

Torah Study

Temple Beth Sholom

שבת בראשית

Genesis 1:1-6:8

Haftarah: Isaiah 42:5-43:11

“Talking Snakes, Aliens and the Big Bang in Genesis.”

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BLESSING FOR THE STUDY OF TORAH

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִלְּךָ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתַי, וְצִוֵּנוּ לְעִסּוֹק בְּדַבְרֵי תוֹרָה.

Barukh atah, ADONAI, Eloheinu melekh ha-olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzivanu la-asok b'divrei Torah.

Blessed are You, ADONAI our God, Sovereign of the Universe, who makes us holy through the Mitzvot, and commands us to occupy ourselves with the words of Torah.

Text #1 Genesis 1:1-5

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ: 1 הָאָרֶץ הִיְתָה תְהוֹם וְרֵקָה וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל-פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם: 2 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהי-אֹר וַיְהי-אֹר: 3 וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאֹר כִּי-טוֹב וַיְבַדֵּל אֱלֹהִים בֵּין הָאֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ: 4 וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לְאֹר יוֹם וְלַחֹשֶׁךְ קָרָא לַיְלָה וַיְהי-עֶרֶב וַיְהי-בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד:

¹When God began creating the heavens and the earth — ²the earth was unformed and void, and there was darkness over the surface of *Tehom*, the deep. Then a wind from God swept over the water, ³and God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴God saw that the light was good, so God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the Darkness He called Night.

TEXT #2 Ovadiah ben Jacob Sforno (16th century) on Genesis 1:1

בראשית בתחלת הזמן והוא רגע ראשון בלתי מתחלק שלא היה זמן קודם לו:

Bereishit...at the beginning of time... This is the first moment which is indivisible into shorter periods. There had not been a concept “time” previous to this, i.e. there had only been unbroken continuity.

Text #3 The *Enuma Elish*, Tablet I of the Mesopotamian Creation Myth

When on high the heaven had not been named,
Firm ground below had not been called by name,
When primordial Apsu, their begetter,
And Mummu-Tiamat, she who bore them all,
Their waters mingled as a single body,
No reed hut had sprung forth, no marshland had appeared,

None of the gods had been brought into being,
 And none bore a name, and no destinies determined--
 Then it was that the gods were formed in the midst of heaven.
 Lahmu and Lahamu were brought forth, by name they were called.

Text #4 “The Yahweh-Tehom Myth,” Rev. A.E. Whatham (cited in *The Biblical World*, Vol. 36, No. 5 (Nov., 1910), pp. 290+329-333 The University of Chicago Press)

The Epic of Creation as given by the Babylonian tablets describing the conflict between the god Marduk and Tiamat, the dragon of the “deep,” begins with a dark, turbulent, watery abyss as already existing, and impersonated by this female monster. Marduk wages war against her, and after a terrible conflict succeeds in killing her. He then divides her body into two halves. Out of one he makes a dome-shaped covering for the heavens, with the evident idea that by this means the upper waters of the now divided “deep” were to be kept from descending upon the lower waters. Nothing is said in these tablets as to what became of the other half, but the Babylonian priest, Berossos, informs us that out of it was made the earth. Here, however, the earth is made without any reference to the body of Tiamat, Marduk himself creating an earth structure which he places upon the face of the lower waters.¹ The Hebrew record of the Creation similarly opens with an already existing dark, turbulent, watery abyss named *Tehom* (Gen. 1:2), a Hebrew word corresponding to the Babylonian Tiamat. After first creating light, Yahweh next proceeds to subdue, or bring under control, the surging waters of the turbulent abyss. He then divides it into two portions, making of the one the upper, and of the other the lower ocean. To keep the upper waters in their place, he creates a domelike support, *rakia*, correctly rendered in all our versions “firmament,” since the original signifies something beaten out, hammered out of a hard substance. The earth is then formed and placed upon the face of the lower waters out of which its material had been gathered.

Text #5 Genesis 1:26-28

כַּוַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ וַיְרִדוּ בְדִגְתַּי הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה
 וּבְכָל־הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל־הַרְמֵשׁ הָרֶמֶשׂ עַל־הָאָרֶץ: כַּוַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצַלְמֵ
 אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם: כַּוַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ
 וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וּכְבֹּשׁוּהָ וַרְדּוּ בְּדִגְתַּי הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל־חַיַּי הָרֶמֶשׂוֹת
 עַל־הָאָרֶץ:

²⁶Then God said, “Let us make a human being in our image, after our likeness. And they shall rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky, the cattle and the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on the earth. ²⁷So God created the human being in His image, in the image of God he created him; male and female He created them. ²⁸Then God blessed them, saying to them, “Be fruitful and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky, and all living things that creep on the earth.”

Text #6 Genesis 2:4-7

אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ בְּהִבְרָאָם בַּיּוֹם עָשׂוֹת יְיָ אֱלֹהִים אֶרֶץ וְשָׁמַיִם: וְכֹל שִׂיחַ
הַשָּׂדֶה טָרָם יִהְיֶה בָאָרֶץ וְכֹל-עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה טָרָם יִצְמַח כִּי לֹא הִמְטִיר יְיָ אֱלֹהִים
עַל-הָאָרֶץ וְאָדָם אֵינֶן לַעֲבֹד אֶת-הָאָדָמָה: וְאֵד יַעֲלֶה מִן-הָאָרֶץ וְהִשְׁקָה אֶת-כָּל-פְּנֵי
הָאָדָמָה: וַיִּיצֶר יְיָ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם עָפָר מִן-הָאָדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נְשֵׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי
הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה:

⁴Such is the story of heaven and earth when they were created. ⁵When ADONAI made earth and heaven there were not yet shrubs of the field on earth, and no grass of the field had yet sprouted, because ADONAI, God, had not had not caused it to rain on the earth and there was no human being to work the soil. ⁶But, a mist would rise from the ground and water the whole surface of the ground. ⁷Then God fashioned the human being from the dust of the earth. He blew the breath of life into his nostrils, and the human became a living being.

Text #7 Genesis 2:15-25

וַיִּקַּח יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם וַיִּנְחֵהוּ בְּגִן-עֵדֶן לַעֲבֹדָה וּלְשִׁמְרָהּ: וַיִּצַּו יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים
עַל-הָאָדָם לֵאמֹר מִכָּל עֵץ-הַגֵּן אָכַל תֹּאכַל: וּמֵעֵץ הַדְּעִת טוֹב וְרָע לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי
בַיּוֹם אֲכָלְךָ מִמֶּנּוּ מוֹת תָּמוּת:

ADONAI, God, took the human, Adam, and placed him in the garden of Eden to farm it and tend it. Then ADONAI, God, commanded Adam, saying, "You are free to eat from every tree in the garden; except for the Tree of the Knowledge of what is good and bad. You must not eat from it, because if you do, you are doomed to die."

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לֹא-טוֹב הֵיזֶת הָאָדָם לְבַדּוֹ אֶעֱשֶׂה-לּוֹ עֹזֵר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ: וַיִּצֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים
מִן-הָאָדָמָה כָּל-חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה וְאֵת כָּל-עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיָּבֵא אֶל-הָאָדָם לִרְאוֹת מִה-יִקְרָא-לּוֹ
וְכָל אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָא-לּוֹ הָאָדָם נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה הוּא שְׁמוֹ: וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שְׁמוֹת לְכָל-הַבְּהֵמָה וּלְעוֹף
הַשָּׁמַיִם וּלְכָל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה וּלְאָדָם לֹא-מָצָא עֹזֵר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ: וַיִּפֹּל יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים תְּרִדְמָה
עַל-הָאָדָם וַיִּישָׁן וַיִּקַּח אֶחָת מִצַּלְעָתָיו וַיִּסְגֵּר בָּשָׂר תַּחַתְנָנָה: וַיִּבֶן יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הַצַּלְע
אֲשֶׁר-לָקַח מִן-הָאָדָם לְאִשָּׁה וַיִּבְאֶה אֶל-הָאָדָם: וַיֹּאמֶר הָאָדָם זֹאת הִפְעַם עָצַם מַעֲצָמִי
וּבָשָׂר מִבָּשָׂרִי לְזֹאת יִקְרָא אִשָּׁה כִּי מֵאִישׁ לָקַחְתִּי-זֹאת: עַל-כֵּן יַעֲזֹב-אִישׁ אֶת-אָבִיו
וְאֶת-אִמּוֹ וְדָבַק בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ וְהָיוּ לְבָשָׂר אֶחָד: וַיְהִיו שְׁנֵיהֶם עַרוּמִים הָאָדָם וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וְלֹא
יָתַבְשׁוּ:

Then ADONAI, God, said, "It is not good for Adam to be alone. I will make a fitting helper for him." So ADONAI, God, created all the animals of the earth and all the birds of the sky, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that would be its name. So Adam gave names to all the animals, and to the birds of the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam, the human being, no fitting helper was found. So then ADONAI, God, made Adam fall into a deep, deep sleep, and God took one of his ribs, then closed up the skin at that spot. ADONAI, God, made the rib into a woman and brought her to Adam. And Adam said, "At last! This is like me, bone

of my bone and flesh of my flesh. Let her be called Woman, because she was taken from man." So it is that when a man leaves his father and mother and marries a woman, they become as close as one person.

Well, the two of them were naked, Adam and his wife, yet they were not ashamed.

TEXT #8 OZAR HAMIDRASHIM (Eisenstein edition) *The Alphabet of Ben Sira*, 74

כשברא הקדוש ברוך הוא אדם הראשון יחיד, אמר לא טוב היות האדם לבדו, ברא לו אשה מן האדמה כמוהו וקראה לילית, מיד התחילו מתגרין זה בזה, אמרה היא איני שוכבת למטה, והוא אומר איני שוכב למטה אלא למעלה שאת ראויה למטה ואני למעלה, אמרה לו שנינו שוין לפי שנינו מאדמה, ולא היו שומעין זה לזה, כיון שראתה לילית אמרה שם המפורש ופרחה באויר העולם,

When the Holy One, blessed be God, created Adam Rishon [the first human being] alone, God said, "It is not good that this mortal should be alone." Therefore God created a woman from the earth, just like him [the human being--Adam] and called her name Lilith. Immediately they began to quarrel jealously with each other. She said, "I will not lie on the bottom." And he responded, "I will not lie on the bottom, rather on top, for it is fitting that *you* lie on the bottom with *me* on top!" Whereupon, she replied, "The two of us are equals, for both of us were created from the earth!" And neither of them listened to the other, and when Lilith saw this, she pronounced God's Name [the Tetragrammaton, which must never be said out loud], and vanished into thin air.

עמד אדם בתפלה לפני קונו ואמר, רבש"ע אשה שנתת לי ברחם ממני, מיד שגר הקדוש ברוך הוא שלשה מלאכים הללו אחריה להחזירה, אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא אם תרצה לחזור מוטב, ואם לאו תקבל על עצמה שימותו מבניה בכל יום מאה בנים, עזבו אותה והלכו אחריה והשיגוה בתוך הים במים עזים שעתידין המצריים לטבוע בו וספרוה דבר י"י ולא רצתה לחזור, אמרו לה אנו נטביעך בים, אמרה להם הניחוני שלא נבראתי אלא להחליש התינוקות כשהן משמונה ימים מיום שיוולד אשלוט בו אם הוא זכר, ואם נקבה מיום ילדותה עד עשרים יום.

Adam prayed to his Creator, "Master of the universe, the woman which you gave me has fled from me!" Immediately, the Holy One, blessed be God, dispatched three angels [Sannuy--סנוי, Sansanuy--סנסנוי, and Samnagluf--סמנגלוף] after her, to bring her back. The Holy One, blessed be God, said to him [Adam], "If she wants to return, so be it. But, if she refuses, she will be punished by having one hundred of her children die each day, leaving her forsaken." Then they [the angels] pursued her and caught up to her in the midst of the raging waters — the same waters in which the Egyptians would drown in the future. They related to her the words of ADONAI, but she did not want to return. They said to her, "But we will drown you in the sea!" And she replied, "Leave me alone. The only reason why I was created was to make babies ill. I have power over boys from birth to eight days old, and over girls from birth until twenty days old."

וכששמעו דבריה הפצירו לקחתה, נשבעת להם בשם אל חי וקיים שכל זמן שאני רואה אתכם או שמכם או תבניתכם בקמיע לא אשלוט באותו התינוק, וקבלה על עצמה שימותו מבניה מאה בכל יום, לפיכך בכל יום מתים מאה מן השדים, ולכך אנו כותבים שמותם בקמיע של נערים קטנים ורואה אותם וזוכרת השבועה ומתרפא הילד.

When they heard this, they quickly subdued her. Then she swore to them in the name of the Ever-living God, "Whenever I see you or your names or your likenesses on an amulet, I will not have power over that infant." And she accepted her punishment that one hundred of her children would die each day. And, indeed, one hundred demons die every day. So, therefore, do we inscribe amulets for little babies with their names [of the angels], so that she [Lilith] will see them and remember her oath...and the child will recover from its illness.

Text #9 Genesis 3:1-7

אֵלֶּהֶם הָיָה עָרוֹם מְכַל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יְיָ אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-הָאִשָּׁה אַף כִּי-אָמַר אֱלֹהִים לֹא תֹאכְלוּ מִכָּל עֵץ הַגָּן: וַתֹּאמֶר הָאִשָּׁה אֶל-הַנָּחַשׁ מִפְּרִי עֵץ-הַגָּן נֹאכַל: וּמִפְּרִי הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר בְּתוֹךְ-הַגָּן אָמַר אֱלֹהִים לֹא תֹאכְלוּ מִמֶּנּוּ וְלֹא תִגְעוּ בּוֹ פֶּן תָּמּוּתוּן: וַיֹּאמֶר הַנָּחַשׁ אֶל-הָאִשָּׁה לֹא-מוֹת תָּמּוּתוּן: כִּי יִדַע אֱלֹהִים כִּי בַיּוֹם אֲכַלְכֶם מִמֶּנּוּ וְנִפְקַחְו עֵינֵיכֶם וְהִייתֶם כְּאֱלֹהִים יֹדְעֵי טוֹב וָרָע: וַתֵּרָא הָאִשָּׁה כִּי טוֹב הָעֵץ לְמֹאכָל וְכִי תִאֻוֶּה-הִוא לְעֵינַיִם וְנִחְמַד הָעֵץ לְהַשְׁכִּיל וַתִּקַּח מִפְּרִיו וַתֹּאכַל וַתִּתֵּן גַּם-לְאִישָׁהּ עִמָּהּ וַיֹּאכְלוּ: וַתִּפְקַחְנָה עֵינֵי שְׁנֵיהֶם וַיִּדְעוּ כִּי עִרְמָם הֵם וַיִּתְּפְרוּ עֲלֵהּ תַאֲנֶה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם חִגְרֹת:

¹Now the serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild beasts that ADONAI, God, had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say: You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?” ²The woman replied to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the other trees of the garden. ³It 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.’” ⁴And the serpent said to the woman, “You are not going to die, ⁵but 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.” ⁶When 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. ⁷Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they perceived that they were naked; and they sewed together fig leaves and made themselves loin cloths.

Text #10 Genesis 3:14-15

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים | אֶל-הַנָּחַשׁ כִּי עָשִׂיתָ זֹאת אָרוּר אַתָּה מִכָּל-הַבְּהֵמָה וּמִכָּל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה עַל-גִּחְוֹנְךָ תֵלֵךְ וְעָפָר תֹּאכַל כָּל-יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ: טוֹ וַאֲיִבָּהּ אִשִּׁית בֵּינְךָ וּבֵין הָאִשָּׁה וּבֵין זְרַעְךָ וּבֵין זְרַעָהּ הִוא יִשׁוּפְךָ רֹאשׁ וְאַתָּה תִשׁוּפְנוּ עָקֵב:

¹⁴Then ADONAI, 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. ¹⁵I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your offspring and hers; They shall strike at your head, And you shall strike at their heel.”

Text #11 Sforno on Genesis 3:1f

והנחש הוא שטן הוא יצר הרע רב החזק עם מעוט היותו נראה. כי אמנם יקרא הדבר בשם איזה דומה לו כמו שנקרא המלך אריה כאמרו עלה אריה מסכבו ויקרא האויבים המזיקים נחשים צפעונים אשר אין להם לחש כאמרו הנני משלח בכם נחשים צפעונים וכו'. ועל זה הדרך קרא בזה המקום את היצר הרע המחטיא נחש בהיותו דומה לנחש אשר תועלתו במציאות מעט מאד וניקו רב עם מעוט הראותו. וכבר אמרו ז"ל שהיה סמאל רוכב עליו והוא שהכח המתאוה המחטיא יעשה זה באמצעו' הכח המדמ' המוכיל אליו דמיוני התענוגים החומרניים המטים מדרך השלמות המכוון מאת האל ית' כי אמנם הכח המתאו' עם דמיוני התענוגים המובילים אליו הם מצוים לכחות הגשמיו' הפועלו' ומחטיאים כונת ורצון האל ית' כשלא יתקומם עליהם הכח השכלי וימחה בהם כאמרם ז"ל עינא ולבא סרסורי דחטאה אשר על זה הזהיר באמרו ולא תתורו אחרי לבבכם ואחרי עיניכם:

The Serpent — this is another word for Satan, which itself is a way of describing the evil urge, the *Yetzer haRa*, (Baba Batra 16). The reason why this evil urge is compared to a serpent is that just like a serpent which makes itself as invisible as possible, blending in with its environment, and yet causes more damage than the most prominently visible obstacles, so the evil urge lurks where one does not suspect to find it. It is a common practice to name phenomena according to other well known phenomena, such as calling the king “lion,” to show what is expected of a king, i.e. strength, fearlessness, etc. Also in Jeremiah 8,17 Israel’s enemies are referred to as “adders which cannot be charmed.” God, using a metaphor, calls the evil urge *a snake* in our verse. Anything or anybody who leads Israel into sin is termed *a snake*. The reason why a serpent has been chosen for such a metaphor is that it is a creature whose potential harm is huge, whereas its potential benefit to man is minimal. Moreover, seeing that its visibility is minimal, it is similar to the *Yetzer haRa* that never attacks frontally, and often poses as friend rather than as enemy. Our sages in Pirkei de Rabbi Eliezer chapter 13, already enlarged on this metaphor by describing Samael as riding the serpent, meaning “taking advantage of this power of imagination.” The insidious nature of the *Yetzer haRa* consists of the fact that it conjures up in our imagination something desirable, which because of its desirability we rationalize into considering as harmless, harboring no physical or spiritual danger for us. Greed, lust, combined with one’s imagination is a powerful tool for leading man into sin. Unless man is able to harness the power of reason against such insidious attempts to trick him into disobedience against God by giving in to his desire for gratification of his senses, he will fall victim to the evil urge’s machinations. When our sages (Jerusalem Talmud Berachot 1.8) said, “the eyes and the heart are agents of sin,” they referred to the warning against the evil urge we recite twice daily in the last section of the Shema liturgy (Numbers 15,39).

Text #12 Genesis 6:1-4

אִי־הָיָה כִּי־הִחַל הָאָדָם לְרַב עַל־פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה וּבָנוֹת יִלְדוּ לָהֶם: וַיִּרְאוּ בְנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת־בָּנוֹת הָאָדָם כִּי טֹבֹת הֵנָּה וַיִּקְחוּ לָהֶם נָשִׁים מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר בָּחָרוּ: וַיֹּאמֶר יְיָ לֹא־יִדּוֹן רוּחִי בָאָדָם לְעַלְמָם בְּשָׁגֶם הוּא בָשָׂר וְהָיוּ יָמֵי מַאֲהָ וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה: הַנְּפֹלִים הָיוּ בְּאָרְץ בְּיָמֵים הָהֵם וְגַם אַחֲרֵי־כֵן אֲשֶׁר יָבֹאוּ בְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל־בָּנוֹת הָאָדָם וַיִּלְדוּ לָהֶם הַמָּה הַגִּבּוֹרִים אֲשֶׁר מְעוֹלָם אֲנָשֵׁי הַשָּׁמַיִם:

¹When humanity began to increase on earth and daughters were born to them, ²sons of the divine beings (*B'nei HaElohim*) saw how beautiful the daughters of humanity were and took wives from among those that pleased them. ³ADONAI said, “My breath shall not abide in humankind forever, for they are but flesh, so let them live one hundred and twenty years.” ⁴It was then, and later too, that the *Nephilim* appeared on earth — when the sons of the divine beings cohabited with the daughters of humankind, who bore them offspring. These were the heroes of old, the men of renown.

TEXT #13 Rashi on Genesis 6:2

בני האלהים: בני השרים והשופטים. (דבר אחר בני הא-להים הם השרים ההולכים בשליחותו של מקום, אף הם היו מתערבים בהם). כל א-להים שבמקרא לשון מרות, וזה יוכיח (שמות ד טו) ואתה תהיה לו לא-להים, (שם ז א) ראה נתתיך א-להים:

Beney elohim, בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים, “the sons of the princes” (from the Aramaic translation) and the judges (Midrash Genesis Rabbah 26:5). Another explanation: *Beney elohim* בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים are the princes who go as messengers of the Omnipresent. They too mingled with them (Midrash, Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer, ch. 22). Every mention of *elohim* (אֱלֹהִים) in Scripture suggests authority, and the following proves it, Exodus 4:16 states: “And you shall be to him as a lord (לְאֱלֹהִים).” Also, in Exodus 7:1: “See, I have made you a lord (אֱלֹהִים).”

TEXT #14 Richard Elliott Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah*, on Genesis 6:4

Some Bible stories are virtually self-contained. Even though they may have implications elsewhere in the *Tanakh*, we can still read them as sensible, comprehensible individual units. But this account of the giants is an example of another type of story: those whose elements are widely separated, distributed across great stretches of the narrative. Those stories provide the connections that make the *Tanakh* a united work, telling a continuous story, rather than a patchwork of little tales.

The issue is that there are giants: uncommonly big, powerful persons, who are frightening. The first question is: from where did they come? Answer: “*beney elohim*” have relations with human women, and they give birth to giants, Nephilim. Whatever the biblical author thought “*beney elohim*” were, we can say at minimum that it refers here to some sort of (male) creatures from the divine realm. As in an extremely mythological theme, such mixed divine-human breeding produces beings who are bigger and stronger than regular humans.

This does not come up again in the story until thousands of years later. When Moses sends men to scout the promised land, they see the giants: “the Nephilim” (Num. 13:33). That is what scares the scouts and their fear infects the Israelites, changing the destiny of the wilderness generation. A generation later, Joshua eliminates all the giants from the land except from the Philistine cities, particularly the city of *Gath* (Joshua 11:21-22). And later still, the most famous Philistine giant, Goliath, comes from *Gath* (I Samuel 17:4). And David defeats him.

We can read each of these stories without noticing that they are a connected account, building to a climactic scene, but obviously we miss something that way. Such widely distributed stories are there because the Bible is *not* a loose collection of stories. It is an intricate, elegant, exquisite, long work with continuity and coherence. When we know our Bible well, we read this story about the giants in creation, and we are aware that they will play a part in the tragedy of the wilderness generation, that Joshua will defeat them, and that David will face the most famous (and last?) of them.

This episode, coming at the end of the first parashah of the year, is a reminder that we cannot really learn the Torah without learning the rest of the *Tanakh* as well.