

Rabbi Jack H Bloom, a practicing psychologist in Connecticut, is director of Professional Career Review for the Central Conference of American Rabbis and editor of *Jewish Relational Care A–Z: We Are Our Other’s Keeper* (The Haworth Press). He was interviewed by the *Reform Judaism* magazine editors.

You have said that many Jews are “in serious denial about the nature of the Deity with whom we are in relationship.”

That’s true. Modern commentators do cartwheels to make “difficult” Torah texts consonant with the idea of a benign, perfect Creator of the world who maintains a special, loving, covenantal relationship with the people Israel. One prominent rabbi wrote that “the Torah speaks of God as a parent, a lover, a teacher and an intimate sharer of our hearts.”

To the astute reader this is not even close to the whole truth. For many Jews,

Moses” (Numbers 15:32).

Not a very loving portrait of God. Even after the passing of time to cool the Divine anger, to perhaps consider compassion, to acknowledge that no law covered this situation, God summarily invokes a law promulgated after the fact and petulantly orders that the entire community stone the unfortunate gatherer. Perplexed by the “apparent severity of the narrative,” modern commentators have speculated on God’s rationale: “The wood gatherer, therefore, was not just violating one law but was destroying the dream that Israel would be a people obedient to God’s

God, what are the implications of acknowledging the dark side of God?

We have long assumed that being so modeled refers to that which is good and noble in us. However, the character traits which cause us discomfort and prompt us to seek out therapy to correct are common to God as well. Just like God, we humans can be intolerant of imperfection (our own and others), judgmental, quick to anger when things don’t go our way, and prone to act abusively and destructively. In short, being modeled after God reflects both what is positive *and* negative about us. To truly grasp this idea, we need to set aside the simplistic concept of a perfect God we’ve inherited from our parents and religious school teachers and come to see and accept the notion of a flawed or wounded God.

Why do you think this simplistic God concept is so prevalent?

We have what Rabbi Richard Address, director of the Union’s Department of

“The character traits which prompt *US* to seek out therapy are common to God as well.”

throughout the ages, God has been and remains a great source of strength and comfort; however, judging from the Torah, our foundation text, all too often God is anything but all-loving.

I could cite any number of Torah passages to prove my point. Here is a less known one: “Now when the Children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man picking wood on the Sabbath day. They brought him near...to Moses and to Aaron, and to the entire community; they put him under guard, for it had not been clarified what should be done to him. YHWH said to Moses: ‘The man is to be put to death, yes, death, pelt him with stones, the entire community, outside the camp!’ So they brought him...outside the camp; they pelted him with stones, so that he died, as YHWH had commanded

ways.” But what happened was not *apparently* severe; it was, in no uncertain terms, a cruel and unforgiving judgment.

Perhaps more familiar to many of us is God’s decree pertaining to Yom Kippur observance: “Indeed, any person who does not practice self-denial throughout that day shall be cut off (*nichratah*) from his kin, and whoever does any work on that day—I will cause that person to perish from among his people” (Lev 23:29-30).

Who would not question a God who treats as capital crimes what we would consider relatively minor infractions—not fasting on Yom Kippur or doing what might be considered “work” according to traditional rabbinic law?

Given that the Torah teaches us that we are created *b’tzelem*, modeled after



Jewish Family Concerns, calls a “pediatric view of divinity”—a view characteristic of young children who see “mom” and “dad” in their roles as parents rather than as complex human beings. As each of us matures, we begin to see our parents for who they are, imperfections and all, and we come to accept that even when they were less than ideal mothers and fathers, they did the best they knew how to do. Our child-parent relationship changes, with our parents learning from us, even as we continue to learn from our parents.

Unfortunately, this kind of transition from an infantile to a mature relationship rarely occurs in our relationship with God. Rather, we stay mired in a less mature, dysfunctional, and ultimately disappointing relationship with the Divine. If instead we recognized that God has imperfections