



Torah for Turbulent Times

"Lightening the Load of Loneliness"

"The loneliest moment in someone's life is when they are watching their whole world fall apart, and all they can do is stare blankly." ([F. Scott Fitzgerald](#)) This past Shabbat we began to read again from the Book of Genesis and learned about the two creation stories. G-d created Adam, literally from the "*adamah*/ground," and placed him in the Garden to guard and take care of it. He was told he could eat of the trees (all except for one) and then G-d declared, "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make for him a partner." (Genesis 2:18) From the very beginning we learn that human beings are meant to be with other human beings. These days we all feel somewhat stuck and lonely, missing family, friends and in-person community.

A brief survey of a few Jewish commentaries on this verse in Genesis reminds us of the importance of seeking and being together in companionship. "By these words God intimates that there is to be a communion with those who are willing to be assisted and in their turn to assist others...so that everyone may be entitled to utter the expression of Pythagoras, 'A friend is another I.'" (The Works of Philo) "The purpose of the human species on earth will not be achieved while humanity who is supposed to reflect the divine image will be left to personally carry out all the menial tasks of daily life on earth by being solitary." (Sforno) And, simply stated, "Two are better off than one" (Ibn Ezra).

What can we do to lighten the load of loneliness? We can meet this moment with a new beginning by reaching out even more to each other and finding creative ways to strengthen our connections. I was inspired by Rabbi Marc Katz's "Eli Talk," as he named this issue and shared what a community can do. "One of the existential and

greatest problems of what it means to be human is that of loneliness. This state of being could only be found to be helpful if it moves us to seek out and connect with the community. But when it becomes chronic, it causes trouble. It's for this reason that our verse says "It is not good" - that humanity should be lonely." Katz reminds us that our drive is for deep and meaningful connection with our fellow human beings. He suggests what we can do and how we can participate in easing this state of being. We need to see and be seen by each other. We can lend a listening ear to hear each other's story with openness and love. And, we can learn to deepen our empathy by standing with each other in our loneliness. ([full video](#))

It's a good thing that our powers as a people to schmooze are very strong. We were not meant to be alone and these powers are not for naught. Loneliness can be soothed and softened when we are able to be there for each other in whatever ways are possible.

-Rabbi Mark