



JEWISH MOSAIC THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR SEXUAL & GENDER DIVERSITY
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torah QUEERIES

Welcome to Torah Queeries, a joint project of Jewish Mosaic and the World Congress of GLBT Jews! Check back regularly for creative and incisive “queer” takes on the weekly Torah portion or Jewish holiday, brought to you by some of the Jewish world’s most dynamic scholars, rabbis, activists and lay leaders.

Du Partsufin: Introducing the Allgender creation by Igaël Gurin-Malous

Parashat Bereshit – Genesis 1:1 – 6:8

on Friday October 5, 2007 (23 Tishrei 5768)

You are blessed, Lord our G-d, the sovereign of the world, the creator of human beings (“the Adam” in the Hebrew). (*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha-olam, yotzeir ha-adam.*)

You are blessed, Lord our G-d, the sovereign of the world, who created human beings (“the Adam”) in your image, in the pattern of your own likeness, and provided for the perpetuation of humankind. You are blessed, Lord, the creator of human beings. (*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha-olam, asher yatzar et ha-adam b'tzalmo, b'tzelem d'mut tavnito, v'hitkin lo mimenu banyan adei ad. Baruch atah Adonai, yotzeir ha-adam.*)

These two *brachot*, part of the *sheva brachot*, or seven blessings traditionally recited at Jewish weddings seemingly say the same thing, yet they reflect an ancient controversy about the creation of humankind, the distinction between man and woman, and the relationship between masculine and feminine, good and bad, ‘myself’ and ‘other.’ The wedding ceremony assumes that the two partners will face each other in life, two halves uniting as one. If we read the text closely we can see that the partners, ‘myself’ and ‘other,’ were not really meant to face each other and maybe never truly will.

Bereshit, the opening *parasha* in Genesis, focuses on creating boundaries and drawing lines — differentiating between the objects of creation, naming them and categorizing them. Adam’s job is to work in the Garden of Eden, maintaining it and watching over it. Adam is also asked to name the animals for perpetuity and indeed does so, until confronted with the need to name an equal, a mirror of Adam’s self. It is here that our story really begins...

Naming something is a powerful experience, traditionally it gives you power over it and confirms your dominance in the relationship. Recognizing a name and using it lets you understand it and know some of its secrets. Like a magic word that establishes familiarity between you and the person, animal or object, it proves that you know what they are about and also know them apart from yourself. It’s not surprising that in our ancient language to know someone also means to know them intimately, signifying a deep, but bounded connection between two beings. Yet, the lines blur. Much ink has been put to paper about the subject of ‘I’ and the ‘Other’ – or, in Martin Buber’s classic formulation, “I and Thou” (starting interestingly with *Du Partsufin* =

double faces). Philosophers, scholars, poets and sages describe how hard it is to truly face one another, and the challenge of looking at the person in front of us and fully relating, while acknowledging the lines between us.

But what if the line isn't supposed to be there? What if we were meant to be one – neither feminine nor masculine but both, in the same creation, in the same person? What if we were meant to reflect neither sex, nor gender — to not be 50% male and 50% female — but one creature that is both or neither? What if we are still “the Adam,” created and named by G-d with a special intention, to mirror him/her/it self?

In the Talmud, in Tractate Brachot, while discussing the blessings in the wedding ceremony, the sages notice that every time the text talks about creating Adam (*yatzar*) the text uses two ‘yuds’ in the Hebrew, whereas when describing the creation of everything else, the text always uses just one ‘yud.’ Considering this, R. Yirmiya Ben Elazar explains that “man was created with two faces. (*Du Partsufin*)” This idea, later picked up by the medieval commentator Rashi (as well as Plato) when describing the creation of human beings, is not new, but it raises real questions that are even more relevant today than in the times of the Talmud. What does it mean for us if G-d intended for us to have two faces in one body, ones that will never look AT each other but always lead in a different direction? What does it mean to never encounter the ‘other’ since the other is a part of us? What is the bigger challenge: facing another person who represents all that we are not or facing that within us? Can two walk together if they face two different directions? Can two really walk side by side?

I would argue that to be a whole person (both man and woman, masculine and feminine) one needs to be an Adam. In order to merit being called that by G-d we have to allow ourselves to realize the nature in which we have been created, which is both masculine and feminine. We are both genders, sometimes both sexes. We need to always look inwards and recognize and call by name all our parts, both biological and spiritual. We are all LGBT I and Q. We are Adam. When we know that, we can be part of *Bney* (descended) Adam in Gods eyes.

Today, we recite the *sheva brachot* during a wedding when the “two halves” find each other, but do we really understand the true meaning of that challenge? Perhaps these blessings should not be recited at weddings at all, but instead should be used to greet a newborn child — a new Adam?

About the Author:



Igael Gurin Malous grew up in Belgium and Israel. He has a traditional Jewish background and studied in yeshiva for many years. As an adult, he has worked a Jewish educator in a variety of institutions in Israel, Europe, and the United States. Igael served as the Educational Director of the World Union of Jewish Students and as the Assistant Director of the Conservative Movement's Ramah Israel seminar. He also directed the Beit Midrash at Jerusalem's Open House, and taught in a Conservative congregation in Tel Aviv. He now teaches in the Judaic studies department at the Jewish Community High School of the Bay in San Francisco.