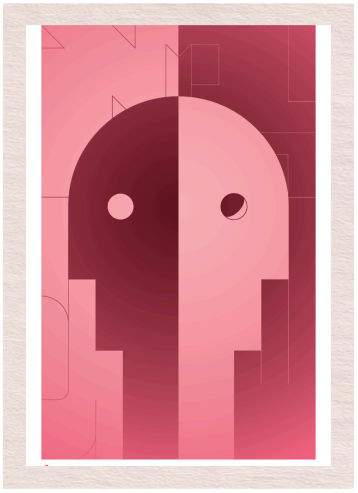
Bereshit: Bereshit (Genesis)

What's it all about?



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God creates the world in six days. On the first day, He creates darkness and light. On the second, the heavens. On the third, the land and the sea, the former flourishing with trees. On the fourth, he appoints the sun, the moon, and the stars to keep time. Fish, birds, and reptiles appear on day five, and then, on day six, all other land animals followed by Man himself. On the seventh day, as you probably know by now, **God rests.**

We get **two divergent accounts** of the creation of Man and Woman, one in which both simply materialize and one in which Adam is fashioned out of the dust of the earth and Eve from Adam's side. Both are placed in the Garden of Eden, are tempted by the snake to **violate the one rule they've been given**—not eating from the Tree of Knowledge—and are promptly **expelled**. The parsha ends with their son Cain murdering their other son Abel, a sin for which he's punished with endless wandering.

> "And God created Man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them... And God saw every thing that He had made."

Take a deeper dive

You would think that the very first chapter of the very first book of the Torah would deliver a clear account of what most human readers would consider the Main Event, namely the creation of Man. But instead, the Torah delivers two accounts that, at first glance, seem entirely at odds. First, there's this telling: "And God created man in His image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." Lovely! But, **a few verses later, the Torah delivers a different story**, one in which God forms Man out of dust, breathing life into his nostrils and then, to stave off the newborn's loneliness, God takes one of Adam's sides and creates Eve. What's going on here? Why the two radically different accounts?

The famous 20th Century American rabbi, Joseph Ber Soloveitchik, wrote an entire book just to answer this seminal question. He called it The Lonely Man of Faith.

There are, Soloveitchik explained, not one Adam but two; he called them Adam the First and Adam the Second.

Adam the First is Adam the Conqueror. God gives him a pretty clear mission statement, commanding him to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it." For Adam the First, to be is to do. He will be measured only by his achievements. We recognize him in our great athletes, our daring soldiers, our bold entrepreneurs. And then, the Torah gives us Adam the Second.

Adam number two, the Torah informs us, was placed in the Garden of Eden "to work it and to guard it." He's a conservationist, a protector, a gardener, **the one who takes care of all of God's creatures**.

What do you do with these two very disparate characters? The answer, of course, is that they're one and the same. We are all a little bit Adam One and a little bit Adam Two, which, maybe, is why we're often so lonely. **These two sides can't really live all that comfortably together**, which is why the parsha ends with Cain the hunter, the clear child of Adam the First, murdering Abel the farmer, the offspring of Adam the Second. Our goal, then, is **to learn to reconcile these very human urges**, a task which can only be accomplished when we lean on other people and, hallelujah, on God. Because though our ancient ancestors may have been banished from Paradise, by staying together and holding each other and having faith despite their fall, they gave us the world as we know it today. **And that's one heck of an origin story.**

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