The Search for God's Image
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Everything that was created during the six days of creation has a partner.

Light was given darkness and together the two of them shared the important task of waking up the sun and the moon.

Likewise the sun was given the moon as its partner and they trade places in the sky dictating when we sleep and when we work.

For its part the sky was given stars to float in its vast expanse providing direction for

the traveler, but without sky as its partner, stars would have no place to hang.

Land and sea were both very ambitious, so they were made each other's partner, each serving as a barrier to the other, preventing their inherent desires to encroach upon the other's space.

The plants were given animals as their partner, and together they both give purpose to land and sea, helping to make the works of creation beautiful and meaningful.

When the sixth day of creation was drawing to a close, God created human beings, realizing that everything else had a partner; the human beings looked around, much like the last player chosen in a school yard game and asked, “Who will be our partner?”. God turned to them and said, “I shall be your partner, I created you in my image and you will help me finish the work of creation. To this, the human being responded, “But God, creation is complete. What else needs to be done?” God explained that the world was created out of chaos, and it would return to chaos unless it had someone to rule over it, to subdue it, to maintain order. God said, “I have done that

for the first six days and now you will do it in all the days to come, you will prevent chaos from reappearing.

Hearing this, human beings began to argue amongst themselves. Chaos ensued and as is all too evident, we have been arguing ever since.

The first line, in the first chapter in the first book of the Torah tells us that when God created the universe, God created it out of *tohu v'vohu*, utter and complete chaos. Nothing worked, there was no law of nature, no moral law, no sense of order. But through the miracle of creation God

established order; step-by-step, day-by-day. God took the cluttered, jumbled mess of the world and made sense out of it. Take a moment and contemplate our environment, the vast detail and complexity that is involved in making it work even for just one day. When we think about it we realize that within the natural world, among plants and animals, rivers and mountains, sky and stars there is almost no remnant of the disorder, or chaos, that existed before. The act of creation was so complete, so well planned-out that almost everything works.

And when it breaks down, when chaos returns it is not found in nature,

atmospheric rivers to the contrary, but rather it is found in us, in human beings, in our **inability** to peacefully coexist, in the chaos created by our own hands.

We who were created to subdue chaos, to prevent war and violence, to protect the environment, to make order out of disarray, we are too often the very source of whatever chaos still remains in the world.

What is our problem? we can't seem to get along. We go to war with each other, we starve each other, we destroy not only the works of our own hands, but God's creations as well. A cynical view would

hold that sadly, we who were created in the image of God, as God's partner in creation, are not the symbol of all that is right with the world, but rather the cause of much of the world's problems.

Gunther Plaut, of blessed memory, A Canadian Reform Rabbi of Holy Blossom Temple whose Torah commentary sits on the shelf right over there explains, that "The role of humans was to assist the Creator in perfecting the world, in this way we become God's co-worker, and complete the act of creation God had begun."[1]

[1] Plaut Commentary

But we have not been so God-like in our role as partners in creation. God gave us one specific instruction on the day of our creation: we were commanded to get along, to never view our fellow as being anything more or less than we ourselves are. That is why, the Mishnah tells us, we were created from one single set of parents, so that we could never say to a fellow human being, "My father was greater than yours."[2]

But too often we do just the opposite, we fail to work out our own differences. In fact, we have failed to see anything *but* our differences -- of color, race, religion, politics, identity and disregarded or discounted the

[2] Leibowitz

one thing that binds us eternally and divinely to each other, the one thing we all have in common, that inside each of us is the divine spark, the image of God.

A Midrash explains that on the sixth day, when God began to create human beings in God's own image the angels who had been ministering to God through all of the previous creations complained amongst themselves. They said one to another, "Should mere mortals be so gifted as to be endowed with the Divine image?" "No," they said, "This is not right. We should hide the divine image from humans." One of the angels suggested hiding it in the sea,

reasoning that the sea was so deep surely humans would never find it there. Still another suggested hiding it at the top of the highest mountain, close to heaven where the angels could keep an eye on it. But the shrewdest angel dismissed their plans. "The human being", the angel said, "is ambitious, and will search high and low to find such a treasure. Let us hide it within the soul of every human being. It is the *last* place in the world a human would think to look."[3]

The chaos that persists in the world, persists not because we don't see each other as human, but because we have

[3] Schulweis, For Those Who Can't Believe

failed to see that in our humanity, rich with diversity and made beautiful by difference, God's divine spark is also present.
But how can we find the divine image of God that the angels hid from us?
How can we see past our outward appearance, and find that divine spark that lies within?

In Pirkei Avot, the Teachings of the great Rabbis of the Mishah and Talmud we read, “Beloved is the person for he was created in the image of God. Still greater was God’s love in that God gave people the knowledge of having been so created.”[4] From this idea, that all human beings were

[4] Pirkei Avot 3:18

created in the divine image of God, can flow all of our actions and interactions with one another.

The responsibility that comes with being created *B'etzelem Elohim*, in the image of God, is that we symbolize God, we are God's role-model in the world and because of that reality we are responsible for what happens. We are not only our brother's keeper in answer to Cain's question, but we are keepers of all the works of creation; and as the Torah commands, we must be holy in our dealings with one another.

“You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.”

As Jews, we share a collective history and story that could not be written, for good or for bad without chaos in the world. We who have been victims of the chaos human beings inflict upon each other know better than many the price human discord can extract. Who better than us to be an *Or L’goyim* a light unto the nations of the world as we lead the charge to restore order and compassion in the world, to bring peace and understanding between each other.

The story of creation gives us a blueprint for creating such a caring and peaceful world. In this story we are reminded not only that we were created in the divine image, but so was everybody else, and that we must partner and work together, we are codependent on each other and on nature in the best and most positive of ways.

When we fail to see that, when we fail to recognize and preserve the likeness of God in ourselves, and when we fail to prevent its distortion in others, we cease being God's partner, and nature's partner and become the very chaos we were instructed to subdue we do not merit the blessing of that

divine spark, that original gift of our very remarkable existence.

In the coming weeks, just as in this past year I fear chaos will again try to reclaim the world, just as it did before God began to create. This time, and everytime ever since it is upon us to restore and create order. To subdue chaos by eliminating the chaos that exists between each of us; and in doing so may we find the image of God hidden inside every soul.

So maybe the work we're called to do isn't just about subduing chaos in the world around us but in how we see each other. If

we could really look past the surface, past our differences, and see that spark of God within each person, think about how much would change.

As we go back out into our lives, maybe the best way to honor being created in God's image is to actually look for it in each other—not in grand gestures, but in small, real ways. Because every time we choose kindness over chaos, every time we reach for understanding instead of judgment, we're helping build the world we're meant to be part of.

It’s not easy work, but it’s good work. And if we can do it, maybe we’ll get closer to the world God envisioned when creation began?