

Weekly Teaching

June 29, 2018

“And God created Ha-Adam (the human being) in the Divine image; male and female God created them.”
(Genesis 1:27)

According to the Torah, God initially created the “human being”, who was both male and female at the same time.

But, this original human being, created equally in the image of God, was lonely.

So, God separated the “male” from the “female”.

It is this gender separation that subsequently created the possibility for inequality, a prevalent state for most of human history.

21st century modern Judaism has attempted to firmly establish the equality of all human beings; all equal to each other and all equal in the Divine image.

Temple Sholom, in its own mission statement, states that one of our goals is to transmit a love of traditional egalitarian Judaism.

But, the “traditional” can create the further equality challenge with the egalitarianism.

My mother Z’L was the dominant religious figure in my youth.

I was raised by her on a daily basis within an incubator of ever-present Judaism.

In her 40’s, she pursued an adult Bat Mitzvah because women of her generation hadn’t been given the ritual opportunity to do the same as the 13-year-old boys.

But, tradition and egalitarianism created for her ambivalence when it came to certain ritual practices.

She wouldn’t wear a *tallit* (prayer shawl), declaring it to be “male garb”. She felt the same way about *t’fillin* (phylacteries).

She only would count men for a *minyan* (quorum of 10), and thought women should be Jewish educators, and not rabbis or cantors.

When our oldest daughter, Naomi, became a Bat Mitzvah, she received her *tallit* and *t’fillin*, and took her place to be counted in a *minyan*.

I asked my mother how she felt about this change in practice for her granddaughter.

Her sage answer: “I didn’t grow up with it, but, Naomi will. So, there’s no reason she should have any discomfort.”

There are many items of inequality that we still grow up with, but this doesn’t have to remain the case.

With intentionality, we can transition all traditional ritual practices to be meaningfully embraced by both males and females.

Today, almost all Temple Shalom girls wear a *tallit* while leading their Bat Mitzvah service.

Each girl is taught that they have equal access to Jewish ritual life, and the hope is that since they are growing up in such a Jewish environment they should never have any discomfort with all ritual practices also observed by their male counter-parts.

However, within our congregation there has been a glaring exception to our emphasis on ritual egalitarianism.

Many Conservative synagogues adopted the practice of adding the *Imahot* (Matriarchs) to the *Amidah* (Standing Prayer).

Our prayer book has within it the option to do the same, but the prayer leader wasn't prompting the liturgical change; instead always publicly leading with the traditional mentioning of only the three Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

This past practice, while seeming innocuous, holds us back from our intentions to truly foster ritual equality for both genders.

By not aligning ourselves with the practice of also highlighting the spiritual leadership of our Matriarchs (Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah) within the *Amidah*, we send the message that the women's voices within the Torah aren't as important as the men.

Women were not treated equally to men during Biblical times, or for most of Jewish history.

But, fortunately, we readily acknowledge this was not God's intention: "And God created Ha-Adam (the human being) in the Divine image; male and female God created them."

The Patriarchs and the Matriarchs both served a pivotal role in the development of the Jewish People. Both need to be liturgically recognized, and now we shall consistently do so.

Per the Ritual Committee's recommendation, the Temple Shalom Board of Trustees has authorized this ritual change.

Moving forward, all Temple Shalom public recitations of the *Amidah* will include the *Imahot*.

Future Temple Shalom generations will have no reason for any discomfort.

My hope is that this ritual change will prompt us all to re-examine how both men and women are truly equal, and how we live our lives so as to best manifest this equality in all things.

I now look forward to hearing within our sacred texts the voices of both our male and female heroes.

The Torah pointedly records that God instructed Abraham to pay attention specifically to the words of Sarah: "Listen to her voice."

Now, we can all do the same.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Mitch
rabbimitch@templesholom.com