



Finding an Inner *Beshert*

BY ERIK GLEIBERMANN

BEFORE THE ONSET of the High Holy Days, a time when Jews perform *teshuvah*, a turning back to evaluate our past actions, I recently found myself recounting conversations from the year with my many friends still persevering in the quest to find romantic partnerships. All of us—whether older, younger, gay, straight, partnered or single—wrestle with the same questions. Why is it often so difficult to find the right one? How do we know when we have found *the one*? Am I healthy enough to build a partnership even if I do find the one? Is the person I already chose really the one?

This issue of the one, the soul mate, the *beshert*, is a deep challenge that extends well beyond the quest for romantic partnership. I find that the idea of *beshert* has a deeper resonance as much with the broadest Yom Kippur themes of love and atonement as with who shares my bathroom and my bed.

Tremendous expectation surrounds romantic partnership in the Jewish tradition as well as in modern culture at large. The hallowed primacy of coupling has its roots right in the opening of our Torah story. What are the first words God speaks to Adam and Eve? *P'ru u'rvu*, “Be fertile, increase, and fill the earth.”

The rabbis traditionally uphold Isaac and Rebekah’s arranged pairing as the loving ideal, but word from the street is that more of us prefer the damp heat of Jacob and Rachel’s lustful attraction. Jacob breaks into tears of infatuation and steals a kiss off Rachel about five seconds after first seeing her. He indentures himself for seven years to receive her hand, and when he doesn’t get quite what he bargains for, sacrifices another seven. I guess that’s what you do when convinced that you’re destined to be with someone.

The Jewish idea of “chosenness” resonates deeply in our identity as a people, and resides too in our beliefs about finding a mate, as though love partnership might reflect in miniature the chosen collective destiny. How beautiful. But I wonder if the hope for such exalted connection doesn’t set us up for disappointment. I have an ex-girlfriend who said when we broke up that she didn’t experience us as soul mates. She wasn’t judging the relationship. Our bond just didn’t have that wordless ethereality she craved. I wanted to ask her, “Do you ever wonder if instead of needing a soul mate you just need someone you can love?”

If *beshert* signifies some sanctified bond destined to be, I don’t believe in it. That outlook feels too metaphysically exclusive. I prefer to believe more mundanely, but no less reverently, that love is abundantly available and with the right *kavanah* (intention) it can be created—a consciously crafted rather than wondrously received relationship.

One creative approach to *beshert* might begin with exploring its elements in our existing non-romantic relationships. I am not implying we substitute *(continued on page 64)*