When God was about to create heaven and earth, 'the 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, and God said, 'Let there be light!'—and there was light. And when God saw how good the light was, He rejoiced: 'I am Aleph, the first letter of a alphabet, the first time.'

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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 The more familiar expression "In the beginning" has been replaced by the more accurate translation.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 ṣāʾēm, 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.

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

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Outline

I. THE FIRST CREATION STORY
Creation of World, Time, and Life (1:1–2:3)

II. THE SECOND CREATION STORY
From the "Human" to "Woman and Man" (2:4–25)

A. The first human (vv. 4–7)
B. Humankind's first home: the Garden of Eden (vv. 8–17)
C. The creation of human partnership (vv. 18–25)

III. TEMPTATION, TRANSGRESSION, AND TRANSFORMATION
In the Garden of Eden (3:1–24)

A. Temptation and transgression (vv. 1–6)
B. The transformation (vv. 7–21)
C. The expulsion (vv. 22–24)

IV. LIFE OUTSIDE THE GARDEN (4:1–6:9)

A. Eve and Adam reunite: childbirth and naming (4:1–2)
B. The first sin: Cain and Abel (4:3–9)
C. Eve and Adam reunite: childbirth and naming (4:15–26)
D. The recapitulation of human origins, and their genealogy to Noah (5:1–32)
E. The marriage between heavenly beings and earthly women (6:1–4)
F. Conclusion: God's regret (6:5–8)