

Conversation on Bereishit Across the Centuries

וַיִּצְרֶה... אֶת הָאָדָם עֶפְרָר מִן הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפֹּחַ בְּאָפִיו נְשֵׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה

The Lord God formed humankind from the dust of the earth; He blew into his nostrils the breath of life and the human became a living being. (Genesis 2:7)

Rashi presents the following midrash in order to emphasize the symmetry of creation not apparent at first glance. It is the human being who balances “above” and “below.” In the Adam/human, dust and spirit conspire. The Israeli poet, Rivka Miriam, also understands that it is humankind that brings an earthly perspective to the heavens and heavenly vision to earth.

עָשָׂאוּ	He made him
מִן הַתַּחְתּוֹנִים	From the lower elements
וּמִן הָעֲלִיוֹנִים	And from the upper elements
גוּף	Body
מִן הַתַּחְתּוֹנִים	From the lower elements
וּנְשָׁמָה	And soul
מִן הָעֲלִיוֹנִים	From the upper elements
...בְּיוֹם רִאשׁוֹן	...On the first day
נִבְרְאוּ	Were created
שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ	The heavens and the earth
בַּיּוֹם הַשֵּׁנִי	On the second
בָּרָא	He created
רָקִיעַ	Firmament
לְעֲלִיוֹנִים	For the upper elements
בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי	On the third
”תִּרְאֶה הַיַּבֵּשֶׁת”	“Let the dry land appear”
לַתַּחְתּוֹנִים	For the lower elements
בַּיּוֹם הָרִבְעִי	On the fourth
בָּרָא	He created
מְאוֹרוֹת	Lights
לְעֲלִיוֹנִים	For the upper elements
בַּיּוֹם הַחֲמִישִׁי	On the fifth
יִשְׂרְצוּ הַמַּיִם	“Let the waters team”
לַתַּחְתּוֹנִים	For the lower elements
הוּזָקַק	It was necessary
בַּיּוֹם הַשִּׁשִּׁי	On the sixth
לְבְרָאוֹת בּוֹ	To create thereon
בְּעֲלִיוֹנִים	For the upper elements
וּבַתַּחְתּוֹנִים	And from the lower elements
וְאִם לֹא	And if not
יִשׁ קִנְיָה	There would be jealousy
בְּמַעֲשֵׂה בְרָאשִׁית	Among the works of creation

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים	In the beginning God created
אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם שֶׁבְּעֶצֶם אֵינָם	The heavens that in essence are not
וְאֶת הָאֲדָמָה שְׂרוּצָה בָּם לְגַעַת.	And the earth that wants to touch them.
בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים	In the beginning God created
חוּטִים מְתוּחִים בֵּינֵיהֶם	Threads stretched between them
בֵּין הַשָּׁמַיִם שֶׁבְּעֶצֶם אֵינָם	Between the heavens that in essence are not
וּבֵין הָאֲדָמָה הַמְּשׁוּעֶת.	And the imploring earth.
וְאֶת הָאָדָם הוּא יָצַר	And humankind he fashioned
שֶׁהָאִישׁ הוּא תְּפִילָה וְהוּא חוּט	So that a person is a prayer and a thread
נוֹגֵעַ בָּמָה שֶׁאֵינָנוּ	Touching that which is not
בְּמַגַּע שֶׁל רֵךְ וְדַקּוּת.	With a touch soft and delicate.

Rivka Miriam

Translated by Steven G. Sager