

155. THE SHATTERING OF THE VESSELS AND THE GATHERING OF THE SPARKS

At the beginning of time, God's presence filled the universe. Then God decided to bring this world into being. To make room for creation, God first drew in His breath, contracting Himself. From that contraction a dark mass was produced. And when God said, *Let there be light* (Gen. 1:3), the light that came into being entered the dark mass, and ten vessels came forth, each filled with primordial light.

In this way God sent forth those ten vessels, like a fleet of ships, each carrying its cargo of light. Had they arrived intact, the world would have been perfect. But somehow the frail vessels broke open, split asunder, and all the holy sparks were scattered, like sand, like seeds, like stars. Those sparks fell everywhere, but more fell on the Holy Land than anywhere else.

That is why we were created—to gather the sparks, no matter where they are hidden. Some even say that God created the world so that Israel could raise up the holy sparks. And that is why there have been so many exiles—to release the holy sparks from the servitude of captivity. For in this way the people of Israel will sift all the holy sparks from the four corners of the earth.

And when enough holy sparks have been gathered, the vessels will be restored, and the repair of the world, awaited so long, will finally take place. Therefore it should be the aim of everyone to raise these sparks from wherever they are imprisoned and to elevate them to holiness by the power of their soul. And when the task of gathering the sparks nears completion, God will hasten the arrival of the final redemption by Himself collecting what remains of the holy sparks that went astray.

The myth of the Shattering of the Vessels (*shevirat ha-kelim*), attributed to the Ari, is found in the writings of Hayim Vital, Moshe Yonah, Yosef ibn Tabul, and Israel Sarug, among others. Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, quoting *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* 3, suggests that the reason that God wanted to create the earth was "to reveal his majesty, since there is no King without subjects. Therefore God constricted His infinite light, leaving a vacated space" (*Likutei Moharan* 6). See "The Contraction of God," p. 13. According to Hayim Vital, the ten vessels were created to contain ten gradations of divine light—the ten sefirot. See "The Ten Sefirot," p. 7. In some versions of this myth, all ten vessels are said to have broken, while other versions insist that the upper three vessels remained intact, while the lower seven shattered. The breaking of the vessels indicates some kind of divine flaw, since the vessels were unable to hold the infinite light that flowed into them. It was the shattering of the vessels, the divine equivalent of the Fall of Adam and Eve, that permitted the roots of evil to enter the world. Once they shattered, the vessels, now called *kelippot*, meaning "shells" or "shards," and conceived as demonic in nature, became the basis of material reality. While most of the divine light ascended on high, some clung to the broken shards. These are the sparks that must be liberated through the process of Gathering the Sparks. As Rabbi Hayim Tিরer of Chernovitz puts it, "The Jewish people must make a mighty effort to return these sparks to the Creator" (*Be'er Mayim Hayim, Bereshit* 32).

According to Israel Sarug (1631): "Traces of the divine light adhered to the fragments of the broken vessels like sparks. And when the fragments descended to the bottom of the fourth and last world, they produced the four elements, and when all these became completely materialized, some of the sparks still remained within. Therefore it should be the aim of everyone to raise these sparks from where they are imprisoned in this world and to elevate them to holiness by the power of their soul."

There are three likely biblical sources for the Ari's myth. The first, Contraction (*tzimtzum*), finds its likely biblical source in the cloud that fills the Tent of Meeting: *A cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the Presence of Yahweh filled the Tabernacle, and Moses was not able to enter into the Tent of Meeting* (Exod. 40:34-35).

The second phase of the Ari's myth, the Shattering of the Vessels, has two likely biblical sources. The first is that of Moses throwing down the first tablets of the Law, which shatter: *He became enraged; and he hurled the tablets from his hand and shattered them at the foot of the mountain* (Exod. 32:19). This is an important source, especially since there are ten commandments and ten sefirot. Equally relevant is the passage in Ezekiel 10:2 in which coals of fire from the altar are scattered by some angelic figure over the city of Jerusalem: *Fill your hands with glowing coals from among the cherubs, and scatter them over the city*. This passage from Ezekiel manages to work in the scattering, the sparks, the concentration of sparks on the Holy Land (and especially Jerusalem), and the holiness of the sparks, since they come from the altar.

A deeply metaphoric passage in the *Idra Rabbah* portion of the *Zohar* (3:135a-135b) about the deaths of the kings of Edom (Gen. 36:31-39) has been linked to the sefirotic process of emanation, which is in turn linked to the myth of the Shattering of the Vessels, in that both describe a cosmic rupture. Interpreted in this fashion, this passage identifies the vessels that shattered with the myth of the prior worlds that God is said to have created and destroyed: "and all the worlds were destroyed." See "Prior Worlds," p. 71. These prior worlds were understood to have been flawed worlds that God created and destroyed. From this interpretation it is possible to conclude that the Breaking of the Vessels came about because of some kind of flaw whose origin must be tracked back to God. For if the vessels had been strong enough, or the light in them stable, they would have fulfilled their original purpose and arrived intact at their destination. Instead, the sparks of holy light must be liberated from the dark matter in which they have descended.

The third stage, the Gathering of the Sparks, may well find its source in the gathering of the manna in the desert: *The Israelites did so, some gathering much, some little* (Exod. 16:17). Like the sparks, the manna has fallen from the heavens to nourish the people's bodies, while the sparks nourish their souls.

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Riminov strongly linked the myth of the Gathering of the Sparks with the messianic redemption: "These holy sparks descended at the time of Creation. It is our task to extract and cleanse the holy sparks by means of learning Torah and performing *mitzvot*. If Israel merits to elevate all the holy sparks through their good deeds, then, when this task is completed, God will hasten the arrival of the Final Redemption. For the Final Redemption cannot occur until all the holy sparks are purified and elevated to their origin. And what if there are a few holy sparks that were led astray? God will collect what is His—He Himself will collect the holy sparks that were led astray." Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Lyady confirms the link between raising up the fallen sparks and the arrival of the messianic era: "When all the sparks of holiness have been released, the Messiah will come" (*Tanya* 25).

Note that the Riminov Rebbe adds a remarkable detail to the myth of Gathering the Sparks: that God Himself will collect any remaining holy sparks that went astray. The Riminov Rebbe links this interpretation to the talmudic dictum, "God is forbearing and collects what is His" (*Y. Tan.* 82a).

In *Esh Kadosh*, Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira suggests that when there was an increase in the *kelippot*—the forces of evil—the deaths of the Ten Martyrs became necessary to prevent a new Shattering of the Vessels. Then Rabbi Shapira offers a parallel explanation for the loss of so many Jewish souls in the *Shoah*, concluding that it was also a time of the Breaking of the Vessels.

Sources:

Zohar 3:135a-135b, *Idra Rabbah*; *Etz Hayim*, *Hekhal Nekudim*, *Sha'ar ha-Melakhim* 5; *Etz Hayim*, *Hekhal Adam Kadmon*, *Derush Igulim ve-Yosher* 2:24b:3-9; *Derush she-Masar* 18-20; *Mavo She'arim*, *Sha'ar* 2, pt. 1, 5:18-19; *Kanfei Yonah*; *Derush Heftzi Bah*; *Keter Shem Tov* 194; *Likutei Moharan* 49; *Makhon Siftei Tzaddikim* on Exodus 34:6; *B'nei Yisakhar*, *Nisan Ma'amar* 4; *Yiyyul ha-Pardes* 8:60d; *Sefer Ba'al Shem Tov*, *va-Yetze* 8, 9; *Tanya* 25; *Be'er Mayim Hayim*, *Bereshit* 32; *Esh Kadosh*; *Wisdom of Solomon* 3:7, 7:25-27.

Studies:

Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos: Isaac Luria and His Kabbalistic Fellowship by Lawrence Fine, pp. 124-149.

173. ADAM THE HERMAPHRODITE

Some say that Adam was originally created with two faces, one male and one female, one facing forward and one behind, as it is said, *Male and female He created them* (Gen. 1:27). Others say that Adam and Eve were created as a single being, with Adam in front and Eve in back, so that Adam's back was in the shape of Eve.

How did this happen? God had originally intended to create two people, but ultimately only one was brought into being.

But facing in two directions made walking difficult, and conversation awkward. So God changed His mind and split Adam into two, making two backs, one for Adam and one for Eve, and dividing them into two separate beings.

Then there are those who say that Adam lost his second face in a different way, through his sin. For when Adam sinned, God took away one of his faces.

The myth of Adam the Hermaphrodite grows out of three biblical verses: *Male and female He created them* (Gen. 1:27), *He blessed them and called them Man (Adam)* (Gen. 5:2), and, *You have shaped me from the back and the front* (Ps. 139:5). But instead of describing Adam and Eve as two people joined into one, *Shoher Tov* 139:5 suggests that "Adam's back was in the shape of Eve." The rabbis also concluded that the man's face went first, because of the teaching that a man should not walk behind a woman on the road. One rabbi, Rabbi Jeremiah ben Eleazar, identifies Adam as a hermaphrodite, thus a being with two sexes. Another rabbi, Rabbi Samuel bar Nachman, identifies Adam as a double-faced being who was later split by God into two. Some versions say that God "sawed" Adam in two, a rather grisly image. The bumps of the spine are said to be evidence of the separation that took place.

Other readings of this myth also indicate that man and woman emerged from a single being. This is true, for example, in the sense that Eve was created from Adam's rib. Before Eve was created, then, her potential existed within Adam. Thus Adam and Eve were once a single being, not in the sense of separate beings fused together, but in the sense of having both male and female qualities.

This myth acknowledges that God made a mistake, an idea that borders on heresy, since God is understood to intrinsically be perfect, and therefore incapable of a mistake. But the actual portrayal of God in the rabbinic texts presents God in a wide range of roles, ordering the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and then regretting it bitterly, or allowing Himself to be overruled by His children. Such a God is almost human, with a complex persona that includes the capacity of being contradictory or of making errors. See the Introduction, p. xlvi. What other errors has God made? Some regard the Shattering of the Vessels in the myth of the Ari to be another example of a divine error, since the vessels shattered before they reached their original destination. See "The Shattering of the Vessels and the Gathering of the Sparks," p. 122.

This myth is a very clear parallel to a Greek myth found in pre-Socratic sources, and most famously in Plato's *Symposium* 189a-190a, that every person seeks to find his or her other half. That myth is intended to explain the nature of Eros as a craving for completeness, since each person is only a part of what he or she once was. This mean-

ing does not really carry over in the Jewish version of this myth, except by implication. The closest concept in Judaism is that of *bashert*, in which every person is said to have a destined one. This grows out of the talmudic dictum that "Forty days before a child is formed, a voice goes forth from heaven to declare that this one will marry that one" (B. Sota 2a).

The Christian biblical commentator Ephraem interpreted *male and female He created them* to mean that Eve was fully formed inside Adam, in the rib that was later taken out of him. There is also an Iranian myth about the first human pair, Masye and Masyane, who were joined to each other. Here, however, they were so like each other that it was not clear which was male and which female.

In *Likutei Moharan*, Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav reads this myth allegorically, where Adam symbolizes God and Eve symbolizes humanity. Because we have sinned, we have turned our backs to God, and therefore God has turned His back on us. But we find that we are still attached to God no matter what we do. Only when we repent our sin does the "operation" of *teshuvah*, repentance, take place, and then we stand face to face with God again.

Sources:

B. Eruvin 18a; B. Berakhot 61a; B. Ketubot 8a; *Genesis Rabbah*. 8:1, 8:10; *Leviticus Rabbah* 14:1; *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan* 1:8; *Midrash Tehillim* 139:5; *Shoher Tov* 139:5; Maharsha on Genesis 1:27; *Zohar* 3:44b; *Zohar Hadash* 55c-d; *Likutei Moharan* 1:108.

180. THE FIRST WEDDING

God had already created the earth, the sun, the moon, and the stars. All of the animals were in the Garden of Eden. The time had come for Adam, the first man, to be created.

God called upon the angel Gabriel to bring clay from each of the four corners of the earth, the north, the south, the east, and the west. This the angel did, and then God formed a clay man and breathed the breath of life into him and the man opened his eyes and began to breathe.

Adam gave names to all the animals and explored the Garden of Eden. But God saw that Adam was lonely, and He decided to create a mate for him.

So one day, when Adam was strolling about in the Garden of Eden, God put Adam to sleep, and while he was deeply dreaming, God took out one of his ribs, and with that rib God created Eve, the first woman.

When Adam awoke and saw Eve standing in front of him, their faces illuminating each other, he understood at once that he had found his true mate. God introduced Adam to Eve and explained how she had been created. Then Adam embraced her and kissed her and said, "*This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called Woman, for from man was she taken*" (Gen. 2:23).

Then God knew that the time had come for the world's first wedding. God Himself prepared tables of precious pearls and filled them with delicacies.

God also created ten wedding canopies for them, all made of precious gems, pearls, and gold. So too did He attire Eve, the first bride, in a beautiful wedding dress, and braid her hair and adorn her with twenty-four different ornaments.

As the ceremony began, the ministering angels walked before Adam, leading him beneath the wedding canopies. Michael and Gabriel were Adam's groomsmen. Then God Himself brought the bride to Adam and stood before them like a cantor, and took the cup of blessing and blessed them, as it is said, *God blessed them* (Gen. 1:28).

As soon as Adam and Eve were wed, still other angels descended to the Garden of Eden, playing music for the newlyweds, beating tambourines and dancing to pipes. So too did the sun, the moon and the stars dance for them, and all of creation joined in the celebration of the world's first wedding.

Sefer ha-Zikhronot explains that while each bridegroom generally has only one *huppah* (a wedding canopy), and a king has three, God made ten canopies for Adam in order to show great honor to the first man. The jewels covering them are all different: chalcidony, topaz, diamond, beryl, onyx, jasper, sapphire, emerald, carbuncle, and gold. This list is drawn from Ezekiel 28:18. The twenty-four ornaments that Eve wore are listed in Isaiah 3:18-24.

There is a debate among the rabbis recounted in *Genesis Rabbah* as to how many canopies God created for Adam. While the number generally given is ten, some rabbis argued there were 11 or 13.

One of the wedding blessings for every Jewish couple is that they attain the holiness and joy granted to Adam and Eve on the day of their wedding.

This myth also provides the origin of the best man at weddings, for since God acted as the best man for Adam, henceforth one must have a best man.

Sources:

B. Eruvin 18a; *B. Berakhot* 61a; *B. Niddah* 45a; *B. Shabbat* 95a; *Genesis Rabbah* 8:13, 18:1; *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* 4:4, 26:3; *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* 12; *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* 4; *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* 7:1-2; *Pesikta Rabbati* 14:10; *Zohar* 3:19a, 3:44b.

131. THE ORIGIN OF FIRE

For the first week of Creation, the sun shone day and night. But when the sun sank at the end of the Sabbath, and darkness came closer, Adam grew terrified. He cried out to God that the serpent was coming to harm him. Then God told Adam to take two flints and to strike them against each other. And when he did, fire came forth, much to Adam's amazement, and he uttered a spontaneous blessing over it. That is why a blessing is recited over a candle at the end of the Sabbath, for fire was then created for the first time.

Myths of origin are common in all mythic systems, including Judaism. Myths of the creation of the world, of the origin of man, and here, of the origin of fire, are all found in Jewish sources. Here God tells Adam how to make a fire, rubbing flints together. This first fire is tied to the darkness that descends after the sun sets at the end of the Sabbath. Thus a series of origins are all linked together: the first Sabbath, the first sunset, the first darkness, the origin of fire—and the origin of the first blessing for the first *Havdalah* service, which takes place at the end of the Sabbath. See "Adam Brings Down Fire from Heaven," p. 137.

B. Pesahim 54a suggests that rather than God directing Adam to rub the flints together, God inspired Adam with divine intuition, so that Adam knew on his own what he needed to do. See "The First Havdalah," p. 319.

Sources:

B. Sanhedrin 38b, 100a; *B. Hagigah* 12a; *B. Pesahim* 54a; *B. Avodah Zarah* 8a; *Genesis Rabbah* 8:1, 11:2, 21:3; *Exodus Rabbah* 32:1; *Leviticus Rabbah* 14:1, 16:2; *B. Pesahim* 54a; *Pesikta Rabbati* 23:6.

556. EVE TASTES THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT

God told Adam, "Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat; 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" (Gen. 2:16-17). But Adam told Eve, "God has said, 'You shall not eat of it or touch it, lest you die'" (Gen. 3:3).

At that time the serpent said to himself, "Perhaps I cannot convince Adam, who heard the words of God for himself. So I will seek out Eve."

The serpent found Eve in the garden and said, "Is it true that God has commanded you not to eat of any fruit in the garden?" Eve replied, "No, there is only one tree in the midst of the garden forbidden to us. We are not allowed to eat of its fruit or even to touch it, for on that day we shall die."

The serpent laughed when he heard this, and said, "God has only said this out of jealousy, for He knows that if you eat of the fruit of that tree, your eyes will be opened, and you will know how to create a world just as He did." Then the serpent went to the tree in the midst of the garden and shook it, so that some of the fruit fell to the ground. "See, I have touched the tree and I have not died. You, too, can touch it without dying."

When Eve saw the serpent touch the tree and not die, she picked up one of the fruits that had fallen and, seeing that it was beautiful and desirable, she tasted it. But no sooner had she taken a single bite, than her teeth were set on edge, and she saw the Angel of Death standing before her, with his sword drawn. Then Eve said to herself, "Now that I have eaten of this fruit, I will die, and Adam, who has not touched it, will live forever, and God will couple him with another woman. It is better that we die together."

This myth grows out of rabbinic awareness of a problem in the biblical text where God warns Adam against eating the forbidden fruit (Gen. 2:16-17), but Eve tells the serpent that they are forbidden to eat from it or touch it (Gen. 3:3). The rabbis assumed that Adam had added on his own, a warning against touching the fruit. (After all, Eve had not been created when God gave Adam the original warning.) The myth assumes that the serpent is aware of Adam's additional warning, and uses this knowledge to convince Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. In one version, he does this by pushing Eve against the Tree of Knowledge, then pointing out that while she has touched it, she has not died. Therefore she might as well eat the fruit, which she does.

In most versions of this myth, Eve sees the Angel of Death the instant she bites into the forbidden fruit. But in *Targum Pseudo-Yonathan* on Gen. 3:6, Eve sees that the wicked angel Samael, one of the names of Satan, was himself the Angel of Death.

Sources:

Targum Pseudo-Yonathan on Gen. 3:6 ; *Bereshit Rabbah* 19:3-4; *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* 1, 4-5, 151; *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* 13; *Zohar* 1:263b; *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* 12 .

Studies:

Eve and Adam: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender, edited by Kristen E. Kvam, Linda S. Schearing, and Valarie H. Ziegler.

564. WHAT THE SERPENT SAID TO EVE

In order to convince Eve to taste the forbidden fruit, the serpent said: "*But God knows that as soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God*" (Gen. 3:5-6). Know that God ate of this tree and then created the world. That is why He has commanded you not to eat of it, lest you create other worlds. The truth is that you were brought into being to rule over everything. Make haste and eat before God creates other worlds that will dominate you." And Eve saw how plausible were the words of the serpent, and she tasted the fruit.

This midrash adds significantly to the biblical version in having the serpent suggest to Eve that God Himself gained His powers after eating from the Tree of Knowledge. While the serpent's original comments promised Eve knowledge, they did not imply that God obtained His knowledge in this way. But the rabbis, reading between the lines, saw a hint of such a meaning in the serpent's comments and made this hint explicit. To do so is to belittle God's unique powers, and it turns the serpent into a heretic. Thus this midrash may be viewed as aimed not only at the serpent, but at those with Gnostic views who failed to acknowledge God's unique powers as Creator of the world.

Sources:

Genesis Rabbah 19:4.

572. HOW CAIN WAS CONCEIVED

Samael was the great prince in heaven. After God created the world, Samael took his band of followers and descended and saw the creatures that God had created. Among them he found none so skilled to do evil as the serpent, as it is said, *Now the serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild beasts* (Gen. 3:1). Its appearance was something like that of a camel, and Samael mounted and rode upon it. Riding on the serpent, the angel Samael came to Eve in the night and seduced her, and she conceived Cain. Later, while Eve was pregnant by the angel, Adam came to her, and she conceived Abel.

Others say it was the serpent himself who seduced Eve, for after he saw Adam and Eve coupling, the serpent conceived a passion for her. He even imagined killing Adam and marrying Eve. So he came to Eve when she was alone and possessed her and infused her with lust. That is how the serpent fathered Cain, who was later to slay his own brother. And that is how Eve was infected with his impurity. As a result, all of Israel was impure from that time until the Torah was given on Mount Sinai. Only then did Israel's impurity cease.

When Cain was born, Adam knew at once that he was not of his seed, for he was not after his likeness, nor after his image. Instead, Cain's appearance was that of a heavenly being. And when Eve saw that his appearance was not of this world, she said, *I have gained a male child with the help of Yahweh* (Gen. 4:1).

It was not until the birth of Seth that Adam had a son who was in his own likeness and image. From Seth arose all of the generations of the righteous, while all the generations that descended from the seed of Cain are wicked, until this very day.

This myth is a response to the enigmatic verse in which Eve says, *I have gotten a man with the aid of Yahweh* (Gen. 4:1). *Targum Pseudo-Yonathan* translates this verse as "I have acquired a man, the angel of the Lord."

One reading of this verse in the Talmud (*B. Shab.* 146a) suggests that Eve had intercourse with the serpent: "When the serpent consorted with Eve, he cast impurity into her." This interpretation is echoed in the *Zohar*: "From the impurity with which the serpent infected Eve emerged Cain." *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* builds on the talmudic interpretation, but changes it in an essential way. Here the true father of Cain is the angel Samael, who came to Eve riding on the serpent. Indeed, in this passage the angel and serpent are closely linked, creating a satanic figure and suggesting that Eve had intercourse with the serpent, a powerful phallic symbol.

In *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, the Torah upbraids Samael as he rides upon the serpent like a camel: "The Torah began to cry aloud, saying, 'Why, O Samael, now that the world is created, is it time to rebel against God? Is this the time to lift yourself on high? God will laugh at the horse and its rider.'" This establishes the role of the Torah as the defender of the human race against the evil intentions of Samael.

Zohar 1:36b explains that two came upon Eve, the serpent and Adam, and that she became pregnant from both of them, and bore two sons. The son of the serpent is, of course, Cain. In order to explain why Cain was evil and Abel was good, *Zohar* 1:54a explains that Cain was conceived from the side of unholiness and Abel from the side of holiness. As a result, Abel was in the likeness of God's image, as stated in the verse *And God created man in His image* (Gen. 1:27). But Cain was of the likeness of the nether image. Just what this is isn't clear, although one commentary, *Ziv ha-Zohar*, identifies the nether image as that of an ape. Because Cain was from the side of the Angel of Death (another possible explanation of the "nether image"), he killed his brother.

The idea that Eve was infected by the impurity of the serpent when she had intercourse with it attempts to portray women as not only impure, but also untrustworthy. It is part of an extensive antifeminine bias found in some rabbinic texts. However, in other texts, Eve is portrayed in a very favorable manner. She is regarded as the mother of all generations, and she is called a life-giver, who nursed the whole world (*B. AZ* 43a).

The serpent of Genesis becomes transformed in kabbalah into a principle of evil, the primal serpent who makes its home in the darkness of the *Sitra Ahra*, the Other Side. It is *a serpent by the road, a viper by the path* (Gen. 49:17). It comes down from above, swims across bitter waters, and descends in order to deceive, lying in wait to ambush mankind with sins. The *Sitra Ahra* is the realm of evil. It is said to be ruled by Samael and Lilith. The primal or primordial serpent is an archetype of evil, based upon the serpent in the Garden of Eden. In this realm it functions as a force of evil, an exaggerated version of the *Yetzer ha-Ra*, the Evil Impulse in every person. Here this impulse is understood to be an underlying principle in the concept of an evil realm. Evil, however, flourishes only in the absence of good. The *Zohar* describes this serpent as "eternal death, on the left side, that enters into a man's innermost secret parts" (*Zohar* 2:52a).

See the closely related myth, "The Seed of Cain," p. 448. For a Hasidic tale about the primal serpent, see "Reb Shmelke's Whip" in *Gabriel's Palace*, p. 226.

Sources:

Targum Pseudo-Yonathan on Genesis 4:1; *B. Shabbat* 145b-146a; *B. Sota* 9b; *B. Yevamot* 103b; *B. Avodah Zarah* 22b; *Genesis Rabbah* 18:6; *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* 13, 21, and 22; *Zohar* 1:28b, 1:36b-137a, 1:54a, 1:55a; 1:243b, 2:52a; *Magen Avot* 53.

575. THE WIVES OF CAIN AND ABEL

Where did the wives of Cain and Abel come from? On the day that Adam and Eve were created, on that very day they coupled, and on that very day they produced offspring. It is said that two entered the bed and seven left it, for Cain was born with a twin sister, and Abel was born with two sisters.

Cain married Abel's twin, and Abel married Cain's. But they could not agree on the fate of Abel's second twin. Indeed, it is said that she was the subject of the dispute between the two brothers, out of which Cain slew his brother Abel, and the voices of the blood of the families who were destined to issue forth from Abel cried out before God.

Since Genesis does not explain what it was that Cain and Abel fought over, there are many myths that speculate about it. One of the most common explanations is that they were fighting over a woman. In this version, she is identified as Abel's second twin. In other versions, such as *Genesis Rabbah* 22:7, the woman they fought over is identified as the first Eve. See "The First Eve," p. 140. This midrash makes the assumption that Cain and Abel were themselves twins, although the biblical text does not state this, and seems to imply that they were not.

Sefer Zikhronot gives the name of the Cain's wife as Kalmana, and of Abel's wife as Deborah. This text also identifies these wives as their twins, contrary to the version in which Cain and Abel do not marry their own twins, but each one marries the other's twin.

Sources:

Genesis Rabbah 22:2-3, 22:7; *Targum Onkelos* on Genesis 4:9; *Sefer ha-Zikhronot* 23:26.