

Avni Shah  
May 16, 2001  
Prof. Arthur Steinberg

## **The Creation of Mankind**

One of the fundamental questions that religions seek to answer is that of origin. How was man put on earth? Why and from what was he created? Who created him? What does his creation imply about the status of human beings? Some or all of these questions are answered by a religion's creation stories. Every religion's creation myths attempt to give solutions to problems present to that religious society. Because of this, each religion may have one or more creation stories, each of those different from one another in the questions they ask and the answers they give.

### **Genesis**

In the Western world, the most well-known creation story is in Genesis (Myth A), in the Old Testament of the Bible. Surprisingly, even the Bible does not relate only a single account of Creation. In the book of Genesis itself, one can find two versions of the Creation of the world that are similar in idea, but different in content and detail. The story in Genesis I claims that God created the world and everything comprising it in six days. On the first day, God created Day and Night. Next came Sky, then Earth, and then Stars and Sun on the fourth. The fifth day was used to create water and sky dwelling creatures, and finally, on the sixth day, God created all the animals of Earth, finishing with mankind. In this version of the creation story, God created man and woman together, on the sixth day. The seventh day was Sabbath, saved for rest.

However, another version of Creation exists in Genesis II, which relates the more popular story of Adam and Eve. Genesis II starts by telling how God rested on the seventh day and then

goes into elaboration of the creation of mankind. This seems to imply that man was created after the seventh day, and during the seven days only the formation of the heavens and the earth was completed. Also in this chapter, man alone was created first, then animals, and then woman – an ordering that goes against that of Genesis I. Also, instead of creating man and woman together, man was created first, from the “dust of the ground” after which God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.” Then, while Adam was sleeping, God took from Adam one of his ribs and created Eve, or woman.

Another difference between the “two” versions of Creation, more noticeable than the afore mentioned, is in their answer of why man was created. In Genesis I, man was created to rule over all the animals. In fact, a section of Genesis I:26 reads “and let [man] 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.” In contrast, Genesis II:5 claims that man was created because there was no one to “till the ground.” The variation in each chapter’s answer to why man was created provides differing implications for the status of mankind. In Genesis I, man is supposed to be the supreme ruler, while in Genesis II, man was created merely as a servant of the land. Western religions, when viewing the status of humans, tend to take the first interpretation as indication of man’s role on earth, believing him to be superior to all other species.

Ignoring the inconsistencies, these two chapters seem to complement each other quite well. While Genesis I does not go into detail about how man was formed, it does state that God created man “in God’s image.” In Genesis II, there is no mention of why man’s form is as it is, but it does say that man was formed from the dust of the earth, and that God’s breath brought him to life. Again, viewed as a single story, each chapter develops a different aspect of Man’s

creation, and the two chapters seem to fit together. However, the differences between them lead one to believe that perhaps once, they both stood independently of one another, and were later integrated into the same story.

It is important to elaborate upon Creation as it appears in Genesis, because due to its widespread popularity, one would not expect there to be any inconsistencies or consider it to be disputable. However, differences between the two exist because Genesis I and Genesis II were written at different times, and each had to satisfactorily answer the questions of its time. Essentially, this emphasizes that Creation stories are not concrete pieces of nonfiction, but are myths that are used to propose and answer questions of the people who create them. As will be seen, many religions have several versions of creation, and each resolves its own set of questions.

## **Hindu**

The Hindu religion, unlike most western religions, does not look to only one work as the fundamental religious doctrine. Hindu religious texts consist of four Vedas: Rigveda, Sâmaveda, Yujurveda, and Atharvaveda. Each of these is divided into three types of documents, the Samhitâ, Brâhmana, and the Sûtra. The Brâhmana is then again divided into three components: Vidhi, Arthavâda, and finally the Upanishads. The Rigveda itself is made of one thousand twenty-eight hymns, and needless to say, there exists hundreds of Upanishads. Not every hymn is meant to teach Creation, but there are several sources that give their own account of the creation of the universe (Deussen, 1-2). Again, each of these varies in terms of their inquiry, and because there are many texts, these differ far more than the two chapters of Genesis in the Bible.

One type of Hindu Creation hymns is the formation of the universe through the sacrifice of Gods, demigods, or even cosmic giants. Two such myths are the Purusa-Sūkta, which translates to “The Hymn of Man” and the Viśvakarman, or “The All-Maker.” Sometimes, as in the Viśvakarman, the one doing the sacrifice is also the object of the sacrifice. The sacrificer offers his own body as a sacrificial object in order to honor himself. These types of creation myths bring about the idea of the necessity of death in order to create life.

In these myths, the *how* of Creation is answered in specific detail, as opposed to Creation in Genesis. In the Bible, it simply says “And God says..” and so it appears. There is no elaboration in terms of what was physically used to create the Sun, Sky, or Earth. However, these Hindu hymns take great pains to specify from what material things (what part of the body) each aspect of the universe was created.

In the Purusa-Sūkta (Myth B), a cosmic giant, referred to as either Purusa or “The Man,” - made of 1000 heads, 1000 eyes, 1000 feet - was believed to have “pervaded the earth on all sides and extended beyond it.” He encompassed “whatever has been and whatever is to be,” or in other words, everything that the universe needed to exist was contained in him. Starting at Verse 8, the hymn goes into detail about his sacrifice and how his body parts were used to create different parts of the world. One fourth of him was left on earth, to make everything physical in the world, and three-fourths of him “comprised what is immortal in heaven.” His fat, which can be interpreted as a mixture of butter and sour milk used in the sacrifice or as the actual “fat” from his body, formed the creatures that inhabit the air, forest, and villages. His mouth, two arms, thighs, and feet accounted for the creation of the four castes of Indian society: Brahmin, Warrior, Merchants, and Untouchables. Moon came from his mind, Sun from his eye, and Wind

from his breath. Sky, Earth, the middle realm of space, and the quarters of the sky were formed by his head, feet, navel, and ear, respectively (Radice, 29-30).

One important point about this myth is that it clearly emphasizes the fact that creation stories are meant to answer society-specified questions. A closer look at the myth shows that it does not directly address the creation of man. Instead, man's creation is indirectly implied through the creation of the caste system. Because the Indian culture focuses so greatly upon the castes of society, its importance is reflected in its Creation myth. In fact, inquiry over the origin of the caste system seems to take precedence over the origin of mankind.

As mentioned earlier, another myth that focuses creation on the sacrifice of a deity is the Viśvakarman (Myth C). However, in this myth, the creator is modeled as a sculptor, or carpenter. He is described as the One God who created the earth and sky and who had "eyes on all sides and mouths on all sides, with arms on all sides and feet on all sides" (Radice, 34-37). The One God sacrifices himself for the sake of creation, and idea very similar to that of the sacrifice of Purusa, who also extended around, through, and beyond Earth.

However, not all of the Hindu creation stories follow this pattern of sacrifice or self-sacrifice. In one of the Upanishads there is the hymn, Brihadaranyaka (Myth D), which tells an extremely unique version of creation. In this myth, God was lonely and so he split himself into two, creating Husband and Wife. From Husband and Wife together, mankind was born. After this, Wife decided that she no longer wanted to be with Husband and changed her form into a cow. In reply, he changed himself into a bull and pursued her until from them, cattle was born. She again changed form into a mare and he a stallion. From them, all hooved animals were created. This pattern continued until finally, all living creatures were brought into the world (Freund, 4-5).

In its attempt to answer how and why man was created, all of these myths have a distinct implication about the status of mankind. Man and all other animals were created by the same means, whether it be from the blood of God or directly as one of God's descendants. Therefore, all animals are partly divine, and no species has any special dominance or superiority over another. This follows the Hindu belief that all living things in the world are part of Brahma, part of the "Oneness," with no one creature being the most supreme.

### **Babylonian**

Babylonian creation stories, taken from tablets dating as early as 800 B.C., are like those of the Hindu religion in that there exist vast numbers of them, all differing from one another. One of the more elaborate stories, known as the Enûma Elish (Myth E) or the Epic of Babylonian Creation, is believed to have been written as early as 1000 B.C. According to this myth, at the beginning, there existed nothing except the divine parents, Apsû, the "primeval sweet-water ocean," Ti>âmat, the "salt water ocean," and their son Mummu, the midst between these two waters. These three bodies together contained all the components necessary for the creation of the universe.

Mummu's progeny soon begat gods and those gods begat more gods until there was so much commotion that Apsû devised a plan to destroy them all. However, Ea, the great grandson of Apsû, was a god of exceptional wisdom, strength, and magic, and was able to protect the gods from the wrath of Apsû. He killed Apsû, freeing the gods of their worry and allowing them to live happily.

However, the gods were still in danger because Ti>âmat was extremely upset by the wrongful death of her husband. She was convinced by the evil-intentioned Kingu to take

revenge. This time, even Ea was no match for Tiamat, so his only hope was to go to his son, Marduk, “the wisest of the gods.” Marduk was able to defeat Tiamat and Kingu, and was appointed supreme and undisputed ruler. After killing Tiamat, Marduk split her corpse into two, creating Heaven, Earth, and the whole universe. He then created time (months, days, and years) by setting up stellar constellations. Finally, having killed Kingu and captured all his followers, Marduk made them all the prisoners slaves to the gods. However, before long, the prisoners tired of the amount of work they were left to do and complained to Marduk. In response, out of Kingu’s blood, Marduk created man to “take over the work of the defeated army of gods and feed the host of Babylonian divinities” (Heidel, 3-10).

The most apparent noteworthy aspect of this myth is in its answer to *why*. Man was not created for some divine purpose, as implied in Genesis I, nor is he created merely as a byproduct of sacrifice. In this myth, he is explicitly created as a servant to the gods, made from the blood of the gods’ own enemies. According to this epic, man is as far from divine as he can get. Also, it is interesting to see that this myth specifically accounts for the creation of time. Perhaps this was a large concern to the Babylonians, who then felt compelled to account for time in their creation myth.

Other Babylonian creation stories also relate that man was created to serve similar functions, though not as low in status as to replace God’s enemies. In one creation story, found on a tablet in the ruins in the city of Ashur, man was created merely to be servile to the lands and the gods. Lines 26-40 state: “Let us create mankind / The service of the gods be their portion, / For all times / To maintain the boundary ditch, / to place the hoe and the basket / Into their hands / ... / to give the trench (its) right course, / To maintain the boundary stone, / To water the four regions of the earth, / To raise plants in abundance” (Heidel, 68-70). This is similar to the

second creation story in the Bible, where man was created because there was no one to “till the ground.” However, in this myth, men were not created from God’s enemies but from the blood of Lamga gods, or craftsmen gods, again implying that they are somewhat divine, but giving them no more priority than other species.

Yet another creation story, found on a tablet at Nineveh claims that man was created to be a servant. However, in this myth, man is give much higher status. In this creation myth, Ea, thought to be the same god from the Enûma Elish but referred to as Ninigiku, is the creator of the world. Once he had created all the rest of the earth and animals, Ninigiku decided that perhaps he should create someone to work with the land and animals. For that purpose, he created man, but he made man to be “more glorious than all other creatures” (Heidel, 64).

Not all Babylonian creation stories go into great detail about the creation of man. One myth, which supposedly dates back to 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C., focuses more on the creation of the earth. The city of Eridu, where this myth is believed to have originated, was formed by the continuous deposit of silt by the Euphrates River. The people who lived there came to believe that Marduk created Earth in much the same way. The tablet states, “Marduk constructed a reed frame on the face of the waters; He created dirt and poured (it) out by the reed frame” (Heidel, 62-3). This myth briefly mentions Marduk’s creation of mankind, almost as an aside, and does not even attempt to answer the questions how or why. However, it is interesting because it shows how perception of immediate environment biases religious beliefs. Had the formation of Eridu not been special, the creation story most likely would not have centered itself around the idea of deposited silt.

## **Polynesian**

In the Polynesian story of creation (Myth F), the myth claims that woman was created first. The god Tane first made a figure of the human form on the Earth Mother's body, that is, out of dirt from the surface of the Earth. Then, in order to bring forth life, he implanted in the figure waiura (spirit) and manwa ora (the breath of life), which were obtained from the Supreme Being, Io. Tane then breathed upon the figure, and the figure, with the warmth of the breath, was able to "absorb life." Finally, the Earth Formed Maid, Hine-ahu-one "sneezed, opened her eyes, and rose – a woman" (Eliade, 130). Except for the obvious difference – woman was created before man – this creation story has much in common with Creation in Genesis II. Not only was the figure of the woman formed from dirt, or dust, but also, she was given life by the breath of God, or Tane. This breath is called the "life spirit" and could have connotations similar to the Holy Spirit of Christianity.

## **Thompson Tribe**

While the Polynesian creation story seems somewhat familiar in its ideas due to its similarity to Genesis, other creation stories have nothing in common with the more well-known monotheistic and polytheistic creation stories. One such creation story comes from an Indian tribe off the North Pacific Coast. This myth does not attempt to explain why man was created, but instead seems to be accounting for the presence of good and evil on Earth. In this myth, although Man is a direct descendant of God, there seems to be no attachment between Man and God. God merely states that in the beginning, evil will seem very powerful, but in the end, good will win out. He does not care to make Man virtuous or powerful, but seems to create him with complete objectivity.

In this creation myth, God and the Five Women (Myth G), the Old Chief (or the One) came down from the upper world on a cloud down to the watery lake, which was all that existed at the time. He pulled five hairs from his head and threw them down. As he did so, each one became a “perfectly formed” woman, whom he then asked what she would like to be. The first answered, “a woman to bear children. I shall be bad and foolish, and seek after my own pleasure. My descendants will fight, steal, kill, and commit adultery.” The second woman answered also wanted to be a woman to bear children, but instead of wanting evil, she stated: “I shall be good and virtuous. My descendants will be wise, peaceful, honest, truthful, and chaste” (Eliade, 135). The third woman asked to become Earth, from which everything would grow and return to in the end. The fourth and fifth women wanted to serve man and chose to be Fire and Water respectively. The Chief then granted their wishes, creating first Earth, then Fire, then Water. Finally, he impregnated the first two women and placed them on Earth, telling them that they would be the parents of all people. And so man, both good and evil, was formed (135).

## **Zuñi**

The creation myth of the Zuñi Indians (Myth H) of New Mexico is also unique in its ideas of the creation of Man. By no means was man initially created as superior, knowledgeable beings. They are described to be vile, almost reptile-like. Eventually, they are redeemed with the help of one man who escapes and pleads with God to save them. Even after this, though, man is not necessarily raised above animals in status; he and animals together are raised above the dark-filled, innermost region of the Earth. This myth was also evidently used to explain certain observations of the world around them. It goes into great detail about the creation of the

different races and tribes that inhabit the earth, and even makes a reference to the presence of monsters in the inner regions of the Earth. The story is as follows:

At first, there was only Awonawilona, the “Maker and Container of All.” From his own flesh, he created the “Four-fold Containing Mother Earth” and the “All-covering Father Sky.” With the joining of these two, Mother Earth was impregnated with all the creatures of the Earth, man included. Before giving birth, she and Father Sky created mountains, countries, regions, clouds, grain and all else in the world.

Man and all creatures alike were born in the innermost cave in the world, the first layer of four. They grew and multiplied as imperfect beings, like “reptiles, grumbling, lamenting, spitting, and using indecent and insulting language.” One man, Poshaiyank’ya escaped to the surface and pleaded to the Sun father to help bring mankind and the animals out of their degenerate state. The Sky Father, in hopes of creating “intelligent, free and powerful beings” again impregnated Earth Mother. This time, two twins were born and were granted omnipotence and mastership of the world.

These Beloved Twain went into the depths of the earth to bring out the creatures, layer by layer, each time losing some who fell behind. (These ones who fell behind remained in the inner caves of Earth and became the “monsters and fearfully strange beings of olden time.”) The creatures ascended ladders, formed from the grass which grew tall and strong by the breath of the twins. The second layer was much like the innermost one, “dark as is the night of a stormy season.” Once this layer became too populated, men were moved, in six different groups, to the third layer. These six groups accounted for the six different races of man: “the yellow, the tawney grey, the red, the white, the mingled, and the black races.” Finally, all six groups of men made it to the third layer, where they grew and multiplied to form the tribes of the Earth. Soon

enough, they became too numerous and were led to the final layer, where “it was like the dawning, and men began to perceive and learn variously according to their natures.” Once man reached this level, the Twain taught them to worship the Sun Father, who was believed to be the teacher of wisdom and knowledge (Eliade, 130-4).

Although man is eventually taught to be knowledgeable and intelligent, God’s original intent was not to create man this way. Man was not created for some great purpose or even to serve as a servant to God, but as a misfortunate byproduct of the joining of Mother Earth and Father Sky.

### **Shilluk**

The next creation story (Myth I) is mentioned mainly because unlike all other creation stories thus far, it implies that the form of man is not to be in God’s image, but instead was modeled out of practicality. This creation story is taken from the Shilluk, in Africa. According to them, man was formed from clay, and different races can be accounted for by the different colors of clay that the Creator Juok used – white, red, and black. (Here, the Shilluk were obviously trying to account for what they observed around them). When making man, Juok gave him legs so that he could walk and run in the fields and arms so that he could “cultivate the millet.” Eyes and a mouth were necessary to see and eat the millet, while a tongue was needed to “dance and speak and sing and shout.” Finally, man needed ears to “hear the noise of the dance and speech of great men” (Eliade, 137-8).

## **A Common Thread through *How***

It would be nice to be able to find a common thread or a way to generalize the myths, but in truth, this is impossible. The only generalized similarity one can make is to say that they are all different. Each one raises its own questions and gives its own answers to those questions. However, in the creation stories researched, there were three commonly used descriptions of how man was created.

The first, as in myth A, F and I, is the creation of man from the Earth: dust, dirt, or clay. In such creation myths, the figure of man is formed from the Earth and then given life by the breath of God. Of the three types, this is the furthest Man comes to being made from God himself, for the only part of God that actually goes into man's being is his breath. However, in these myths, man seems to be given the highest status among all species. Here, he is venerated and thought to be the most intelligent and supreme species, such as in myth A, where man is given dominion over all animals.

The second type of creation is the formation of man from the blood of Gods. Such creation is seen in myths B, C, and E, where man is created either by the sacrifice of Gods, cosmic giants, or even the sacrifice of God's enemy. This is the next step up on the ladder of God's body becoming a part of man. Because man is made from God's blood, he must be somewhat divine, if not related to God in some form. However, in these creation myths, especially in B and C, all other species are made through the same sacrificial practices and from the same blood, implying that all animals are partly divine and that no one species has power over another. Myth E is in a class of its own, for man was created from the blood of God's enemy and was given the lowest status, one even lower than God's enemies.

Finally, there is creation of man as a direct descendent of God. Myths D, G, and H tell of the birth of man from a woman that God either married or pursued. In these myths, Man is not related to God through a single breath or through blood, but by sex and fatherhood. It seems that these myths tend to remove Man's status the furthest from divine. In these myths, man seems to have been created merely as an aside to God's pursuit of his wife (myth D), or of Mother Earth (Myths G and H). Here, man is given the lowest priority – not acknowledged to be even partially divine, and not created for any special purpose, not even to serve. For example, in myth H, man was originally considered to be one of the most despicable creatures in the four folds of the Earth. Although the status level of man varies in these myths, he is by far not as supreme as seen in the first category of creation.

Of course, these “generalizations” are not very strong. Any generalities I could make that would thread from one religion to another or even through all the creation stories themselves would be inherently incorrect. The above is merely an interesting observation I made while researching these different creation stories.

## **Personal**

Although both my parents are very devout Hindu's, I have never been particularly religious. I was always given the freedom to explore other religions and choose for myself which path I wanted to follow. Through my explorations with friends' religions, and especially through the material and discussions in this class, I feel I have more exposure to different religious doctrines and am more apt to make decisions about my religious beliefs. As a child of science, I do believe in the Big Bang Theory and in evolution, but this does not necessarily imply that I do not believe in God. In fact, I have found a way to reconcile the two ideas.

I thought about putting all my ideas and beliefs together and making my own creation story – a story that would answer all the questions I had about the origin of the universe and of mankind. But in doing so, I ran into a problem. I had to figure out how to explain the concept of God, and that is something I do not think that the human intelligence or capacity for language can explain. I believe that he is something beyond a physical manifestation, without shape or form. He cannot be attributed human qualities like thought or consciousness because he is entirely non-human. In trying to come up with a creation story, I found that I believe “God” to be more a force of energy that permeates through the universe, a kind of higher power. I could not say that he is conscious of what goes on, although he is a part of everything, but in a way he is “aware” of everything. He has his own way of controlling what goes on, and may or may not actively participate in everyday affairs of the universe.

In my mind, I have doubts that this higher power cares to affect every man’s actions or directly participates in everyday things. He did not create good, evil, happiness, pain, or death, but rather set the pathway for these things through the evolution of species, a scheme that he implemented. I also do not believe that man is the ultimate product of evolution; there is much time ahead of us and thereby more time for us to evolve to better suit our environment, both as it is now and as it will change over time.

I also believe that this higher power does not see time as linear, but rather past, present, and future are all one. He does not see the “end of the universe” as we see it because the term “end” means nothing to him. Similarly, he does not see the beginning of time, or the beginning of the universe as it is viewed on Earth. This is another reason we cannot explain him with our own understanding. This higher power lives in a different dimension than humans. Whereas we exist in our three-dimensional world, he may exist in a fourth, fifth, or even infinitieth.

Another question that arises, and that no religious doctrine I've seen tries to explain, is the origin of God, or a higher power. Where did he come from? Out of what did he form? Again, in trying to come up with a creation story of my own, I pondered this. For me, it was important to reconcile two seemingly contradictory beliefs: the Big Bang Theory and the concept of a higher power. But this is how I did so: Perhaps at the beginning, when all the energy and matter of the universe was gathered into one place, an instant before the universe split off into what it is now, the higher power arose. I would not say that the energy gained consciousness, because again, I do not think that you can describe the higher power in those terms. Rather, I think he somehow came into being, formed from maybe an infinite amount of energy gathered at one point, an idea partly influenced by my belief that the higher power is some form of energy. Through the Big Bang, perhaps his energy spread through the universe, permeating everything and uniting everything with his "self," his energy. This is also why I say that he is "aware" of everything – because he is present everywhere and through everything.

I know that these beliefs may seem contradictory given man's understanding of energy or physical matter. But as I have mentioned, I do not believe that one can describe the higher power with such manmade concepts and laws. However, one thing I do like about my model is that it leaves room for the creation of other species on other worlds. I have trouble believing that Earth is the only planet in the universe capable of supporting life. From this, it follows that Man was not necessarily created for some great purpose. Man may not be the ultimate product of evolution and may not even necessarily be the most developed or intelligent species in the universe. We cannot possibly fathom what plan this higher power has, or even if a plan exists, and any attempts to do so would be futile. Instead, we must live this life doing what we believe to be true and right, ideas we ourselves created and so only we can live by.

## Works Cited

- Deussen, Paul. *The Philosophy of the Upanishads*. New York: Dover Publications, 1966.
- Eliade, Mircea. *Essential Sacred Writings from Around the World*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1967
- Freund, Philip. *Myths of Creation*. New York: Washington Square Press, 1965.
- Heidel, Alexander. *The Babylonian Genesis*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954.
- The Holy Bible*. King James Version. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 2000.
- The Rig Veda: An Anthology*. Betty Radice, ed. London: Penquin Books, Ltd, 1981.