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The Wind of God

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GEN. 1:2b: וַיַּחַם אֱלֹהִים מְרֹאָת עָלָיו נֹרֶם. The ordinary translation of this passage in English is "and the Spirit of God moved upon the waters." The latest commentator, Skinner, in the *International Critical Commentary*, interprets it thus: "The Spirit of God was brooding — not, as has sometimes been supposed, a *wind* sent from God to dry up the waters (Targum of Onkelos, Abraham Ibn Ezra, and a few moderns), but the divine Spirit, figured as a bird brooding over its nest, and perhaps symbolising an immanent principle of life and order in the as yet undeveloped chaos" (pp. 17, 18). He adds: "It is remarkable, however, if this be the idea, that no further effect is given to it in the sequel." He also points out that בָּרָא in this sense occurs only here, and that the cosmogonic notion of the world-egg on which this interpretation is based has no vital connection "with the main idea of the narrative." He might have added that there is no trace of such a conception elsewhere in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Gunkel, Dillmann, and Delitzsch interpret the passage in the same general manner, connecting it with the conception of a cosmogonic world-egg. The absolute lack of relation of this idea (of the Spirit of God brooding over the waters as over a world-egg) to the rest of the passage is even clearer to Gunkel than to Skinner. בָּרָא¹ he describes as a ḥṭaq

¹ Professor Briggs has gathered all the uses of בָּרָא in a paper (*JBL*, xix), which is the basis of the article in Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius. Basing on this, with some slight differences, I find the use of the word to be as follows: (a) The common, and apparently the original sense is *wind* — 117 times. (b) Closely related to this, *breath*, — 58 times, — both the breath of God, where

λεγόμενον in this sense, while with regard to the whole conception he adds: "If in a Hebrew narrative it is first narrated that a bird brooded over an egg, it is with certainty to be expected that the narrator reported in the second place that a chicken was hatched out of the egg. Therefore the narration of the brooding of the Spirit must have reported further what befell the world-egg as a result of this brooding." (*Kommentar*², p. 92.) To relieve the difficulty, he supposes that there is a lacuna in the original narrative, which did once record the result of this brooding in hatching something out. His commentary on the passage would seem to be the best proof of its own error. This, it may be added, is the traditional interpretation of this passage by both Jewish and Christian exegetes. Rashi gives the re-

it might often equally well be translated wind, and the breath of man. In the latter sense it becomes the vital principle (breath of life, Gen. 7 18, 22) breathed into man by God (Gen. 2 7), but also the property of the beast (Ec. 3 19). (c) From this comes naturally the sense *spirit* — 76 times — as the emotions or affections of courage, anger (in God or man) and good or evil dispositions (the spirit of whoredom, of justice, etc.). Sometimes it interchanges or is used in parallelism with *שֶׁבֶת* as the personality, and sometimes with *כָּל* as the mentality. It is the source of prophecy and of ecstasy. It is also the source of false prophecy. As the principle of life and as the principle of prophecy (true or false) the *רוּחַ* comes from God. (d) It is designated 94 times as the *spirit* of God (Yahaweh, etc.). As such it is a power which stirs men to prophecy, to frenzy, which enlightens and deceives. With Ezekiel it is so near akin to wind that it picks him up and carries him to another place. Generally it puts what is good and exalted into men, as prophecy, wisdom, power to govern (Job 32:8 explains this spirit in man as the breath of God), military prowess, technical skill. As prophecy it is once represented as an independent entity *רוּחַ רְעוּת*, which offers to go and be a lying spirit in the mouth of the prophets (1 K. 22:21 f., but observe how this is interpreted by Zedekiah in the context). Once also in Job (4:15) it seems to be an independent entity, a vision of dread. As that by which God puts life and noble powers in man (the spirit of good, Neh. 9:20, Ps. 143:10) it finally becomes in one passage the synonym of the face or presence of God (Ps. 139:7-8), and in one passage as *רוּחַ קָדוֹשׁ* and *רוּחַ זָהָב* and it is identified with the *מֶלֶךְ עָלֵיכֶם*, by which God led Israel in the wilderness (Isa. 63:10-14). The other passage (Ps. 51:18) where Briggs interprets *רוּחַ קָדוֹשׁ* in the same sense, must, I think, be ruled out. These words are parallel with *רוּחַ נִירְבָּה* and *רוּחַ נִירְבָּה* in the preceding and following verses, and all three phrases must be interpreted alike.

There is no passage in which *רוּחַ* has the sense given to it in the ordinary translations of Gen. 1:2.

ceived Jewish view — “as a dove that broods over the nest,” which is found also in *Hagiga*.² Jerome (*Quaest. ad loc.*) says, “Pro eo quod in nostris codicibus scriptum est *ferebatur* in Hebraeo habet **MEREFETH** quod nos appellare possumus incubabat, sive confovebat in similitudinem volucris ova calore animantis.” Apparently this interpretation is not original with him, but simply that current and traditional among the Jews.³

Turning to the earliest versions, we find the Septuagint rendering the passage *καὶ πνεῦμα θεοῦ ἐπεθέρετο ἐπάνω τοῦ ὕδατος*. Now in the passive the verb *ἐπιφέρω* in classical Greek commonly means *to rush upon, attack, strike*, conveying generally the sense of hostility. It is also, however, used both early and late in the more literal sense of *borne* or *lifted up*. In the LXX the active often indicates hostility;⁴ in the passive it is only used once, in a passage somewhat similar to this (Gen. 7 18), “The ark was borne (*ἐπεφέρετο*, Heb. לִלְלָה) upon the face of the water.” The Vulgate, both here and in Gen. 2 2, translates by *ferebatur*. In the Targums⁵ מַרְחַת is translated by מַשְׁכָה, *blowing*. The Syriac Peshitta transliterates the Hebrew.

רָחַם in Piel occurs in Hebrew in only one other passage, namely, Deut. 32 11. This is the description of the eagle or vulture teaching its young to fly. “As the vulture stirreth up its nest, **רָחַם**, over its nestlings, spreadeth out its wings, taketh him, lifteth him upon its pinions.” The first of the verbs in this passage, **רָחַם**, *stirreth up, awaketh*, describes the action of the bird in forcing its young out of the nest; then follows **וְיָסַר**, describing the actual process of getting the young to take to the wing; while the latter half of the verse describes the action of the parent bird in supporting and

² So Jastrow (*Dictionary of the Targumim*, etc.) רָחַם, “Pi, to move, hover, flatter (sic) *Hag.* 16 a (ref. to Gen. 1 2) בֵּין שְׁמֹרֶתֶת עַל בְּנָה וּבְנָה, like a dove that hovers over her young without touching them.”

³ It is noteworthy that, while Jerome thus interprets the passage, he actually translates מַרְחַת by *ferebatur*, clearly influenced by the LXX *ἐπεφέρετο*.

⁴ So to lift up the hand against, Zech. 2 9; lift up a report against, Judith 8 8; of attack in battle, 2 Mac. 12 25, etc.

⁵ Onkelos, Jonathan, Jerusalem, and Samaritan.

helping them after they have taken to the wing.⁶ Now precisely what is the action of the parent bird described by פָתַח ?

Of the actual procedure of eagles, griffon vultures, or other similar birds in the earlier stages of teaching or helping their young to fly, described in the first two verses of the above quatrain, I am able to get no information from published works or from personal inquiry of the most distinguished ornithologists, whom I have in the last few months annoyed with many importunities. In the case of certain smaller birds, observers have seen the young shouldered or jostled out of the nest, as described here, and thus compelled to attempt flight. They usually land on the ground as the result of the first attempt, whereupon the parent birds fly down to them, flap their wings and fly before them, as though showing them how to fly, rush at them and away from them, hover about them, sometimes hold food before them at a little distance, and in general scold and coax them to flight. If from this one may argue to the conduct of the griffon vulture in connection with the flight of its young, I should suppose that פָתַח is to be rendered *flappeth* or *shaketh* the wings, *rusheth* or *fluttereth*, possibly even *hovereth*, but never *broodeth*, motion, not rest, being connoted.

The passage is commonly translated into English "fluttereth over her young." The Greek and the Targum of Onkelos, while agreeing more or less with one another, translate the word in this passage very differently from their translation of Gen. 1 2, or rather they translate something quite different from the Hebrew.⁷ In the Greek the vulture

⁶ Driver (*Deuteronomy, ad loc.*) quotes Alexander's citation from Davy's *Salmonia*, illustrating this in the case of eagles as follows : "Two parent eagles on Ben Weevis were teaching their offspring, two young birds, the manœuvres of flight." Rising from the top of a mountain, they "at first made small circles and the young imitated them ; they paused on their wings waiting till they had made their first flight, holding them on their expanded wings when they appeared exhausted, and then took a second and larger gyration, always rising towards the sun, and enlarging their circle of flight, so as to make a gradually ascending spiral" (p. 358). Tristram, in his *Natural History of the Bible*, cites the same or similar testimony.

⁷ Apparently not because they had a different text, but because of a misunderstanding of the Hebrew, due to ignorance of the way in which young birds actually learn to fly.

covers the nest (*σκεπάσαι*) and *yearns after* (*ἐπιποθεῖν*⁸) its young. In the Targum it *meditates* over its nest (*מִדְבָּר*) and *covers* (*מַחֲזֵק*) its young. In the Syriac it flies about over the nest (*בָּבָשׂ*); but in the second part the Hebrew verb is transliterated, as in Gen. 1 2.

תִּתְהַנֵּן is used once in the Kal form, in Jer. 23 9: "My heart is broken in the midst of me; all my bones **תִּתְהַנֵּן**; I have become like a drunken man, and like a mighty man whom wine has overcome." This is commonly rendered "all my bones shake," which is the translation also of the LXX (*ἐσαλεύθη*) and of the Aramaic **וְיָלֵן**.⁹ The contents also seem to suggest as the sense of the passage the knocking together or shaking of the bones from fear.

The cognate languages give us little assistance. The root **תִּתְהַנֵּן** is wanting in Ethiopic and Assyrian. In Arabic it means *be soft* (infrequent), with which, I believe incorrectly, the Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius connects the Kal form in Jer. 23 9, translating *grow soft, relax*. In Syriac the root appears in the Pael with the meanings *foster, cherish, hover, brood, incubate, pass the hand back and forth* (over a priest at ordination), while the noun *ruhāfā* means *pity, clemency, benevolence, incubatio gallinae, illapsus Sancti Spiritus*.¹⁰ From this the Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius deduces for the Hebrew the meanings *move gently, cherish, brood*, in Deut. 32 11 "*hovering over young*," and in Gen. 1 2 "*hovering over face of waters, or perhaps brooding (and fertilizing)*." This supports the interpretation of the Jewish and Christian expositors from at least the time of Jerome onwards, but, as already pointed out, introduces in Gen. 1 2 a cosmogonic conception of which we find no other trace in Hebrew liter-

⁸ Aquila, however, appears here to use consistently the same verb as in Gen. 1 2, *ἐπιφέρεσθαι*.

⁹ De Lagarde, *Prophetae Chaldaice*.

¹⁰ Prof. R. J. H. Gottheil, who has kindly looked up for me the use of this root in Syriac and Arabic, is of the opinion that it is not an original root in Syriac, but taken over from the Hebrew, and that all the meanings given above depend on the supposed meaning of *מַחֲזֵק* in Gen. 1 2. If this be correct, we may probably trace back the traditional interpretation of the Jewish and Greek expositors as far at least as the *Peshitta* translation.

ature, apparently the conception of the world-egg familiar in Indian cosmogony, from which it spread to the West.

Putting together the three passages in which the word occurs in Hebrew, I believe that in each case it denotes a motion of the general type described by one or another of the words *flap*, *shake*, *rush*, *flutter*. In Gen. 1 2 it is the wind rushing over or upon or against the water, like the flapping or shaking of wings; in Deut. 32 11 it is the literal flapping or shaking of the wings; and in Jer. 23 9 it is the shaking or knocking together of the bones in terror.

The ordinary cosmogonic conceptions of the Hebrews, of which we find abundant traces in the Bible outside of the more formulated cosmogonies of Gen. 1 and 2, are quite different in character, and indicate a connection of thought and tradition quite unlike those prevalent in India, out of which sprang the world-egg idea.

In Ps. 89 7-14, Yahaweh is described as ruling the waves of the sea and stilling the tumult of its billows. He has smitten and profaned Rahab; with His strong arm He has scattered His foes. This is a part of the creation work, by which He founded heaven and earth, creation being depicted as connected with the battle of Yahaweh against a monster, here called Rahab, and its allies, who are foes of God or the gods. Similarly, in Ps. 74 12-17, God is described as having, in the olden time, divided the sea by His strength, smitten the heads of dragons on the waters, crushed the heads of leviathan, and given him for food to the jackals. This is part of a creation myth, as shown by the results; for as a consequence of this battle with the sea monsters and leviathan, God digs out the fountains and the valleys in which they run, dries up the primitive rivers, forms night and day, moon and sun, and establishes the boundaries of the earth.

The Book of Job abounds in references to the creation myth and to the mythical monsters with whom God contended in connection with the creation of the world. So in Job 26 12 b we read :

"With His strength He troubled the sea,
And with His skill He pierced Rahab.
His wind spread out heaven,
His hand slew flying serpent."

Rahab is here connected with the sea, and flying serpent with the heavens. In connection with the battle of the sea, the Almighty pierces Rahab; then heaven is spread out by His wind, and the flying serpent slain, apparently in heaven. In cc. 40 and 41, the two monsters are named *behemoth* and *leviathan*, the former inhabiting dry land and the latter the deep. These monsters were evidently well known in Hebrew tradition.¹¹ In 2 Esdras 6 40-52, two living creatures are described as preserved by God on the fifth day of creation, behemoth and leviathan, to the former of whom He gave as his habitation a part of the dry land, whereon are a thousand hills, and to the latter that seventh part of the earth occupied by the sea.¹² In Enoch 60 7-9, it is further noted that behemoth is a male and leviathan a female. In Enoch 54 8 the water above the heavens is described as male and the water under the earth as female. Job 7 12 and 9 13 refer to a monster of the deep called dragon (תְּהִלָּה) or Rahab,¹³ which, with its allies, has been overcome and imprisoned by the Almighty.

In the 38th chapter of the same book, while the monsters are not mentioned by name, mention is made of the struggle of God with the deep itself: "When the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy: when God shut up the sea with doors, fastening it in with bars and gates."

In general the Book of Job gives the following picture of the universe: the sky, strong as a molten mirror (37 18),

¹¹ Cf. also Pa. 44 20, Ezk. 29 4-5 & 32 2-4, Pa.-Sol. 2 22-24. In Ezekiel the dragon myth is used in describing the fate of Egypt, and in the Psalms of Solomon, of Pompey; but in both cases the ancient myth is clearly in mind.

¹² Cf. also Apocalypse of Baruch, 29 4: "And behemoth will be revealed from his place, and leviathan will ascend from the sea, those two great monsters which I created on the fifth day of creation, and I kept them until that time; and then they will be for food for all that are left."

¹³ In Ps. 40 8 the plural of this, *rēhābîm*, appears to mean false gods; *tōhô* is used in the same sense in 1 Sam. 12 21 and Isa. 41 20.

rests upon pillars (26 11), and above it are the waters held up by clouds (26 8); the earth rests upon a chaos of waters or a great sea (26 7); and in the bowels of the earth is Sheol or Abaddon (26 6); the waters are closely connected with darkness, and both those above and those below the earth form the habitation of monsters; this, with slight variants, may be said to be the regular Hebrew view of the universe. And out of the various references scattered through both the earlier and younger literature, we may reconstruct the following cosmogony as that ordinarily prevalent: first, a condition of chaos and darkness, a waste of waters, inhabited by monstrous and noxious forms; then a battle of Yahaweh, with the approval and rejoicing of the gods (divine or semi-divine beings, stars, etc.), against the deep and the monsters of chaos, in which in some way He uses the wind. By means of this He spreads out a firmament above, resting upon pillars, provided with windows,¹⁴ through which the waters above may be let down upon the earth. Beneath, upon the great void, He spreads the earth, a dwelling-place for living things, under which is the sea or abyss (*tēhōm*).¹⁵ In this abyss, as also in the heights above, still dwell great monsters, which the Lord has preserved there, which no other than He can control, who are dangerous and noxious to men and to the works of men.¹⁶

¹⁴ Cf. Gen. 7 11, 2 K. 7 2, 10, Ps. 78 22.

¹⁵ Gen. 7 11, 49 22, Deut. 33 18, Ps. 42 5, 78 15, Prov. 8 20.

¹⁶ In Isa. 51 9 the delivery from Egypt is described in terms of the old cosmogonic myth: "The arm of Yahaweh cut in pieces Rahab, pierced the dragon." In Isa. 30 7, Egypt is called Rahab, because "she helpeth in vain." In Ps. 87 4, and elsewhere, we find the same use. The myth is also applied eschatologically. As God once created the earth, after destroying the monsters of chaos, so He shall again, out of a world reduced to chaos because of the wickedness of man, recreate a new earth and a new heaven by the same means; so the late Isaianic Apocalypse (Isa. 24-27). Here we have (27) three monsters: leviathan, the swift serpent or flying serpent (which appears to be the same leviathan mentioned in Job 38 as inhabiting the waters above the firmament and causing the eclipse); leviathan, the crooked serpent, which is the sea encircling the earth; and the dragon in the depths of the sea, which is the serpent of Am. 9 5. In a somewhat similar picture of the reduction of the earth to chaos through the wrath of God, in Jer. 4 22, birds, men, and beasts are destroyed; mountains and hills lose

It is clear that this cosmogony is closely related to that of Babylonia, where we have the same contest of Marduk (acting for the other gods, whom he thereby largely supplants) with a female monster, *tiāmat*,¹⁷ which is by root the same as the Hebrew *tēhōm*. This monster he splits in two, after inflating her with a great wind. He reduces her various allies to submission, and after treating her corpse with contumely, he divides it into two parts, out of one of which he makes the heaven and out of the other the earth, the waters being thus separated into two great seas, the one above the firmament of heaven and the other beneath the earth.

Turning from the popular Hebrew cosmogony to the formal cosmogony contained in Gen. 1-2 4, we find a striking difference. The latter is on a much higher and more spiritual plane. It is not only monotheistic, but has quite freed itself of anthropomorphic elements. It is, however, in certain points, plainly related, like the popular cosmogony, to Babylonian thought. The Babylonian cosmogony, as we know it in the cuneiform texts, is contained in seven tablets. Similarly the systematized cosmogony of the Priest Code, after the first two verses, is developed into seven sections or seven days. To this the first two verses constitute an introduction, describing the conditions antedating creation itself. The earth was *tōhū* and *bōhū*, two words evidently handed down from antiquity. This chaotic condition is further pictured as darkness upon the face of *tēhōm*. But *tēhōm*, here used without article, is, as already stated, radically

their solidity and shake to and fro, the light of the heavens is turned into darkness, and the earth becomes waste and void, *tōhū* and *bōhū*, the technical words for "chaos" used in Gen. 1 2. This cosmogony constituted, also, an element of the religion of the Hebrews, and was represented in their ritual and religious paraphernalia. So, in the temple of Solomon was a great laver, the so-called "sea," representing the *tēhōm* (1 K. 7 2), interpreted by comparison with Babylonian use), and on the candlesticks of Herod's temple, as represented on Titus's arch at Rome, are pictured apparently the monsters of that *tēhōm* whom Jahaweh had overcome. (Cf. the similar use in Babylonian temples.)

¹⁷ In the Babylonian myth we have also *apsu*, "sea," as a technical term or name. At least once in Hebrew (Isa. 40 17), the corresponding root **בָּהֵם** has the same sense.

identical with the Babylonian *tiāmat* and is evidently, like *tohū* and *bōhū*, a technical term of the cosmogonic myth. In this chaos God acted or displayed himself by means of the מָרְחַת upon the face of the waters.

Now, in view of the evident relation of this cosmogony to the Babylonian cosmogony, we should naturally expect to find some relic of the contest of God with the monsters of chaos, and, more particularly, with *tiāmat*, inasmuch as we find that word reflected in the Hebrew *təhōm*. As we have seen in the common Hebrew cosmogony, the wind is Yahaweh's weapon or tool, of which he makes use to spread out the heavens.¹⁸ Similarly, in the Babylonian myth the winds are especially Marduk's weapons and tools in his struggle with Tiāmat and his formation of the world. It is therefore natural to find in this passage a reference to such a use of the wind by God, and to translate it literally, "and the wind of God was rushing upon the face¹⁹ of the waters." It is a relic of that contest of Yahaweh with the monsters of chaos common to the popular Hebrew and to Babylonian cosmogony, but so spiritualized that we have only the faintest indications of origin. In general, these first two verses of this chapter may be said to represent what remains, in the exalted cosmogony of the Priest Code, of the story of the battle of Marduk with Tiāmat of Babylonian mythology.

The remainder of the cosmogony, recording the Seven Words of Creation and their results, corresponds similarly

¹⁸ Besides the passage referred to above (Job 26 12) in which Yahaweh spreads out the heavens by His wind, תְּהֻם is represented as the implement of His activities in the following passages: Gen. 8 1 (P), He sends out the wind over the earth to dry it up; Ex. 15 10 (E) and Isa. 11 15, by the wind He brings the sea over the Egyptians; similarly, Ps. 147 8, by His wind He makes the congealed waters flow; Num. 11 11 (J), by a wind He brings in the quails; Isa. 27 8, He uses the wind to vanquish His foes; Isa. 4 4, He purges Jerusalem by a wind of judgment and a wind of burning; Hos. 13 15, the sirocco is the wind of Yahaweh to bring destruction as a punishment; Ps. 104 4, the winds are Yahaweh's messengers or angels, and in the following passages, where it might also be rendered breath: Ex. 15 8, Isa. 30 22, 59 18, Ps. 18 16, 35 22; in Isa. 11 4 it is similarly used of the Messiah as the representative of Yahaweh.

¹⁹ Note also how in Babylonian the *wind* is hurled against the *face* (*panu*) of Tiāmat.

to the seven tablets of the Babylonian cosmogony, but is again so spiritualized that it may be said that almost the only trace of its Babylonian origin still remaining is the number seven.²⁰ A connection between the two parts of this cosmogony (Gen. 1 i. 2 and Gen. 1 3-2 4) has been established by the words בָּרַא and בָּרֵא. Closely allied to the primitive meaning of בָּרַא, *wind*, is its secondary meaning, *breath*, so that it is often impossible to say which is the more proper rendering — by His *wind*, or by His *breath*, Yahaweh overthrows his foes, Yahaweh brings judgment upon His people, etc. As already pointed out, בָּרַא is the vital spirit by which God gave life to man, by which He restored dead Israel to life, etc. So here the *wind* of God is regarded as the vital spirit of the universe, His breath uttering the six creative words by which, in the conception of the cosmogony of the Priest Code, the successive acts of creation are accomplished.²¹

²⁰ Cf., however, the fourth day: the sun, moon, and stars set in the heaven to give light and rule the day and the night, which may contain a trace of the old polytheistic, astral worship, but corrected in part by the statement that these rulers of day and night are themselves creations of God; and the fifth day: where, among the creatures of the sea and air, both created out of the water, is recognized the continued existence of the great sea monsters, dragons, serpents, etc., of popular belief (v. 21) included in Job, Enoch and Esdras under the titles behemoth and leviathan. In the creation of man (v. 22) on the sixth day we have also a remnant of the more primitive anthropomorphic conception of God, and probably also a trace of polytheism in the words put in the mouth of God: "Let us make man in our image." Not that the writer means to speak of more than one god of Israel, but that he cannot yet altogether divest himself of the thought of a plurality of gods, and conceives of god or the gods as having of necessity a human form.

²¹ See, on the whole subject of Hebrew cosmogony, my article in Hastings' *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. iv.