

Sparks
by Rabbi David Aaron
Founder and Dean, Isralight
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Created in the image of love
The power to be who you are

In the very opening sentences of the Torah (Bible) we are told that the first human being was created in G-d's own image. And what was that image? The first human being was actually a man and a woman — a single entity that included the two sexes. "And G-d created man in His own image, in the image of G-d created He him; male and female created He them" (Genesis 1:27).

In this union of male and female, in this oneness of opposites, the first human being reflected the image of G-d — a oneness that includes otherness and yet remains one.

This is a very important concept. A lone individual does not reflect the image of G-d; an individual in unity with another individual does. So until an individual makes a space to include another, and allows that other to do the same, we do not have the oneness that reflects the image of G-d. In other words, the image of G-d is love.

The Torah records that after the human being was created, G-d said: "It is not good for man to be alone."

G-d determines that the human being needs "a helper," but it is a while before Eve is created. Instead, all the birds and animals are created and the human being is asked to name them. At the conclusion of which, the Torah tells us that he did not find a helpmate.

What does naming the creatures have to do with finding a helpmate?

The Midrash explains that G-d was playing matchmaker. G-d was fixing up the first human being with all the animals in the garden. And Adam was going out on dates. Well, imagine Adam standing there in the lobby of the Paradise Motel. He is waiting anxiously and who walks in but... "That's a... that's an... elephant! Umm... this isn't going to work, G-d."

Poor Adam. He was surrounded by all these animals but he wasn't happy. Now why couldn't he be happy with an attractive giraffe or a cute little chicken? Because an animal is subordinate to man; it's not his equal. In fact, Adam was commanded to "have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Genesis 1:28). Adam cannot overcome his loneliness and find true love with a subordinate being over whom he rules.

The Torah is very clear in describing an appropriate spouse. G-d said, "I will make a fitting helper who is "kenegdo" — against him, opposite and parallel to him. In other words, G-d will create for him someone who, in a very positive, respectful way, will stand opposite him and engage him on parallel ground.

An animal may be a great help to man in doing his work, but an animal cannot be the "significant other." You will not be ultimately satisfied in the quest for love unless it is with someone you acknowledge is your equal, and whose difference you respect.

That's not to say that some insecure men would prefer not to be challenged. I have heard guys advise each other: "Get yourself a young girl, one you can mold." And yes, a man might find someone young and vulnerable and try to make this woman fit his ridiculous fantasy of a wife who considers him the lord and master. But he will only make his life harder as a result. He will have a very lonely existence, and he will sorely miss the engagement that a "helpmate *kenegdo*" would have provided, an engagement that is essential in the process of spiritual growth. All the sadder, because, in this way, he will deprive himself the opportunity of being the living manifestation of G-d expressed through the ability to love, making a space within himself to include a unique other.

In order to love, you need to withdraw yourself from the center and create a space for another in your life. Love starts only when you do that. In other words, if you are self-centered, you are not ready for love. If you are self-centered, you can't make enough space to nurture another. And true love is not only creating that space within your life for another, but also giving him or her that space and respecting and maintaining that space. It is being a part of another life and removed from that life at the same time.

VIVA LA DIFFERENCE

Once we're able to withdraw ourselves from the center and create space for another, we must develop the keen sensitivity for just how uniquely different — just how other — our partners are. We tend to see what we have in common, and we tend to overlook the differences. When people say, "love is blind," this is what they mean.

But true love is not blind. True love is seeing — seeing the differences, the otherness, the good and the bad. True love is seeing and still loving. In Hebrew, the verb "to see" is directly related to the verb "to respect." And that is what seeing with the eyes of true love means. True love requires that we see and accept and respect those we love for who they are, without projecting our dreams and fantasies upon them.

This is very hard, because we tend to want to fit those we love into our imaginary pictures of love. And if they don't quite fit, we want to alter them to fit.

But if we succeed in seeing not just what we have in common with those we love, but what makes us different, and if we appreciate and honor those differences, then we can take the next step toward giving of ourselves to that person. And simultaneously we must enable our partners to do the same for us, which means allowing them to make a space in their lives for us, allowing them to acknowledge our otherness, allowing them to give of themselves to us.

It's like hugging. When you hug another person, you create a space with your arms to include him or her. But, of course, it must be in a manner which allows that person the freedom of opening his or her arms to include you. If that simultaneous giving and receiving doesn't happen, the relationship can't work. It is not love. It is something else, and the something else only creates friction and unhappiness, and eventually the relationship breaks up.

To fulfill the image of G-d that we have created in we have to be a living manifestation of love — creating space in our life for a significant other, respect their unique otherness, give of ourselves to them and allow them to do the same.

Rabbi David Aaron

Author of Endless Light, Seeing G-d, The Secret Life of G-d, Inviting G-d In, Love is My Religion, Soul Powered Prayer, Living A Joyous Life, and The G-d-Powered Life