

Years before I had children, I came across and fell in love with a children's book called *Becoming Me*, by Martin Boroson. It opens:

“Once upon a time . . . I was.

There was no one who knew that I was. . . but I was. . .

I liked to make myself into different shapes. . . everywhere I looked, there was only Me. I must be very big.

I played by myself for ages. . . then I started to get lonely.

I wanted someone else to play with - someone who wasn't me.

So I took a deep breath, gathered all my strength together, and squeezed really hard.

I started to feel dizzy – it felt like I was falling.

And then all of a sudden, in a big burst, I became – something else!”

The story of creation continues with the first-person Creator describing all of the wonderful possibilities of becoming, including the glorious moment of becoming . . . YOU.

I love this imagining of creation as stemming from Divine loneliness and longing for another with whom to interact. It's also a mystical understanding with a lot of precedent.

Centuries ago, Rabbi Chaim Vital wrote: “Prior to Creation, there was only the infinite *Or Ein Sof* filling all existence. When it arose in G-d's Will to create worlds and emanate the emanated...[the Divine] contracted (in Hebrew "*tzimtzum*") [it]self in the point at the center, in the very center of Her light. He restricted that light, distancing it to the sides surrounding the central point, so that there remained a void, a hollow empty space, away from the central point... After this *tzimtzum*... She drew down from the *Or Ein Sof* a single straight line [of light] from His light surrounding [the void] from above to below [into the void], and it chained down descending into that void.... In the space of that void He emanated, created, formed and made all the worlds.

In this week's parasha, Bereshit, the world begins, according to the literal text of torah, built on a basis of *tohu v'vohu – chaos and nothingness*. I love that the Lurianic Kabbalah, as I just cited, understands that chaos to be synonymous with undifferentiated Godness. The first act of creation was motivated by a desire for there to be an Other with whom the divine could interact. It was an act of making space, so that the Other could come to be.

In the parashah, creation unfolds in two different versions. One orderly and evolutionary – first water, light and darkness, then primitive, then finally more complex life forms, and finally, the human, male and female (and presumably everything in between) made in God's image, all proclaimed into being by divine word. This is the one we read in Genesis 1, taking six days, culminating in Shabbat.

Genesis 2 takes us down into the mud, and describes a one singular human corpse, rather than an image of God, we might say, “made out of mud, muscle and blood, skin and bones. . .” , formed from mud and filled with life by the breath of God.

In this version, God is much less talkative, and doesn't speak at any point in the creation process until giving this solitary human its first charge, to eat of any tree in the garden except for the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And then, in verse 18, God observes:

“לא־טוֹב הַיּוֹת הָאָדָם לְבַדּוֹ אֶעֱשֶׂה־לּוֹ עֶזְרָא כְּנֶגְדּוֹ:”

“It is not good, for the human to be alone. I will make a help opposite him.”

This leads to the deep sleep, the removal of the rib, the creation of the woman, the set-up of woman the entity that derives from and yet completes and is always subordinate to man.

But before that, I want to look at this Divine observation:

לא־טוֹב הַיּוֹת הָאָדָם לְבַדּוֹ. . . It is not good for the human to be alone.

In the Talmud, in Masechet Berachot page 61a, Rabbi Yirmiyah suggests that the human was originally created with two faces, essentially, a double human, conjoined back-to-back.

Nachmanides, based on this teaching, suggests: “And the Holy One, blessed be, saw that it is good that “the help” stand facing [Adam], and that [the human] should see and be separated from it or joined to it at will. This is the meaning of what [Hashem] said in the verse, *I will make him a helper opposite him*.

*Lo tov heyot ha’Adam l’vado*: Rashi suggests that humans must not be alone, so that we will not be confused with God, who is the only entity existing in singularity, without a counterpart.

But in contrast to Rashi’s position, what strikes me is not the difference between the human and the Divine, with this observation about the human condition, but the similarity.

In the Kabbalistic version of the creation of the world, God contracts or divides God’s very self in order for there to be an Other with whom S/He can interact. God observes first *לֹא טוֹב הָיְוֹת הָאֱ-לֹהִים לְבַדָּא* *lo tov heyot haElohim l’vado* – it is not good for ME to be alone – and dividing God’s one oneness, creates the condition for an Other to appear.

Only later, looking at the human, does God extend the same observation to the creation made in the Divine image – this, too, should not exist as a whole, but as something in relationship with an Other.

We often invoke the notion that humans were made “in the image of God,” to remind ourselves of inviolable dignity of each human individual. And that is certainly a worthy thing to remember.

But in our age of individualism, I think it's equally important to acknowledge this interpretation of *tzelem Elohim* – being an image of God is to make space for each other, to seek to be in relationship: Just as the first act of Creation was for the Divine to make space so that something new could exist, just as the first Divine observation about the human condition is that we should have an Other with whom to interact, we enact our role as Divine Image when we make space for an Other, when we seek relationship not just with God, but with each other. We enact our unique human role by remembering that we all come from the same source, AND by acknowledging the distinct mystery at the heart of creation: that no human being can fully know another's mind, and the divine play of *trying* to understand each other is what brings us closer to the holiness.

It is not good for the human to be alone. In this new cycle of torah, let's remember to make space for each other, and also to reach out and bridge the gaps between us.