

("Hham," "Gheresciòn"), which system—like Hirsch's in his German version—was logical and suited to the needs of the original audience, but would appear bizarre to modern English readers.

As for the translation of biblical verses that appear in cross-references, (1) any verses cited from within the book of Genesis are, of course, translated as they appear in the present work; (2) verses from the other four books of the Torah are translated according to my (preliminary) English rendering of Shadal's Italian version of those verses; and (3) verses from the rest of the Bible (*Nevi'im and Ketuvim*) are translated, in general, as they appear in the 1917 Jewish Publication Society version (as used in the Soncino Books of the Bible), with some exceptions, mainly the substitution of "you" for the archaic "thou" and "thee." (Although the use of such antiquated forms might have been technically correct when translating certain Italian pronouns in this volume, it would have been out of keeping with Shadal's generally modern style.)

Sprinkled throughout Shadal's Hebrew commentary were quotations in Latin from a variety of sources, ranging from Virgil's *Aeneid* down to a Dutch Jewish doctor's 1845 medical thesis. These, too, have been translated into English. Whenever it was possible, I made use of available English versions; especially helpful in this regard were various volumes of the Loeb Classical Library. When no such ready-made translations existed—as was the case with obscure writers such as Stephanus Byzantius and later writers such as Rosenmueller—I armed myself with Latin dictionaries and grammars and did the job myself. Although this was my first initiation into the mysteries and glories of this dead language, I am reasonably sure that the results closely approximate the authors' intent.

APOLOGIA

The Italians have a saying, *traduttore traditore*—"the translator is a traitor." Any usual kind of treason that I may have committed in attempting to convey Shadal's meaning and tone in this book is compounded, I am afraid, by another form of betrayal. Luzzatto's choice of Hebrew as the language of his commentary was a deliberate one, based on his firm belief that Hebrew should be fostered as a living language of the Jewish people. As pleased as he undoubtedly would have been at the revival of *Ivrit* in the land of Israel, Shadal would certainly have been disappointed to know that elsewhere, even well-educated Jews have been less than zealous in developing Hebrew reading and writing skills, and that English now seems to be the language of choice for Judaica. Ultimately, what Shadal deserves is a new, unabridged, and annotated edition of his commentary in Hebrew. Until such a work appears, I hope that this translation will at least help to introduce Shadal to the English-speaking Jewish—and general—public.

Samuel David Luzzato On Genesis

Bereshit

1:1. IN THE BEGINNING, GOD CREATED THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH.

The wise understand that the intent of the Torah is not to teach of the natural sciences, but that the Torah was given only to direct humankind on the path of righteousness and justice, and to establish belief in the Unity and Providence of God in their hearts, for not to the scholars alone was the Torah given, but to the entire people. Just as the concepts of Providence and reward and punishment are not explained (and properly not explained) in the Torah in a philosophical manner, but are treated in human terms ("And the Lord was angry with them," "And His heart grieved," and many other such expressions), so the story of the Creation is not told (and properly not told) in the Torah in a philosophical manner—for as the Rabbis said, to impress upon flesh and blood the power of the Creation is impossible.

Therefore it is not proper for the Torah scholar to force the Scriptures from their literal meaning to make them conform with the natural sciences, nor is it proper for the critic to deny the Divine origin of the Torah if he finds things in its stories that do not conform with scientific research. Both scholar and critic ought instead to examine the inner nature of the human mind, and the different learning approaches nature takes when it speaks to each mind: to a child in its way, to a youth in another way, to an aged man in another, to the strong in a special way, to the weak in a special way, to the rich in one way, to the poor in another. So with all groups of human beings nature speaks to their minds in a

way particularly befitting them, and nature never reveals to any of them the naked truth without some veil or garb. And so the blessed Giver of the Torah (for the God Who created nature and the God Who gave us the Torah is one God), when He speaks to human beings, must speak according to their level and not according to His.

Now God wanted to proclaim to humankind the unity of the world and the unity of the human race, for error in these two matters caused many evils in ancient times. Without knowledge of the world's unity it followed that people believed in private gods with limitations and imperfections, and that people would do evil deeds in order to gain their favor (see my comment in *Yitro* [Ex. 20:3] on "You shall not have other gods").¹ Without knowledge of the unity of the human race it followed that one people would hate and despise another, and that physical force, not justice and righteousness, would rule among them. These two cardinal principles—the unity of the world and the unity of the human race—are the overall purpose in the story of the Creation. Other parts of the Book contain still other purposes, which will be explained.

In the beginning, God created. Many have been aroused to ask why no specific utterance is mentioned in the creation of heaven and earth, and why the creation of the angels is not mentioned. One may also wonder why the first day is different from the rest of the days of creation: each of them is devoted to a particular thing, or to particular things of one type or class, but the first day includes a particular thing, the creation of light, and includes besides that a general thing that is more comprehensive than anything else—the creation of heaven and earth. This is very strange; it would have been fitting for one day to be devoted to the creation of heaven and earth, without adding the creation of a particular thing, the light.

It seems to me that one answer will suffice for the three questions, and that is that heaven and earth were not created on the first day but before it. As it is said, "The Torah was not given to the ministering angels." The purpose of the creation story is only to tell of the beginning of the lower world, the abode of humankind, and only partly of the beginning of the higher world as it relates to humankind, that is, the good that reaches us from it. It would not have been possible to explain Heavenly matters to man, and yet neither was it God's intention to cause man to believe that nothing exists other than what we see and

1. In that comment, Luzzatto expands on this concept: those who believe in one God believe that He is good, and they seek to emulate His goodness, but those who believe in many gods inevitably believe in one or more evil gods and seek to emulate their evil, as ancient history attests. Polytheists ascribe jealousy, hatred, and rivalry to their gods, with the result that human relations suffer. It was only after the Torah was disseminated over the world that the nations began to recognize that all men are brothers.

know. For this reason the Torah tells what was created and done on each of the six days of creation, but prefaces the details of the creation with one verse to include another creation, one which preceded the six days. Its details are not explained in the Torah, which merely states, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," and not, "And God said, 'Let there be heaven; let there be earth'"—in order to inform us that it was not His purpose to tell us the details of that creation, and that this is only an abbreviated statement including several utterances.

The "heaven" and "earth" mentioned here are not exactly the same heaven and earth that are later specified on the second and third days. The "heaven" mentioned here includes everything above the earth, while the heaven mentioned on the second day includes only that part of it known to man. The "earth" mentioned here includes the land with the water, and the air above it, while the earth mentioned on the third day includes only the dry land.

This, in my opinion, is the essential plain meaning of this verse. One might object that this negates what is written in the Ten Commandments [Ex. 20:11]: "For in six days the Lord made the heaven and the earth," but actually there is no contradiction there to my interpretation. It does not say, "In six days the Lord created (*bara*) the heaven and the earth," but "In six days the Lord made (*asah*) the heaven and the earth," meaning the making of the sky and the division of the land from the water. The words "and all that is in them" in the Ten Commandments refer to the light, the luminaries, and the living things on the land and in the water. In *Ki Tissa* (Ex. 31:17) ["For in six days the Lord made the heaven and the earth, and on the seventh day He ceased and rested"], the verse is brief and mentions only the heaven and the earth, while "all that is in them" is included by inference.

The Rabbis, too, said that the Throne of Glory preceded the creation of the world [Bereshit Rabbah 1:5].

created. The verb "to create" (*bara*) in the *kal* and *nif'al* conjugations, is never found anywhere to refer to human activity. We find that a human being is called "maker" (*oseh*) or "fashioner" (*yotser*) but never "creator" (*bore*). It seems that this root refers to anything out of the ordinary way of the world, as "I will do wonders which were never performed (*nivre'u*) in all the land" (Ex. 34:10); "If the Lord performs a creation (*beri'ah yivra*) so that the earth opens its mouth" (Num. 16:30); "I have announced to you new things from this time. . . They are created now, and not from old" (Is. 48:6, 7); "For the Lord has created a new thing in the land" (Jer. 31:22). Here, "God created the heaven and the earth" is a Divine activity without compare.

We find creation *ex nihilo* stated explicitly in II Maccabees 7:28.² The Sa-

2. "I beg you, child, look at the sky and the earth; see all that is in them and realize that God made them out of nothing. . ." (New English Bible).

in Syriac means a “reminder.” The meaning of this verse is, “Every time that you remember this day that we established an alliance together, you will also remember that I gave you seven ewe-lambs, and as a result, you will remember that I spoke to you concerning the well that I dug and that your servants usurped from me.”

21:31. THEREFORE WAS THAT PLACE NAMED BE'ER SHEVA, FOR THERE THE TWO OF THEM SWORE.

21:32. HAVING THUS ESTABLISHED AN ALLIANCE IN BE'ER SHEVA, AVIMELEKH AND PIKHOL, CHIEF OF HIS ARMY, HAVING RISEN, RETURNED TO THE COUNTRY OF THE PHILISTINES.

returned to the country of the Philistines. In my opinion, Be'er Sheva, too, was within the country of the Philistines, as it says later [v. 34], “Abraham dwelled in the country of the Philistines a long time.” Here it says they “returned,” because they were at the outskirts of their land, and then they went back to the interior of their land, to the royal city.

21:33. (ABRAHAM) PLANTED A TAMARISK IN BE'ER SHEVA, AND THERE HE PREACHED THE NAME OF THE LORD, GOD ETERNAL.

tamarisk (eshel). See Kimhi, *Shorashim*, and Gesenius.⁵

21:34. ABRAHAM DWELLED IN THE COUNTRY OF THE PHILISTINES A LONG TIME.

22:1. NOW AFTER THESE THINGS, GOD TESTED ABRAHAM, AND HE SAID, “ABRAHAM!” AND HE SAID, “HERE I AM.”

God tested Abraham. The Holy One, blessed is He, knew that Abraham would not shrink from fulfilling any commands that He might give him, but He commanded him to bind Isaac so that he would be rewarded for performing this awesome deed, since the reward for merely thinking of an act is not the same as the reward for doing the act. This is the opinion of Nachmanides and R. Jo-

5. In his *Shorashim*, Kimhi says that *eshel* “is a general term for any tree. . . . But R. Jonah [ibn Janah] said that perhaps it is the name of the tree that in Arabic is called *أراك*, which resembles the tree which is called *tamariz*.” In his *Lexicon*, Gesenius identifies the *eshel* as *Tamarix orientalis*, but he presents the alternate view—citing the present verse—that *eshel* means any large tree, or a “grove.”

seph Albo (*Ikkarim, ma'amar* 4, ch. 13). Undoubtedly, besides this hidden reward, the event itself—in which he proved himself a true fearer of God and did not deny Him his son, with the result that his son did not die [after all]—caused him incomparable happiness and joy that was sweet to the soul.

Mendelssohn's opinion was that the purpose of such a test is to strengthen a given virtuous trait in the heart of the one being tested, to the point that it becomes a well-established characteristic of his soul. The practical part of one's nature is not perfected merely by knowledge and understanding of good character traits, but also by the constant performance of deeds that derive from them, accustoming oneself to them until the trait is strengthened in the doer's heart.

In my opinion, given that God chose Abraham so that he might become the father of a special monotheistic people, and given that the idolatrous peoples used to immolate their sons and daughters as offerings to their gods, and given that such acts are an abomination before God, Who never intended to command His people to do such things, commanding them instead not to do any of them—God saw that the lack of such sacrifices would be considered a disgrace and a great blemish upon His Torah and those who upheld it. The nations would say to Israel, “Where is your love for your God?” Even the Israelites themselves might view their religion as valueless because of this lack.

Therefore, God tested Abraham (whose heart He already knew to be able to stand the test) early on, in order that both Israel and the other nations might clearly recognize that faithful servants of God would not find it too hard to do this and even more (as is the slaughter of an only son born to his father's and mother's old age) if God were to ask this of them, but that a true God would not desire such sacrifices and would in fact despise them. And for this test, which was for the purpose of glorifying the Faith and its believers, God chose Abraham, the father of the believers, so that the true Faith should not be held in disparagement, lacking its splendor and glory, even for one generation.

One of the ancients, Sanchuniathon, preserved a memory of this incident, albeit mixed with many errors. These are his words:

Cronus, then, whom the Phoenicians call Israel, although he commanded the country and from a native bride called Anobret had an only-born son, whom they called on that account Iehud [*Yahid*]¹—which is how an only-born son is still named among the Phoenicians—when the country was threatened with the greatest danger on account of war, he placed his son, adorned in regal style, upon an altar which he had erected, and slew him.¹

1. The English version presented here is probably a fourth-hand translation. In the original edition of Shadal, the excerpt was printed in Latin, presumably a translation of the Greek version of Philo of Byblos, which in turn was presumably taken from Sanchuniathon's Phoenician.

According to Bruns, it occurred to Abraham to sacrifice his son to his God because he saw the Canaanites slaughtering their sons and daughters. According to De Wette, the entire story is a parable designed to tell the greatness of Abraham's love for his God. According to Eichhorn, the command came in a dream; perhaps this is so, but it was a dream of prophecy from God.

and (He) said (va-yomer elav). These words should undoubtedly be accented with a *darga* and *tevir* [rather than with a *munah* and *zakef katon*],² and so it appears in (1) a manuscript *Humash* on parchment in my possession, (2) a manuscript *Humash* on parchment in the possession of my late friend Almanzi,³ (3) a manuscript *Humash* in the city of Erfurt, and (4) a manuscript *Humash* on parchment from the year 5247 (1447) written by R. Isaac Pesante, in the possession of my friend Moses Soave.⁴ So I have found, too, in a *mahzor* printed by Soncino,⁵ but in the *mahzor* of Salonika⁶ they "halted between two opinions" and placed a *zakef* above [the word *elav*, as in the standard version] and a *tevir* below.

22:2. AND HE SAID, "TAKE YOUR SON, YOUR BELOVED ONLY SON, ISAAC, AND GO TO THE COUNTRY OF MORIAH, AND IMMOLATE HIM THERE IN A BURNT OFFERING, UPON THE ONE OF THE MOUNTAINS THAT I WILL TELL YOU."

go to the country of Moriah. He did not tell him to do this where he was, but told him to go to another land, in order to give him the opportunity to reflect upon the matter, so that his act should not be done in haste. All this was for the purpose of rendering his merit the greater.

the country of Moriah. II Chron. 3:1 states that Solomon built the Temple in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, but there is no proof from the Scriptures that the Temple Mount is itself the mountain of the Akedah, only that it was in that country and that region.

2. As Margolies points out, the *munah-zakef katon* accentuation would bring out the following illogical meaning: "And He said, 'Abraham-and-he-answered-here-I-am.'" In contrast, the accentuation favored by Shadal would facilitate the proper reading. (Margolies, *Samuel David Luzzatto*, p. 124.)
3. Joseph Almanzi (1801–1860) of Padua, a noted bibliophile and Hebrew author, whose library of manuscripts became the nucleus of the Judaica collection of the British Museum.
4. Moses (Moise) Soave (1820–1882), a scholar and teacher in Venice.
5. Perhaps the *Mahzor Minhag Roma* (Soncino and Casalmaggiore, 1486).
6. This could refer to any of a number of *mahzorim* printed in that city, including those of the Catalanian rite (1527), the Aragonese rite (1529), or the Ashkenazi rite (1551–1555).

upon the one of the mountains that I will tell you. He did not tell him immediately; all this was so that he would do the act with composure and not in haste.

and immolate him (ve-ha'alehu) there in a burnt offering (le-olah). There is no doubt that God did not intend him to immolate Isaac, but that he told him so merely to test him. There is no need to twist the verse and interpret *ve-ha'alehu* (lit. "and raise him up") to mean "to offer him" as a burnt offering (as do Gersonides and Wessely), since even if this was His intent, Abraham did not so understand it, and God ought to have spoken more precisely. When they say that God spoke equivocal language to him in order to see whether he would interpret it leniently or strictly, they have not removed God's speech from the category of deception. Besides, if the command had not been clear, Abraham would have been a cruel evildoer to decide to kill his son without a clear command from God but on the basis of uncertain language.

Some of our Rabbis as well, in *Bereshit Rabbah* 56, engaged in sophistry to remove any self-contradiction from God's words, saying that He did not tell him to slaughter Isaac and make him a burnt offering, but only to "bring him up" to the top of the mountain, and after he brought him up, He told Abraham to bring him down. Rashi cited this midrash here and below at v. 12 because he found it useful in removing doubt from the minds of the masses. He added to the language of the midrash the words *la'asoto olah* ("to make him a burnt offering"), so that we should not find it hard to understand what the midrash does with the word *le-olah*. He meant to say that the midrash explains this word as if the text said, ". . .with the intention of making him a burnt offering, but do not slaughter him until I tell you." This, however, is far from the plain meaning of the verse, and Abraham did not so understand it, for he took the knife to slaughter his son without waiting for a second utterance of God to come to him.

One who concludes from this episode that the God of the Hebrews desires human sacrifice is speaking a patent and repugnant falsehood.⁷

22:3. ABRAHAM, HAVING RISEN IN THE MORNING, PUT THE PACK SADDLE UPON HIS ASS, TOOK WITH HIM HIS TWO SERVANTS AND ISAAC HIS SON, SPLIT THE WOOD (NEEDED) FOR A BURNT OFFERING, AROSE AND WENT TOWARD THE PLACE THAT GOD HAD TOLD HIM.

22:4. ON THE THIRD DAY, ABRAHAM, HAVING RAISED HIS EYES, SAW THE PLACE FROM AFAR.

7. Luzzatto may have had in mind Paul Henri Thiry, Baron d'Holbach (1723–1789), atheist and virulent anti-Semite, who made such a charge in his book, *L'Esprit du Judaïsme* (London, 1770).

Let Us make. In my opinion, this too is an archaism analogous to the Aramaic. It does not mean that He consulted with others, such as the angels, for He also said "in Our image," and man is not in the image of the angels. Neither is it the plural of majesty; but such is the Aramaic idiom, as in, "And we [i.e. Daniel] will tell its interpretation before the king" (Daniel 2:36). Daniel would not have spoken in a self-aggrandizing manner when speaking with the great king (as Ibn Ezra notes). This mode of speech is often found in the Jerusalem Talmud and in the *midrashim*; for example:

- "He said to him [Simeon ben Shetah to Yannai], 'What shall we say for the food we have not eaten?'" (Berakhot ch. 7).
- "I, too, will explain it (נפתרינהו, lit. "we will explain it") according to the opinion of the Rabbis" (Shir Ha-Shirim Rabbah, on "O my dove in the clefts of the rock") [Songs 2:14].
- "Would that I had a father and mother, that I might honor them (דא קריניו) lit. "that we might honor them") and inherit Paradise" (Peah ch. 1, in the Jerusalem Talmud).

Rosenmueller wrote that it was the custom in Hebrew to refer to oneself in the plural, as in, "Let us [i.e. David] fall now into the hand of the Lord" (II Sam. 24:14). This, however, is no proof, because David was not speaking of himself alone, but of himself and his people. So also Rehoboam, when he said, "What counsel give you, that we may return answer to this people?" (I Kings 12:9), was including his advisers with him, as was Absalom when he said, "Give your counsel what we shall do" (II Sam. 16:20).

man (adam). A generic term, like "sheep" or "cattle," and therefore it says *ve-yirdu* ("let him rule," lit. "let them rule") in the plural. The term *adam* is apparently derived from *adom* ("red"), and not from *adamah* ("earth"), for the animals, too, were created from the earth. Man, however, is physically distinguished from the animals in that he is not covered with hair, and his skin (in moderate climates) tends to ruddiness.

in Our image (be-tsalmenu). The form of the body and its parts is not called *tselem* ("image") but rather *to'ar* or *tavnit* (as Maimonides says in the *Guide for the Perplexed*, Part I, ch. 1). The expression is *yefeh to'ar* ("fair of form"), not *yefeh tselem* ("fair of image"), and in speaking of the composition of the parts of a whole it is said, "The model (*tavnit*) of the tabernacle and the model of all its furnishings" (Ex. 25:9). The term *tselem*, however, is applied to anything made to resemble something else, such as a portrait on paper of the likeness of a particular person, or a sculpture or molten image in resemblance of anything, as it is written, "Images of (*tsalmei*) your emerods, and images of your mice" (I Sam. 6:5); "And made for you images of (*tsalmei*) men" (Ezek. 16:17); "The images of (*tsalmei*) the Chaldeans portrayed with vermilion" (*ibid.*, 23:14).

The word *tselem* is derived from *tsel* ("shadow") (as per Bochart), for the

shadow, too, portrays a form resembling a body, and from its example people learned the beginnings of representational art. In Aramaic, too, we find *tselem dehava* ("golden image") and similar phrases, and the reference is always to a thing made in resemblance of another. Only once have we found it, in Daniel (3:19, "And the form (*u-tselem*) of his visage was changed"), in reference to the appearance of a living man, but there its meaning is transferred and inexact.

Man is "the image of God," that is, in some aspect he resembles God, Who is Master of all the forces of nature. Now it would seem that the prefix *bet* in the word *be-tsalmenu* ("in Our image") contradicts my explanation—similarly, the phrases "in the image of God He created him" [next v.], and "in the image of God He made man" [below, 9:6]—for as I have explained it, man is himself the image of God, and not *in* His image. However, it is worth noting that the *bet* is occasionally added to the predicate:

- "How it [the people] is inclined to evil (*be-ra*) [more lit. "is evil"]" (Ex. 32:22);
- "Behold, the Lord God, the Mighty One (*be-hazak*), will come" (Is. 40:10);
- "But He is one (*be-ehad*)" (Job 23:13);
- "Extol Him Who rides upon the skies, whose name is the Lord (*be-Yah*)" (Ps. 68:5).

This *bet* is quite customary in Arabic. Apparently the expressions *be-ra*, *be-hazak*, *be-ehad* are the equivalent of saying, "So-and-so is in the state which is called 'evil,' 'mighty,' 'one.'" Here, too: "Let Us make man in such a state that can justly be called 'the image of God.'"

The expressions "in Our image" and "image of God" are no proof that the Torah teaches that God has a human form (anthropomorphism), yet it cannot be denied that some of our forebears ascribed a human form of God. Thus they said in the nuptial blessing (Ketubot 8), "Who created man in His image, in the image of the likeness of His form (*be-tselem demut tavnito*)," and *tavnit* is certainly a term for the structure of the parts of the body. Nevertheless, our forebears did not believe that God or the angels possessed a physical body like ours; Rashi expressly wrote (Makkot 112) that the angels are not flesh and blood. However, the truth of the matter is that a pure, disembodied intelligence, without any form, without any length, width, or height, is a concept that a human being finds impossible to imagine and difficult to accept. If the philosophers speak of it, ultimately they have only a negative conception of it, not a positive one. The Torah, however, was given to all the people, and the people must be able to conceive of their God in positive, not negative, terms. The ancients attributed to God, the angels, and the souls an ethereal substance finer than any body known to us, yet possessing a physical form (see *Melekhet Mahashevet* on the *parashah* of *Shelah Lekha*).

in Our likeness (ki-demutenu). To resemble Us. How does man resemble