

“IT IS NOT GOOD”

Twice in the Torah the expression, “lo tov -- not good,” is used. The initial use is the first comment God makes on human nature – “it is not good for a man to be alone.” (Gen. 2:18) The second occurs when Moses, as lone judge, is deciding all the Israelite disputes and his father in law, Yithro, says, “What you are doing is lo tov -- not good.” Each instance refers to the burdens of aloneness.

Man, Aristotle famously declared, is a social animal. The Torah reminds us of this truth with the first man and the greatest man. Each of us -- men and women -- needs others to survive and to flourish.

The central moments of Jewish prayer -- the Amidah, the Kaddish, require a Minyan, a quorum of ten. The philosopher Whitehead once wrote that, “Religion is what one does with his solitude.” But Judaism teaches that more often religion is what we do in community, in mutual aid, in support of one another, in relationship.

Jews are a covenantal people. We were born into a relationship in this world. We are a familial people, and feel powerful ties to one another throughout the world. It is not good to be alone, to separate oneself from the community. God’s first comment on human nature remains powerful and important today.