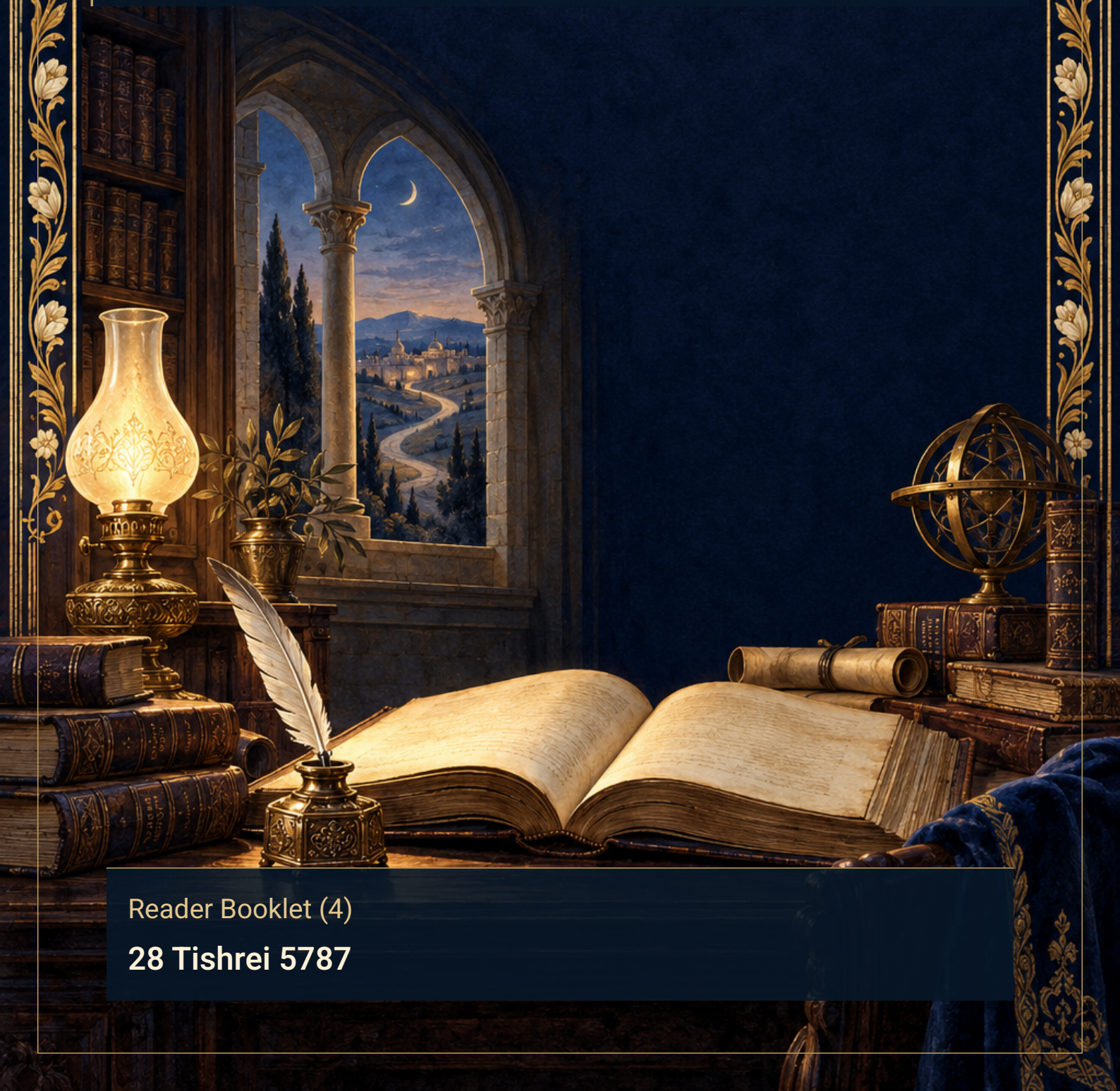


Beit Midrash YeshivahAI

Vayishan Vayikach

What Does “Distasteful to Him” Mean?
A Study of Rashi on Genesis 2:21



Reader Booklet (4)

28 Tishrei 5787

One word that opened an entire inquiry

This booklet grew out of one word in Rashi: וְתַבְּזָה, “she would become distasteful.”¹ On the sleep that fell upon Adam during Eve's creation, Rashi writes: “So that he would not see the piece of flesh from which she was created, and she would become distasteful to him.” Why should seeing her creation diminish her appeal in his eyes? He later declares with joy: “Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.”

An immediate answer might be that blood and cutting are unpleasant to see. Yet the question goes deeper. Childbirth also involves blood, and the newborn is nevertheless welcomed with affection. Some people recoil from the sight; others do not. Even revulsion does not necessarily destroy love. How does a passing stage of formation become a lasting attitude toward a complete human being?

The Talmud, Midrash, and Rashi's commentators teach us to distinguish origin from witnessing formation, and affection for a newborn from the desire to marry. The commentators describe the creation differently, so their answers differ as well.

The explanation developed here is that sleep protects **the way Eve is received**: it prevents Adam from seeing a stage whose influence the sources describe as continuing after completion, and Eve is presented to him affectionately after she has been formed. This combines several sources. How the sight weighs alongside affection and wonder remains an open question. We will approach the explanation through the difficulty and the commentators.

The accompanying **Research Booklet** contains the full range of interpretations, evidence, and comparisons of the review reports. Each reference here identifies a unit and page in it. The inquiry was conducted at Beit Midrash YeshivahAI, under human direction and rabbinic supervision. [\[source\]](#)

1. Rashi, Genesis 2, 21.

Reading guide

From Rashi's wording to the question, the commentators, and the explanation we can teach.

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“For further study” references lead to the Research Booklet. Its page numbers were checked after pagination.

1. What exactly is Rashi explaining?

The verse says: “The L-rd G-d caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; He took one of his sides and closed up flesh in its place.” Rashi explains the connection between sleep and removal: וַיִּשָּׁן וַיִּקַּח, “He slept, and He took - so that he would not see the piece of flesh from which she was created, and she would become distasteful to him” (Rashi, Genesis 2:21). [\[source\]](#)

Adam is the one who must not see; Eve is the one who might become distasteful **in his eyes**. This does not mean that she herself would feel ashamed. The wording expresses rejection and diminished appeal and affection: he might fail to receive her warmly. Midrash Lekach Tov gives the parallel wording: “So that she would not become unappealing to him, and he would not reject her.” ² We need not add that he would judge her to be a being of lesser value.

This is the heart of the question. A disturbing sight can provoke an immediate recoil. Rashi is concerned about its effect on **Adam's attitude toward Eve**. Why should seeing the separation affect his attitude toward her after her formation is complete?

Moreover, if the problem is that she was taken from his body, sleep seemingly does not solve it. Adam knows this afterward. We must clarify what seeing adds to knowing, and exactly what was to be prevented.

First, we distinguish origin from sight and study how an earlier sight continues to affect a person (chapters 2-4). We then examine childbirth, the accounts of creation, and sleep (5-8), before developing the explanation and defining its limits (9-11).

For further study in the Research Booklet: T1 - p. 4; T27 - p. 8

2. “She comes from me” can be a basis for love

Ramban, commenting on “Therefore a man shall leave,” explains attachment to one's wife through her being bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh: he wants her always to be

2. Lekach Tov, Genesis 2, 21-23.

with him. ³ Their shared origin thus appears as a reason for closeness, just as the original question suggested. His comment there is not a direct explanation of Rashi on sleep; it teaches us not to identify origin itself with diminished appeal.

The Netziv likewise compares Adam's love for Eve to a person's love for his own hand. ⁴ He describes love even before intercourse and attachment. We must be precise: his words concern the period after Eve was brought to Adam; they do not date that love to the moment of cutting. Still, we cannot base the entire answer on an assumption that love does not exist before a marital relationship.

We distinguish **origin** - Eve's being taken from Adam; **knowledge** - what Adam knows about it; and **sight** - what he witnessed during her creation. Ramban and the Netziv see origin as a reason for closeness. The effect of consciously knowing that origin needs separate examination.

Here, **affectionate reception** means being received with favor and warmth. Asking about the **weight of the sight** means asking how it combines with affection and wonder in Adam's attitude toward Eve. An origin that creates closeness and a sight that provokes revulsion can coexist.

Nor do all commentators describe knowledge alike. In Akedat Yitzchak, recognizing the origin contributes to joy. Be'er BaSadeh suggests that, under certain interpretations, advance knowledge of it might diminish affection. There is no single agreed rule about it.

For further study in the Research Booklet: T7 - p. 16; T8 - p. 18; T30 - p. 29

3. Ramban, Genesis 2, 24.

4. Ha'amek Davar, Genesis 2, 23-24.

3. The Talmud's analogy: what remains of the sight?

Sanhedrin 39a records the objection that taking the side during sleep resembles theft. The first answer is an analogy: a silver vessel was taken and a gold one given in its place. Adam benefited. But a question remains: why do this secretly? Why not take it openly?

A second analogy follows. Meat is placed under hot embers and ash, removed, and offered as food. The observer says מַאי־סָא לִי, “It is repulsive to me.” The application is that, had the side been taken openly, she would have become repulsive to him.⁵

The two analogies answer different questions. Silver and gold explain **what was given**: a benefit. The meat explains **how it was received**: the manner of giving can affect reception even when the gift is good.

Two comments by Rashi define the argument. Of the meat: “This is how it is roasted; because he saw it in its unappealing state, it became repulsive to him.” Of the application: “He would see her being cut out before her formation was complete.”

The emphasis is not on merely knowing how meat is prepared, nor on an unnatural procedure. Rashi says this is the normal way of roasting it. The observer saw it at a stage he found unappealing, and that sight affected his subsequent reception of it.

This is an important advance: even when the physical work is complete, the attitude formed by seeing it is not necessarily

5. Sanhedrin 39a with Rashi.

repaired along with it. The analogy provides a pattern of continuing influence. It is not a law that everyone who watches food preparation rejects the food. It teaches what can remain of a sight; chapter 11 returns to how that influence weighs alongside affection.

For further study in the Research Booklet: T3 - p. 9; T4 - p. 10

4. Yafeh To'ar: the body is completed, but aversion remains

The analogy concerns reception after completion. Yafeh To'ar finds an explanation within the creation narrative itself: Bereishit Rabbah preserves a tradition in which Adam saw the first creation and rejected her, after which she was created for him a second time, secretly.⁶ Rashi here does not recount the whole narrative of two creations. The description of the sight includes mucus and blood. The traditions have textual variants, detailed in the Research Booklet. We need not make the entire explanation depend on one uniform wording everywhere.

Yafeh To'ar explains that even after the first creation had been completed and adorned, “because he had seen her in her unseemly state, his mind drew away from her” - לפי שרא' בנוולה רחקה דעתו ממנה.⁷ He refers to the analogy in Sanhedrin. Here, continuing rejection after completion is stated explicitly.

What did completion change? The body's condition. What did not disappear automatically, according to this explanation? The aversion already formed. This answers how a passing

6. Bereishit Rabbah 17, 7.

7. Yafeh To'ar, Bereishit Rabbah 17, 7; scan HebrewBooks 42241, PDF p. 240.

condition can affect one's attitude toward someone now standing complete. The commentator describes the result, not the entire psychological process. The remembered image could explain it, but that is a possible explanation, not the source's wording.

Yafeh To'ar assigns the braiding of the hair and presentation to the second creation. Concealment and presenting Eve after completion are thus connected in his commentary. In the case he describes, adornment did not erase the attitude already formed. The balance between revulsion and affection remains for the conclusion.

For further study in the Research Booklet: T5 - p. 11; T28 - p. 14

5. The comparison with childbirth remains serious

Childbirth involves more than an abstract idea of closeness. There is blood and an unattractive sight, yet the child can be welcomed joyfully. The Midrash itself emphasizes this: “Covered with mucus and blood, everyone embraces and kisses him.”⁸ The word **everyone** extends the question beyond the parents alone.

Etz Yosef explains in a parallel passage that G-d implanted in nature an affection for a newborn in everyone's eyes, prompting embraces and kisses.⁹ Affection exists despite the sight. We therefore cannot simply say that all blood leads to rejection, or that favor overcoming an unpleasant sight must require an additional miracle. Chapter 10 examines the possibility of granting favor despite the sight.

8. Vayikra Rabbah 27, 7.

9. Etz Yosef, Vayikra Rabbah 14, 4.

Still, affection for a newborn and the desire to marry are different relationships. Is there a source for that distinction in our case, or have we invented it simply to answer the question?

Avot deRabbi Natan, version B, chapter 8, says in its discussion of Eve's creation: “Whenever a man sees a little girl covered with blood, he does not readily marry her”; it then gives the reason: שלבו גס בה, “because he has become overly familiar with her.” This source explicitly connects seeing the baby girl with marital desire. The printed text contains details and a correction in the connecting word, documented in the Research Booklet. [\[source\]](#)

We face two questions. Can a newborn be loved despite blood? The Midrash says yes. Does that affection necessarily create a desire to marry her later? Avot deRabbi Natan describes difficulty entering marriage. Combining these sources yields a possible explanation: affection for someone at birth does not require marital desire toward that person. The childbirth comparison limits the explanation “blood alone,” but does not simply refute Rashi.

This is not a complete answer. “Overly familiar with her” concerns familiarity and the manner of acquaintance; Rashi in Sanhedrin emphasizes seeing something “in its unappealing state.” No statement identifies the two reasons. Nor does “not readily” mean “never.” The source advances the question without authorizing a universal law.

For further study in the Research Booklet: T16 - p. 19; T17 - p. 22;
T22 - p. 44

6. What would Adam have seen? The commentators differ

To assess the childbirth comparison, we must know what Adam would have seen. The commentators offer three descriptions: **partzuf** - Adam and Eve as two joined sides that were separated; **zanav**, literally “tail” - a limb or appendage from which the woman was formed before it had her complete shape; and **an actual rib** - a rib in the bodily sense, as Be'er BaSadeh lists it. These are different interpretations, not stages of one process.

On some interpretations, Adam would have seen a piece that had not yet acquired its complete form. Maskil LeDavid emphasizes the absence of form under the “zanav” interpretation. ¹⁰ That is not the sight of a fully formed baby being born. It is a real difference between the processes.

Rashi himself, on “from his sides,” cites the account of two joined faces or sides. Under that account, “he would see formless material” is insufficient. Levush HaOrah explains that even a complete body might become distasteful to him during separation, before skin and flesh had covered the cut. ¹¹

Be'er BaSadeh argues within the partzuf interpretation from the sight of blood and mucus. This is not Levush's wording about the cut. The distinction must be preserved even though both consider the revulsion explanation applicable to a body that already has form.

The table presents three explanations of the sight. Its last two rows belong to the same bodily interpretation: partzuf.

¹⁰. Maskil LeDavid, Genesis 2, 21.

¹¹. Levush HaOrah, Genesis 2, 21.

Bodily interpretation	Commentator	What is emphasized in the sight?
Zanav	Maskil LeDavid	A formless piece, before completion
Partzuf	Levush HaOrah	A complete body, with a cut not yet covered
Partzuf	Be'er BaSadeh	Blood and mucus during separation

The difference from a complete newborn is substantial in the first account. In the other accounts, the childbirth question is stronger, since the sight includes a formed body and blood. We cannot take the first interpretation's answer and declare all interpretations resolved.

For further study in the Research Booklet: T9 - p. 26; T10 - p. 27; T11 - p. 28; T30 - p. 29

7. Be'er BaSadeh: why is seeing needed as an explanation?

Be'er BaSadeh distinguishes three bodily accounts: partzuf, zanav, and an actual rib.¹² Alongside the explanation based on sight, he examines two other explanations for sleep: the joy of a sudden discovery and temporary concealment of the fact that the woman was taken from Adam.

Under the partzuf interpretation, the commentator says, Adam will immediately notice that the joined part has been removed. There is therefore no surprise of the kind required by the discovery explanation. Concealing the origin cannot work in the same way either: Adam will know that the joined side has been taken from him.

¹². Be'er BaSadeh, Genesis 2, 21: "He closed"; "He slept, and He took".

The argument has two negations. **She cannot be presented as a sudden discovery**, and **her origin cannot be concealed from him**. But he can be prevented from seeing the separation. Hence: “For this reason, the explanation that he should not see was necessary.”

This is a commentator's answer to “But he knows afterward”: in this interpretation, knowledge remains, while sight is prevented. It explains why the sight explanation is needed within his account, not how every instance of revulsion develops. It does not cancel the pain explanation.

In alternatives concerning zanav or an actual rib, the commentator is concerned precisely about advance knowledge: it might diminish affection. He therefore proposes concealing that knowledge “for a time.” Sleep has a temporary benefit even if Adam will later know. This does not guarantee that later knowledge can never affect him.

A further distinction matters: “We do not need the revulsion explanation” means it is unnecessary for explaining the verse under certain alternatives. It does not mean revulsion is impossible. An explanation's applicability and the need to invoke it are different questions.

The alternatives divide as follows in Be'er BaSadeh specifically:

Bodily interpretation	What does he say about the alternatives?	The sight explanation
Partzuf	He knows immediately; sudden discovery and concealing the origin do not help	Needed: the sight can be prevented
Zanav	The origin can be concealed “for a time”; pain applies here too	Not needed in his explanation

Bodily interpretation	What does he say about the alternatives?	The sight explanation
Actual rib	The joy of discovery is cited from Akedat Yitzchak; alternatively, concealment “for a time”	Not needed in his explanation

The joy of discovery is expressly stated for an actual rib. Extending it to zanav requires marking an inference. The two negations belong to partzuf.

For further study in the Research Booklet: T30 - p. 29; T29 - p. 47

8. Why not simply explain it as preventing pain?

Several commentators explain deep sleep as preventing distress, pain, or fear. Maskil LeDavid distinguishes bodily interpretations: under zanav the pain is relatively small, so he seeks the revulsion explanation; under partzuf he explains sleep as preventing pain.

Be'er BaSadeh maintains the pain explanation **even under zanav**: even minor pain is worth preventing. Levush HaOrah and Be'er BaSadeh explain revulsion under partzuf too.

Rashi's commentators disagree; there is no agreed rejection of the pain explanation.

Gur Aryeh connects sleep with closing the place of removal: the open site could also recall the sight that was prevented. ¹³ He therefore discusses Rashi's order of comments, explaining “He closed” before “He slept, and He took.” For him, the sight explanation accounts for both sleep and closure. This clarifies what it adds beyond preventing pain: a connection between

13. Gur Aryeh, Genesis 2, 21, note 39.

the timing of removal, the sight, and the order of Rashi's commentary.

Rashi's choice of revulsion as an explanation requires attention to the verse and his interpretation. Some commentators show why this reason fits it. We cannot infer that every other reason has been disproved, or that G-d could not preserve favor another way.

For further study in the Research Booklet: T10 - p. 27; T12 - p. 33; T13 - p. 34; T20 - p. 38

9. Sleep and presentation: a positive dimension as well

The account does not end with what Adam did not see. After formation, the verse says, “He brought her to the man.” Radak cites the Sages' distinction between taking her with his awareness while awake, which would make her distasteful to him, and bringing her without his awareness, which made her dear to him. ¹⁴ Radak says “with his awareness” and “without his awareness”; these should not be silently replaced with Rashi's language about sight.

Akedat Yitzchak combines two causes of joy: a sudden discovery and a lack already felt before finding one's partner. ¹⁵ Adam felt the lack, and afterward the woman was brought to him. After citing revulsion and pain, Akedat Yitzchak prefers this approach with “the correct explanation.” That is not an explicit rejection of the other reasons, and we must not attribute his entire preference to Rashi.

¹⁴. Radak, Genesis 2, 21.

¹⁵. Akedat Yitzchak Gate 8, Genesis 2, 21-23; Da'at edition pp. 192-193.

Combining the sources yields a positive explanation: sleep removes the sight whose effect continues after completion, and the presentation introduces Eve affectionately after she has been formed. The way she is received is protected.

Each component has an identified source. But none of the commentators cited states the whole combined explanation in those words. Connecting them is the work of our inquiry.

For further study in the Research Booklet: T13 - p. 34; T31 - p. 35;
T22 - p. 44

10. Be'er Mayim Chaim: sleep and removal during sleep

Be'er Mayim Chaim objects that “so that she would not become distasteful” does not by itself explain why deep sleep was needed. ¹⁶ G-d grants a woman favor in her husband's eyes; why not grant Eve favor despite the sight? This challenges the necessity of the whole procedure, not merely the possibility of revulsion.

He answers by distinguishing purposes. Sleep shows the angels that Adam is human, not divine. Once he was asleep, the side was taken during sleep also to prevent diminished appeal. There is thus a difference between **why sleep was induced** and **why the side was removed while he slept**.

His answer explains sleep and the timing of removal through two purposes. Revulsion explains the timing, even when it does not by itself require sleep.

Yafeh To'ar's abridged commentary assigns sleep to the removal itself and disputes the interpretation concerning the

16. Be'er Mayim Chaim, Genesis 2, 21, 1-2.

angels. ¹⁷ This is a different discussion from the full commentary studied in chapter 4 about the persistence of the earlier impression.

For further study in the Research Booklet: T14 - p. 37; T20 - p. 38

11. What has been established, and what remains open?

What is explicit in the sources. “She would become distasteful to him” concerns preventing a loss of Eve's appeal in Adam's eyes, not her own embarrassment. Rashi in Sanhedrin and Yafeh To'ar describe a sight at an unfinished stage whose effect remains after completion. Sleep prevents seeing that condition.

What does seeing add to knowing? Be'er BaSadeh answers under partzuf: Adam knows anyway that she was taken from him, but he can be prevented from seeing the separation. Under the other interpretations, he proposes temporarily concealing knowledge as well. This division explains why the sight reason is needed in his interpretation, not its entire emotional operation.

What we combine. Sleep protects the way Eve is received: the troubling sight is prevented, and she is presented affectionately after formation. This explanation is grounded in its components; it is not proof that all components together exhaust Rashi's intention.

The childbirth question sharpens its limits. Blood alone does not explain diminished appeal; affection for a newborn does not require marital desire; and the sight prevented differs by

17. Abridged Yafeh To'ar, Bereishit Rabbah 17, 4.

bodily interpretation. These distinctions advance the explanation without erasing the question.

What remains open. How does the sight weigh alongside affection and wonder at Eve's creation? Wonder, affection, and revulsion can coexist. The sources describe diminished appeal, but do not fully explain how these forces combine in Adam specifically.

The explanation's scope is limited too. This account is not a law that every first encounter determines appeal or that favor becomes immune to change after presentation. “Not readily” does not mean “never.” Nor is sleep proved to be the only possible Divine way to preserve favor.

The study has advanced: we have learned what Rashi seeks to prevent, how the commentators explain it, and what can be combined from their words. The remaining question is now more precise than the question with which we began.

For further study in the Research Booklet: T22 - p. 44; T26 - p. 53; T29 - p. 47

12. A short route to further study

To go deeper, you need not begin with the entire research dossier. Choose a question and follow its corresponding unit in the Research Booklet. References give research pages, not pages in this booklet. Every unit-page pair is a separate link; if your viewer does not open the specified page, use the printed number.

The condition before the sin: T23 - p. 41; limits of the search for an explanation by the Rebbe: T25 - p. 51; the research process and report comparisons: T24 - p. 55

The question of diminished appeal before the sin is treated separately in the research: shame, modesty, revulsion, and favor must not be treated as one thing. The search for a specific explanation by the Rebbe is likewise documented within its limits. Not finding one in the material examined does not prove none exists.

The research also documents how the explanation improved: contributions from four reviewers, errors, retractions, and editorial corrections. Comparison helps assess the reliability of the process but does not replace a Torah source. This booklet presents the argument itself; details of the process remain in the Research Booklet.

Sources for study

A selection for studying the texts themselves, from early sources to later commentators. References and ordering follow the Research Booklet.

The Sages

- Bereishit Rabbah 17:7 and 18:4; Avot deRabbi Natan, version B, chapter 8 - read the creation narrative, the matron, and “overly familiar with her” without merging the reasons.

↗ ↗ ↗

- Sanhedrin 39a with Rashi - distinguish the benefit question in the silver-and-gold analogy from the reception question in the meat analogy.

↗

The commentators

- Rashi, Genesis 2:21 - read the three comments and their order: “from his sides,” “He closed,” and “He slept, and He took.” ↗
- Ramban, Genesis 2:24 - how does shared origin explain attachment? ↗
- Akedat Yitzchak, Gate 8, pp. 192-193 - the two causes of joy and their status alongside revulsion and pain. ↗
- Yafeh To'ar, Bereishit Rabbah 17:7 - why does aversion remain after completion and adornment? ↗
- Be'er Mayim Chaim, Genesis 2:21 - why was sleep induced, and why was the side taken while he slept? ↗
- Be'er BaSadeh, Genesis 2:21, on “He slept, and He took” - three bodily interpretations and the two negations leading to the sight explanation. ↗
- Ha'amek Davar, Genesis 2:23-24 - the hand analogy, love, and attachment in context. ↗