

Baked into the human condition are these pulls in different directions:

Genesis 1: 27-31. And God created Adam in [God's] image, in the image of God [God] created him; male and female [or: from male to female] [God] created them. God blessed them and God said to them, “Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.” God said, “See, I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food. And to all the animals on land, to all the birds of the sky, and to everything that creeps on earth, in which there is the breath of life, [I give] all the green plants for food.” And it was so. And God saw all that [God] had made, and found it very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Genesis 2: 4-8: Such is the story of heaven and earth when they were created. When the LORD God made earth and heaven— when no shrub of the field was yet on earth and no grasses of the field had yet sprouted, because the LORD God had not sent rain upon the earth and there was no man to till the soil, but a flow would well up from the ground and water the whole surface of the earth— the LORD God formed man^bHeb. *'adam*. from the dust of the earth.^cHeb. *'adamah*. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being. The LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom He had formed.

Berakhot 61a:3-4

Rav Naḥman bar Rav Ḥisda interpreted homiletically: What is the meaning of that which is written: “Then the Lord God formed [*vayyitzer*] man” (Genesis 2:7), with a double *yod*? This double *yod* alludes to that fact that **the Holy One, Blessed be He, created two inclinations; one a good inclination and one an evil inclination. Rav Naḥman bar Yitzḥak strongly objects to this: If that is so, does an animal, with regard to whom *vayyitzer* is not written with a double *yod*, not have an inclination? Don't we see that it causes damage and bites and kicks?**

Rather, interpret the double *yod* homiletically, **in accordance with** the opinion of **Rabbi Shimon ben Pazi**, as **Rabbi Shimon ben Pazi said**: This alludes to the difficulty of human life; **woe unto me from my Creator [yotzri] and woe unto me from my inclination [yitzri]**. If one opts to follow either his Creator or his inclination, woe unto him from the other.

[Sanhedrin 38b:2](#)

Rabbi Yoḥanan bar Ḥanina says: Daytime is twelve hours long, and the day Adam the first man was created was divided as follows: In the **first hour** of the day, **his dust was gathered**. In the **second**, an undefined **figure was fashioned**. In the **third**, **his limbs were extended**. In the **fourth**, **a soul was cast into him**. In the **fifth**, **he stood on his legs**. In the **sixth**, **he called** the creatures by the **names** he gave them. In the **seventh**, **Eve was paired with him**. In the **eighth**, **they arose to the bed two, and descended four**, i.e., Cain and Abel were immediately born. In the **ninth**, **he was commanded not to eat of the Tree** of Knowledge. In the **tenth**, **he sinned**. In the **eleventh**, **he was judged**. In the **twelfth**, **he was expelled and left** the Garden of Eden, **as it is stated: “But man abides not in honor; he is like the beasts that perish”**

But all of this is good?!

Aviva Gottlieb Zornberg writes in *The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis*: “At the very end of the saga of Creation, just before the Sabbath (and therefore after Adam has begun to “evaporate”) the Torah says, “And God saw all the He had made and found it very good. And there was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day” (1:31). God reviews a work of art that now includes failure and death, and calls it – as never before – *very good*. . . Why is the totality of things very good, since it now implicitly includes exile and shame, the flattening and dulling of the human body and face?”

Zornberg goes on to cite many scholarly attempts to answer that question, but I think that the answer is in the premise of the question: from an individual human perspective, death and failure are uncomfortable. We might label them as bad.

But from the perspective of an evolving drama of communal existence, death and failure are necessary threads in the whole fabric. There is a conversation in the Talmud Avodah Zara in which Reish Lakish says, essentially, “how fortunate are we that our ancestors sinned and had to die, for if they had not, there would be no place for us in this world.”

A world already perfect is a world without any dynamism or innovation. So I love the hint that this midrash offers that the human condition – of failure, of pulls in different directions – is part of the greatness of creation, a necessary element rather than an aberration.

Tamar Biala: “Elohin cries out in pain: curses the Serpentess – umbilical cord, tied at one end to her, and at the other to her offspring. She cuts it sharply, utterly separating Herself from the Chovah. . . The insult felt by Elohin, the mother who wished to raise and feed her children inside her, echoes. But by now they know how to eat by themselves and she sends them away from the Garden, which is for fetuses only.”

As a mother, I celebrate even as I mourn my child’s acts of differentiation. The greatest joys are the joys of startlement – when my child makes a statement using words I didn’t know she knew- or shows me that she can succeed on climbing something I didn’t know she could climb. Each of these achievements take her further out of the realm of my protection – but each of them are *very good*.