

Equality in Creation  
Yom Kippur Morning 2018/5779  
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Before moving to Kansas City, while living in New Jersey, I spent two weeks every summer serving on faculty at an overnight Jewish summer camp. One day, while waiting outside the dining hall with Eliana, my daughter, who at that time was only 6 months old, in her stroller, I noticed something. Eliana was in her stroller next to Jonah, another baby, in his stroller. The youngest campers, around 7 years old, were also outside and they wanted to play with Eliana and Jonah. When they began playing they went back and forth between Eliana and Jonah trying to get high fives and making both babies smile. Then, one of the kids asked if Eliana was a boy or a girl. I answered that she was a girl and Jonah was a boy. Immediately the kids split; the boys gathered around Jonah's stroller and the girls around Eliana's. Shocked and a bit confused I watched the kids continue to try to get high fives and smiles, but this time the girls only paid attention to Eliana and the boys only to Jonah. Sadly, I was not, after thinking about it surprised that at such a young age our society had already taught them to play with someone who was like them. Because ever since having a child, it seems that gender has taken over my life. When I walk into a Buy Buy Baby store or even the target kids section, it is divided by gender. Each gender has been assigned its own color and style and I am supposed to buy things for my child accordingly. Everything in our society has been gendered.

This obsession with gender goes far beyond pink and blue. When media personalities publicly judge people or when others critique a person, the criteria are different dependent on a person's gender. Just think of the number of ways that people label us and set norms for us based on our sexual attributes. We first encounter these labels surprisingly early in life, and it makes me wonder about what we unintentionally model for children.

"Girls don't get messy"  
"boys don't cry"  
"walk like a lady"  
don't "throw like a girl"  
"he's such a good leader," but she's "too bossy"  
"girls can't be selfish," but "boys can't be caring"  
Or my absolute least favorite, "You're being such a girl."

We are surrounded by gender prejudices.

I have never lived in a world where women could not vote nor had different rights than their male partners. I live in a world where a woman can campaign to be the President of the United States, can be at the top of the Forbes wealthiest list and have influential voices in media. Even though I live in this world, there are still moments when I realize that gender is still used as a way to evaluate a person's character, talents and capability. And in recent years has been the reason for many workplace harassment accusations.

Men and Women are different. But shouldn't our differences be celebrated instead of challenged? Shouldn't our differences bring us together to make this a better world instead of allowing them to bring hate into the world? Shouldn't our differences be admired instead of be used to elevate one over the other?

When we look to our Jewish sources, we see all sorts of stories where our characters are treated differently because of their gender. Women who never even receive a name. Women who are silenced. Women who are the lead characters but are treated like an afterthought. But if we go way back to the beginning of humanity, I think we can learn a lot from the creation of man and woman.

The Torah actually has two different accounts of our creation. The presence of two different stories invites us to consider a multitude of approaches to the question of gender, an issue at the heart of the story of human creation. The ancient rabbis believed every word, every dot, and every extra squiggle in Torah to have meaning. Therefore, the addition of both of these stories of human creation might dare us to think differently about gender. It might help us ask if we will be open in this New Year to thinking about gender and gender roles differently. Will this be the year we move beyond judging people based on the characteristics associated with their gender and instead toward a place where we judge by actions, accomplishments and an individual's overall character?

In the first account, Man and Woman are treated exactly the same. The text reads, "God created man in God's image, in the image of God, God created them; male and female God created them." (Gen. 1:27)

In the second account, the story is drastically different. God first creates a man and then says, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him." So, first God created animals, but did not find a fitting helper amongst the wild beasts or birds so "God cast a deep sleep upon the man and while he slept, God took one of Adam's ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot. And God fashioned the rib into a woman." (Gen. 2:18-22) The story continues, as I am sure we are all familiar, with Eve taking the blame for eating from the Tree of Knowledge.

We can't help but notice the contrast that exists between these two renditions of Creation. In the first, the text presumes that men and women were created simultaneously, that there was a unified sense of gender embedded in that first person, reflecting God's masculine and feminine attributes. That both man and woman were equal beings. And the second, where Adam is clearly created first, as male, and Eve, the female, is created later, as an afterthought.

The ancient rabbis were puzzled as to why there were two creation stories in our Torah and two very different views of man and woman. So they tried to find answers. One question that they asked is why the use of the word *zela*, commonly translated as rib, is used. In the second account, it states that "God took one of his ribs." One opinion understands *zela*, to actually mean "side," as it is understood in Exodus when we learn about the creation of the tabernacle.

By comparing Eve's creation with the construction of the Tabernacle, a place where God would dwell amongst us, it imparts sanctity to her. Bringing the equality of man and woman from the first story into this second story.

In the Kabbalistic Jewish tradition, Adam and Eve were created as one entity. The Zohar uses both creation accounts to explain this. The first Adam/Eve is called by Kabbalists, *Adam Ha-Rishon*, the first being. This explanation tells a story of Adam and Eve being born simultaneously side-by-side, or back-to-back, attached like conjoined twins, as it says the phrase "male and female God created them" twice in our text. The idea that Adam and Eve were co-equals at birth is not a Kabbalistic secret; it was openly discussed in ancient midrashic literature. It was also known two thousand years ago that the idea that Eve came from Adam's rib was a common misunderstanding.

The reinterpretation of the second story by our sages makes it seem obvious to me that they were trying to tell us, by emphasizing the equality of Adam and Eve that we, the Jewish people and our tradition are people of the first story.

So why does it seem that so many years later, we live in a world of only the second story? A world where gender discrimination happens, even unknowingly, in the workplace. A world where children learn from a young age what a man or woman is supposed to be. A world where many women who hold positions of power or leadership are treated differently. I am sure many in this room have their own stories, but I would like to share with you from the perspective that I know best, in Judaism. Even in a liberal denomination of Judaism such as ours, women in leadership roles are treated differently than men.

Although the first woman ordained at our Reform seminary was in 1972, women rabbis are still treated differently than their male counterparts. Only a small number of large congregations in America have a woman rabbi as their head spiritual leader. Women rabbis endure comments about their clothing choices and life choices. Many female rabbis still get called by their first name while our male counterparts get called rabbi. I have personally experienced many of these.

Once while officiating at a funeral in New Jersey, the funeral director was talking to me about other rabbis in the area that we both know. During the entire conversation he referred to my male colleague as rabbi and his last name, but referred to my female colleague as only her first name.

Shortly after my daughter was born, during a congregational dinner where she was in attendance, I was looked over to lead motzi, even though I was the only clergy person in the room. After the lay leader leading the meal announced to the room that no clergy were there to lead and called upon the executive director, the table I was sitting with sat confused trying to point me out to the leader. Unfortunately, after I was pointed out to the leader, she, yes she, said that she didn't see me as a rabbi in that moment, but only a mother.

And a few weeks ago before our own Shabbat services when a mother suggested to her young son to go tell the rabbi about the Jewish thing he did, the young boy walked up to an old man with a beard who was not a rabbi, and told him.

In a movement of Judaism where we pride ourselves in inclusion and egalitarianism, many still have pre-conceived notions of what defines a rabbi.

Sadly my experiences are not unique. So much so that a new taskforce has been created. This past March, I attended the Central Conference of American Rabbis convention where I was introduced to a task force about women in the rabbinate. As part of the convention, I attended a session devoted to this new task force. Sitting in a room with Sally Priesand, that first woman ordained in America in 1972, I learned that I am not alone. The session was eye-opening, disconcerting, and hopeful. It made me feel like just one person in a sea of wrongs; both a good feeling and a hard one to accept. Speaking about hopes for cultural change, one female colleague said she hoped that in five years she could serve as senior rabbi in a large congregation without having to do it like a man. Another said she wished her family life was not scrutinized more than her male counterparts. Another said she wished her male colleagues just understood what she goes through as a women rabbi. I said, I wish in a movement of Judaism where we pride ourselves in inclusion and egalitarianism that we wouldn't need to have these conversations, but alas, we do. We need to bring these issues to the forefront.

Unfortunately, not just in the Jewish world, but across America we see these trends in gender inequality. Although women in general receive more college and graduate degrees than men, on average, women continue to earn considerably less than men. The National Women's US Soccer team made less money in their winning year than the men's team did that same year even though the men did not play as well overall. In 2016, women working full time in the United States typically were paid just 80 percent of what men were paid. The gap has narrowed since the 1970s, due largely to women's progress in education and workforce participation and to men's wages rising at a slower rate. Still, the pay gap does not appear likely to go away on its own. At the rate of change between 1960 and 2016, women are expected to reach pay equity with men in 2059. But even that slow progress has stalled in recent years. If change continues at the slower rate seen since 2001, women will not reach pay equity with men until 2119. (Facts from AAUW)

In the past year, more than ever, gender issues have been brought into focus because accusations about harassment in the workplace have become a norm. And as the accusations hit the public domain, the #metoo movement took over social media. Posts emerged everywhere from female politicians, rabbis, daughters, mothers, college students, perhaps even people in this room. About two million people posted within the first 24 hours of the movement. The 'me too' movement actually began in 2006, defined by its website its purpose is "to help survivors of sexual violence, particularly women of color from low wealth communities, find pathways to healing." (*metoomvmt.org*) In less than six months, though, because of the viral me too hashtag, a vital conversation has been thrust into the national dialogue. What started as local grassroots work has expanded to reach a global community of

survivors from all walks of life and helped to de-stigmatize the act of surviving. I wonder if Eve from our second creation story would have added the words #metoo to her profile page.

If our ancient rabbis could teach the message that we should be a people of the first creation story, than so much the more so, should we teach that message today.

In order to teach that message, let us start by adding the following vidui, confession, written by my friend and colleague, Rabbi Mary Zamore, who is the executive director of the Women's Rabbinic Network, to our pleas on this Yom Kippur morning.

*Al cheit shechatanu*

For the sin we have committed before You . . .

by not believing the victims

by being silent while women were bullied, harassed or undermined

by claiming to be ready to listen when we were not

by claiming equality exists for all

by not supporting victims

by not providing sexual harassment prevention training

by accepting the sexist comments made every day

by blaming the victims

by claiming our workplaces, synagogues, and organizations were safe

by contributing to an environment that allowed harassment

by explaining away harassment

by believing the victims but not acting to make change

by worrying about our community's reputation instead of the victims' needs

by not reflecting on the past and present behavior within our community

by denying that gender harassment has many faces

by allowing victims to suffer retribution

by not noticing when women simply walked away from our community or institution

by making the reporting of harassment difficult and hard to engage

by promising change and not fulfilling this promise

*Al cheit shechatanu*

For the sin we have committed before You, we ask forgiveness.

We ask forgiveness. I ask forgiveness. I ask forgiveness for not pointing out to the funeral director in New Jersey what he was doing. I ask forgiveness for not standing up for myself publicly to the lay leader. I ask forgiveness for not helping better educate our children about equality. Me too – I have experienced. Us too – We have all struggled. God too – Even God has battled. As we enter this New Year we must remind ourselves that when we encounter moments that resemble the second creation story, we should, like the ancient rabbis, try to turn those moments into ones of equality. Let us build a world where gender equality is the norm, where our workplaces are safe, a world where our children all play together, where everyone can be treated the same as a leader, where no one has to flock to social media to

share their story, a world where we judge people on their actions, accomplishments and overall character. Together let us build a world of the first creation story.