

Jeffrey Cohen's the rhyming rabbi

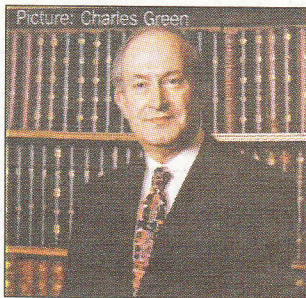
BEREISHIT, you might think, is a familiar story. But, *writes Lauren Krotosky*, it's been translated into rhyming couplets by Rabbi Jeffrey Cohen, who decided to adapt the text into an altogether different, but beautiful, interpretation.

"The main trigger was when I was on holiday in the Lake District and went on the Wordsworth Trail," he recalls. "There wasn't much to do so I sat down and started writing about Bereishit. I went to Israel for six weeks and devoted two to three hours a day to poetry. I employ a great deal of Midrashic ideas in my poetry.

"The text is written in a very brief form. A poet wants to get beneath the text, behind people and into people.

"I have also included 50 pages of notes at the back of the book explaining the sources that I used and the number of issues that flow from that debate."

Rabbi Cohen says he has always loved poetry. "For every family event – be it a birthday, anniversary, you name it – I always write a poem. I won a poetry competition at the age of eight, and espe-



Rabbi Jeffrey Cohen

cially love Hebrew poetry."

The book took him five months to write, and he says he's not aware of any such publication before, certainly not from a Jewish perspective.

"I think the book will appeal not just to a Jewish audience, but to people who are religious or simply have an interest in the Bible. I hope it will have a wide appeal. That is perhaps why I called it *Genesis in Poetry* as opposed to *Bereishit in Poetry*."

So far, he's had a wildly enthusiastic reaction to the book. "Overwhelmingly so. The response has been positive. Ann

Creation by Rabbi Cohen

*Why just now,
Indeed, why ever,
Infinity's thread
Did God choose to sever?
Whatever possessed him to empower
Those who would morally cower;
Betraying indifference
To their own existence;
Those who would lie
And deny,
Seek to dethrone
The One blissfully alone –
And rarely, if ever, truly atone?*

Sansom, the editor of a poetic journal in England, wrote a very complimentary review."

At the age of 70, Rabbi Cohen has been studying biblical literature for more than 60 years so has a fair amount of knowledge on Midrashic tradition, and put some of those ideas into his account.

But he doesn't have plans for a similar project anytime soon. "At 70, I thank God for every day when I wake up, go to shul, and have my breakfast!

"I don't want to be too ambitious. We'll see."