

**II. In the Image of God**  
First Morning of Rosh HaShanah  
Thursday, September 13, 2007

**High Holy Days 5768**  
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Ohr Shalom Synagogue

Boker Tov. Shanah Tovah. Last night we looked at the Zohar's understanding of an incredible verse from the creation story:

וְנָהָר יֹצֵא מֵעֵדֶן לְהַשְׁקוֹת אֶת-הַגָּן. And a river flows from Eden to water the garden.

We talked about how a constant flow of blessing, the river, comes from God, from Eden, to water the garden, and we the people are the garden. We tried to understand how to best put ourselves into the flow, to be nourished and grow. See, for those who were here last night, it can be summarized into one sentence.

But for this morning, I want to start with something a bit different. I want to swim upstream, as it were, and try to learn a little about God, from whom the river flows. Trust me?

Deep breath. Close your eyes. Another deep breath. In your mind's eye . . . picture God. See it. Okay, one more deep breath. Open your eyes.

Raise your hand if you pictured something filled with beauty, or love, or life?

I am not sure how many people pictured an old man, long beard, stern looking. Doesn't tend to be the most common image of God anymore. God the Father, or perhaps Great-Grandfather, seems to have gone out of fashion. Just as well, never my favorite image.

I love the irony that we are taught that we are created in the Divine Image, and then flip that on its head and paint God to look like us. But Torah doesn't tell us that God looks like us, it tells us that we resemble God, and that is actually quite different.

We are the copy. God is the original, not vice-versa.

So how do we know that we are created in God's image? My favorite answer to any question: Torah tells us so. It is text number one on page two of the handout.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֵׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ

And God said, Let us make humanity in our image, after our likeness.

It doesn't get any more explicit than that. Simply that God decides that we should be created in the Divine Image. And amazingly, God creates us in the Divine Image, all of us, boys and girls.

וַיְבָרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצַלְמֵי אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם

So God created man in God's own image, in the image of God created God him; male and female God created them.

So there is no distinction between the genders, and no story about a rib. That will be in the second creation story. But notice, from inception, or conception, humanity is designed in the Divine Image.

And do not think that God is neutral about this. Remember, God designed them this way. And, in case you missed the point:

וַיְבָרֵךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶתְהָאָרֶץ

And God blessed them, and God said to them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth.

God blessed them. Nice. And what does it mean to be in the Divine Image? Well there is a midrash that says, they are told to have dominion over the rest of the animals – just like God is the boss in God's world, humanity is the boss in ours. A little subtler but there, just as God fills this world with life, so too are we called on to fill this world with life. All-in-all a good thing to be created in the Divine Image.

This is the core of the classic understanding, generated from this first creation story, that we resemble God not in fingers and toes, but in our actions in this world. As Moshe Cordovero writes throughout his wonderful Tomer Devorah we must resemble God in our deeds or else we will have debased that image, and made ourselves ugly.

Now on to Genesis two, creation story two, which is text number two on page two.

In this creation story, is humanity created in the Divine Image?

We are reading texts that you know. Texts, that hopefully you look at, minimally once per year. In fact, the two creation stories are exactly the texts that I taught on my tryout Shabbos at Ohr Shalom a little over four years ago.

So . . . is humanity created in the Divine Image in Genesis two. Nope. Not that I can see.

So in the second creation story, humanity is made from dirt, right, the dust of the earth, and the breath of life blown in through our nostrils, but nothing about the Divine Image.

Interesting. Also, no boys and girls, just Adam, and no be fruitful and multiply, no fill the earth. The tradition refers to this original Adam as androgynous, meaning boy and girl together, because when God separates Adam into two, then we get the boy and the girl.

Adam is lonely. There is nothing in creation like him. Just like the midrash quoted above, here to, it says, just like God is unique in the world above, so too was Adam made unique in this world.

But Torah does not say that Adam resembled God, or that Adam was created in the Divine Image.

That changes when God divides Adam in two, and we get male and female. Now God is able to give Adam an עֵצָר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ, a partner who is like him.

Finally, when Adam awakes from his surgery, now he is a man, he sees the woman, and Torah quotes for us the first recorded words of humanity:

וַיֹּאמֶר הָאָדָם זֶאת הִפְעַם עִצָּם מֵעֲצָמַי וּבָשָׂר מִבְּשָׂרִי לְזָאת יִקְרָא אִשָּׁה כִּי מֵאִישׁ לְקָחָהּ זָאת:

And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.

Still nobody resembles God, but lo and behold, what two look alike now? Adam doesn't say that she was created in his image, but he sees that they bear a striking resemblance to each other – bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh.

And the resemblance is not only skin deep. It doesn't say they have the same eyes, or hair, or cheek bones, but they deeply resemble each other.

Neat. The first thing that humanity resembles is each other. So for those who think opposites attract, male and female are seen here as cut from the same cloth, as it were, and:

עַל־כֵּן יַעֲזֹב־אִישׁ אֶת־אָבִיו וְאֶת־אִמּוֹ וְדָבַק בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ וְהֵיוּ לְבָשָׂר אֶחָד:  
וַיְהִי שְׁנֵיהֶם עֶרְוָמִים הָאָדָם וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וְלֹא יִתְבַּשְׂטוּ:

Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

Sounds like they find this to be a good thing. Notice, in the first creation story, in the Divine Image is linked to conquering the world and reproducing. In the second story, being in each other's image, is arousing, charged with sexual energy, and mutual since neither was ashamed. And it doesn't say be fruitful and multiply, it says cling to each other and become one flesh. Those two are definitely related, but they are not exactly the same.

We have sexual energy, not tension, fully consummated and celebrated. And still no Divine Image.

Let's keep reading the story. You know what happens next, they both eat from the Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, from which they were commanded not to eat.

(Actually, tomorrow we are going to see if the Zohar agrees that they were told not to eat of the fruit of that tree. Do your homework and see what you can come up with.)

So they eat. God punishes them. You may remember my comment about the punishments from previous High Holy Days. If not, ask me later.

And what happens after they are punished?

Adam names his wife. And he gives her not just any name, but a beautiful name of blessing:

וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ חַוָּה כִּי הִוא הִיְתָה אִם כָּל־חַי:

And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living.

Now we acknowledge the fruitful and multiply, and it is a blessing, but not directly from God. Adam is the source of the blessing, and Eve is blessed as a creator of life. Two

Divine roles, blessing and creating life, usurped by the creation, in a powerful loving manner. The punishments do not drive a wedge between these two who resemble each other, they bring them closer. Adam blesses Eve. They find comfort together.

And then God does something incredible. God the punisher, now, perhaps moved by the power of the love and care between these two who resemble each other, becomes God the comforter:

וַיַּעַשׂ ה' אֱלֹקִים לְאָדָם וּלְאִשְׁתּוֹ כִּתְנֹת עוֹר וַיַּלְבָּשֵׁם:

For Adam and for his wife the Lord God made coats of skins, and clothed them.

So nothing about Adam and Eve being in the Divine Image, but look what has happened, God has started behaving like Adam and Eve. God is now acting in the human image, and it is a good look. A better look, in my humble opinion, than God the punisher.

I need to make sure you see that, God responds to Adam and Eve's tenderness with Divine tenderness – the human behavior or attribute is transformed into a Divine Behavior or Attribute. And it is very good.

So, now we have God and humanity looking like each other, only it is based on humanity's actions, not God's.

And God sees it.

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֱלֹקִים הֵן הָאָדָם הָיָה כְּאֶחָד מֵעָמָנוּ לְדַעַת טוֹב וָרָע

And the Lord God said, Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil.

God acknowledges that now humanity is like God, resembles God. In what capacity? In the capacity to distinguish good and evil.

Be careful, remember the deed for which they are punished, eating the fruit, occurred before they could distinguish good from evil, right from wrong. Once they learn the distinction, they choose the good. They care for each other, and they inspire God to care for them as well.

But now God is threatened. God is concerned:

וַעֲתָה פֶּן־יִשְׁלַח יָדוֹ וְלָקַח גַּם מֵעֵץ הַחַיִּים וְאָכַל וַתְּחִי לְעֹלָם: וַיִּשְׁלַחַהּ ה' אֱלֹקִים מִגֶּן־עֵדֶן

Now, what if he puts forth his hand, and takes also from the tree of life, and eats, and lives forever; and the Lord God sent him out from the Garden of Eden.

So resembling God is a result of independence and the subsequent choice to care for each other. And the consequence of being in the Divine Image is expulsion from the garden.

Huh?

That doesn't seem right. How can it be that we only gained being in the Divine Image after we ate what we were told not to eat, and how could it be that our subsequent behavior in the face of punishments moves God to compassion, and then we get expelled?

What is the nature of the Divine Image, and why now that we earned it or achieved it, must we leave the garden?

A few things should be clear:

First, being in the Divine Image is predicated on a level of independence. The animals of creation cannot be in the Divine Image because they lack the ability to reason and to choose.

Second, we must have the option of bad choices. The only way that choosing well can be of significance is if choosing poorly is sometimes a compelling option, sometimes even more compelling than choosing well.

Third, the Divine Image is linked directly to our ability to distinguish right from wrong. The moral decision to eat or not to eat, is only a moral decision after they eat. In their innocence, the decision to disobey is not evil, the category doesn't even exist. However, after they eat they are then moral beings, and can be judged. When their actions after the gaining of Knowledge of Good and Evil are scrutinized, Adam and Eve appear to be exemplars of virtue and should be praised.

Fourth, God does not always act in a manner we would label as Godly or in the Divine Image. That is, there is a standard of moral conduct inherent in the term Divine Image, and even God sometimes fails to measure up to the standard.

Finally, at the core of the story of Adam and Eve is their relationship or resemblance to each other. As bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh, they walk together as sacred partners and they band together in the face of all that is beyond their control. And when they do so, God shows them loving kindness as well.

So, why did they have to leave the garden? Easy. Creation was completed in the garden. God rested, all was done. There is no place in a world like that for two such powerful beings. They had gained independence and moral reasoning, and they discovered they could be loving to each other, by choice. They could bless each other. They could create new life, choosing this blessing conscious of the consequences – Eve, it is going to hurt again, and Adam, you are going have to put in more hard hours in the field. And they choose this, together.

Not only do they create new life, but when they behave this way, they even inspire God to behave this way. Adam and Eve can define the Divine Image, and God will appear that way in this world. Their goodness creates a Good God and a good world.

So where does that leave us, this first day of the New Year? How do we understand ourselves as being created in the Divine Image?

I would suggest that we are still on the trajectory of on-going creation. We are still in formation. We are still digesting the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. We are not all that far from where we were that day we left the garden.

For all of the conveniences of the contemporary world, for all of the knowledge and wisdom acquired over the past millennia, who among us aspires to more than finding a true life partner to share the road, a real partner bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh, a person with whom we can be completely naked, vulnerable, no secrets, and at ease. And as I said last night, the reality is no longer limited by the model of Adam and Eve. People find their עֵצֶר כְּנֻדָּוּ, their soul mate as it were, in a spouse, or a life partner, or a best friend.

And, who among us would not trade away all our fancy clothes for one pair sewn directly by God's hand?

Now we set our path for the coming year. We choose our journey companions. We decide whether or not we will be menschen, ethical beings, lovers of Goodness and Compassion no matter what life doles are way.

And God will respond. When we are loving, God will be loving. We will be in the Divine Image because God will treat this world, as we treat it and one another.

Are you ready to accept the responsibility of being loving, so God will be loving, being forgiving so God will be forgiving, being compassionate so God will be compassionate?

If we all behave Godly, we can inspire God to behave Godly and we will live in a Godly world. We will dictate the quality of this, our joint creation.

As we continue to roam outside of the garden let us continue to build partnerships and community together, all of us as bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh and let us build towards a caring future.

This new year will bring us opportunities to bring these lessons to bear, at work, at home, on election day. Dear God as we have eaten from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, as you have seen within us the potential that we resemble Divine Beings at our best and theirs, help to teach us and guide us in straight paths for your name's sake.

Amen.