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## **The “Genesis” of Patriarchy**

A colleague and close friend recently shared this story with me: She was about to meet with her synagogue president and other members of her synagogue board to begin negotiating her next contract with her congregation. A bit nervous, as these conversations can be stressful, her sister in-law offered her this advice, “walk into that meeting with the confidence of a white heterosexual man.” I was appalled by this advice and then my friend shared, “You know what? It worked. I imagined the bravado and confidence that my male colleague walks around with and I felt ready in a way that I hadn’t before.” In reflection, I don’t know what is more disappointing: The fact that those were the words of encouragement that her sister in law had to offer or that her sister in law’s charge worked. Isn’t 2018 the year of the “woman” as CNN and many other news outlets have claimed? Shouldn’t my friend have felt empowered and confident as a female? Guess not. And so I think there is more work to be done this year or any year to come to be labeled, “Year of the Woman.”

The phrase “year of the woman” was originally coined for the 1992 elections, when American voters elected more new women to Congress than in any previous decade, the slogan was reclaimed to give power to the Women’s March and the #MeToo movement, emboldening and empowering female voices across America.

This past year, we Americans, have spent a lot of time examining and thinking about patriarchal power dynamics and how they have impacted interactions and relationships between men and women. Perhaps some of us believed that patriarchy and inequality between sexes was a thing of the past. And then the NY Times story about producer Harvey Weinstein broke and we realized we have a serious societal problem.

In response to that NY Times story, on Sunday afternoon October 15th of this past year, the actress Alyssa Milano used her Twitter account to encourage women who’d been sexually harassed or assaulted to tweet the hashtag MeToo. Within 24 hours of her post, Twitter said that the hashtag had been reposted over a half a million times. From October 15th into October 16th, more than 12 million Facebook posts, comments, and reactions appeared with the #metoo. The goal of the hashtag, was to give people a sense of “the magnitude of the problem.” Many of you sitting here today probably remember waking up to a Facebook feed dominated by women discussing their experiences of harassment and assault that Monday morning. Some of you might have used the hashtag yourself and re-lived and wrote about a painful memory. Those of you who are not on Facebook or Twitter might recall hearing of this movement in the news. The #MeToo movement on social media and beyond has

taught us that sexual assault and sexual abuse is common, that it is not isolated to the Entertainment industry, and that for decades, women had come to believe that nothing could be done about it.

These truths were and are heartbreaking and the silence around them has gone on for too long. The question is where do we go from here and how can Torah and our tradition be our guide from this moment on?

How did we get here to begin with? Where did patriarchy, a system that has allowed men to feel and act more powerful than women come from? Journey with me all the way back to Adam and Eve. The Torah provides us with two stories about the creation of human beings. In the first chapter of Genesis, which I will refer to as Genesis I, the text tells us, *Vayivareh elohim et ha-adam b'tzelmo, b'tzelem elohim barah oto, zachar u'nekevah barah otam. And God created humans in God's Image, in the image of God, God created him; male and female God created them.*

Now in the next chapter, chapter 2, that I will refer to as Genesis II we have a different telling of the creation of human beings. The text tells us, God formed man from *afar min ha'adamah, from the dust of the earth*. God blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being. A few verses later, God says it's not good for man to be alone. So God decides, "I will make a fitting helper for him." So God creates animals, but none of these will do. So then God casts a deep sleep on the man, who is now referred to as Adam and God performs surgery. God takes one of his ribs and fashions that rib into a woman. Then a few verses later after the eating from the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden, God punishes Adam and Eve, and one of those punishments is that Adam will rule over Eve.

How do we get such a radically different telling of the creation of human beings from one chapter to the next? Biblical commentators offer theories. Perhaps the first story in Genesis, where God creates human beings in equal fashion in one line was just the headline and the second story is the details. Perhaps the first story was written by one author maybe our ancestors the Priests and the second story by a more narrative inclined group known as source J. Or perhaps as our member Bruce Feiler points out in his book *Adam and Eve: The first Love Story*, two versions of the story, "reinforces the notion that life is fundamentally about creative tension." "Creation" he says is about, "Co-creation." So two very different narratives exist for us, that depict opposing ideas about the origins of relations between man and woman. The first story is one of equality and the second could be the very beginnings of patriarchy.

In another theory, an argument suggests that the first telling (Genesis I) is strictly from God's point of view. The second telling, where Eve is created out of Adam's rib could be seen as a more anthropological point of view, perhaps a human point of view. However, the human point of view, the second telling of Genesis transforms the original creation story from one which men and women are equal to one in which men have dominion over women. Or as scholar Mijal Bitton puts it,

“In Genesis II, God describes the way that men experienced and interpreted Genesis I.” If we read Genesis II as a human interpretation of Genesis I, then we human beings, are responsible for patriarchy. Yet, a closer reading might provide an antidote. Once woman is created and Adam pronounces her as a woman, the Torah text jumps back into a narrator voice and says, “Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh.” In Hebrew, “*vasar echad*”...one flesh. Similar to the first telling when God creates, *adam*...not Adam or man, but *adam*, a non-gendered term for human beings. One flesh. One term for humanity...*adam*.

Is it possible that a narrow and literal reading of Genesis 2, often seen as the more popular origin story for Adam and Eve, is the reason for patriarchy? Maybe...

For those of you who have a more scientific mindset, Yuval Noah Harari explores biological reasons for patriarchy in his NY Times Bestseller, “Sapiens.” Harari wonders if men developed over time as stronger, violent, and more competitive, as ways to survive. As a result, male DNA has something innate in it that created a patriarchal social structure. Harari though is quick to debunk these theories and comes to no strong conclusions.

We may not know exactly how patriarchy came to be, but we know that it has been institutionalized in our culture for too long and as a result the inequalities are numerous: Women experience sexual violence more than men. The threat of violence permeates women’s consciousness more than men. Women are underrepresented in higher-wage jobs, local and federal government, business, and educational leadership. Wage inequality permeates every economy and almost every industry. Women continue to provide far higher rates of unpaid labor in the home, women have less access to education and women have lower rates of property ownership.

In the Jewish community, women’s work and contributions are consistently undervalued, underestimated and often rendered invisible. Men are often the public faces of work. In Jewish professional settings, women’s voices are less likely to be invited, championed, supported or invested in than those of men. The majority of articles and books hailed in the Jewish community are authored by men. Jewish panels are consistently majority if not exclusively male. Women continue to be underrepresented at the very top of professional leadership in all of the majority of Jewish organizations. There is still immense social capital and currency in traditionally male ways of interacting and doing business in the Jewish communal workplace. The Jewish boys club is real.

This past year we broke open a communal wound in our secular and Jewish world and now we need to fight the infection and find a cure. To do this we must shift the status quo with teshuvah, education and re-education, and all of us “stepping in.”

Let's start with *teshuvah*, it is Rosh Hashanah afterall.

Here's a case study:recently, the comedian Louis C.K., took the stage at the famed Greenwich Village comedy club, "The Comedy Cellar." Louis has performed many times at this club throughout his over twenty years in the stand-up world.

So, what was the big deal about him showing up just a few weeks ago? Well, it was his first stand-up appearance since he admitted to sexual misconduct nine months ago. The response to him taking the stage was mixed. While the press claimed he received a standing ovation when he took the stage, his fellow peers in the entertainment industry felt like the way in which he returned to his old stomping ground made it seem as if not much had changed for him. I can't stop thinking about the comedy club owner's response. Noam Dworman told the Washington Post, in response to his club letting Louis take the stage, "There can't be a permanent life sentence on someone who does something wrong."

I see why he would say that. Human beings should not have to walk around with the proverbial "scarlet letter" on their forehead if they have done something wrong. However, when someone does something wrong the clear path to removing a "life sentence" is *teshuvah*, atonement. And I am curious why for so many who have admitted to sexual misconduct over this past year there has not been an equal amount of outpouring of *teshuvah*. I am deeply concerned that Louis C.K. is able to glide right back on to the stage to perform and I am even more concerned that he received applause when he took the mic. Admission of sin is NOT *teshuvah*. Teshuvah is behavior change.

Imagine what a role model Louis CK, could have been if he had taken that mic and said the following before he started his routine, "I'm sorry for the pain I caused the women I hurt. I am sorry for how I disappointed my fans. I am seeing a therapist, I am learning how to change my ways. Would it be ok with you if I did some comedy here tonight as it is what I love to do and I want to figure out how I can earn your trust again?" We can and should hold those who are in the spotlight responsible, as well as those who are not in the spotlight. Like the male boss who thinks it is ok to put his hand on his female intern's knee or the fraternity brother who thought it was ok to take advantage of the drunk freshman girl, or the young boy at soccer practice who is told by his coach to stop running like a girl as motivation to make him go faster. We must hold all of these folks responsible, we must hold each other responsible. We must hold our systems responsible, including the police, the judicial system, principals, guidance counselors, and religious institutions. I use the word "we" on purpose here as it speaks to how we read some of our most important liturgy during this season.

The Une Tane Tokef, is a collective imperative. The prayer is written in the 3rd person. Not I. We. What if our repentance this year demands that each of us do our part in helping to affect our collective fate? Judaism teaches that all of our actions are

tied to one another. A good deed begets another good deed. It's upon each of us, individually, to take responsibility for our role in everyone's social well-being; our work together can impact the severity with which sexual harassment and sexual assault effects us all. Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg remarks,

We need teshuvah – which literally means “returning” – to see where we need to be in relationship to others, to ourselves, and to the transcendent. We can each harness our passions and our resources powerfully; there are a lot of ways to invest in the wellbeing of our local community, our country and the world.

In addition to teshuvah, we need to think about how we are educated and how we are educating. How did Genesis II gain so much more popularity as the biblical creation story over the story in Genesis I? Simple, it was taught that way. Literally, the story of God taking a rib from Adam and out of it fashioning Eve, the first woman, became the more popularly and commonly taught story of human creation. So, what do we need to re-teach and what do we need to teach differently? My close friend, Rabbi Evan Schultz wrote on facebook shortly after #MeToo took center stage these words, “I hear you. I believe you. I promise to teach my sons how to properly treat you.” Evan is the proud father of three boys whom he works hard to teach how to be menschs every day. And of course there is more to dismantling socially constructed gender norms than just being a mensch.

The website “My Jewish Learning” offers a list of “10 Ways You Can Promote Gender Equality in Your School.” As I scrolled through the list I was proud to see that BHS could check many of the things it suggests. We have female lay leadership, we have women leading prayer, we have pictures and statues of strong women in the building, we have teen female leaders, we are mindful of language around gender. We need to take our congregational successes and make sure they are being replicated in other areas of our lives, as well as the larger Jewish community. Share our successes, so that others can learn from what we do well.

Beyond the walls of our congregation, we need to tell the stories of our female heroes Jewish and non-Jewish. We need to encourage both our boys and girls to be like those heroes and emulate their qualities. We need to teach that Adam and Eve and all those who identify in between know that they were made in the image of God. And therefore we all have gifts and capabilities, and the right to reach our individual potential.

### *Stepping In*

In addition to *teshuvah* and *education*, we all need to step in here both men and women and make change. For all the power of hashtags and marches, only a small

amount of perpetrators have been called to task, and of those, we have yet to see a serious recognition of wrongdoing. We need to step in and say that's not ok. Stepping in means we can all try and radically shift the power dynamics that have been a chronic symptom of patriarchy. Women keep talking, we can't grow fatigued here and lose our voice. We need to keep stepping in AND leaning in. And perhaps some men need to literally, "lean out" so that women can "lean in." While I like to believe there is space for everyone at the board table sometimes you can't squeeze in another chair, so be bold, give up your seat.

Stepping in means that both men and women need to call out those who exhibit unacceptable behavior. If a friend or a buddy makes an inappropriate sexual comment, you gotta say something. If a stranger is cat calling on the street, yell something positive louder. Examine your own behavior. Be exacting with how you treat others. Stay away from talk about anybody's body or appearance. Comment on the soul rather than the flesh that houses it. Keep your hands to yourself. Check in if people want a hug. Don't be afraid to be overly cautious. Remember to put yourself in other people's shoes. Remind yourself we are all, but one flesh.

Stepping in is something that other female clergy are doing over these high holy days by speaking openly about sexual abuse, misconduct, and the marginalization of women. This is partly because its topical and also because in a traditionally male dominated field we have suffered. So we're stepping in and hoping that 5779 can be the year of the woman, where we see unparalleled advances for women in the Jewish community – in terms of policy, office behaviors, allyship, advancement, equity, and leadership. We hope to raise up the voice of Genesis I to be the dominant foundation of the creation of males and females, where no one is told they will serve the other rather they will be equal partners in the ongoing creation of our world.

### *Conclusion*

Our biblical creation story does not end with the creation of man and woman, rather it ends with Shabbat. Often we describe shabbat as a day of rest, but it is also a taste of the world to come. When it comes to women's rights, equality between men and women, and the eradication of sexual violence and misconduct, we can't rest. Today is the birthday of the world and we recite the phrase over and over again "Hayom harat olam," translated as, "Today the world is born." We usually read this as a joyous phrase. Yet at this time...let's really make this a new world... On this new year, this phrase is a warning to us, this phrase is pleading with us. Let's not stay this way forever, rather, let's give birth to a new reality, a new dawning of equality and safety for all.

Shanah Tovah.