

MORASHAH
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Rabbi Kenneth Greene

Parashat HaShavuah Series

B' reishet...B'tzelem Elokim

In describing the creation of humankind, the Torah posits a rather complex picture. “And God created man in His image, in the image of God created He him, male and female created He them.” What is meant by the image of God? And furthermore, was only the first being created in “God’s image” or both genders? Might one assume that we are talking physicality or could it be that we are focusing on psychological or spiritual elements? If, as the simple wording of the text seems to imply, gender *per se* is not the issue, then perhaps our focus must be on the elements that both genders may share, as well as what they may have in common with God.

Only recently we observed Yom Kippur. The liturgy for Neilah includes a number of Selichot, Forgiveness poems, that require the repeated repetition of the Divine Attributes. By examining those attributes, we may gain some insight into “God’s image”. God is described as being compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in kindness and truth. In addition, God is quick to forgive the sinful and those who make other kinds of errors, big or small, in their lives. We might consider this compassionate side of God’s personality as more nurturing and caring, almost a “female” side. At the same time, the focus of worship on Rosh Hashanah described God as a sovereign, a model of authority as well as a parent, protective and very much concerned with the well-being and justice of those in His charge. The elements may be identified with a “male” side of God. If we add to these descriptions the appearance of a God Who is actively involved in the creative process, as well as a communicator of the highest order, we may then discover the kind of characteristics that truly help us define, in the language of the Torah, what makes “God’s image”. Humankind may have certain intellectual capacities that make us superior to the animal world, but it may well be the “human” aspects of our personalities that truly make us in God’s image.

Shabbat Shalom!

Rabbi Greene is rabbi of Freehold Jewish Center (NJ) and current Chair of Morashah.

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