

When God was about to create heaven and earth, ²the earth was a chaos, unformed, and on the chaotic waters' face there was darkness. Then God's spirit glided over the face of the waters, ³and God said, "Let there be light!"—and there was light. ⁴And when God saw how good the light was,

א בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם
וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ: ² וְהָאָרֶץ הִיְתָה תֵהוֹ וְכָהוּ
וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל-פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת
עַל-פְּנֵי הַמָּיִם: ³ וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אוֹר
וַיְהִי-אוֹר: ⁴ וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאוֹר כִּי-

The First Creation Story

CREATION OF WORLD, TIME,
AND LIFE (1:1–2:3)

Genesis 1 unfolds in a rhythmic, poetic fashion, depicting an orderly creation of the world and life in six days. Genesis does not offer a scientific account of creation but an interpretation and a system of values that encodes from the start three essential ideas: the power of language, especially God's word; the goodness of God's world; and the orderly nature of the world. Creating the world begins with a series of separations—from chaos to differentiated bodies—that, with one exception (day 2), are pronounced as "good." In the first three days God creates a context for life. In the last three God creates heavenly and earthly bodies to inhabit the space. The movement of each day, from evening to morning, replicates a journey from darkness to light.

1. *When God was about to create.* The more familiar expression "In the beginning" has been

replaced by the more accurate translation. As Rashi noted, the opening verses do not claim creation out of nothing.

2. *chaotic waters'.* The feminine noun *t'hom*, often translated as "the deep," echoes the name of the Mesopotamian goddess Tiamat. According to the Babylonian creation myth, Tiamat was brutally killed by her rebellious offspring in the process of creating the world. See also at 7:11, "great deep."

3. *God said.* God's use of language contrasts with some other ancient Near East creation stories that emphasize battles among the gods. By privileging language as a source of creative power, the Torah identifies tools for renewal in times of military defeat.

"*Let there be light!*" As the first of God's creative acts, light becomes not only a physical phenomenon but also a symbol of clarity and illumination that extend beyond the physical.

4. *God saw how good.* This phrase repeats in similar form six times in this passage, expressing the basic goodness of God's creation.

► A woman would have up to eight pregnancies to provide the optimum family size.

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► For the Rabbis, the female also shares in the divine image.

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► Our sexualities seem to point toward some element in the divine nature.

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► Your hands create my body / your mouth breathes life in me / my face shines.

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