

The Nature of Man
Rosh Hashanah 2009
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Searching through the newspapers in Israel, I try to find interesting topics to discuss with you. I think I've found it, in of all places the personals. Here are just a few of the Jewish personals that I've found.

*Divorced Jewish man seeks partner to attend shul, light shabbos candles, celebrate holidays, build Sukkah together, attend brisses, bar mitzvahs.

Religion not important.

*Orthodox woman with get, seeks man who got get or can get get. Get it?
I'll show you mine, if you show me yours.

*Jewish businessman, 49, manufactures Sabbath candles, Chanukah candles, havdallah candles, and Yahrzeit candles. Seeks non-smoker.

*I am a sensitive Jewish prince whom you can open your heart to, share your innermost thoughts and deepest secrets. Confide in me. I'll understand your insecurities. No fatties.

*Jewish male, 34, very successful, smart, independent, self-made, self-reliant, looking for girl whose father will hire me.

We are all searching for something. It has been said that life is a journey that we all must take, but how we get to our destination varies profoundly.

This morning, I wish to teach a new appreciation for the narratives in the book in Genesis. I want to share them with you, not just for the sake of learning, but because I think they have something profound to say about how we can journey through our own lives and because these short little stories address how we can confront the deep pessimism that pervades our country. The concise descriptions of Adam and Eve's creation found in the first two chapters of Genesis also have something to say about how we can revitalize what I believe is our beleaguered Jewish community. Don't worry, my message is fundamentally hopeful.

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, the former dean of Yeshiva University, pointed out in his 1960s paper, "The Lonely Man of Faith," that there are two versions to the story. In Genesis chapter 1, we read, "So God created man in His own image. . . . male and female God created them. And God blessed them and said unto them, 'be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the fowl of the heaven, and over the beasts, and all over the earth.'" In Genesis 2, we get a completely different idea of who Adam, our archetype is, "And the God formed man out of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and he became a living soul. And the God planted a garden eastward in Eden. . . . And the Eternal took man and placed him in the Garden

of Eden to serve it and to protect it. Then the God said, “It is not good that man should be alone...so God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept He took one of his ribs and ... made a woman.”

Rabbi Soloveitchik wrote that these two accounts teach two different understandings of the human condition. Adam #1, in Genesis 1:26, is created on the sixth day of creation and is fashioned in the divine image. Adam #2 is created probably on day one and out to of the dust of the ground but with the breath or spirit of God. One is inherently noble, being created in the divine image; the second has the potential for nobility but is ultimately rooted in the mud. Adam #1 is told to fill the earth and subdue it. He controls and manipulates his environment. He is the fixer. Adam #2, on the other hand, cultivates the garden and protects it. He is less a producer and more laid back. He accepts life for what it is. His wife says eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and he does exactly that.

Adam #1 finds his meaning in his relationship with Eve, who is his equal, both being created together. Adam #2, cares more about his relationship with God, and sees his wife as a mere “helpmate.” She is there to serve his needs. His covenant is with God, not her, so he lives tragically alone. Thus the title of the Soloveitchik’s work, “The Lonely Man of Faith.”

Why would the biblical authors include two dissimilar descriptions of Adam? On face value, it doesn't make any sense. Some believe that different authors penned the two variant versions. Both stories made it into the Bible as a sort of compromise among the Canon's editors. As a Rabbi, I can appreciate that, having participated in some vigorous debates here at Beth Or. But Soloveitchik argues that the narratives complement each other, teaching us that there are times when we must be like Adam #1 who fought, struggled and defined himself by his efforts. And there are also times to accept life and what it has in store for us with a greater amount of faith, confidence and acceptance, as did Adam #2.

As some of you may know, my brother in law, David Singer is fighting for his life against Leukemia. After months of chemo, stem cell transplants, the doctors told him that there was nothing more that they could do. They sent him home to die, giving him about 3 weeks. That was five months ago. Laurie's brother, David, just wouldn't accept his sentence. Though he accepted the diagnosis, he continued to fight for life by going out and embracing every moment with his family to the best of his ability. He would put on his protective mask, and go out for a meal. He would spend time in his garden, focusing on the simple pleasures of life. He wrote a beautiful piece on his website, about the splendor of his garden and his

memories there as a child. He would call his parents, his sister, his brother, and his children. He was Adam #1. He wouldn't be passive in the face of insurmountable odds. I am continually amazed by David and by many of you who do likewise every day. Sometimes our only task is to rail against the darkness and the despair.

Most of us remember, Art Buchwald, the noted humorist and columnist. He died a few years back. Buchwald wrote about how abundantly he lived as he lay dying of kidney failure. He relished having friends visit him. He enjoyed hearing how they were going to miss him. Buchwald says he wished everyone would have the opportunity to hear their eulogies while they were still alive. There are lots of people like my brother in law and Art Buchwald who we think are dying ... but are truly living. They are the fighters like Adam the first and they inspire us.

Sadly, there are also times, when we must simply accept what life has in store for us. To fight is futile. This is lesson of Adam #2. We just passed the 8th anniversary of 9/11. The wounds are still very fresh. Just recently the National Park Service dedicated thousands of acres in Shanksville, Pennsylvania to the heroes of United flight 93, who crashed their plane, in order to thwart an immanent attack. Recently, the New York Times interviewed about 30 families who had suffered the loss of a loved one in the

Twin Towers. They wrote a few paragraphs describing how each of the families was dealing with their loss. The family of Michael Roberts caught my attention; a young man, a firefighter, cut down in the prime of his life. His mother attends Little League dinners to present the same award for character that her son had once won, to make sure that his memory is kept alive. In her garden, she planted Irish roses which she sees every day. It has nine sides and is eleven panels high. There is one rose – an orange one, - which represents Michael. She looks at first thing in the morning, and oftentimes it causes her to cry. The article concluded with her husband having once told her to stop crying. “Honey,” he said, “It is what it is.” That night she took a piece of oak tag paper and wrote: that very phrase down... “It is what it is.” “That was a turning point,” Mrs. Roberts said, “When I can’t deal with my pain, that paper is what I hold on to.” Acceptance can bring peace.

There is a very fine line between knowing when to fight for life, as Adam #1 did, and knowing when we have to faithfully accept our disappointments and loses, as did Adam #2. It is difficult to make those choices, but here’s the beauty of the Torah; both are be true. Both are sacred stories. For some, my advice to you is: don’t give up too easily when confronted with challenges. Fight to your very last breath. Never give in.

To others, my advice might be, “Talk to God, find peace, when that is all that is left.” Wisdom is balancing these two truths, these two paths.

Soloveitchik archetypes also apply to the different types of Jews that exist in the world, and these two types have thrust us into a crisis. Adam #1 types are ethical, universalists who truly want to make this world a better place. They find meaning in their relationships with others, as did Adam with Eve. The Adam #1s of the world bless us, for they are the ones who build the hospitals, fund the museums, and endow the universities, but many often weaken us by their loose connections to their Jewish heritage. Adam #2 also challenge us, for they worry about the covenant and kashrut, but because of their passionate obsession with God, they frequently forget to be mensches. These Jews keeps the faith, are experts in Torah, and we are grateful that they are, but sadly they too often abandon their fellow human beings, and wind up living alone. The Rabbis argue that there are two types of mitzvot, there are mitzvot *Bein Adam l'Chavero*, between a person and his neighbor and there are those that are *Bein Adam l'Makom*, between a human being and God. Adam #1 focused exclusively on the *mitzvot Bein Adam l'chavero*, the ethical, while Adam the second, focused solely on the holy, *Bein Adam l'makom*.

Consider, our own Walter Annenberg, (may he rest in peace) who died in 2002. He generously gave away more than \$2 billion. When he considered his philanthropic responsibilities, and I'm glad he did, he gave over \$200 million to his High School, the Peddie School. He gave \$50 million to the United Negro College Fund, \$500 million to public education and to the State of Israel, he gave \$1 million dollars all back in June 1967, following the Six-day war. He was a great universalist, a citizen of the world, a man of courtly standing, friend of Presidents and Kings, but not an engaged Jew. He knew all about the *mitzvot bein Adam l'chavero*, he knew what it meant to reach out to his fellow human beings, but I wonder, how much good he could have done to help Israel and the Jewish people, had he understood about the second type of mitzvot, that link us to our heritage.

Last year, Shimon Peres, the President of Israel, personally invited Barbara Streisand to perform at Israel's 60th anniversary celebration by singing her stirring *Aveinu Malkeinu*. And she accepted. But she did not show up! While newspapers and gossip columnists wondered why she cancelled, I wondered: why was she invited? The Israeli newspapers quoted Peres as saying that he had heard many Cantors "but none who could sing *Avinu Malkeinu* like Streisand." True, she sings a great rendition, but she is no Zionist. In fact, she has never even been to Israel. Paul McCartney has

been to Israel. Following his recent performance this summer, the ex-Beatle said, "I've heard so many great things about Tel Aviv and Israel, but hearing is one thing ... and experiencing it for yourself is another." McCartney went to Israel despite multiple death threats, and he's not even Jewish.

Google Madonna and Israel, and you'll quickly see that she just returned from our homeland, having put on a magnificent concert in Tel Aviv and having celebrated Shabbat with Prime Minister Netanyahu and his family.

But, if you Google Barbara Streisand and Israel only one thing comes up.

Thirty years ago she celebrated with Israel speaking to Golda Meir, but she did so from California.

During Israel's war in Lebanon, two years ago, 85 high profile Hollywood celebrities took out a full-page ad in the Los Angeles Times condemning Hezbollah and Hamas for their terror attacks on Israel. Among those who signed were: Nicole Kidman, Bruce Willis, Danny DiVito, Sylvester Stallone, Sumner Redstone, Bernie Mac ... but Barbara Streisand didn't sign. In fact, with the exception of Michael Douglas, not a single Jewish Hollywood actor signed! Adam #1. Also in honor of Israel's 60th anniversary, last year's Israel Film Festival, held in Los Angeles, honored Carl Reiner and his son, Rob. One newspaper correspondent made the mistake of asking them why they were being honored. Carl Reiner replied,

“When you get old, people want to give you awards. We’ve never been to Israel and we don’t really have much of a connection.” Funny guys, great comedians, terrific producers.... by their own admission.... no connection whatsoever. They are the poster children of Adam #1 the universalist. This saddens me and weakens us all.

I saw a picture this summer of Adam #2, the Jew who is observant but with no regard for human decency or the law. How many of us saw images of five rabbis handcuffed to each other, members of the Syrian Jewish community who were recently arrested for money laundering ... for money being donated to their synagogues with kickbacks in cash to the donors to avoid taxes. One sold kidneys and counterfeit Gucci bags on the side. We’ve seen pictures of Chasidim being arrested for violating child labor laws; pictures of the Spinka Rebbe living in Los Angeles who was also arrested and convicted of money laundering; pictures of Chassidim in Postville, Iowa who hired illegal workers at their kosher slaughtering houses and didn’t offer the most basic worker’s rights; pictures of rabbis fleeing to Israel to avoid extradition for white-collar crimes that they have perpetrated.

I don’t know any of these New Jersey, Postville or LA rabbis but believe me: none of them would ever dream of putting something non-kosher in their mouths. None of them would ever dream of talking during a

Torah reading. They worry almost exclusively about the mitzvot *bein adam l'makom*, linking God and us. And yet, when it comes to cheating on their income taxes or outright stealing or, in one case, selling kidneys ... they see nothing wrong with that!

I'm going to tell you something that I've never shared publicly. About fifteen years ago, Beth Or bought a Torah from a Torah scribe in Brooklyn, who sold us what he claimed to be a brand new torah. A few years later, we learned that the torah was in fact 50 years old. We had been duped. This fraud was pointed out by Beth Or's personal scribe Rabbi Isaac Leizerowski, who has just finished another Torah for us. I and a number of officers went to Brooklyn to be given \$15,000 worth of silver merchandise for the welfare of the congregation as reimbursement for the deceit. Some of the Torah silver in the ark today came from that transaction. On our way, home we went to a kosher restaurant for lunch and a Jewish bookstore. I made a few purchases and put them on my Visa. I actually felt good about helping these small, struggling establishments. No sooner had I gotten home, that my credit card fraud company had called to tell me that my card was being used for unauthorized music purchases in Israel and were being sent to some address unknown by me in Brooklyn. Now, I used my card in a kosher restaurant and a Jewish bookstore, and someone within minutes of

my leaving the store, stole my numbers. Oh, they knew about the covenant, they were bound to God and kashrut; they just weren't bound to me or to the law.

What's the good of the black hats and coats and the glatt kosher meat when so many, these days don't meet the minimum in ethical standards? Indeed, the whole purpose of the rituals is to inculcate a sense of the ethical. Rav, the codifier of the Talmud, put it so well when he wrote, "Do you think it really makes a difference to God in which manner you slaughter an animal?" No, he said, the whole purpose of the commandments is *l'tsaref et habriot* – to refine us, to teach us self-control, to make a human being act like a *mensch*.¹

Biblical critics have long believed that the two versions of the creation of the Adam are the result of two canonical authors with two different traditions. Both made their way into the Bible during the process of codification. But, maybe, there are two versions of Adam's creation in order to teach us the importance of balance to our lives and in our Jewish community.

We all face anxiety and dissatisfaction. We must remember to fight for life and dignity, while balancing this resolve with acceptance in the face

¹ Rabbi Mitchell Wohlberg

of defeat and the inevitability of death. The wise know that to everything in life, there is its season, or as Ecclesiastes wrote, “A time to fight and a time for peace.”

And when it comes to our precious heritage, our major denominations have their strengths and weaknesses. The Orthodox, who often embody Adam, the second, can teach us about mitzvot, the centrality of Israel and they can teach us about our covenant with God, that has stood the test of time. We liberal Jews also have an important lesson. We can teach about social justice, supporting all people who are in need, not just Jews. But we must live a balanced life. There is a time and a need for both paths. One without the other is lacking. Would those who are fervently concerned with ritual be more concerned with those outside of their community. Would those who are passionate humanists, be more concerned with the welfare of their own community. The Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsh of the 19th century called it *Torah im Derech Eretz*, Jewish tradition wedded to being a mensch. That is the goal for us as Jews.

May this New Year be a year of joy, peace and balance rooted in the truth that we are to see the model for our lives in both Adam 1 and Adam 2. After both were created, then God knew that creation was complete and very good.

