To highlight the above understanding of myth there are two quite different accounts of creation in the book of Genesis. The oldest creation story is in Genesis chapter 2 verses 2-25. It is beautifully rich and colourful story that is centred on humankind as well as being a very anthropomorphic text in which God is depicted with human characteristics. In Genesis 2, God’s hands mould an earthling from the earth. The Hebrew adam is a generic term for humankind but for our purposes here we will translate it more literally as earthling or earth being. This earthling was without a companion so God continues moulding animals from the earth but none of the are suitable companions or the earthling (Genesis 2:18-21). So, to resolve the situation of loneliness god finally cuts the earthling in half (Genesis 2;21-23). The Hebrew word tsela (Genesis 2:21) which is generally translated as “rib” but means both “side” and “rib”, can be translated in either way. It makes more sense to suggest that God took a whole side of the earthling and closed it up in flesh and formed a woman. Now at last an equal companion has been found and he earthling exclaims in delight and perhaps somewhat narcissistically:

This at last is bone form my bones,
And flesh form my flesh!
This one is to be called woman (ishah)
For this one was taken from man (ish) (Genesis 2;23)

The Hebrew text thus underscores the rather beautiful idea that he earthling (adam) is only fully man (ish) after ishah (woman) is created. The two need each other to be sexually differentiated. It is only when woman exists does the earthling biome man. Unfortunately such finer points of language do not come across in translations.

Genesis 1:1-2:4 is a very different account of creation. It is a later text in many ways, and priestly scribes probably edited it in the sixth century BCE, around the time of the Babylonian exile. Whereas Genesis 2, the older account, is from the oral tradition and seemingly sources from the 10th -9th century BCE, however, to return to Genesis 1. It is a majestic text not centred on humankind, as genesis 2, but on God. it is not an anthropomorphic text for here God simply speaks and creation happens in a very ordered way, in fact in a contrived order, based on the seven days of the week. The priestly themes are predominantly present in this chapter – the transcendence of God rather than the immanence of God and the orderliness of the events indicating God’s total control. By way of contrast, in Genesis 2, God has problems to solve in creating, especially that of loneliness and companionship. The mention of festivals and time calculations were the domain of the priests (genesis 1:140. The declaration that God made the sun and moon which we worshipped by other cultures also betrays a priestly teaching (Genesis 1:15-19)) that God is greater that he sun and the moon. Many commentators suggest that genesis 1 was a liturgical hymn –again a priestly link. The refrain structures of the verses, as will be noted below, reinforce a hymn-like, chant-like structure. Genesis 1- the first creation account in the Book of genesis – is a poetic masterpiece. The refrain structure provides a rhythmic, verse formation. “God said let there be …and so it was…” is repeated seven times. The word creation in this first account is simple and easily accomplished. Whereas the second account in Genesis 2 is very tactile and hands on. God moulds every creature from the earth except woman. Another refrain feature on Genesis 1 is noted in the repetitio “evening came and morning came the first (second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth) day”. Such repeated sections point to an ancient and oral tradition even though the final editing of this text is relatively late. In refrain mode again the statement “and God called…" is reiterated as if to emphasis the relationship with God of all
created things as well as the nurturing influence of God over what is made. In this account God names everything whereas in Genesis 2 the earth being (adam) names the other animals. A final refrain “and God saw that it was good” is also repeated seven times. The goodness of creation refrains culminate in the positive “and it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). An obvious meaning of the Genesis 1 creation myth would have to be the wholesomeness of creation which was made by God who effortlessly initiates everything and creates order out of chaos especially out of the chaos of nothingness.

A sample of the literary art of the text lies in the first two verses:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth formless and void and darkness was upon the face of the deep. But God’s spirit hovered over the face of the waters.

(Genesis 1:1-2)

The Hebrew text does not have the definite article (in the beginning) that is included in most translations hence “in a beginning” above. This indefiniteness of the original authors/editors is a remarkable, accurate instinct. The Hebrew tohu (formless) and bohu (desolate), which are very difficult to translate, sound sinister, menacing and almost onomatopoeic. Another “nasty” sounding phrase follows “darkness was upon the face of the deep”. It reads like a watery chaos. Thus far we have God, the heavens and the earth, which is formless and desolate, and dark, deep waters. But the literary balance of the text juxtaposes the reassuring words “but God’s spirit hovered over the face of the waters” – establishing some sort of authority over the watery depths.

The creation of humankind (Genesis 1:26) is in the image and likeness of God, ‘male and female God created them” (Genesis 1:27). God’s final act of creation on the seventh day is to rest. An important psychological creation- even God must rest. Of course there is a priestly interest here linking his resting of God into the keeping of the Sabbath.