וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים ו אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם

"And G-d created the Human in G-d's likeness; G-d shaped them male and female."

בראשית א:כז | Genesis 1:27

The first edition of humanity's creation story does not begin with a man named Adam in the Garden of Eden. There is no Tree of Knowledge, animals to name, or woman taken from man's rib. Instead, the Torah tells us that humanity begins with the creation of a being: both male and female. In fact, in the first chapter of Genesis, the Human is only ever referred to in the third-person masculine plural; as is the case in modern Hebrew, the third-person masculine is used in reference to any non-singular group of people, in which at least one man is present. To that end, said Human can be understood at face-value exactly as described by the verse: both male and female.

It is not until Genesis 2:7, when G-d breathes life into *his nostrils* that the archetypal Human is referred to in the first-person masculine, singular: "וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים". It is with the pronominal suffix "יו" that Human is first described as a singular man. The Human, initially created and referred to as more of a conceptual being than an identifiable person, does not become masculine until the chapter in which woman is created by removing the first woman from the rib of the first man, both of whom are as of yet unnamed.

I argue that neither man nor woman was created in Chapter 1:27. Instead, G-d created the first human as androgynous and intersex, containing both masculinity and femininity, male and female genitalia. Therefore, the first human encompassed the ends of the entire spectrum of sex and gender.

Such an understanding is corroborated by Rashi, whose commentary cites Bereshit Rabbah 8:1: [G-d] created [the Human] at first with two faces, and afterwards He divided him. Though using the traditional masculine language for both G-d and the Human, Rashi's reference points to a figure who was not anatomically akin to the people we picture today, but rather was a

multi-faced being who was divided in Genesis 2:21. In the Midrash, Rabbi Yirmeya ben Elazar defines Adam, specifically, as androgynous; Rabbi Shmuel bar Naḥman then explains that the Human was created with two faces and two backs; essentially, the Human looked much like we imagine conjoined twins today: two people attached at the side. As such, Rabbi bar Naḥman continues, when it is written in Genesis 2:21, "וַיִּקַּח אַחַת מִצַּלְעֹתָיו", G-d did not take a rib from the side of the Human, but took an *entire side* of the first Human, to create the first woman.

In line with Rabbis ben Elazar and bar Naḥman, I would like to present that the first Human was not a man or a woman: They were both. The first human, with the sexual characteristics of both biological sexes, was inherently plural, inextricably androgynous, and indelibly intersex. It was not that woman was invented from the rib of man. It was not that femininity was born of masculinity. It was the separation of one from the other that created both. If the first human was, as the Midrash presents, initially simultaneously male and female, what does this entail for the earlier part of the same verse: בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ? G-d created humans in G-d's own image, which is clarified in the same verse to be both masculine and feminine. In the midrashic understanding, it was the Human--Adam *and* Eve, still conjoined--that resembled G-d's likeness. If the first Human, pre-bisection, was created in G-d's image and--as presented by Bereshit Rabba--the combination of the first man and woman, G-d can be understood as necessarily non-binary and intersex.

Such an androgynous creation story is entirely precedented. The Sumerians told of Enki and Ninmah who, in prototyping the humans we see today, first made a human with neither male or female sex organs.[1] Plato's *Symposium* describes that the human body used to be, in every way, double what it is now: two heads, two backs, four arms, etc.[2] There were those who were comprised by two men, those of two women, and those who were half man and half women (the

[1] "Enki and Ninmah: Translation," The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, accessed December 6, 2025, https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/section1/tr112.htm.
[2] Plato, *Symposium* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

androgyne, andro meaning male and gyne meaning female); when Zeus feared the power of these double-humans, he cut them in half and created those we know today: men; women; and those somewhere in between, always searching for their other half.[3] The traditional Kongo religion of the Bantu people of Central Africa contains a creation story, in which humans are male on their right side and female on their left.[4] The history of religion is rich with stories of an androgynous initial human, pointing toward the validity of the midrashic interpretation of a dual Human, in reference to the Torah's description of the first person as masculine and feminine. In fact, even the concept of G-d as intersex is not novel; in Hinduism, Ardhanarishvara is a deity who is split down the middle: Shiva (masculine) and Parvati (feminine).[5]

The Jewish tradition does not limit the study against a gender-binary to the first human. In Mishnah Bikkurim 4:1-5, the אַנְדְּרוֹגִינוֹס is defined as one who is similar to both men and women in some ways, only men in other ways, only women in others, and even neither in other ways even still. The אַנְדְּרוֹגִינוֹס, then, is decidedly intersex: having both male and female sex organs. Mishnah Bikkurim 4:5 then defines a טֻמְטוּם as one who is sometimes male and sometimes female.

My belief is not that G-d is intersex. I do not even believe that the rabbis were describing the first human as existing outside of the gender binary. I understand that Genesis 1 and 2 present two different creation stories.[6] Instead, I offer that the Torah--a text that has long been adapted and recontextualized with new understandings--offers an exciting opportunity for a new genre of analysis: a queer Torah. In this current contemporary era, by queer-ing the Torah, one can learn more about our Jewish tradition and the human condition.

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[3] Ibid.
[4] Kimbwandènde Kia Bunseki Fu-Kiau, African Cosmology of the BÂNTU-Kôngo: Tying the Spiritual Knot: Principles of Life & Living (Brooklyn, N.Y: Athelia Henrietta Press, Pub. in the name of Orunmila, 2001).
[5] "Ardhanarishvara: Androgynous Form, Shiva-Shakti & Hinduism," Brittanica, accessed December 6, 2025, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ardhanarishvara.
[6] Joseph Dov Soloveitchik, The Lonely Man of Faith (New Milford, CT: OU Press : Maggid Books, 2018).

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