

SERMON – Transgender Day of Remembrance

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THE IMAGE OF GOD

Part I: INTRODUCTION TO LECHA DODI

In Genesis, when God creates humankind, it reads:

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים | אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם:

And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

It is a curious line, that God creates man, and then it says, “male and female He created them.” Is it him or them? Is it one or more?

The Rabbis noticed this, and there is a fascinating line of commentary that seems particularly right to share today.

In the Midrash called *BREISHIT RABBAH* we read:

... Said R' Yirmiyah ben Elazar: In the hour when the Holy One created the first human, He created him [as] an androgyne/androgynos, as it is said, “male and female He created them”. Said R' Shmuel bar Nachmani: In the hour when the Holy One created the first human, He created [for] him a double-face/di-prosopon/du-par'tsufin, and sawed him and made him backs.

In other words, the first person was, in our tradition, neither male nor female, but a blend of both, and the pronoun was ‘them.’

I will say more about this later, but as we are about to sing Lecha Dodi, this is particularly relevant.

Lecha Dodi imagines the male and female aspects of God as having become separated, and so not completely whole. On Shabbat, our mystics imagined the two aspects of God reuniting and so at peace and whole.

We can imagine God, and in God's image, the first person, *Ha Adam*, to have been whole because they contained all genders and were not yet separated – sawed - into binary male and female.

Like our Midrash, we can see this not as a story of male and female, of complementary opposites, but instead that wholeness is beyond gender, beyond the divisions we live with and we create, and that all humans are one family, are in the image of God, and that all genders are part of each of us.

Part II: WHOLENESS IS THE IMAGE OF GOD

Earlier I spoke about the creation of humankind, and how the first human was androgynous, not yet divided into genders. All genders were potential within the first Adam.

Our rabbis point out that this was to show that all human beings are one family, or connected, are equal.

More than that, we are created *b'tzelem Elohim*, in the image of God.

Rabbi Yitz Greenberg takes this belief, and from it frames what he calls THE THREE FUNDAMENTAL TRUTHS about human nature in Judaism.

- 1. We are each of infinite worth – no one is expendable, and we cannot quantify the value of any human life*
- 2. We are all fundamentally equal – no human being is any more important than any other human being.*
- 3. We are each totally unique – there is no one else like us, and no one is interchangeable with anybody else.*

In my Introduction to Judaism class we were talking about this, and how strange it is that at the same time, Judaism teaches that God has no image, but that we are in the image of God.

The first human shows that God's image is not gendered, but is the dissolution of Gender.

Rabbi Art Green has a great teaching on this, based on his reading of Abraham Joshua Heschel. He writes:

“Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel — a teacher, scholar, and civil rights activist — has a powerful commentary on the Jewish prohibition of creating images of God. Why is it that images are really forbidden in Judaism? Some people think that it is because God has no physical form and so anything we could create would be a form of idolatry. But no, this is not the true answer; images are forbidden, but not because God does not have an image. God does have an image: YOU; a human being. You are the image of God. The person sitting next to you is the image of God... it is our role... to ensure that our communities are places where everyone can embrace their whole selves and live up to their Divine potential.

Rabbi Stephanie Kolin connects this to the sense of wholeness. She said that to have peace, to find a sense of wholeness, to be one’s complete entire self, to feel unbroken and uncompartimentalized and undivided, is a sacred thing. It is a holy thing, a blessing for each one of us, for every person to be able to be their whole self, respected and loved for who they uniquely are respected and loved for who they uniquely are.

So as we remember those who have died due to violence against Transgender people, we also remember that in our tradition all people are holy, are people are made in the image of God, all people are sacred, and that within each of us is an entire world.

That is why our tradition teaches that to kill a single person is to destroy an entire world. This year, at least 331 worlds have been lost to violence.

We who believe that every person is sacred must mourn those lost worlds, those lost individuals, and work to push back against violence and hate for people who are different, so that the society we live can become holy, can become whole, can find shalom – peace.

Ken Y’hi Ratzon