The Story of Adam and Eve

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This describes the explanations of the story of "Adam and Eve" from the Book of Genesis as given by 'Abdu'l-Baha, and then further speculations about it on my part.

To reflect on this story, it is necessary to go back to the story itself in English translation. The copy I am using is from the "New Oxford Annotated Bible", also called the "New Revised Standard Version", which is extensively annotated. I am picking up the story beginning in Genesis Chapter 2 verse 4:

> **In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up – for the Lord God had not yet caused it to rain upon the earth and there was no one to till the ground; but a stream would rise from the earth and water the whole face of the ground – then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. And the Lord God planted a garden in the east; and there He put the man He had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.**

[Here I mention a few of the annotations. There was a "word play" originally in ancient Hebraic with the term "adam", which meant a human being, and the word "adamah" which meant ground or soil – emphasizing the idea that man's body is formed from the earth and it is the "breath of God" which brings it into physical and/or spiritual life. The term "Eden" meant "delight", and was the source word for this original "garden" from God. The ancients believed that the tree of life conferred eternal life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil conferred wisdom.]

> **A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches...**

[The four branches are not important for our purpose, but they were conceived as watering the four corners or four directions of the middle east, although two of the four run closely aligned for much of the way: the Tigris and the Euphrates]

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called the creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner.

[The annotation notes that the term translated as "helper" did not have the sense of a servant or slave, but a relationship of mutuality and interdependence; a partner. There seems to me an inherent tension already in the potential understanding of the scripture concerning the relationship between man and woman: on the one hand she is to be his "helper" but on the other hand he is created first, and she is created afterward to be his companion.]

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, then he slept; and He took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man He made into a woman and He brought her to the man.

[The annotation notes another word-play immediately below here, with the word "ish", designating a male, and "ishah", designating a female. So now, gender distinction clearly comes into play. The annotation also observes that having been created from a rib, the woman bears an intimate relationship to the man which is not shared by any of the other animals, which were all created independently of man.]

Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman [ishah], for out of Man [ish] this one was taken." Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

[The annotation suggests that this verse indicates the sexual, procreative impulse is not sinful but was created as a God-given impulse for a man and a woman to join together…therefore the relationship between them, and between them and God was so far without guilt.]

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be open, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

[The annotations note that here there is a suggestion, with the serpent, of evil already existing in the world. The serpent begins by insinuating some doubt as to what God actually commanded, and proceeds to cast suspicion on the true motive for God's prohibition. The annotations also state that in the Septuagint version the phrase here is "you will be like gods (plural)" - the "divine beings of the heavenly court"]

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

[The annotations suggest that "knowing good and evil" symbolizes the "entirety of knowledge" and that their bodily shame indicates the loss of an innocent, trusting relationship with God and each other.]

They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" He said, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." He [God] said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate." The Lord

God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel." To the woman He said, "I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." And to the man He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it', cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

[The annotations have comments here – among them the observation that the serpent originally did not "crawl on its belly" but that this was its punishment; also this suggests an explanation of man's seemingly innate fear of serpents, and an observation about the pangs of childbirth – apparently being related to the woman's carnal lust for her husband, being as a punishment for this. Another punishment was her now being explicitly placed in a subordinate position to him, rather than in "the ideal equality of creation". They also note that man must now "work" for food; also that "work" is not inherently evil, but it becomes "toil" when man's relation to God is broken. They note that the mortal nature of man was "implicit in the circumstances of origin from dust", but it now becomes a known inevitable fate, which haunts humans throughout life due to their disobedience. They note that beginning in chapter 3 verse 17 ("and to the man He said") the word Adam has shifted from a generic term for human beings into a personal name for this man. Much more, not in these annotations, must be covered in order to discuss the concepts of "original sin", of "knowledge" and of "mortality".]

The man named his wife Eve because she was the mother of all. And the Lord God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them.

[Annotations: the Hebrew for "Eve" sounds much like the Hebrew word for "living". In providing "garments of skins" the annotations suggest that this showed God's care for man, even at a time of judgment.]

Then the Lord God said, "See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever – therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken (ie, having been formed out of dust). He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden He placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life. (this ends Chapter 3, with the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden).

[Annotations: Here "**like one of us**" more explicitly suggests the idea that man would become not like the Lord God, but like the "divine beings of the heavenly court". Note that the temptation story itself only deals with eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, although the tree of life was also mentioned in the beginning. The cherubim were conceived to be winged creatures, half human and half lion like the Egyptian sphinx, and statues of them were often placed as guardians of sacred places. Note that the "flaming sword" is not stated as being wielded by the cherubim, but rather is placed near it or them, "to warn banished human beings of the impossibility of overstepping their creaturely bounds"]

Now let us turn to an explanation of the symbolism by 'Abdu'l-Baha, found in "Some Answered Questions" Chapters 29 and 30.

Chapter 29 briefly touches on Adam and the notion of original sin as follows: "**But the majority of the Christians believed that Adam sinned and transgressed by eating from the forbidden tree, that the dire and disastrous consequences of this transgression were inherited for all time by his descendants, and that Adam has thus become the cause of the death of man. This explanation is irrational and clearly mistaken…"**

This is followed by a more detailed discussion of the story of Adam and Eve in chapter 30. In this session, or chapter, Laura Clifford Barney asks 'Abdu'l-Baha to explain "the truth of the story of Adam and His eating from the tree?" 'Abdu'l-Baha explains some of the symbolic meanings in the story. He states, **"These verses of the Torah have…numerous meanings. We will explain one of them and say that by Adam is meant the spirit of Adam and by Eve is meant his self** [the human condition]. **For in certain passages of the sacred scriptures where women are mentioned, the intended meaning is the human self. By the "tree of good and evil" is meant the material world…in the material world light and darkness, good and evil and all manner of opposing realities are to be found. The meaning of the serpent is attachment to the material world. This attachment…led to the banishment of the self and spirit of Adam from the realm of freedom to the world of bondage…By the**

"tree of life" is meant the highest degree of the world of existence; that is, the station of the Word of God and His universal Manifestation. That station was indeed well guarded until it appeared…In the all-highest Paradise the tree of life alludes to…the universal Manifestation of God. For from the days of Adam until the time of Christ, there was little mention of life eternal…This tree of life alludes to the station of the reality of Christ…attachment of the spirit and self to the material world – which is sin – was inherited by His [Adam's] descendants. This attachment is the serpent…Note that if these words were taken literally…it would be sheer injustice and absolute predestination" [ie, that all the generations of Adam's descendants would also be punished by God for Adam's sin]

He concludes with the statement, **"This is but one of the meanings of the biblical account of Adam. Reflect, that you may discover the others."**

This is an invitation for us all to meditate on the meanings in scripture – for in many cases, in the stories, allegories and parables the meaning is not meant to be found in the literal account, but they are rich with multiple symbolic meanings, which are relevant for all time. At this point then, I should explicitly state my general view of this story of Adam, Eve and the garden of Eden. I think of it as both divine and human – I'm tempted even to say "divinely human".

The surface layers of the story can be read as an "explanation" for many aspects of life in this world. Why do many people fear snakes? – this is a fairly common fear (as is fear of spiders, or of darkness, of heights, of dangerous animals, etc.) Why is childbirth so painful (and in the past, it was often even fatal). Why must mankind struggle, "by the sweat of our face" to eke out our existence and eat bread from the grain we painstakingly grew and harvested, threshed, ground, and baked – while all the other animals find their food seemingly with little effort on a daily basis? Why, in most cultures, were women subordinate to men? Was this only due to the superior brute strength of the men – or could some greater rationale be invoked? Why must we die? If God loves us, then why are our lives so hard? These are some of the questions which, in the literal reading, the garden of Eden story seems to address – and for much of history, most people did not look further than the literal or the surface story. Today however, many people dismiss religion altogether, due to the seeming absurdity of stories like this one, when taken literally – yet still without meditating on what deeper meanings can be found in it. 'Abdu'l-Baha assures Laura Clifford Barney, and through her, all future readers that

other meanings also exist in this story, and that we may discover some of them by meditating deeply in a prayerful way on the verses. With this in mind, I will offer some further thoughts, step by step, in reviewing the language of this story as quoted above.

Note that the story begins very briefly with the creation of the earth, noting that there was not yet rain nor any living, growing things on the earth, but water was on the "whole face of the ground". Interestingly in modern scientific views of the origin and development of the earth, it is thought to have gone through an early, very hot phase – in which the surface was all molten like lava [it was called the "hadean" phase – literally "hellish"] and then a "late heavy bombardment phase" between 4.1 and 3.8 billion years ago, in which huge quantities of water were dumped on the earth by comets and asteroids as our young solar system rearranged itself. It is thought that at the end of this "late heavy bombardment phase" the whole surface of the earth in fact was covered by water – an idea hinted at by this language, that there was not yet rain nor any growing things, but the water was coming from the ground and it covered "the whole face of" the earth.

After this very brief introduction, God is then said to have created Adam and placed him in a garden called Eden, which was "to the east". God forms man from "the dust of the ground", and then breathes life into him. Of course, our physical body is indeed from the earth and returns to it in death. As for the meaning of "breathing life" into Adam – here the meaning is a bit mysterious. Are we to take this as only bringing our physical life to us? [We are still struggling to understand how life even arose on earth]. Or is this "life" meant to be understood as a *spiritual* life – the existence of consciousness, of a soul, of an ability to recognize our Creator and understand the Creator's wishes as to how we are to conduct ourselves in the world? Is this a reference to *eternal* life? Was "Adam's" (or humankind's) life intended by God to be an eternal life, once we are brought into existence? The story clearly seems to depict an idyllic or ideal state in which we were fully in harmony with the "Lord God". The "garden of Eden" then, is but an external representation of this idyllic existence, in which all food is provided for Adam and Eve without any effort on their part.

Note that there is little mention of animals until the serpent appears in the story. There is the Lord God, Adam, and all kinds of wonderful trees with variegated fruit. We might even ask: are many of these "fruit trees" types which are now unknown on earth? If we saw a literal garden of Eden, would we recognize what we saw there, or would it look more like heaven than like our earth? The implication in the text is that there was no pain, no unpleasantness, no

stinging, biting or other nasty critters – clearly a contrast with the curse later placed on Adam and Eve, that they would have to struggle with "thorns and thistles" and would earn their food "by the sweat of the face", from tilling the ground rather than simply plucking from the trees. They walked nude in the garden with no concern about stinging insects, stepping on thorns or thistles, or anything at all requiring any sort of protection from the environment.

Also note that being formed from earth (dust) and air (the breath of God) refers to two out of the four "primal elements" which the ancients thought formed all things, these being earth, air, fire and water. These formed two pairs of opposites: earth (heavy) was the opposite of air (which is light) and water (cool) obviously is the opposite of fire (hot). So this story has us formed of two opposing primal elements: earth representing our material body, and air representing our spiritual nature, which is our true connection to the Creator.

Why is this garden designated as being "to the east"? There may be actual historical reasons for this designation in the story – some scholars have even attempted to place an actual approximate physical location for the "garden of Eden" on a map of the Middle East – but as Baha'i writings also observe, historically many great religions have arisen in this area and then spread westward (and spread further eastward too) – but note that Mesopotamia, Persia, Arabia etc. are all located east of what is now Israel. Many of the prophets of history and in the Old Testament, prior to the time of Christ actually did live "to the east" of Israel – as also did Mohammad after Him - thus we can also contemplate this direction, "to the east" as symbolizing not necessarily a physical place, but as the origin of spirituality, of a state of connectedness between humanity and the "Lord God", via His prophets and messengers.

Next in the text, after the creation of Adam and the placing him in this garden, we have a comment about the tree of life being planted "in the midst" of the garden, and then also the tree "of the knowledge of good and evil." Later the location of this latter tree is even specified by Eve as being "**in the middle**" of the garden – not tucked away in some remote corner which they might not frequent, but prominently placed, and not to be missed. The location of the "tree of life" however is not specified so it is left to us whether to think it is immediately adjacent to the tree of the "knowledge of good and evil", or at some distance away from it. I think it is important to note that the tree of life is mentioned first, and immediately after it is mentioned the tree of knowledge of good and evil. This brings us to the heart of what I think is perhaps the most important metaphor in the entire story. Before they ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve were like the other animals: they were in a

condition of "natural grace". Not knowing of good and evil (like the animals) they could not alienate themselves from the grace of God. This is the essence of what distinguishes what we call "man" from the other animals – our ability to recognize that we have a Creator, and that the Creator asks certain behaviors from us and prohibits other behaviors. This means that we become conscious of a "moral imperative". When we violate it we can become even worse than the animals, who sometimes kill each other out of instinct and natural emotions – but when we recognize God and strive to obey His commands, we become something far greater than the animals who are not able to do this. Thus God warns Adam that if he ate of the fruit "on that day he would die". Note that Adam and Eve both ate of the fruit and they did **not** physically die on that day, or on the many succeeding days: they produced offspring, and they lived for a very long time according to the scriptures. No – this refers to a spiritual condition – that once they recognized good and evil, the purpose of their free will became apparent. If they disobeyed or ignored God they could **spiritually** die, by having separated themselves from Him. To be human is no longer to be in a state of "natural grace" but to strive for consciously-chosen grace – to draw closer to our Creator, through our thoughts and deeds. The fruit of the "tree of life" is the life of eternal progression toward God in a way which is unique to "man", unlike the animals who do not even understand that they have a Creator. Thus the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil leads to both possibilities: spiritual death in turning away from God, or an eternal life in striving to approach nearer to "Him". The literal text leads one away from this true meaning, in my opinion: God did not "fear" that they would eat of the fruit – indeed God knew that they WOULD. This was the actual **purpose** of this fruit. Nor did God fear that by eating the fruit of the tree of life they would become "too much like Him" or even like the angels – indeed the fruit of that tree of life (which named first in the story) actually comes only after having first eaten of the other fruit – the knowledge of good and evil. One might say that the fruit of the tree of life was the most important thing about the entire garden and the reason that man was put there – but first came the knowledge of good and evil. Without that knowledge, Adam and Eve – though they had an awareness of God in this story which the other animals did not – did not yet have much awareness of God's wishes for them, and thus no way of "gaining or losing God's pleasure" – to put it into human terms. In this sense, the "garden of Eden" represents some pre-existing state of nearness to God, which we all have in our full innocence before birth, and our being "driven out" of this garden is the whole point of our life on earth – which is an endless test and a struggle to draw nearer to that condition of nearness to Him, which we will only reach in its fullness after death – which is indeed an inevitability for us all.

Note that the text does not make explicit whether or not Adam and Eve would **physically** die even if they never ate of the fruit of the tree of good and evil. Some believe that because their bodies were material, inevitably they would have died anyhow, but they did not yet have an understanding of this – just as most animals seem not to understand, until near the end of their life, that they will die. They live each day without worrying about tomorrow, whereas we are constantly thinking about the future and also aware that our lifespan is limited. Thus, one might say that along with the knowledge of good and evil, they also became aware of the reality of death – on that very day, they realized that their life on earth was finite. I believe this is a story about why we are in this world, how we are different from the other animals, the nature of our free will, of the knowledge of God, and about the consequences of our choices. The importance of the story is not about the garden itself, but about how "Adam and Eve" (how all of us) must leave the garden and live among the "thorns and thistles", and struggle with the "sweat on our faces", until we die to this world in the end.

But this is getting ahead of the text. Let's turn back to the chronology. After creating Adam (man) and placing him in the garden, God creates all the other animals and asks Adam to name them. This story is told in a more beautiful fashion in the Qur'an, in which God asks the angels the names of all the animals and they do not know. Then God asks man, and man gives them names. The angels then realize that man has some creativity in him, which they do not have, as they only follow God's instructions. And it is true: we do give names to each type of animals. God did not dictate to us any names for them. The animals also do not seem to have any "names" for other animals. They recognize which ones are like them and which are not like them, but without any names. And man also individually names some animals who come into close contact with him (like our pets) and they learn our names for them, which they had not for themselves before. One might say that when God "names" something, it is a creative act, bringing it into being (as in the beginning of Genesis when God says, "let there be light", and there was light). When we name something, we do not create it, but we do distinguish it and analyze it and its relationship with other things in the world.

Next in the story, God wishes to give man a partner like himself yet not exactly alike: so he causes a "deep sleep" to fall upon him, takes from him a rib, and out of that fashions Eve. This almost sounds like giving him anesthesia to perform surgery on him, does it not? Like a good surgeon, He even closes up the wound when He is done. And Adam delights in having a true partner, like himself but not identical. Some read this literally, as a scriptural designation of man as being somehow more important than woman. I believe this might be understood

better as an acknowledgment that throughout history and in most cultures, men were in fact dominant over women in most aspects. That is, this is descriptive, not really proscriptive, regarding the relationships between the sexes. Furthermore as the annotations said, the term "helper" did not imply an inferior status -that only came later. Also note the verse, immediately after Eve's creation, that "**therefore a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh**". This is **descriptive**, not proscriptive, regarding men and women leaving their families of origin and bonding intimately with each other, thus forming a new family. Those words were not written as being God's words, but they were a human reflection on the nature of society and civilization, which adds more credence to the idea that Adam being formed first and the one to whom God speaks first, essentially reflected then-current cultural concepts about men and women. **"And they were both naked, and were not ashamed** – here they were still like the animals, who do not wear clothing.

Now comes the story of the "temptation" and the eating of the fruit. Here the serpent plays the role of the "bad guy", tempting Eve to eat the fruit. But it should be noted that in ancient cultures the serpent was not always seen as "bad". Serpents are ancient symbols of power and wisdom as well – take for example the famous "staff of Asclepius" – which is still used today as a symbol for physicians and the healing arts – depicted as a staff with two serpents woven around it (a sort of a double helix, like the shape of DNA!). Other ancient drawings and traditions also attribute wisdom and power to snakes.

The snake approaches Eve – why? Is this because she is somehow more "weak-willed" and gullible than Adam? No, not necessarily so. Recall that God's prohibition was given to Adam. Adam presumably passed this on to Eve, so for her this is second-hand information. How closely had Adam conveyed God's command? [In a trial, this would be called "hearsay evidence" and usually excluded, because it was not heard directly]. First the serpent asks her exactly what did God say? Did he say don't eat any of the fruits, or was it only this fruit? Eve replies that it was this specific fruit – and then goes beyond what the scripture records as having been told to Adam, by saying that they are not even to **touch** the tree. (Other traditions have her saying that they aren't even supposed to **look** at the tree.) So the serpent having aroused curiosity (the desire for more knowledge), Eve examines the tree and the fruit. She finds that the tree is attractive, and the fruit seems to be good. Being thus encouraged, then Eve eats the fruit and gives some to Adam – who apparently is **standing right next to her.** If we were to blame Eve for breaking God's commands, how could we not blame Adam equally –

since he made no attempt to stop her, not even with any verbal reminder, and he himself seems immediately to eat when she hands the fruit to him. One might call them "co-conspirators", if this was in fact some crime.

Now that they have eaten, they realize their "nakedness". Well, apart from the fact that we are "naked apes" (as Desmond Morris put it in his book title) unlike most animals which are covered by hair, and we do need clothing for protection from the elements – there is also, I think, an implication that they now became aware of sexual impulses and of the procreative nature of their genitals. Even in cultures where only loincloths are worn, this may be in good part to limit indiscriminate physical desires for people of the other gender, and to encourage the choosing of only particular spouses with whom to share our most intimate physical aspects.

Now we have the rather strange and very literal image of God "walking" in the garden in the cool of the evening and calling for Adam. By the way, in a famous German novel referencing this story, God calls out to Adam not "Where **are** you?" but "Where **were** you?" [Lit: "Wo **warst** du, Adam?" Like a mother asking a child if he touched the cookies and knowing full well that he did – God doesn't want the information – He already knows, and He just wants to hear Adam tell the truth. And Adam's response is also instructive. He says that he was aware of God being in the garden, and they hid – not specifically because they feared God's anger about their **eating** the fruit – but rather because they were **aware** of their **nakedness**, as being an undignified state in which to encounter God.

Next comes a "circle of blame" – which interestingly is incomplete. God asks Adam why he ate the fruit. Adam says in effect "well, it was Eve's idea". God then asks Eve why she did it and she in effect says, "well, it was the serpent's idea". Note that God doesn't even ask the serpent why it prompted the act – had he done so, the serpent might have replied "Well why did **You**, Lord, place the tree smack in the middle of the garden then tell them not to eat from it – you must have **known** they would succumb to curiosity, so you have only yourself to blame!" Completing this "circle of blame" is entirely reasonable, but left to the reader to realize.

Then come the "punishments". The serpent is punished most severely, as the instigator: arms and legs are removed; he must forever crawl in the dust and "eat it", and from then on people will strike at the serpent, and the serpent will bite at them. Eve is punished secondarily, by the

pain and danger inherent in childbirth (which presumably never would have even happened, had they not been awakened to the purpose for their genitals) and by explicitly being placed in a subordinate position to man, and then man is punished to a lesser degree by now having to toil for a living, eating the plants of the field [i.e. this is the origin of agriculture out of a hunter-gatherer society], amid "thorns and thistles" and by the "sweat of his brow (or "face") shall he eat bread, rather than just gather fruits.

After this comes the naming of "Eve" (woman) with a name that sounded like "living", because we are all brought into life by our mothers. After this comes the provision of clothing from animal skins – and note this is the very first implication in the story that mankind would eat meat, and not just plants and fruits, for the skin of animals comes after having slaughtered them for food! Presumably, prior to this they were vegetarian.

Then they are driven out of the garden, "to the east", and both a cherubim and a "flaming sword" are placed to guard the entrance to the garden. Why are both necessary, and just one apparently is insufficient? Clearly in my mind there is more symbolism here. The "flaming sword" is a physical sort of object and the cherubim is more like an angel – a living creature, and an unworldly one at that. One interpretation may be that we do not return to the garden until we **die** (the flaming sword of death cuts us down) and then some angelic being must judge whether or not we are then worthy to enter the garden of paradise. In fact, the reality of death is strongly emphasized in the ending to this story – just a couple of lines prior to the mention of the cherubim and sword, God states that **"to dust you shall return"**.

It is fascinating how strongly this story continues to resonate in our collective consciousness thousands of years after it was recorded. Immediately I think of John Milton's epic poem "Paradise Lost"; John Steinbeck's novel "East of Eden", which he considered his greatest work and which was adapted to a movie starring James Dean; the novel "Wo Warst Du Adam?" by Heinrich Böll; and the novel "Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil by John Berendt", also made into a movie - just to mention a few of the innumerable works of art and literature reflecting on the meanings in this ancient scripture.

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