

Oneness with humanity  
Kol Nidrei 2025  
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A little girl asked her mother, "How did the human race appear?" The mother answered, "God made Adam and Eve and they had children, and so was all humankind made." Two days later, the girl asked her father the same question. The father answered, "Many years ago, there were monkeys from which the human race evolved." The confused girl returned to her mother and said, "Mom, how is it possible that you told me the human race was created by God, and Dad said they developed from monkeys?" The mother answered, "Well, dear, it is very simple. I told you about my side of the family and your father told you about his."<sup>1</sup>

That joke is probably funnier with a different group of people but it starts to get at what it means to be a human being. We, as Reform Jews, have no problem reconciling evolution, science, and history with our sacred texts because we aren't wedded to the literal meaning of the Torah. We can be expansive in our views as we explore the origins of humanity. Yes, Genesis starts off with one man and one woman. Perhaps, indeed, there were initially two ancestors who evolved from their ape ancestry, six million years ago. Or perhaps, the change to bipedalism, four million years ago, where we could walk on two legs, came from two people. Homo sapiens could've equally descended from another miraculous pair over 100,000 years ago.<sup>2</sup> Regardless, we know that that trajectory of human life on planet earth goes back thousands, if not millions, of years.

What is of most interest to me, at this time, is less about our physical evolution than an exploration of our human nature as it pertains to today. When we study Ecclesiastes during Sukkot in our Sukkah, we see that there are some things that are timeless. Ecclesiastes states, "One generation goes, another comes, but the earth remains the same forever. The sun rises, and the sun sets—and glides back to where it rises. Southward blowing, turning northward, ever turning blows the wind; On its rounds the wind returns. All streams flow into the sea. אֵין כֶּל-חַדָּשׁ תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ. There is nothing new beneath the sun!"<sup>3</sup>

Now, we can agree that there are some things that do indeed change. Technology, medical advancement, transportation, and communication are areas that have radically transformed our lives and will continue to do so. But what has not changed is our human nature. Being a human being is complicated and our sacred texts speak to that. Are we good? Are we bad? Our history and Jewish teachings suggest that we are a mixed bag. In Judaism, we are taught that every human being is born with two inclinations, a *yetzer*, an inclination to do good, and a *yetzer*, inclination to do evil.<sup>4</sup> All of us. You, me, a child, the nice old lady you are sitting next to. We

have differing impulses, motivations, and drives. Sometimes, this can bring us together and other times, it can be quite divisive.

Human nature is multifaceted to be sure. On the one hand, people can strive to have so much power that they abuse it and oppress others. There are many examples of this. And also, we have those who strive to help, assist, and make life better for people. Humans can be selfish and self serving or kind and generous. There is no one who is all or none. There is good and bad in each person and everyone has the free will to act on their impulses and, God willing, live with the consequences.

Even the rabbis, thousands of years ago, recognized that humans have different sides. In Judaism, we have a famous *midrash*, a teaching, about the origins of humanity. Rabbi Simon said that, “When the Holy One, blessed be God, came to create Adam, the ministering angels formed themselves into groups and parties, some of them said, ‘Let him be created,’ while others urged, ‘Let him not be created.’” Basically, there was an argument in heaven about whether humans should exist at all.

The midrash continues, “Thus it is written, Love and Truth fought together, Righteousness and Peace combated each other. Love said, ‘Let him be created, because he will dispense acts of love.’ Truth said, ‘Let him not be created, because he is compounded of falsehood.’ Righteousness said, ‘Let him be created, because he will perform righteous deeds.’ Peace said, ‘Let him not be created, because he is full of strife.’”

And so, in the heavens above, these attributes come to life as Love and Righteousness advocate on behalf of us humans while Truth and Peace argue against it. And so, what did God do in the midst of this debate? He took Truth, and like wrestler might do, he threw it to the ground. With Truth out of the way, God made the first human, Adam. In another telling, according to Rabbi Huna the elder, while the ministering angels were arguing with each other, going back and forth, the Holy One, blessed be He, just took action and created a human being. And then defiantly, God said to them, ‘What are you going to do? Adam has already been made!’”<sup>5</sup> Basically, God showed us how to ask for forgiveness first rather than permission. So sneaky!

In this midrash, in spite of the concerns of how we would turn out, God overrides the objections and here we are, the imperfect creatures that we are.

We know there are people who act lovingly and do righteous deeds. And there are those who lie, cheat, and increase strife. There is much to say about the time we are living in because the challenges are immense and good people can appear to be in short supply. However, I don’t believe that to be true. I see a lot of people genuinely trying to help one another. I witness acts of kindness and concern. Most of the people we come into contact with are genuinely good people. I’m talking about most members of our families, okay maybe not our mother in law, our

friends, most people in our neighborhoods and community. And of course, everyone who is a member of Temple Beth David are the best of the best.

Now, I want to point out some people that I know who are actively trying to make our communities better places for all. These are people, in a time of extreme divisiveness, are building bridges, reaching hands out across the divide, and embodying the best qualities in human kind. And so, I would like to introduce some of them to you here and now.

Last February, I read a very inspiring article in the NYT about an evangelical pastor named Bill White who preached against the sins of homosexuality. All was well for him and his theology until his son came out as gay. Bill White shared his journal entries over the years describing his thoughts, feelings, and relationship with God. When his son Timothy turned eight years old, they were teaching in the church about manhood and Christianity. Pastor Bill took his son on hikes and other activities as he strived to raise his son to be a man. Timothy, though, wasn't really interested in contact sports and instead befriended girls.

When Timothy was thirteen years old, Pastor Bill wrote in his journal about his conversation with his son. Timothy described that he needed to explore some things and was wondering that he might be gay. Bill tried to not react to his son's words but later felt devastated. He wrote in his journal that he hated homosexuality. He prayed that God would spare his son of this. As Bill wrote this entry, he cried, because anyone he knew who was gay, had left the church.

Over the next two years, Bill realized that his son was indeed gay and he started a journey to reconcile his love for Jesus, his deep faith in Christianity, and LGBTQ inclusion. Pastor Bill came to realize that God was trying expand his kingdom to be more inclusive where one can be both gay and a practicing Christian. Pastor Bill White faced a lot of blowback from people at the church and some even wanted his ordination to be suspended. However, he loved his son and he was going to stand by him, no matter what.

After I had seen the article in the NYT, I reached out to Pastor Bill White since he lives in Long Beach. We had a couple of lunches and he came and spoke powerfully at our last Pride Shabbat in June. He is a humble and yet inspiring man who chooses love over everything else. He has become a role model for those in the evangelical churches to find ways to accept people they love and still believe in Jesus. It takes a lot of courage to reflect and struggle with long held beliefs and even more so, to go public about it. Bill White has also started an organization called, Small Church Big Table<sup>6</sup>, in order to help other ministers and pastors integrate their faith and acceptance for those who are LGBTQ. It gives me hope that love and compassion have a chance against bigotry, ignorance, and hate. Pastor Bill White is a beacon of hope.

Another person who impresses me is Bishop Sherman Gordon, from Family of Faith Christian Center in Lakewood. He and members of his church attended my series on Israel one and a half years ago. I didn't know anything about them but I found that they were great

students and deeply engaged in the material. Some of them even came to our last Rosh Hashanah service a year ago. They came to be connected with our synagogue because of Robin Harrison. As you know, Robin Harrison is a rabbinical student at the Academy for Jewish Religion. He is less than 2 years away from ordination.

Anyways, his dean Rabbi Joshua Hoffman has an amazing connection with Bishop Gordon. When hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans, Bishop Gordon went down there for weeks to volunteer. Alongside him was Rabbi Hoffman. They repaired roofs, painted walls, and fed the homeless together. A deep bond came out of their working together. Bishop Gordon upon his return made point of bringing some younger members of his church to Valley Beth Shalom, where Rabbi Hoffman worked, and they did community projects together.

Bishop Gordon explains that we cannot only walk on our own path. It is very important that we focus on what we have in common as opposed to our differences. I, along with ten members of Beth David, were honored to go to his church this past Easter. We will never forget it, the dramatic reenactment of the resurrection of Christ with costumes, acting, and song was riveting. Bishop Gordon believes that it's important for us to learn from one another so that we not just tolerate our differences but that we come to appreciate them.

During this past year, I've come to know the mayor of Cypress, David Burke. I initially contacted him the wake of antisemitic graffiti at one of its parks. David responded sincerely and invited me to do the invocation at the City Council meeting this past June. I will be going back on Oct. 27<sup>th</sup>, as well. Apparently, I may have been the first rabbi to have ever done this in Cypress. Anyways, David has convened a number of us religious leaders to foster understanding and religious diversity in Cypress. We actually have an event scheduled for Tuesday night, Nov. 18<sup>th</sup> starting at 6:30 p.m.

David Burke has championed this kind of event because he grew up in the 1980's and 1990's before the internet and wide spread screen time. He feels that today people can be self isolating in little bubbles and only interact with people they agree with and get information that confirms their existing beliefs. On the other hand, he has seen when people come together in person and get to know each other, they are more likely to not only tolerate differences but they may even find that they like people who are different than they are. David sees that the city of Cypress is diverse with race, age, differing cultures and faith, and he wants to bring people together to learn from one another, so that we can see that we have much in common. Maybe, I will see you in Cypress on Nov. 18<sup>th</sup>. Everyone is welcome.

Pastor Bill White, Bishop Sherman Gordon, and Mayor David Burke are individuals who have decided to put relations with others irrespective of sexual orientation or identity, race, ethnicity, or religion, as a high priority. They each embody the best of qualities where even the divine aspects of Truth and Righteousness would concur that there is hope for humans yet. As I

have shared these examples with you, it's to perhaps inspire you to reach out beyond your comfortable relationships. Maybe, we can still converse with another person regardless of our political difference, citizenship, religion, or race.

This is sacred work and it is supported by our teachings. In another midrash, we are taught that Adam was created alone, as single individual, to foster peace among people. This is so no one person can say that my parent is greater than your parent because we all descend from the same person. Also, the midrash explains that the Holy One, blessed be God, is great in how God created humankind. When a person stamps several coins with the same seal, they are similar to one another. However, when God stamped people with the seal of Adam none of us is similar to another. And so, while we are different, we all come from the same source and we can all say *בְּשִׁבְלִי נִבְרָא הָעוֹלָם* that the world was created for me.<sup>7</sup>

We are different and yet we are the same. We all have a yetzer ha tov and a yetzer hara, an inclination to do good and an inclination to do evil. We can choose to act on the best parts of ourselves and strive to connect with those who are, who look, and who believe differently from ourselves. Leaders such as Pastor Bill White, Bishop Sherman Gordon, and Mayor David Burke can be role models for us to help make our communities and country places of tolerance, understanding, and of peace. We are all created *b'tzelem, eloheim*, in the image of God. May we live up to the godly parts of ourselves. May we be beacons of hope, love, and connection as we strive to be the best version of ourselves.

**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> <https://upjoke.com/human-jokes>

<sup>2</sup> <https://humanorigins.si.edu/education/introduction-human-evolution>

<sup>3</sup> Eccl 1:4-7, 9

<sup>4</sup> Berachot 61a

דרש רב נחמן בר רב חסדא: מאי דכתיב "וַיִּצֶר ה' אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם" בְּשְׁנֵי יוֹדִין? — שְׁנֵי יִצְרִים בָּרָא הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, אֶחָד יִצֵּר טוֹב וְאֶחָד יִצֵּר רָע.

**Rav Nahman bar Rav Hisda interpreted homiletically: What is the meaning of that which is written: "Then the Lord God formed [vayyitzer] man" (Genesis 2:7), with a double yod?**

This double *yod* alludes to that fact that **the Holy One, Blessed be He, created two inclinations; one a good inclination and one an evil inclination.**

### 5 Midrash Rabbah - Genesis VIII:5

R. Simon said: When the Holy One, blessed be He, came to create Adam, the ministering angels formed themselves into groups and parties, some of them saying, 'Let him be created,' whilst others urged, 'let him not be created.' Thus it is written, Love and Truth fought together, Righteousness and Peace combated each other (Ps. LXXXV, 11)1: Love said, 'Let him be created, because he will dispense acts of love'; Truth said, 'Let him not be created, because he is compounded of falsehood'; Righteousness said, 'Let him be created, because he will perform righteous deeds'; Peace said, 'Let him not be created, because he is full of strife'" What did the Lord do? He took Truth and cast it to the ground" said the ministering angels before the Holy One, blessed be He, 'Sovereign of the Universe! Why dost Thou despise Thy seal? (Truth is seal of God) Let Truth arise from the earth!' Hence it is written, Let truth spring up from the earth.

As it is written, And God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was good-me'od (Gen. 1, 31), i.e. and behold Adam was good. R. Huna the Elder of Sepphoris, said: While the ministering angels were arguing with each other and disputing with each other, the Holy One, blessed be He, created him. Said He to them: 'What can ye avail? Man has already been made!'

<sup>6</sup> <https://smallchurchbigtable.com/>

<sup>7</sup> Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin*: 37a

וּמִפְּנֵי שְׁלוֹם הַבְּרִיּוֹת, שֶׁלֹּא יֹאמַר אָדָם לַחֲבֵירוֹ: "אֲבָא גָדוֹל מֵאֲבִיךָ", וְשֶׁלֹּא יִהְיֶה הַמִּינִים אוֹמְרִים: "הִרְבֵּה רִשְׁוִיּוֹת בְּשָׂמַיִם".

The mishna cites another reason Adam the first man was created alone: **And this was done due to the importance of maintaining peace among people, so that one person will not say to another: My father, i.e., progenitor, is greater than your father. And it was also so that the heretics who believe in multiple gods will not say: There are many authorities in Heaven, and each created a different person.**

וּלְהַגִּיד גְּדוּלְתוֹ שֶׁל הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, שֶׁאָדָם טוֹבֵעַ כַּמָּה מַטְבְּעוֹת בְּחוֹתָם אֶחָד – כּוֹלֵן דּוֹמִין זֶה לָזֶה, וּמִלֵּךְ מַלְכֵי הַמַּלְכִּים הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא טְבֵעַ כָּל אָדָם בְּחוֹתָמוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם הָרִאשׁוֹן, וְאֵין אֶחָד מֵהֶן דּוֹמֶה לַחֲבֵירוֹ. לְפִיכָךְ כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד חַיִּיב לוֹמַר: בְּשִׁבְלִי נִבְרָא הָעוֹלָם.

**And this serves to tell of the greatness of the Holy One, Blessed be He, as when a person stamps several coins with one seal, they are all similar to each other. But the supreme King of kings, the Holy One, Blessed be He, stamped all people with the seal of Adam the first man, as all of them are his offspring, and not one of them is similar to another. Therefore, since all humanity descends from one person, each and every person is obligated to say: The world was created for me, as one person can be the source of all humanity, and recognize the significance of his actions.**