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In the Beginning

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.
—Genesis 1:1

What if the biblical God is not male?

What if the biblical Creator, in the original language of the Bible, is spoken of as a female Spirit?

Genesis 1:1 to 2:3 describes the Creation of the universe by an all-good, all-powerful God. The Creation—not just of all objects, but also of all ideas—sets the tone for the entire Bible. All else, all the remainder of the pages that make up the texts of the Hebrew and Christian holy words are commentaries. Backgrounds and foregrounds, highlights and dim places, all politics, history, art, relations between men and women, all stand in relation to the first chapter of Genesis.

Let's look at what the opening lines of the Bible say about the Creator:

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. (Genesis 1:1–2)

Spirit of God, in the original Hebrew, is *ruah Elohim*. *Ruah*, the word meaning “Spirit,” is a feminine noun. *Elohim* is a grammatical feminine plural form of God. Nothing is said about a bearded old man in flowing white robes. What is said is that Spirit, denoted

by a feminine word and a feminine plural word, is Creator and moves.

As we read the Bible, we should not forget that all life springs from Spirit. There is no fearsome Father to run from, no overbearing Mother, no absent Parent to search for. Remind yourself; make a note if you need to: no matter what you might have heard before, the Creator is not a large man. This reminder will help clarify the Bible for you. The God of the Bible is described as feminine Spirit.

Repeated Themes

The ideas outlined in the early verses of Genesis may seem simple to you, or they may take some time to absorb. What the Bible says in its first verses may seem either literal or abstract, so that you may just want to skim the surface and turn to stories of women and men found later in the Bible and this book. But even if you don't begin at the beginning, you will want to return to the ideas expressed in the early biblical verses, because the deeper meanings of biblical stories are found there.

As we shall see in the first chapter of Genesis and throughout the Bible, the concern of the Creator, Spirit, is not only Creation but also conception, comfort, providence, wisdom, and immortal life. The Bible is a timeless, self-referential text; there is hardly a line, book, or story that does not relate to another in its pages. Themes repeat themselves, as do significant words and ideas. To start with the misconception that God is exclusively a male and not, as the text says, a feminine-plural creative force, is to read through the pages of Scripture not in the light of the text but under a shadow.

You will want to read this Creation account for yourself. For now, let's slip under the face of biblical waters, look into the well of Scripture and its overarching themes, and see just a glimpse of the bounty that lies beneath the surface of a few key words in the first chapter of the Bible.

Two Kinds of Time

If you have ever dipped into biblical waters, you will have already recognized that in the Bible things happen in two different kinds of time. The opening words in the Bible describe one kind of time. “In the beginning” time is spiritual, synchronous, simultaneous coexistence—everything good that ever was or will be happening in a present moment. We hint at this kind of time when we speak of immortality or eternal life, when we say “forever.”

Simultaneous time can’t be measured or budgeted by a clock or the lowering and rising of sun or tides. It’s not variable. The message of synchronous times is spiritual, perfect, and unvarying—not “I loved you on July 31, but not on August 9.” The first chapter of Genesis describes only simultaneous time.

The second chapter of Genesis introduces time as measurable in hours, days, and years, time that can be measured by the clock and by genealogies. It is historical and chronological—the “my mother was born in . . .” or “I’ll meet you at eight o’clock” kind of time.

The distinction is important. Among other things, the distinction explains miracles. What we call miracles happen at the intersection of the two kinds of time—timeless truth meeting the lives of men and women and nations in clock time.

The time referred to as “in the beginning” describes Spirit—God extending, appearing, and acting throughout the cosmos simultaneously. This kind of time is freedom, endless bliss, perfect peace, continuing spiritual and scientific exploration. This kind of time can reach you wherever you are in chronological or clock time, and these two kinds of time intersect throughout the Bible pages.

Water

Water plays such an important role in the Bible that one cannot possibly consider only its literal meaning. As we have read in Genesis 1:2, the Spirit of God moves on the face of the waters. In major

events of early chapters of the Bible to come—the Ark and the Flood, the parting of the Red Sea—water is also a metaphor for the physical manifestation of the first named element of Creation. There is a lifetime of study of biblical water—seas, oceans, rivers, rain, snow, hail, dew, and the mixture of water and light, the rainbow.

The Voice, Light, First Day

The revelation of Creation comes into focus with the words, “And God said.” The first thing God said is, “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3).

In Genesis the original Hebrew word for “light” is *or*—often referred to or translated as “revelation” or “truth” (or both). Light, like water, streams throughout the Bible. When we say that we “see the light” on a topic or idea, we are referring to seeing the truth of something.

All Creation in the first chapter of Genesis takes place in the light. Though there is yet no sun, moon, or stars, still there is light. Creation is revealed; more specifically, the truth of what already exists is revealed.

An example is, when you’re moving through a darkened house, things can be felt though nothing can be seen. At hand is a light switch. Touch it and the room floods with light. In stages, the eye takes in every inch, every nook and cranny, everything that has been purposefully, carefully, artfully placed in a room for nourishment, comfort, and rest.

In a way, that is how Genesis 1:3 introduces the nuances of Creation. Everything is there, but the light makes it visible.

And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.

And God called the light Day and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day. (Genesis 1:4–5)

For the first day of Creation—the division of light from darkness—the word *first* is used; the following days are designated second through seventh. The unity and oneness of Creation by *Elohim* is further clarified in that choice of the cardinal ordinance—a *first day*.

God's words define and make distinctions. There is one Source, but not one big blur. So, in the first verses of Genesis, light is day and not night. And as we read on we see what we now take for granted: morning is not evening, the dry land is not water, fruit trees are not grass, the moon is not the sun, birds are not whales. Each and every idea is distinct and individual and moves in the context of the *ruah Elohim*—Spirit of God.

Revelation, the last book of the Bible, graphically depicts light and darkness. Try tracking the word *light* all the way to the end of the Bible to see a glimpse of the spiritual signification described in this first chapter of the Book.

The Second Day

And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.

And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so.

And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day. (Genesis 1:6–8)

After the Light of the first day and the visibility that comes with the Light, there is the second day spoken into being by the Voice that clarifies—that brings understanding through a division of one thing from another. And it is all harmony or Heaven though there is still no earth.

The Third Day

By the third day Creation is pregnant with activity and implicate, enfolded order (Genesis 1:9–13). References to the “third day”

appear throughout the Bible and indicate a change between the historical story-in-time and the spiritual present in-the-beginning time. As you stay alert to the *third day* in biblical texts, you will see that when that day is mentioned the story moves into another dimension.

In this original third day, dry land appears and the seas are gathered. This same *ruah Elohim* says:

“Let the earth sprout vegetation: seed-bearing plants and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, seed-bearing plants of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that this was good. And there was evening and morning, a third day.
(Genesis: 1:11–13 TNK)

The text indicates that every plant, every tree, every thing and idea already exists.

The seed is within itself, says the King James Version. Every plant and tree, every thing and every idea are already made, not in an hour or a year but in in-the-beginning time where everything already made is made.

Attacks on the Seed

At this point in Genesis there is no creation of—nor division of—male and female. Later, after gender and sex are introduced into biblical accounts, attacks are made on the seed of the woman. The question will be asked: Are these attacks on woman or attacks on the Spirit of God and Creation? As we trace the word *seed* and the lives of the women in Scripture through the Bible, the answer becomes clear: the woman is the surrogate for the attack on the Creation of *ruah Elohim*. Woman is the scapegoat, not merely for men or society, but for attacks on the Creation revealed in the first chapter of Genesis.

The Word *Fourth*

Like *ruah* (Spirit), *fourth* is a word indicating the feminine in Hebrew. The Voice says, “Let there be two great lights” (Genesis 1:14). These lights divide the day from the night, as the “firmament” of verse 6 divides “the waters from the waters.” The lights are “set in the firmament of heaven to give light upon the earth and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness.” The light has already been divided on the second day. If these two great lights are to mean the sun and the moon, their emergence takes place in a feminine context. The lights appear for “signs and seasons” as well as for days and years. Further, the two lights are to rule over “the day and night,” and the Hebrew word for “rule over” is also a feminine gender word—*Memshalah*—indicating the rule of God. And the stars also appear, as they will throughout the Bible, as a sign of fertility and birth. Everything is in its place, and it is all good.

Abundant Provision

The Voice rings out again: “Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven” (Genesis 1:20).

So it is too with the whales and other living creatures. The waters bring them forth “abundantly,” and of the revelation of this fifth day—like the revelation of the third and fourth—it says that God saw that it was all good (Genesis 1:12, 18, 21). The use of the word *abundantly* as a reference to the first chapter of Genesis takes on added significance as the Bible texts unfold. One example is “I will abundantly bless her provision” (Psalm 132:15).

In the Bible no virtue is necessarily gained nor points awarded for starvation, physical or emotional. The biblical Creator, the Spirit of the first chapter of Genesis, provides abundantly.

Female Image

In this ascendant order of Creation, from light to day and night, to heaven and earth to seas and land to plant to fish to fowl to beast, to the sixth day and male and female, the female is the last.

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. . . .

So God created man in his own image.
(Genesis 1:26–27)

The feminine-plural *ruah Elohim* says, in Robert Alter's Hebrew translation of Genesis, "Let us make a human in our image, by our likeness, to hold sway over the fish of the sea and the fowl of the heavens and the cattle and the wild beasts and all the crawling things that crawl upon the earth."

Alter adds in a note: "The term '*adam* (a human) is a generic term for human beings, not a proper noun (suggesting a person's name). It does not automatically suggest maleness . . . and so the traditional rendering 'man' is misleading, and an exclusively male '*adam* would make nonsense of the last clause of verse 27."

The Creation outlined in Genesis 1 is completed in the repetition by God of all the abundance that has been revealed through the words of the text. Whether one reads male and female to mean two separate genders or one image, including both genders as a compound idea, the female is the highest idea in the revelation of Spirit's unfolding Creation.

Blessed Rest

And then the crowning achievement, a seventh or Sabbath day of rest in which to survey, set a stamp on, and reflect on the whole of Creation. Just as the living creatures of the fifth day and the male and female of the sixth day are blessed, so too is this rest on the seventh day blessed (Genesis 2:3).

There are countless examples of good and blessing throughout the Bible, but when examples such as “water,” “the third day,” and “the seed within itself” appear in the text, they are reminders that the story is not merely historical or geographically located but points to spiritual territory. To explore and settle into spiritual territory, there are biblical texts that describe the light and the path to the place where the light dwells. But on that path the text goes to Eden, where gullible, victimized, incomplete women and weak, frightened, jealous men pass the days of their lives, young and restless, old and forlorn. One wonders why anyone could want Adam and Eve in the family tree.

Popular perception has assumed that a male God is the center of the Creation account in the first chapter of Genesis. But Creator is Spirit, a feminine-gendered word. This feminine word is overturned in chapter 2 of Genesis when another Creation account is introduced and life gets complicated under a male-gendered word for God.