

*Selections from*

# *Creation Stories from Around the World*



*Encapsulations of some traditional stories  
explaining the origin of the Earth, its life, and its peoples*

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*This Norse story of the origin of the earth, sky, and humanity is paraphrased from Snorri Sturluson's Edda, as translated by Anthony Faulkes. Sturluson lived in Iceland from 1179 to 1241, and he apparently composed the Edda as a compilation of traditional stories and verse. Many of verses he included appear to date from the times when Norse sagas were conveyed only in spoken form by Viking bards.*

## Odin and Ymir<sup>1</sup>

In the beginning of time, there was nothing: neither sand, nor sea, nor cool waves. Neither the heaven nor earth existed. Instead, long before the earth was made, Niflheim was made, and in it a spring gave rise to twelve rivers. To the south was Muspell, a region of heat and brightness guarded by Surt, a giant who carried a flaming sword. To the north was frigid Ginnungagap, where the rivers froze and all was ice. Where the sparks and warm winds of Muspell reached the south side of frigid Ginnungagap, the ice thawed and dripped, and from the drips thickened and formed the shape of a man. His name was Ymir, the first of and ancestor of the frost-giants.

As the ice dripped more, it formed a cow, and from her teats flowed four rivers of milk that fed Ymir. The cow fed on the salt of the rime ice, and as she licked a man's head began to emerge. By the end of the third day of her licking, the whole man had emerged, and his name was Buri. He had a son named Bor, who married Bestla, a daughter of one of the giants. Bor and Bestla had three sons, one of whom was Odin, the most powerful of the gods.

Ymir was a frost-giant, but not a god, and eventually he turned to evil. After a struggle between the giant and the young gods, Bor's three sons killed Ymir. So much blood flowed from his wounds that all the frost-giants were drowned but one, who survived only by building an ark for himself and his family. Bor's sons dragged Ymir's immense body to the center of Ginnungagap, and from him they made the earth. Ymir's blood became the sea, his bones became the rocks and crags, and his hair became the trees. Bor's sons took Ymir's skull and with it made the sky. In it they fixed sparks and molten slag from Muspell to make the stars, and other sparks they set to move in paths just below the sky. They threw Ymir's brains into the sky and made the clouds. The earth is a disk, and they set up Ymir's eyelashes to keep the giants at the edges of that disk.

On the sea shore, Bor's sons found two logs and made people out of them. One son gave them breath and life, the second son gave them consciousness and movement, and the third gave them faces, speech, hearing, and sight. From this man and woman came all humans thereafter, just as all the gods were descended from the sons of Bor.

Odin and his brothers had set up the sky and stars, but otherwise they left the heavens unlit. Long afterwards, one of the descendants of those first two people that the brothers created had two children. Those two children were so beautiful that their father named the son Moon and the daughter Sol. The gods were jealous already and, when they heard of the father's arrogance, they pulled the brother and sister up to the sky and set them to work. Sol drives the chariot that carries the sun across the skies, and she drives so fast across the skies of the northland because she is chased by a giant wolf each day. Moon likewise takes a course across the sky each night, but not so swiftly because he is not so harried.

The gods did leave one pathway from earth to heaven. That is the bridge that appears in the sky as a rainbow, and its perfect arc and brilliant colors are a sign of its origin with the gods. It nonetheless will not last forever, because it will break when the men of Muspell try to cross it into heaven.

*This story is from the Kojiki, the Japanese "Record of Ancient Things". The Kojiki was compiled in the 500s to 700s A.D., at the direction of various emperors intent on standardizing and preserving Japan's mythic history. The Kojiki does not tell the story of the origin of the world and its peoples per se, but it is the story of the origin of Japan and of Japan's aristocratic families.*

## The Origin of Japan and Her People<sup>ii</sup>

When heaven and earth began, three deities came into being, The Spirit Master of the Center of Heaven, The August Wondrously Producing Spirit, and the Divine Wondrously Producing Ancestor. These three were invisible. The earth was young then, and land floated like oil, and from it reed shoots sprouted. From these reeds came two more deities. After them, five or six pairs of deities came into being, and the last of these were Izanagi and Izanami, whose names mean "The Male Who Invites" and "The Female who Invites".

The first five deities commanded Izanagi and Izanami to make and solidify the land of Japan, and they gave the young pair a jeweled spear. Standing on the Floating Bridge of Heaven, they dipped it in the ocean brine and stirred. They pulled out the spear, and the brine that dripped of it formed an island to which they descended. On this island they built a palace for their wedding and a great column to the heavens.

Izanami examined her body and found that one place had not grown, and she told this to Izanagi, who replied that his body was well-formed but that one place had grown to excess. He proposed that he place his excess in her place that was not complete and that in doing so they would make new land. They agreed to walk around the pillar and meet behind it to do this. When they arrive behind the pillar, she greeted him by saying "What a fine young man", and he responded by greeting her with "What a fine young woman". They procreated and gave birth to a leech-child, which they put in a basket and let float away. Then they gave birth to a floating island, which likewise they did not recognize as one of their children.

Disappointed by their failures in procreation, they returned to Heaven and consulted the deities there. The deities explained that the cause of their difficulties was that the female had spoken first when they met to procreate. Izanagi and Izanami returned to their island and again met behind the heavenly pillar. When they met, he said, "What a fine young woman," and she said "What a fine young man". They mated and gave birth to the eight main islands of Japan and six minor islands. Then they gave birth to a variety of deities to inhabit those islands, including the sea deity, the deity of the sea-straits, and the deities of the rivers, winds, trees, and mountains. Last, Izanami gave birth to the fire deity, and her genitals were so burned that she died.

Izanagi grieved over Izanami, and a deity was born from his tears. Distraught after burying Izanami, he used his long sword to behead his son, the deity of fire, whose birth had killed Izanami. From the blood on the sword came three deities of rocks, two deities of fire, and one of water, all of which are needed to make a sword. Eight more deities arose from the body of Izanagi and Izanami's slain son.

Izanagi still longed for Izanami, and he went to the underworld in search of her. Finding her in the darkness, he called to her and asked her to come back to the land of the living with him. She promised him that she would go ask the gods of the underworld, but she begged him to not look at her as she did so. She was gone long, however, and eventually he broke off the end of a comb in his hair and set it afire for a light. He found her body with maggots consuming it, and these maggots were the eight deities of thunder. Ashamed to be seen in this condition, Izanami chased Izanagi out of the underworld. First she sent the thunder deities after him, and then she herself pursued him. At last he grasped a huge rock and used it to close the passage to the underworld. Enraged, she shouted to him that she would each day strangle one thousand people of Japan. He responded that if she did so, he would each day cause fifteen hundred Japanese people to be born. This is why fifteen hundred children are born each day and one thousand people die each day.

Izanagi returned to his home and bathed to purify himself after this terrible experience. As he disrobed, new deities arose from his clothing, and more arose from the water as he bathed. Three of these were ancestors of Japanese

families. The last of the deities was a son, Susa-nō-wo, who became the deity of the sea. He was eventually exiled to earth for his behavior in the heavens, but he and his sister, the Goddess of the Sun, parented eight deities. Among these was the ancestor of Yamato family that ruled Japan, and two others were ancestors of nineteen of its highest families.

When the deities had pacified the land, the Goddess of the Sun dispatched Japan's first ruler from the heavens to the earth. Descending from the Floating Bridge of Heaven to the mountain tops, he built his palace. Eventually he met a beautiful young woman, Princess Brilliant Blossoms, and asked her to marry him. She deferred to her father's judgment, and her father gave him both Princess Brilliant Blossoms and her older sister, Princess Long as the Rocks. The new emperor refused the older sister, however, because of her ugliness. When the father heard this, he explained that he had offered Princess Long as the Rocks because her children would have lived eternally. Instead, the children of Princess Brilliant Blossoms were mortal, which is why the emperors have never had long lives.

Princess Brilliant Blossoms was soon with child, so soon that the emperor could hardly believe that she bore his children. To prove herself, she built a palace and shut herself in it and set fire to it, knowing as he did that the children of anyone but the emperor could not survive the flames. Amidst the flames she gave birth to three deities, and ultimately their descendants were the imperial family of Japan.

*This story is from the second and fourth Brahmanas of the Brhad-arayaka Upanishad, which was written in India in the 700s or 600s B.C. The principal actor in this story can be taken to be Praja-pati, the Lord of Creation, or Brahma the Creator. Like the original, however, this story uses "he" as its subject, because "he" may be taken more metaphorically as any sentient being who creates by his or her own thought.*

## Creation By and From The Self<sup>iii</sup>

In the beginning there was absolutely nothing, and what existed was covered by death and hunger. He thought, "Let me have a self", and he created the mind. As he moved about in worship, water was generated. Froth formed on the water, and the froth eventually solidified to become earth. He rested on the earth, and from his luminance came fire. After resting, he divided himself in three parts, and one is fire, one is the sun, and one is the air.

Thus in the beginning the world was only his self, his being or essence, which then took the shape of a person. At first he was afraid, but realizing that he was alone and had nothing of which to be afraid, his fear ceased. However, he had no happiness because he was alone, and he longed for another. He grew as large as two persons embracing, and he caused his self to split into two matching parts, like two halves of a split pea, and from them arose husband and wife.

They mated, and from their union arose the human beings of the earth. The female reflected on having mated with someone of whom she was once a part, and she resolved that she should hide so that it would not happen again. She changed to a cow to disguise herself, but he changed to a bull and mated with her, and from their union cows arose. She changed to the form of a mare, but he changed to that of a stallion and mated with her, and from that union came horses. She changed to the form of a donkey, but he did likewise, and from them arose the single-hoofed animals. She became a ewe, but he became a ram, and from their union came the sheep and goats. It continued thus, with her changing form to elude him but him finding her and mating with her, until they had created all the animals that live in pairs, from humans and horses to ants.

After all this work, he reflected that he was indeed Creation personified, for he had created all this. Rubbing back and forth, he made Fire, the god of fire, from his hands, and from his semen he made Soma, the god of the moon. This was his highest creation because, although mortal himself, he had created immortal gods.

*This Babylonian story of creation comes largely from the Enuma Elish and the Astrahasis, which appear to have been written between 1900 and 1500 BC, perhaps during the time of the Babylonian King Hammurabi. The tablets of both are broken and incomplete. At the end of the story here, the details of the creation of humans are supplemented with material from fragments of later writings. The latter may date as late as the 500's BC, but their consistency with the earlier Enuma Elish suggests that they tell the same story. The main actor in these tablets is Marduk, the most powerful of the Babylonian gods. Like most Babylonian gods, he has many names, and elsewhere he is sometimes known as Bel.*

## Marduk Creates the World from the Spoils of Battle<sup>IV</sup>

In the beginning, neither heaven nor earth had names. Apsu, the god of fresh waters, and Tiamat, the goddess of the salt oceans, and Mummu, the god of the mist that rises from both of them, were still mingled as one. There were no mountains, there was no pasture land, and not even a reed-marsh could be found to break the surface of the waters.

It was then that Apsu and Tiamat parented two gods, and then two more who outgrew the first pair. These further parented gods, until Ea, who was the god of rivers and was Tiamat and Apsu's great-grandson, was born. Ea was the cleverest of the gods, and with his magic Ea became the most powerful of the gods, ruling even his forebears.

Apsu and Tiamat's descendents became an unruly crowd. Eventually Apsu, in his frustration and inability to sleep with the clamor, went to Tiamat, and he proposed to her that he slay their noisy offspring. Tiamat was furious at his suggestion to kill their clan, but after leaving her Apsu resolved to proceed with his murderous plan. When the young gods heard of his plot against them, they were silent and fearful, but soon Ea was hatching a scheme. He cast a spell on Apsu, pulled Apsu's crown from his head, and slew him. Ea then built his palace on Apsu's waters, and it was there that, with the goddess Damkina, he fathered Marduk, the four-eyed, four-eyed giant who was god of the rains and storms.

The other gods, however, went to Tiamat and complained of how Ea had slain her husband. Aroused, she collected an army of dragons and monsters, and at its head she placed the god Kingu, whom she gave magical powers as well. Even Ea was at a loss how to combat such a host, until he finally called on his son Marduk. Marduk gladly agreed to take on his father's battle, on the condition that he, Marduk, would rule the gods after achieving this victory. The other gods agreed, and at a banquet they gave him his royal robes and scepter.

Marduk armed himself with a bow and arrows, a club, and lightning, and he went in search of Tiamat's monstrous army. Rolling his thunder and storms in front him, he attacked, and Kingu's battle plan soon disintegrated. Tiamat was left alone to fight Marduk, and she howled as they closed for battle. They struggled as Marduk caught her in his nets. When she opened her mouth to devour him, he filled it with the evil wind that served him. She could not close her mouth with his gale blasting in it, and he shot an arrow down her throat. It split her heart, and she was slain.

After subduing the rest of her host, he took his club and split Tiamat's water-laden body in half like a clam shell. Half he put in the sky and made the heavens, and he posted guards there to make sure that Tiamat's salt waters could not escape. Across the heavens he made stations in the stars for the gods, and he made the moon and set it forth on its schedule across the heavens. From the other half of Tiamat's body he made the land, which he placed over Apsu's fresh waters, which now arise in wells and springs. From her eyes he made flow the Tigris and Euphrates. Across this land he made the grains and herbs, the pastures and fields, the rains and the seeds, the cows and ewes, and the forests and the orchards.

Marduk set the vanquished gods who had supported Tiamat to a variety of tasks, including work in the fields and canals. Soon they complained of their work, however, and they rebelled by burning their spades and baskets. Marduk saw a solution to their labors, though, and proposed it to Ea. He had Kingu, Tiamat's general, brought forward from the ranks of the defeated gods, and Kingu was slain. With Kingu's blood, with clay from the earth, and with spittle from the other gods, Ea and the birth-goddess Nintu created humans. On them Ea imposed the labor previously assigned to the gods. Thus the humans were set to maintain the canals and boundary ditches, to hoe and to carry, to irrigate the land and to raise crops, to raise animals and fill the granaries, and to worship the gods at their regular festivals.

*This story is a synthesis of three stories from classical Chinese mythology. The stories come from The Classic of Mountains and Seas, an anthology of stories collected in the first century B.C. that were nearly as ancient then as the anthology seems to us today.*

## Pan Gu and Nü Wa

Long, long ago, when heaven and earth were still one, the entire universe was contained in an egg-shaped cloud. All the matter of the universe swirled chaotically in that egg. Deep within the swirling matter was Pan Gu, a huge giant who grew in the chaos. For 18,000 years he developed and slept in the egg. Finally one day he awoke and stretched, and the egg broke to release the matter of the universe. The lighter purer elements drifted upwards to make the sky and heavens, and the heavier impure elements settled downwards to make the earth.

In the midst of this new world, Pan Gu worried that heaven and earth might mix again; so he resolved to hold them apart, with the heavens on his head and the earth under his feet. As the two continued to separate, Pan Gu grew to hold them apart. For 18,000 years he continued to grow, until the heavens were 30,000 miles above the earth. For much longer he continued to hold the two apart, fearing the return of the chaos of his youth. Finally he realized they were stable, and soon after that he died.

With the immense giant's death, the earth took on new character. His arms and legs became the four directions and the mountains. His blood became the rivers, and his sweat became the rain and dew. His voice became the thunder, and his breath became the winds. His hair became the grass, and his veins became the roads and paths. His teeth and bones became the minerals and rocks, and his flesh became the soil of the fields. Up above, his left eye became the sun, and his right eye became the moon. Thus in death, as in life, Pan Gu made the world as it is today.

Many centuries later, there was a goddess named Nü Wa who roamed this wild world that Pan Gu had left behind, and she became lonely in her solitude. Stopping by a pond to rest, she saw her reflection and realized that there was nothing like herself in the world. She resolved to make something like herself for company.

From the edge of the pond she took some mud and shaped it in the form of a human being. At first her creation was lifeless, and she set it down. It took life as soon as it touched the soil, however, and soon the human was dancing and celebrating its new life. Pleased with her creation, Nü Wa made more of them, and soon her loneliness disappeared in the crowd of little humans around her. For two days she made them, and still she wanted to make more. Finally she pulled down a long vine and dragged it through the mud, and then she swung the vine through the air. Droplets of mud flew everywhere and, when they fell, they became more humans that were nearly as perfect as the ones she had made by hand. Soon she had spread humans over the whole world. The ones she made by hand became the aristocrats, and the ones she made with the vine became the poor common people.

Even then, Nü Wa realized that her work was incomplete, because as her creations died she would have to make more. She solved this problem by dividing the humans into male and female, so that they could reproduce and save her from having to make new humans to break her solitude.

Many years later, Pan Gu's greatest fear came true. The heavens collapsed so that there were holes in the sky, and the earth cracked, letting water rush from below to flood the earth. At other places, fire sprang forth from the earth, and everywhere wild beasts emerged from the forests to prey on the people. Nü Wa drove the beasts back and healed the earth. To fix the sky, she took stones of many colors from the river and built a fire in which she melted them. She used the molten rock to patch the holes in the sky, and she used the four legs of a giant turtle to support the sky again. Exhausted by her labors, she soon lay down to die and, like Pan Gu, from her body came many more features to adorn the world that she had restored.

*This story comes from the Kono people of Guinea. Like many African stories, it is as concerned with the origin of death as with the origin of life, and with the origin of the many races that inhabit the earth.*

## Death, and Life and Death<sup>v</sup>

In the beginning there was nothing: neither matter nor light existed. In this world lived only Death, whose name is Sa, and his wife and their only daughter. Needing a place for his family to live, Sa eventually used his magical powers to create a vast sea of mud. They lived in this filth and instability for many years.

Finally the god Alatangana came to visit Sa and his family. Alatangana was appalled at the mess in which they lived, and he condemned Sa for creating such a dirty place that lacked light and life. To set things right, Alatangana first consolidated the mud into the solid earth. However, this lifeless expanse across which he could now walk still depressed him. First he made plants to cover the new earth, and then animals to live on it. Even Sa realized that Alatangana had made the world a much better place, and he took Alatangana in as his guest.

Alatangana was wifeless, and eventually he decided he wanted Sa's daughter for his wife. Sa at first was diplomatic in refusing to let Alatangana marry his daughter, but finally he explicitly refused Alatangana's request. Alatangana, however, wooed Sa's daughter, and eventually they eloped to a distant region of the earth.

Alatangana and his new wife set up a happy home amidst the paradise that Alatangana had created from Sa's sea of mud. They had fourteen children. Seven were girls and seven were boys, and of each four had light skin and three had dark. This did not distress Alatangana, but he and his wife were shocked to find that their children spoke different languages that the parents did not understand.

Frustrated with this state of affairs, Alatangana finally went to Sa for advice. Sa explained that this was a curse that he had put on Alatangana's children because of the way Alatangana had stolen his daughter. Alatangana returned home, and eventually his children went off to found the peoples of the world, the French, the English, and the other European peoples, and the Kono, the Guerze, the Manon Malinke, and the Toma Yacouba of Africa.

All these descendants of Alatangana and his wife still lived in darkness, because although Alatangana had made the life that covered the earth, he had could not find a way to make light. As before, his frustration forced him to call on Sa for help, but rather than face his hostile father-in-law, he decided to send two messengers. He chose the tou-tou bird, a small red bird that is one of the first to arise each morning in the forest, and the rooster. These two birds went to ask Sa how the world could be lit so that the new peoples of the earth could see to work.

When the two presented their problem to Sa, he invited them into his home and taught them a song with which they could call forth daylight. When the two returned to Alatangana, he was furious at the nonsense they reported about a song they had learned. He nearly killed them, but eventually he sent them on their way.

Not long afterward, the rooster broke into song, and the tou-tou bird sang its first notes. For the first time, dawn began to appear, and soon it was day. The sun that they had called forth made its way across the sky, and when it set the stars appeared to provide faint light at night. Every day since has begun the same way, with the call of the tou-tou bird and the cry of the rooster.

Alatangana was grateful for the gift that he now realized Sa had given to him and his children. Sa was not long, however, in calling for payment of the debt. He came to Alatangana and pointed out the good things that he had done despite Alatangana's theft of his daughter. Now he demanded that in return he could, whenever he liked, claim any of Alatangana's offspring. Knowing his guilt and his debt to Sa, Alatangana agreed, and so it is that Alatangana's children, the human people, must meet with Death whenever he calls for them.

**A note on the next two stories:**

The Hebrew Bible, or the Old Testament, is known to modern readers from the Masoretic text, a compilation of Hebrew texts assembled by Jewish scholars in the seventh to tenth centuries A.D. from older scrolls and codices. That text, and thus the Old Testament, contains two creation stories. It is not unusual for cultures to have multiple creation stories, and throughout this booklet the paraphrases have melded two or more variations of a culture's creation story into one. However, because the two stories in the Old Testament are so different, the two stories are recounted separately here as "Yahweh" and then "The Elohim".

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This creation story is from Genesis 2:4 to 3:24 of the Hebrew Bible or the Old Testament. Extensive analysis of its style and content have led scholars of the Bible to conclude that the story was written in about the Tenth Century B.C.. That was around the time of King Solomon's reign and in a time when Israel was a powerful nation. In contrast, the story in Genesis 1:1 to 2:3 was written three or four centuries later and under very different circumstances.

The author of the story in Genesis 2:4 to 3:24 is known to scholars as "J". That is because J referred to the creator as Yahweh (יהוה or "YHVH" in ancient Hebrew, or "Jahweh" in the German native to many scholars of the Bible, or ultimately "Jehovah" in modern usage). The paraphrase below maintains J's use of the Hebrew name "Yahweh" rather than the English word "God". The latter is, after all, only a derivative of the German word "Gott" and is in no way tied to the Hebrew language of the Old Testament or even the Greek of the New Testament.

Some scholars have considered J the more primitive or rural of the two authors of the creation stories in Genesis. Others are more generous and characterize J as a poet rather than a priest. J was probably recording his or her people's oral traditions in written form. Certainly J's story is a more human story of temptation and punishment than the austere story written later by the author known as "P", and J's creator is more anthropomorphic.

In J's story, the humans that are created have names. To English speakers, "Adam" and "Eve" are just names, but "Adam" meant "man" in ancient Hebrew and may also have been a play on "adamah", the Hebrew word for "earth" or "clay". "Eve" was the word for "life".

## Yahweh<sup>vii</sup>

On the day that Yahweh made the heavens and the earth, the land was dry and barren until a mist came up from the earth and wetted the land. Then Yahweh took dust from the earth and shaped it into the form of a man, and he breathed life into that form, and it came to life.

Yahweh created a garden in a place called Eden. In this garden Yahweh placed all the trees that bear fruit, including the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. A river flowed out of Eden and watered the garden, and there it divided to become four rivers that flow to the four corners of the world. Yahweh put the man there and instructed him to cultivate the garden and to eat of whatever fruit he liked, except for fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Then Yahweh decided that the man should not be alone, and that he should have a helper. Thus Yahweh made the beasts of the field and the birds of the air, and the man gave a name to each of them. However, none were fit to be his helper, so Yahweh made the man fall into a deep sleep and took one of the man's ribs, and he made it into a woman. This man was Adam, and the woman's name was Eve.

In the garden was a snake, and the snake persuaded the woman that she could eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil without dying, and that eating the fruit would give her Yahweh's knowledge of good and evil. She ate the fruit, and she gave some to the man too. For the first time they were ashamed of being naked, and so they made aprons for themselves.

When the man and woman heard Yahweh in the garden, they hid from him, but Yahweh called them out and asked why they had hidden. The man explained that they hid because of their scanty clothing. Yahweh asked the man how they knew to be ashamed of nudity, and if they had eaten the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The man explained that the woman had eaten of the fruit and given him some too. When Yahweh asked the woman, she explained that the snake had beguiled her into eating the fruit.

Yahweh said to the snake, "Because of what you have done, you are cursed more than any other animal, and you will have to crawl on your belly in the dust, and you will be beaten by the offspring of this woman". To the woman Yahweh said, "You will be cursed with great pain in giving birth to children, yet you will have the desire to reproduce, and your husband will rule you." Finally, to the

man Yahweh said, "Because of what you have done, the ground is cursed and you will never eat of this fruit again. You will grow plants and fields and eat bread until you die, until you become the dust from which you were made."

Then Yahweh said, "This man has become like us, knowing good and evil - next he will seek the tree of life and try to live forever." Therefore Yahweh made the man and woman clothing and drove them out of the Garden of Eden, and he placed a winged half-human, half-lion creature at the Garden's gate to keep them out.

*This, the second of our two Hebrew creation stories, is from Genesis 1:1 to 2:3. It thus appears first in the Hebrew Bible's Book of Genesis, but it is actually the younger of the two stories presented there. A considerable body of scholarship over the last two or three centuries has concluded that this story was written in about the sixth century B.C. That was after Israel was conquered by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. and at a time when the Hebrews were faced with exile in Babylon.*

*The author of this later story is known to scholars as "P", because he or she wrote from a much more "priestly" perspective than J, the author of the chronologically earlier story that appears in Genesis 2:4 to 3:24 (see "Yahweh", above). P's story is one of creation ex nihilo (from nothing), and the creation is a much more stately process than that in J's story. Because of the timing of its writing and the grandeur of its language, P's story has been interpreted by scholars "as an origin story created for the benefit of a lost nation in the need of encouragement and affirmation" (Leeming and Leeming 1994, p. 113). In fact, some scholars have suggested that P's story was actually written in Babylon.*

*P used the name "Elohim" for the creator, and that usage is continued in the paraphrase below. "Elohim" (אלהים, pronounced "e lo HEEM") is actually a plural word perhaps best translated as "the powerful ones". P also used plural phrasing in the Elohim's creation of humankind "after our own likeness". Scholars have suggested that the use of the plural "Elohim" rather than the singular "Eloha" may hearken back to polytheistic roots of Middle Eastern religions and was a way to emphasize the magnitude of the deity in question. P's first people have no names at all, in keeping with the story's focus on the grandeur of the creator rather than on the created.*

## The Elohim<sup>viii</sup>

In the beginning the Elohim made the sky and the earth, but the earth was shapeless and everything was dark. The Elohim said "Let there be light," and there was the light that made day different from night. And that was the first day.

The Elohim said, "Let there be a dome to separate the heavens from the waters below," and there were the heavens. And that was the second day.

The Elohim said, "Let the waters of the earth gather so that there are seas and there is dry land," and so it was. The Elohim said, "Let there be vegetation on the land, with plants to yield seeds and fruits," and so it was. And that was the third day.

The Elohim said, "Let there be light in the heavens, and let them change with the seasons," and so there were stars. Then the Elohim made a sun and a moon to rule over the day and to rule over the night. And that was the fourth day.

The Elohim said, "Let there be creatures in the waters, and let there be birds in the skies," and so there were sea monsters and sea creatures and birds. The Elohim blessed them, saying "Be fruitful and multiply". And that was the fifth day.

The Elohim said, "Let the earth have animals of various kinds", and so it was. Then the Elohim said, "Let us make humans after our own likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, over the cattle and creeping things of the land, and over all the earth." The Elohim said to these humans, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, ruling over the fish and the birds and the animals of the land. We have given you every plant and tree yielding seed. To every beast and bird of the Earth we have given every green plant for food." And that was the sixth day.

And on the seventh day the making of the heavens and earth was finished, and the Elohim rested.

- <sup>i</sup> Snorri Sturluson 1987, *Edda* (trans. by Anthony Faulkes): London, J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 252 p. (PT 7312.E5 F380 1987)
- <sup>ii</sup> Donald L. Philippi, trans., 1969, *Kojiki*: Princeton, Princeton University Press, 655 p., and Joseph M. Campbell, 1962, *The Masks of God: Oriental Mythology*: New York, Viking Press, 561 p.
- <sup>iii</sup> S. Radhakrishnan, (editor and translator), 1953, *The Principal Upanisads*: New York, Harper and Brothers Publishers, 958 p. (BL1120.E5 R2)
- <sup>iv</sup> **Sources for “Marduk Creates the World from the Spoils of Battle”:**
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- Tikva Fryer-Kensky, (trans), *Astrahasis*, in O’Brien, Joan, and Major, Wilfred, 1982, *In the Beginning: Creation Myths from Ancient Mesopotamia, Israel, and Greece*: Chico, CA, Scholars Press, 211 p. (BL226.O27 1982)
- <sup>v</sup> Jan Walls and Yvonne Walls (translators and editors), 1984, *Classical Chinese Myths*: Hong Kong, Joint Publishing Company, 135 p. (BL1825.C48 1984)
- <sup>vi</sup> Ulli Beier, 1966, *The Origin of Life and Death* African Creation Myths: London, Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 65 p. (GR355.B4)
- <sup>vii</sup> **Sources for “The Elohim” and “Yahweh”:**
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- David Adams Leeming and Margaret Adams Leeming, 1994, *Encyclopedia of Creation Myths*: Santa Barbara, ABC-CLIO, 330 p. (BL 325.C7 L44 1994)
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- <sup>viii</sup> See previous note.