



THE NEW OLD PATH

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A Life Worth Sharing

Created at the dawn of existence, Adam has the entire world at his disposal and yet this is still not enough. God gives His stamp of ‘good’ approval at the completion of each day, and yet at this point, for the first time, the Torah gives a description of something that is quite the opposite ‘...it is not good that man be alone’ (*Gen. 2:18*). No reason for this proclamation is given, perhaps because the implications of loneliness are obvious – no matter how much we have, it is useless if we have no one to share it with, and no matter how much we do, it feels futile without recognition. Even the Hebrew term for life, *chayim*, is in the plural, implying that by definition, we need others for life to be complete.

God decides that man’s remedy is an *ezer k’negdo*, or ‘helper opposite him’ and with this strange term, affirms that ideally life

should be shared. And so, the first-ever recorded ‘medical’ operation is performed and the origins of humankind are put into place as woman is created. Adam awakes and utters his first recorded statement, ‘This time it is bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh. This shall be called woman (*isha*) for from man (*ish*) was she taken’ (*Gen. 2:23*).

It seems that man is created directly from God, and woman, in turn, is created directly from man. Yet there is an essential nuance in the Hebrew text that can very easily be lost in translation. Previously the only title used for a human was *adam*, stemming from *adamma*, meaning ‘ground’, implying the static nature of humanity. Yet now, with Adam’s opening speech, a change is suggested, whereby man is referred to as *ish*, from the same etymological root as *esh*, or ‘fire’, signifying passion and movement.

Perhaps the Torah is proposing something momentous: Adam needs to first perceive his counterpart as an *isha* before he can fulfil his potential as an *ish*. Thus,

Woman provides man, just like man provides woman, with the opportunity to love, to share and to self-discover. Alone, one is incapable of accomplishing these things fully.

a powerful paradox is created: genuine self-definition cannot be achieved alone, by oneself. It can only be fully achieved within the context of another. And just as this was the case with the first two human beings, it can be extended to any relationship – people need companionship in order to truly recognise themselves:

Two are better than one... for if they fall, one can lift the other... if two lie together they can warm [one another], but how can one warm [oneself]? (*Eccl.* 4:9-12)

With this in mind, one may ask: why does God initially describe the first woman as an *ezer k'negdo*, or 'helper opposite him'? Surely the terms 'helper' and 'opposite' seem contradictory? Rashi cites the Talmud, stating that if man is worthy, she will be a 'helper', and if not, she will be 'opposite him', implying that it is one or the other (Rashi on *Gen.* 2:18; *BT, Tractate Yevamot* 63a). The description of woman as a 'helper' on the one hand or as 'opposite him' on the other, is dependent on his worthiness of her.

Perhaps, however, in light of the idea that man is reborn as an *ish* when God creates the *isha*, these seemingly contradictory terms can be understood differently. God chooses the term *ezer k'negdo* not to imply a contradiction, but a causative relationship – she is a helper *because* she is opposite him. Sometimes a partner needs to provide direct assistance and support, while other times, a partner needs to take the opposite approach and provide an objective 'sounding board' to refine

thinking and behaviour. In the same way that one needs a mirror in order to truly know oneself, one needs the other in order to afford genuine self-reflection. Woman provides man, just like man provides woman, with the opportunity to love, to share and to self-discover. Alone, one is incapable of accomplishing these things fully. This paradigm of how individuals relate to one another extends to family, friends, colleagues, communities and even strangers.

Through the simplicity and subtlety of the Hebrew language, the creation of the parents of humanity is portrayed. This illustrates the foundational relationship, which all of civilisation can learn from and model, between *isha* and *ish*, woman and man reborn. Each ideally serves as an *ezer k'negdo*, a helper opposite their counterpart, within the reflective existence of *chayim* – a life worth sharing! ■

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