

AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps
Torah Portion – Pinchas

No Two Alike

God said to Moses: "Ascend these heights of Abarim and look out at the land that I have given to the Israelite people. When you have seen it, you will be gathered unto your kin just as your brother Aaron was (i.e., you will die)." At that time, Moses spoke to God, saying: "May God, Source of the breath of all flesh, appoint someone over the community who will go out before them and come in before them, and who shall take them out and bring them in, so that God's community may not be like sheep who have no shepherd"
[Deuteronomy 27:12-13, 15-17]

Teach us rabbi, if we see an unusual person, what is the proper blessing to make? This is what our sages said: When you see someone who is entirely black or entirely white, or a hunchback, or a dwarf, or someone misshapen by some other kind of congenital disease, recite the blessing "Blessed are You...who creates a variety of creations" (*m'shaneh et ha-briyot*).

When you see a person who is missing a limb, someone who is blind, or someone covered with sores, recite the blessing "Blessed is the True Judge" (*barukh dayan emet*). That is only when they started out whole and later became afflicted. If, however, they had these characteristics from birth, recite the blessing "Who creates a variety of creations."

When you see lovely creatures and lovely trees, recite the blessing "Blessed are You...in whose world there are such things (*sheh-kakha lo b'olamo*).

But if you see a great gathering of people, recite the blessing "Blessed is the Wise One who knows all secrets" (*Baruhk hacham ha-razim*). For just as their faces are different from one another's, so are their minds unlike one another's. In fact, each person has a distinctive and individual mind.

You can see that this is so from the request that Moses made at the time that his death was drawing near. He said to God: "Master of the Universe! The mind of every single person is known by You, and you know that no two people are exactly alike. When I leave them, I plead with You -- should you appoint a new leader, please appoint someone who will accept each and every person according to that person's individuality."

How do we know that Moses made this request? From the way he addressed God as *Adonai Elohei ha-ruchot l'kol basar* (Adonai, God of the various kinds of human spirit).

[Midrash Tanhuma, Pinhas #10]

QUESTION: What theology of diversity lies behind this teaching?