

Yom Kippur 2017

God as Mother

A retail fabric merchant made his way to his wholesale supplier to buy the goods he needed for his business. The wholesaler instructed his workers to wait on the merchant and to bring him all that he ordered. Standing in the middle of the warehouse, the merchant bellowed all sorts of orders and requests.

“I want 1,000 yards of that cloth, 2,000 yards of the blue velvet, 3,000 yards of that white silk,” he shouted. His requests continued on and on until it came time to total up the price of the goods and to pay the bill. The merchant took the wholesaler aside and, very embarrassed, whispered in his ear, “Listen, I can’t give you any money for this right now. Please allow me credit until I can pay you.”

We ask the same thing tonight, as we shout out all sorts of requests to God in the *Avinu Malkenu* prayer. We want forgiveness, health, a good life, wealth, redemption and many other things of value. But when it comes down to the last verse (to pay the bill, so to speak), we whisper: “Our Father, our King, be gracious to us and answer us, though we have no worthy deeds (with which to pay You for our large order). Please grant us charity and kindness, and save us.¹”

The metaphor of God as our Father, our King, sitting on a throne weighing our deeds and sins, inscribing us for the book of life is only one image of God. God is completely beyond our understanding. Yet, to be able to talk or teach about God, we use reference points, images we can comprehend. Metaphors and allusions are used but “never meant to be taken literally, merely meant to point us toward something we can imagine but never really see.” Metaphors are so powerful because of the space between the two comprehensible concepts. God is the space in between, in, and all around.

¹Jacob ben Wolf Kranz, known as the Maggid of Dubno, a *Hasidic* master and teacher (1741-1804). Reprinted from Aaron Levine’s “[The New Rosh Hashanah Anthology](#),” published by Zichron Meir Publications.

God as only our Father, our King, is too constrictive and too patriarchal... we are all made in God's image. God is just as much Mother as Father. And we all know other people with these beautiful instincts and qualities that are not mothers or fathers, yet they still embody these characteristics.

There is a divine spark within each of us; the relationships we have with each another cannot be defined by the outward costumes we inhabit, the masquerade masks we wear, or the frivolous nature of much of our time. Each of us, no matter what our birth sex, our gender identity or the way we present ourselves to the world, embodies an essence of the divine.

Pronouns and personification actually confine rather than expand our understanding. If it were possible to think of God without anchoring our thoughts to anything known, our concept of God would be more accurate. God does not conform to gender or human constraints.

Yet, if we limit our understanding of God to stereotypical male images, we are only experiencing God through a very narrow lens. Although I think of the Divine using many metaphors, one that constantly calls me is God as Mother.

The relationship between a mother and child is beautiful and often indescribable:

- The way a three year old runs to her mother every time she sees her, with eager excitement and anticipation
- The care with which a mother cleans a wound and the connectivity that allows mothers to feel their children's emotional pain.
- The ability mothers have to discern their babies' cries, and the instinct to go from 0-60 whenever their cubs are in danger.
- The eagerness with which children aim to please their mothers and the sense of pride and love that overwhelms our senses when we see our children peacefully sleeping.

I experience the Divine in all of those ways. Think of God as a sweet Mother, a caring Mother whose love is unconditional, whose arms are always wide open; whose home is always your home, a

mother that sees our faults and strengths, our deepest fears, our biggest challenges, our half-truths and still, for no conceivable reason, accepts us, loves us and cares for us with warmth, compassion and forgiveness.

God, Please hear our cry... there is no reason to believe we will be better. We are not worthy of your love, but, even still, have compassion on us, your children, and inscribe us in the Book of Life.