



## Book Review

*Let There Be Light: The Real Story of the Creation*  
by Liana Finck

Review by Kalman Goldstein

Ever since Hebrew Day School, Liana Finck (daughter of long-time Beth Sholom members Harriet and Michael Finck!) has been impressed by *Bere'shit* as a literary work that tackles fundamental aspects of humanity. As a cartoonist and graphic novelist, Finck's take on Genesis has a crucial distinction: God is a woman, with nuanced feelings both about Herself and Her creatures. She may feel exhaustion, empathy, loneliness, and self-criticism when the patriarchs stubbornly imagine God as "he." She creates "woman" so that "man" will not despair, soothes Noah's PTSD with a rainbow, gives Abram Isaac, and performs a plethora of miracles for both. Only at the book's end, when Joseph prattles on about the linear course of history to follow, has God had enough of male chutzpah. Finck has God revisit Eden, restore Lilith, and turn her loose as Disruptor.

Finck walks a fine line with the women of Genesis. A small, single panel of Adam and Eve having sex shows her straddling him. On the other hand, in a burlesque of the section of "begats," the generations spring directly from male orifices and crevices, with no women necessary, but lots of blood and pain. Rebekah keeps her opinions to herself, but does help Jacob fool Isaac to gain inheritance. Sarai endures Abram's failed ambitions, but after the Akedah simply walks out, erasing him from her life. Leah is a clay idol, with hands, that Esau eagerly takes to wife. When the serpent reveals God's womanhood to Noah's wife, she calls her husband to dispose of the pest. When God descends to meet Nimrod halfway, atop the Tower of Babel, revealing herself, he remarks "she's *only* a..." and God zaps him. Finck omits a number of episodes featuring willful women, some of which she explains (Hagar, Dinah), but some she does not.

Anachronisms abound. Abraham's story is set in New York, complete with commuter trains, art school, taxis, senior living facilities with wheelchairs, and a suburban Dutch colonial birthplace. Eden itself becomes reduced to a gated, vest-pocket park. In a comment on present environmental problems, Finck's patriarchs, and their sheep, wear bubble helmets. Some are one-offs: Noah and wife wear mid-century kitschy aprons, God introduces the animals to one another with the 'Jewish mamma' instruction to "play nice." Potiphar's wife is dressed as a dominatrix. The funniest, however, concerns Noah:

instead of his sons confronting his naked drunken stupor, he is in his underwear, with a boom box, dancing to ABBA's "Mamma Mia."

As a cartoonist as well as tale-teller, Finck employs a wide range of techniques. Since almost all the drawings are in black and white, the occasional red attracts attention: Eden's apples, the rainbow, and Joseph's coat of three colors, but also Rebekah's t-bone steak, Esau's blood-red head, and the spontaneously-generated Begats. At the same time, the full-page use of blacks control the pace. This is especially effective in underpinning God's gradual maturation. God's facial features are increasingly delineated, as is Her emotional sophistication. In the end, God has become a grown woman, not a fairy queen with tiara and magic wand.