

God creates the human and blows the breath of life into his nostrils (Gen. 2:7). The technical term for this is that he **suscitates** him. God then plants a garden and **places the human being in the garden** (2:8). That is the first account of how the human creature ended up there. The Torah then digresses and tells us how God has made the garden spring up with beautiful trees, including the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (2:9). It digresses again and describes how one river flows into the Garden and four rivers that branch out from it (2:10-14). But then, at the conclusion of this little story, it gives us a second account of how God **put the human in the garden**.

First account:	וַיֵּשֶׁב ה' אֱלֹהִים גֶּן בְּעֵדֶן מִקְדָּם וַיִּשָּׂם שָׁם אֶת הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר יָצָר. <i>God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he placed the human whom he had formed. (Gen. 2:8)</i>
Second account:	וַיִּקַּח ה' אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם וַיַּנְחֵהוּ בֵּגֶן עֵדֶן לְעֹבְדָהּ וּלְשִׁמְרָהּ. <i>God took the human and set him in the Garden of Eden to work it and guard it. (Gen. 2:15)</i>

These two accounts suggest very plainly that the human creature was created before the Garden existed, and only once the Garden existed, was the human creature placed in it. Many possible interpretations and themes can be derived from this little story, including these three: **1. From "Wildness" to Civilization.** For however long it took God to make the Garden, the human being existed in a pre-Edenesque or "wild" state. "Wildness" therefore, exists deep within collective human memory, and the story that Genesis is telling here is about the movement of human beings from a "wild" state to a "cultivated" state. While paleoanthropology tracks the story of human evolution in the fossil and archeological records, these verses offer their own nod to what we understand about the development of human beings from their "wild" uncivilized pre-hominin ancestors. *When God takes the human creature and places him in the Garden, God is dislocating the human creature from its wild surroundings and relocating him to a place where he can create a culture.*

2. Home: The human experience includes a series of transitions, the most important of which is the transition from homelessness to home. God creates the human and understands that he will require a zone of shelter and a set of boundaries. *By placing the human in the Garden, God establishes home at the center of human consciousness.* Companionship as an antidote to human loneliness will follow. Eventually, when the first human couple is ejected from the Garden, they will have to create their own home somewhere. Home, dislocation, relocation, exile, and return, become some of the great themes of the Bible.

3. Life. The Garden is a place that is pulsating with life. It is abundant with vegetation and animals. The human is created from earth and is brought to life. The transition from lifelessness to life is fragile. It is akin to birth. *The Garden is the "rehab" center of the Creation story.* It is the place where the human can recover from God's **suscitation** and can develop quickly into a fully functioning creature. The midrash (Gen. Rabbah 15:4) explores a different dimension of this transition. Two of our favorite rabbinic debating partners, R. Yehuda and R. Nehemia, imagine the process quite differently.

וַיִּשָּׂם שָׁם (בראשית ב, ח). רבי יהודה ורבי נחמיה. רבי יהודה אומר: עלה אותו... רבי נחמיה אומר: פתה אותו...
“He placed there [vayasem sham] [the man]” – R. Yehuda and R. Nehemia debated this text. R. Yehuda said: He elevated him... R. Nehemia said: He enticed him...

Both provide arguments from relevant prooftexts. (R. Yehuda relates the word for placing שָׂם to the appointment of a king: **שׂוֹם תָּשִׂים** – You shall set [som tasim] a king over you (Deut. 17:15), that the person you designate as king is elevated from the rank of ordinary person to the rank of king. R. Nehemia derives the idea of enticement from a complicated series of prooftexts from which he creates the analogy that God is like a king, and the first human is like a guest. Just as a king invites a guest to a royal palace, God invited the human to the Garden of Eden). The two rabbis keep their debate going on the second of the two verses. (Gen. Rabbah 16:5)

וַיִּקַּח ה' אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם וְגו' (בראשית ב, טו). רבי יהודה ורבי נחמיה. רבי יהודה אומר: עלה אותו, הִיד מַה דָּאֵת אָמַר (ישעיה יד, ב): וְלִקְחוּם עִמָּי וְהִבִּיאֹם וְגו'. רבי נחמיה אומר: פתה אותו, הִיד מַה דָּאֵת אָמַר (הושע יד, ג): קחו עִמָּכֶם דְּבָרִים וְשׁוּבוּ אֶל ה' וְגו'.
“The Lord God took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden, to cultivate it and to keep it” (Genesis 2:15). “The Lord God took [vayikah] the man...” – Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Nehemia debated this text. Rabbi Yehuda says: He elevated him, just as it says: “The peoples will lift them up [ulkahum] and bring them...” (Isaiah 14:2). Rabbi Nehemya said: He enticed him, just as it says: “Take [kehū] words with you and return to the Lord...” (Hosea 14:3).

Again, both provide support for their positions based on prooftexts. (R. Yehuda connects וַיִּקַּח to the verse in Isaiah that refers to the elevation of the House of Jacob from exile back to the Land, and R. Yehuda connects וַיִּקַּח to the verse in Hosea that refers to persuasion and repentance.)

But What are R. Yehuda and R. Nehemia really arguing about?

Elevation vs. Enticement: What's the Difference?

Whenever we come across a debate between these two rabbinic figures, we are seeing a clash of two very different worldviews. It is always very tempting to hypothesize that these views correspond to conservative and liberal views, but that is just us projecting our own opinions onto the ancient sources. What is so important in examining these debates is that there is never a declared winner or loser. Both represent legitimate schools of thought, and both share equally in the expansion of our understanding of the issues. They are complimentary and interdependent. The tradition needs them both, and they, like the other great debaters in rabbinic literature, teach us how to disagree and learn from each other without becoming disagreeable and stuck in our own opinions. ***Their views on how the human being was placed in the Garden offer us two views about human dignity.***

When R. Yehuda says that the human being was **elevated** to the Garden of Eden, he is saying that originally, human beings were indistinguishable from all other creatures. When the human moved from outside the Garden to inside the Garden what we are seeing is an **elevation** in human dignity. That **elevation** is because God ordained it so. God gives the human being the status of "resident of the Garden" because that's what God wants for human beings. That is God declaring that humans have dignity. That **elevation** can only be a result of a divine imperative. In R. Yehuda's view, God runs the world and determines the place and status of every creature in the world. The human creature has no say in where he is going to end up. ***Human dignity is solely the prerogative of God.***

R. Nehemia offers a different philosophy of human dignity. When he says that God **enticed** the human being into the Garden, ***he is presenting the human being as an active participant in his transition from outside the Garden to inside the Garden.*** For R. Nehemia, the human creature's dignity is a result of his agency, desire, and will, since he could have always turned down the invitation. His acceptance of God's invitation demonstrates his willingness to enter the Garden.

R. Yehuda - God Elevates the Human	R. Nehemia - God Entices the Human
<i>Humans derive their status because of God's will.</i>	<i>Humans derive their status because of their own agency.</i>
<i>Human dignity depends only on God's will.</i>	<i>Human dignity depends on human will.</i>
<i>God runs an ordered world by decree.</i>	<i>God runs an ordered world by persuasion.</i>
<i>God wants humans to follow God's decree.</i>	<i>God wants humans to be partners with him.</i>
<i>The human's ejection from the Garden is a punishment from which human beings will learn to obey God.</i>	<i>The human's ejection from the Garden is a necessary stage in the process of learning to be like God.</i>

A Final Thought: On the Freeing of the 20 Hostages

We watched the events of earlier this week play out with great emotion. One could hardly hold back tears seeing families come together and clutch their loved ones with unimaginable intensity. These reunions have enlivened us and given us great hope that we will enter an era of healing and renewal. This feeling however, remains incomplete while the bodies of so many slain hostages still away repatriation to Israel for a proper Jewish burial. ***To the 20 hostages that survived two years of captivity, their release is a transition from death to life.*** Being held hostage, shackled, starved, tortured, beaten, and in some instances literally held in cages, was, for them, to encounter death. Survival requires choosing life at every instance. Every moment of every day was focused on survival and the choices necessary for survival. In the context of these events, the text about God taking the human and placing him in the Garden has an added dimension of allegorical meaning for us. ***It is one thing to be taken from the wild and placed into a structured environment. It is another thing to be brought home. But it is yet another thing entirely to be brought back to life.*** In the most dramatic sense, outside of the Garden is where evil and chaos reign. Outside the Garden there is danger, vulnerability, and the fear of calamity and death. Inside the Garden is order. Protection. Kindness. Love. In a word: Life. It is not farfetched to imagine that to the released hostages, their first moments in freedom, the first taste of their mother's chicken soup, their first embraces with wives, girlfriends, children, parents, were like the Garden of Eden. The transition from captivity to freedom meant being plucked out from underground and brought literally above it as the dawn rose for a new day. As former hostages and survivors attest, the path of recovery is long and not without complications. But during these moments we witnessed something akin to the miraculous, the restoration of life. And if we allow ourselves to stretch our imaginations a little further, what we witnessed also was a glimpse of



Eden. Shabbat Shalom! Avinatan Or reuniting with his parents.

We pray for the repatriation of the bodies of the slain hostages that remain in Gaza, that their grieving families may attain a measure of peace in knowing they have a final resting place. AMEN.