but yearns to be restored to its greatness; like humanity, cast out of the Garden of Eden, far away from God, woman was told, “You will yearn for [relationship with] him, but he [man] will rule over you.”²⁶

It is crucial to remember that those words, dipped into the acid of the female experience,^{xi} do not describe an ideal. They describe a curse. The curses were descriptions of reality after the sin. The curses say: This is the way it will be, not this is the way it should be. The ideal is equality. Diminishment—of the moon, of humanity, of woman—is the negative repercussion of moving away from God. The goal is to move forward to closeness and to equality.

On the great cosmic stage, it is the woman who plays the starring role. It is she who represents the Jew, the “other,” who is cast down, the one who yearns to reunite, who because of her distance understands on the deepest, most profound level that only in returning to relationship and unity once again will there be joy and peace. And it is she who struggles to teach the world about equality and connection, she who agitates that her gift should not be disdained, but treasured.

In the next chapter, we will analyze what happens when the woman’s voice is ignored—not only by the outside world, but by herself.

ⁱ ספר עקידת יצחק שער נב הערה ג': משך מזה, כי רק בהיות האדם בבחינת שני עצמים נפרדים, עד שנכנס בגדר המנין והמספר יוכל לחטוא ולהיות בו קלקול והפסד מוסרי, וזש"א הכ' "ולא יהיה בהם נגף בפקוד אותם," כי אם ישתדל כל אדם לזכך גופו עד שישתווה אל הנפש להיות עמה לעצם אחד לא יחטא, ויען כי כל חטא ואשמה אשר יחטא האדם ואשם לאלקיו הוא רק בעבור הסתת חמרו וגופו שהוא מחצית עצמותו, ע"כ נצטווה שיתן גם מחצית השקל לכפר עליו.

ⁱⁱ רמב"ן, בראשית פרק ב' י"ח: וראה הקב"ה כי טוב שיהיה העזר עומד לנגדו, והוא יראנו, ויפרד ממנו ויתחבר אליו לפי רצונו.

ⁱⁱⁱ פרי צדיק, פרשת קרח אות א: וזהו הענין המחול לצדיקים והוא יושב ביניהם בגן עדן וכל אחד מראה באצבעו. ובבחינת העיגולים שם אין שום מדרגות שהכל שוים כמו עיגול שאין בו ראש וסוף.

^{iv} בראשית רבה ה' ד': אמר רבי ברכיה לא פירשו המים התחתונים מן העליונים אלא בבכיה הה"ד (איוב כח) מכי נהרות חבש ר' תנחום מייתי לה מן הכא עושה ארץ בכחו וגו' לקול תתו המון מים וגו' ואין לקול אלא בכי היך מה דאת אמר (ירמיה לא) קול ברמה נשמע.

^v רבינו בחיי במדבר כ"ח, טו: ולעתיד לבא יהיה השמש עם הירח שוין באורה כמו שהיו בתחלה, וכמו שמורה על זה מלת הגדולים, וכן יהיה בסוף.

^{vi} רש"י, מלכים א' פרק ז' ל"ו: כמעט איש לוויה. כמעט איש ולויות - פתח סביב כזכר ונקבה החבוקים בזרועותיהן, כן פירשו רבותינו (יומא נד א). כמעט - לשון אחיזה ודיבוק, כזכר המעורה בנקבה, ופירושו: איש ולויותו. ולפי משמעותו 'לויות' לשון 'דיבוק', שולדור"א בלע"ז, כמו לויות היו שם, עשויות כמערת איש, והמערה כמו שפירשנו.

²⁶ See Genesis 3:16.

בראשית כ"ט ל"ד: על כן קרא שמו לוי: תרגום יונתן: ואתעברת תוב וילידת בר ואמרת הדא זמנא יתחבר עמי בעלי ארום ילדית ליה תלתא בנין והיכדין עתידין בנוי למהויהון מתחברין לשמשא קדם יי בגין כן קרא שמיה לוי.

vii גור אריה, בראשית א, כ"א: ודווקא הנקיבה מלחה, מפני שהגיע לה הפסד מצד עצמה ויש לה הכנה לזולתה, והיינו במה שהיא עומדת לסוף לצדיקים לעתיד לבא, והיא מוכנת בכח לדבר שיהיה בסוף, ודבר זה ענין הכה, ושייך דבר זה לנקיבה, פירוש מה שכל נקיבה היא מוכנת לזולתה - והיא בכח לא בפעל, ולכך דבר זה טבעי לנקיבה. והיינו דמשני "בשרא דנקיבה מלחא מעלי לה", כי דבר שהוא במלח יש לו קיום לזולתו על ידי המלח, והוא בכח מוכן לדבר שהוא בסוף, וכל ענין הכנה ראוי לנקיבה, והיא ענין טבעי מסודר מן השם יתברך. ואילו היו נבראים עם זוג שלהם והיו אומרים שבהם תהיה הסעודה לעתיד - היה קשה, אך מפני שכל הבריות האלו אין בריות שלימות, שהרי אין זיווג להם, מזה תדע כי אינם בריות המתחייבים לעולם הזה, והם מתייחסים לעתיד, לכך כל דבר זה הוא מסודר וראוי, ואין להאריך כאן יותר. והוא יתברך יתן חלקינו בחיים, ולשאוב מים בששון ממעייני הישועה (עפ"י ישעיה יב, ג), ולשמחנו עם המצפים לשמחתו, ויפרוש עלינו מזיו כבודו...

viii רש"י, בראשית א כא: התנינם - דגים גדולים שבים ובדברי אגדה (פרק הספינה) הוא לויתן ובן זוגו שבראם זכר ונקבה והרג את הנקבה ומלחה לצדיקים לעתיד לבא שאם יפרו וירבו לא יתקיים העולם בפניהם.

ix פירוש הגר"א דספרי דצניעותא: והחילוק שבין הסירוס לבין הריגה כי אע"פ שאין יוצא החסד הזה ע"י פי היסוד מ"מ נהנין ממנו כידוע בסוד נהיר לנוק' דרך דופן והוא החסד שמנהיג את כל הדורות וזן בחסדו כל בשר מקרני ראמים ועד ביצי כנים אלא שהוא בהסתר פנים ואין נסים נגלים עד לעתיד שאז יתגלה בפום אמה. אבל אור הנקבה נתבטל הכל עד לע"ל.

x חידושי אגדות ע"ז דף כ"ד: כי רוצה לומר תכלית התאחדות הרצון שיש אל הש"י עם ברואיו שרצונו מתאחד עמהם וזהו עצם השחוק.

xi כלי יקר, שמות טו א: ומה שנאמר השירה הזאת בלשון נקיבה ארז"ל (שמו"ר כג יא) שכל שירות העה"ז נאמרו בלשון נקיבה לפי שיש אחריהן צער כנקיבות שיש להם צער לידה, ועוד שהנקיבות אינן נוטלות בעה"ז כי אם עישור נכסים כך הנחיל ה' לישראל שבעה אומות מן שבעים, אבל על העתיד נאמר שירו לה' שיר חדש כי אז יהיו זוכרים.