

The Same and Different

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

“What do you do” Mr K. was asked, “if you love someone?” “I make a sketch of that person,” said Mr. K., “and make sure that one comes to resemble the other.” “Which? The sketch?” “No,” said Mr. K., “the person.”

So runs one of Berthold Brecht’s “Stories of Mr. Keuner.” Too often that is how we relate to those in our lives; we have an ideal image and insist the person conform to what we wish. Yom Kippur teaches us the proper balance. We confess in the collective because goodness is part of the ‘sketch’ to which each soul should conform. But there are also private moments of prayer and reflection to explore and invigorate the individual.

Every attempt to make people the same results in tyranny. A human King, the Talmud comments, stamps coins and all are the same. The King of Kings stamps human faces and all are different. Yom Kippur reminds us of the exquisite balance demanded of a healthy spirit. We must care for the community, join with them, not be lost in detached solipsism. But equally our task is to cultivate that which is ours alone, the special endowment given to each precious, unique human soul.