



Parashat B'reshit

B'reshit and bashert: in our beginning, all kinds of love were sanctified

by Amy Soule on Friday October 16, 2009

28 Tishrei 5770

Genesis 1:1 - 6:8

So God created humankind in God's own image; in the image of God humanity was created; male and female God created them. (Genesis 1:27)

Perhaps my friends laugh at me when they hear that B'reshit is one of my favourite Torah portions because so many times strict religious people look toward certain segments to judge me as gay, but it's easy for me to explain myself.

Look hard at the holy, loving statement above. Genesis 1:27 states all of humankind was created in God's image. Although it mentions sexual difference alone, it's easy to extrapolate and thus explain that God created an array of sexual orientations, all of which are loved by God and holy.

It also gives us a couple teachings about sex. If read according to the traditional meaning, we can look at it to mean that women are equal to men since they were created simultaneously by God.

A second understanding helps affirm intersex people too. If male and female anatomies were created together then people blessed to have both kinds of anatomy shouldn't be treated like "freaks of nature", as they tend to be in our so-called "modern" society, something the Talmud understands too.

In the Mishnah, Rabbi Yosi makes the radical statement: *androgynos* (a term for a dual-sex human which some have recognized as similar to today's term for intersex) *bria bifnei atzma hu* / the *androgynos* (intersex human) he is a created being of her own." His Hebrew expression blends male and female pronouns to express the complexity of the *androgynos*' identity in a very poetic way.

Furthermore, the Hebrew word *bria* (created being) explicitly refers to divine formation; hence this term also reminds us that all bodies are created in the image of God, as clearly stated in our Torah portion.



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God blessed them... (Genesis 1:28)

According to the Midrash (Genesis Rabbah 8:13), this blessing indicates that God officiated at Eve and Adam's wedding. Some might throw this against us as "proof" that God only blesses straight love, but it can mean much more. Adam and Eve are only one example of love and marriage. Perhaps I'm deviating from our text right now, but the Tanach gives examples of other kinds of love (and perhaps wedding ceremonies).

If we look at the story of Ruth and Naomi, we see echoes of our Torah portion, where it is stated men cling to their spouses. If we look at Ruth 1:14, we read that Orpah kissed Naomi but Ruth clung to her. Sure, Ruth marries Boaz later in the story, but it seems a little bit like a marriage of convenience to ensure she and Naomi don't have to worry about money and can live their lives together as they want to. They are relatives (mother and daughter-in-law) but their relationship has always struck me as deeper.

Look at this:

Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me (Ruth 1:16-17).

I'm very aware these lines have always been viewed as Ruth's conversion to Judaism and inspired many who have converted, but to be honest her conversion is hardly remarkable. Moving, in Biblical times, often meant worshipping different gods and goddesses.

Instead, these lines of Scripture seem to represent a wedding vow. They are so popular at wedding and commitment ceremonies for gay women that, according to Ceremonies of the Heart (an anthology of lesbian commitment ceremonies conducted twenty-some years ago), they were assumed to be standard for any religious (Jewish or Christian) affirmation of love between women.

Gay men can look to the Tanach for an example of a marriage ceremony too. 1 Samuel 18:1-4 reads like this:

When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his



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own soul. Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that he was wearing, and gave it to David, and his armour, and even his sword and his bow and his belt.”

Here we have an explicit reference to gay love. Others may attempt to water down everything and remind everyone that David was involved in relationships with women but it seems crystal clear. Two men are involved in a covenant of love.

They remain devoted to each other and in mourning Jonathon, David clarifies everything to ensure readers don't wonder about his sexuality (since he had relationships with women too):

I'm very distressed for you my brother Jonathan; Greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. (2 Samuel 1:26).

He might have cared, on some level, for women (making him bisexual) but his dominant feeling was toward men (perhaps a 5 on the Kinsey scale?).

No matter our understanding and interpretation of the stories of Ruth/Naomi and David/Jonathon, they have great potential to prove all love is holy and affirmed by God. Perhaps the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of classical Hasidism, said it best (ironic as that might seem) :

From every human being there rises a light that reaches straight to heaven. When two souls are destined to be together find each other, their streams of light flow together and a single brighter light emanates from their united being.

It stands to reason the Baal Shem Tov couldn't have foreseen that his words might become an affirmation of all kinds of love, but his language is generic. He doesn't state "When a man and a woman find each other..." He leaves his remark open to everyone, perhaps an early acknowledgement that there are multiple ways to love and all of them can be *kiddushim*.

When I was younger, I sometimes confused the words *bashert* and *b'reishit*. Now, having completely grasped their distinct meanings, I'm happy to combine them in a coherent, affirming way, asserting that in the beginning God created people differently and that our besherts can be anyone, whether same, opposite or both sexes. No matter where we look, whether to the Torah, other places within the Tanach, the legal sections of the Talmud or even to the teaching of a Hasidic leader many centuries ago, our religious tradition has all kinds of holy affirmations that we can look toward whenever we are feeling alone and in need of a reminder that we are God's and created b'tezelem Elohim.



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