

Everyone knows that Bereishit gives us two creation stories: the one in Chapter 1, the “It was evening, it was morning” story, and the more expansive narrative in Chapters 2 and 3, Adam and Eve and the snake and the fruit in the Garden of Eden. But within these two stories are at least four separate ways of considering one of the most fundamental aspects of being human: the nature of men and women, and the relationship between them (at least four ... maybe someone can find more). That’s what I want to look at today.

First, we have the version found in Chapter 1:

<p>כּו וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים, נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כִדְמוּתֵנוּ; וַיְרִדוּ בַדָּגַת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם, וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל-הָאָרֶץ, וּבְכָל-הָרֶמֶשׂ, הֹרֵמֵשׁ עַל-הָאָרֶץ.</p>	<p><b>26</b> And God said: 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.'</p>
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<p>כּז וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ, בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ: זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה, בָּרָא אֹתָם.</p>	<p><b>27</b> And God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them.</p>
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The language is famously ambiguous: “And God created **man** in His own image, in the image of God created He **him**; male and female created He **them**.” The meaning of that last clause is also not straightforward. Is the story saying simply that God created two equivalent versions of the human, one male and one female? Or is it saying that each human being is at least a little bit male and a little bit female? This ambivalence is built in to a few very simple words, giving us two different ways of understanding gender. (Parenthetically: I think these two interpretations coexist whether you take the more traditional view of gender that we older people grew up with, or contemporary approaches to gender. From a traditional perspective, one can use this text to see maleness and femaleness as two different manifestations of humanness, or to highlight that women can act or feel in ways typically considered “masculine”, and men in ways typically considered “feminine”. From the more recent perspective, the parallel to the first is the possibility of being “born in the wrong body”, with a gender identity different from one’s outer appearance. The parallel to the second is the notion of gender identity as fluid, shifting, nonbinary. It would be nice if people would use this text, and others like it, to see how others’ ways of understanding the world can coexist alongside their own, rather than using them to justify exclusion. But this is parenthetical.)

So we’ve got already two possible ways of looking at the human. The second story, in Chapters 2 and 3, also offers us at least two different perspectives. The first is in part 1 of the story, where we get the creation of woman out of man, after all the animals are found unsuitable as partners. The second is in part 2 – the snake and the fruit.

So let’s take a look at these. First, in Chapter 1 we saw that there is no “model human”: God is the model (“*b’tzelem Elohim*”). Chapters 2 and 3 give us a story in which human beings are

explicitly *not* like God: the whole appeal of the fruit is that it will make the people like God. So the humans are independent of and separate from God. Here, by contrast, we do have a “model human”. But who is it? In the first part of the story, man is the model, and woman is a secondary version of man, formed from his rib.

**כב** וַיִּבֶן יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הַצֶּלַע אֲשֶׁר-לָקַח מִן-הָאָדָם, לְאִשָּׁה; וַיְבָאָהּ, אֶל-הָאָדָם. **22** And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from the man, made He a woman, and brought her unto the man.

**כג** וַיֹּאמֶר, הָאָדָם, זֹאת הַפֶּעַם עֲצָם מִעַצְמִי, וּבֶשֶׁר מִבְּשָׁרִי; לְזָאת יִקְרָא אִשָּׁה, כִּי מֵאִישׁ לָקַחָהּ-זֹאת. **23** And the man said: 'This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.'

This kind of makes sense: if we try to look through the eyes of people who didn't know about human development, physically the female body would likely have looked like a modification of the male body, rather than the other way around.

But as the story progresses, what happens? Here we get another picture entirely. It's the woman who is approached by the snake, and it's the woman who eats of the fruit and gives it to the man. It's the woman who displays the qualities – curiosity, hunger for knowledge, willingness to try new things – that will lead her and Adam out of the garden. In this part of the story, the woman, and not the man, is the model for human behavior. So the man is the physical “model human” – but it's the woman who gets to be the model for what makes us godlike.

These two stories also present the ambivalence, or multivalence, inherent in relationships between men and women – or really in relationships between any two loving partners regardless of their sex. The first is the coming together:

**כד** עַל-כֵּן, יַעֲזֹב אִישׁ, אֶת-אָבִיו, וְאֶת-אִמּוֹ; וַדְּבַק בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ, וְהָיוּ לְבֶשֶׁר אֶחָד. **24** Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh.

And the second is the other side of relationships: the conflict that can arise when two independent individuals have to live together, perhaps wanting different things, having different needs – and both having a “selfish” (*self-ish*) desire to meet their own needs over those of the other. What's the first thing Adam does when God questions him about the fruit? He blames Eve! This is part of what it means to have eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. In all relationships there is a complicated dance of cleaving [coming together] and cleaving [splitting apart], sometimes at different times, sometimes together.

One last thing. Both the humans and the snake are described using the same word: *Arum*. The two usages are homonyms, meaning naked in the case of the humans, and something like shrewd or cunning in the case of the snake. Notably, the word is applied to both the man and the woman. So we have again the unity between the male and female we saw in Chapter 1, but in a kind of parody. There we are made in the image of God. Here the story says that what we really are, at heart, is snaky.