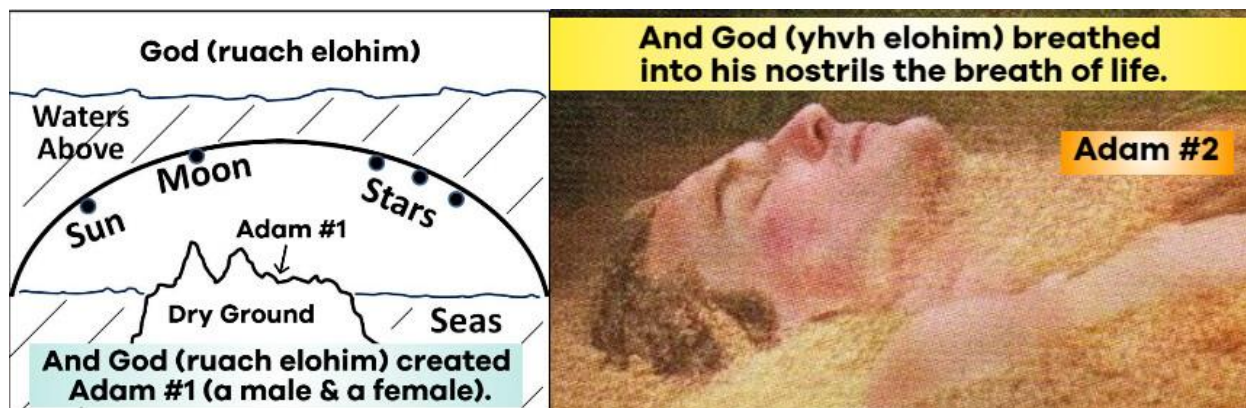


## The Jewish Paradox of God



Judaism has never been a religion of fixed doctrines or dogmas. It is, and has been, a complex system of evolving ideas and beliefs. This has created a diversity of Jewish views, but there is within those views an overarching rubric that unites Jews of every persuasion, from the most Orthodox to the most liberal or secular. This rubric, at once so dynamic and so compelling in its possibilities – *it consists of **Judaism’s “sacred narratives” (stories).*** The first two stories in Genesis are cornerstones of “*the rubric.*”

There is no one authoritative Jewish conception of God, although all Jewish thinkers agree on this:

*God is one and invisible.*

However, the *Book of Genesis* opens with two sacred stories about God that seem to be a paradox. A *paradox is a seemingly absurd or self-contradictory statement or proposition that when investigated or explained may prove to be well founded or true.* This paradox is revealed in their references to God -- “**ruach elohim**” and “**yvh elohim**.”

1. In the picture on the left identify the locations of **ruach elohim** and **Adam #1**. **The Creator of the Heavens and the Earth** is **ruach elohim**. **Adam #1** is **two people**, a male and a female.

2. In the picture on the right identify the locations of **yvh elohim** and **Adam #2**. The planter of the Garden in Eden is **yvh elohim**. He is also the **maker of Adam #2**, **animals**, **birds**, and a **female human**. **Adam #2** is **one male human**.

This is the paradox that *must always be kept in mind* when we think about the concept of God in the *Jewish Scriptures* (the *Scriptures of Jesus*).

*God (**ruach elohim**) is in a remote space that is inaccessible to humans.*

*God (**yvh elohim**) is intimately close to humans.*

1. **God is the transcendent reality which exists beyond the limits of our knowledge.** He is the most powerful force in the universe, yet He is the one least visible and knowable in the world. God creates and sustains nature, but He cannot be identified with it. He is different from nature and stands above and outside it. God created man but He cannot be compared to humanity. The world is divided into polarities of the holy and the profane, Israel and other nations, the Sabbath and weekdays, good and evil.

2. **God is the immanent reality which is an accessible, personal being.** God is a nurturing and comforting parent who is near to us and all humanity. God has created us in His image and endowed us with His own characteristics. God expects us to be like Him. God hears our prayers and answers us.

**The two ideas about God coexist within Jewish belief.** Sometimes they are intertwined into a seamless system of belief that affirms both transcendence and immanence.

- **Transcendence** is a state of being or existence above and beyond the limits of material experience.

- **Immanence** is the state of being within the limits of possible experience or knowledge.

At different times Jews believe more strongly in one idea than the other. The history of Judaism records successive attempts to find answers to the fundamental questions of human life and its meaning. These ideas are held within Jewish minds:

*Even though God is unattainable,  
we seek Him and strive for a relationship with Him.*

*Although we can never truly know God,  
we cannot resist the urge to try to understand Him.*

*God may be abstract and unknowable,  
we believe that we are created in the divine image.*

*We imagine God as transcendent and impersonal,  
yet the God we worship is also a deeply personal God.*

This is summed up in this statement – “*We can only relate to God through the world and the people He created.*”

*Teachings of the Jewish Jesus, and discussions about him,  
must begin with an understanding of the Jewish paradox about God. \**

May Your Shalom Increase,  
Jim Myers

\* **Primary Source Material for this Article**

*What Do Jews Believe? The Spiritual Foundations of Judaism* by David S. Ariel © 1995; Schocken Books, New York, NY; pp. 1-18.