

SEPARATE BUT EQUAL

ויאמר ה' אלקים לא טוב היות האדם לבדו אעשה לו עזר כנגדו¹

This פסוק tells us that woman was created as an עזר כנגדו to the man. רש"י quotes the גמרא² that if man is fortunate, woman will be an עזר, a helper. If he is unfortunate, she will be כנגד, or against, him. However, I think we can glean a new understanding of this פסוק by viewing a similar phraseology used elsewhere in the תורה. In פרשת כי תצא ח, we read the פרשה of תואר. אשת יפת תואר describes how if a man sees a beautiful woman in war, he may take her in and marry her, provided he goes through a process that the תורה requires to make her seem more unseemly.³ רש"י, quoting the גמרא⁴ uses an interesting לשון of "the תורה is working כנגד the יצה"ר". This is a bit puzzling, as it seems the תורה is actually *giving in* to the יצה"ר. What exactly is going on here?

By the אשת יפת תואר, the תורה and יצה"ר are viewing this woman from 2 different perspectives. The יצה"ר sees a beautiful woman, and an opportunity to cause the man to sin. The תורה sees something else. There really is a beautiful woman who is able to be a worthy mother of the Jewish People, but is trapped in a foreign body. The אור החיים quotes the זוהר that when אדם הראשון sinned, the סטרא אחרא (evil forces) took the souls of צדיקים, and placed them in impure bodies. These souls were supposed to purify the bodies they were attached to. If they were unsuccessful, they would ultimately find their way to Judaism. One such example is that of שכם בן חמור. His soul was really that of the famed and martyr, רבי חנינא בן תרדיון. This soul was trapped in the body of שכם, and tried to cling to the pure soul of דינה בת יעקב. Ultimately, the soul wound up by רבי חנינא. Other such examples, or products of them, are רות (the ancestor of דוד and ultimately משיח), the famed שמעיה and אבטליון (who were central to the מסורה), and אונקלוס הגר, whose תרגום has made תורה understandable to the masses. The soldier in battle is really yearning for this woman's pure soul, and we remove all of the physical layers by making her look repulsive, so he can see what he was really looking for this whole time. If all goes well, the story ends in a happy marriage.

¹ בראשית ב.יח
² יבמות סג.
³ עיין דברים כא.יא
⁴ קידושין כא:

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Getting back to the עזר כנגדו, I believe we can learn a very important lesson as to the essence of marriage. If I move my right arm, if you are looking at me from the front, you will see me move my **left** arm. That is because we are opposite, or כנגד, each other. We are viewing the same thing from 2 different perspectives, which results in our interpreting the act 2 different ways. You really know I'm moving my right arm, because you are in a sense conforming to my perspective, which you know to be correct. I once heard that when the פסוק says "על כן יעזב איש את אביו ואת אמו"⁵, both partners take their heritage and incorporate it into their relationship. They are both coming from different backgrounds and different perspectives. Yet, when they realize there is an ultimate truth (even if that truth is not the "absolute truth", but a compromise to get to the more desired goal), they alter their perspectives to see that which they know to be true. A man and a woman will always be כנגד each other. Every person will always be כנגד someone else. However, when they help each other out, and act as an עזר that is כנגדם, they will arrive at the אמת.

Now we can answer our original question. The עזר כנגדו, like the תורה and the אשת יפת תואר, are really working together to fulfill a common goal. The process of יפת תואר can be likened to the dating process. When a man and woman meet, there is an initial physical attraction. As time goes on, and they get to know each other better, the physical layers peel away, and all that's left is the 2 souls ultimately finding their soulmates, their באשערט. A successful marriage is where both parties deepen their relationship from the initial attraction to that of companionship and trust, and develop not necessarily one perspective, but the ability to come together to one truth.