

Where Are You?

Thought for the Week:

Adam and Eve had choices: The tree of life or the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Choosing is an essential part of being human. We can choose good, which is the way of life, or disobedience, which results in death. We choose between the two trees countless times every day.

Commentary:

They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. (Genesis 3:8-9)

Once there was a Chassidic teacher, a great rabbi, who was observing the children playing hide-and-seek. One child covered his eyes and counted while the other children scattered and hid. Then he went and began to find the children, one after another. As he found them the others join the search.

After watching the children play for a while, the rabbi returned to his books. Time passed, and the voices of the children faded away. He was eventually disturbed from his studies by the sound of a lone child's voice crying in the schoolyard. He went out to see what had happened, thinking perhaps the child might be hurt. He asked the child, "Son, what is it? Why all this weeping?" The boy explained, "We were all playing hide-and-seek. I was hiding, and they didn't find me. They quit looking for me, and they all went home." He began to sob. The rabbi realized that this child's sorrow was like God's sorrow. God has, in a sense, concealed Himself and bid us to look for Him, but no one is looking for Him.

In the garden of Eden humans experienced God directly. In the paradise of Eden, human beings lived in simplicity and innocence, without sin, guilt, shame or knowledge thereof. God was present; He was immediate; He was revealed. He spoke with them. Walked with them. They knew His presence; they recognized His voice. He was not hidden. There was no seeking after God. God was everywhere; His voice carried through the orchard.

What has happened since then? Why has God removed himself? Why has He hidden Himself away? Let's look at the story. Who hid from whom? The Torah says, "The man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden" (Genesis 3:8). In the story, it is God who calls out to man. God did not hide Himself. God searched for man. He called out to the human beings, "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9). Abraham Joshua Heschel took the title of his famous philosophy of Judaism from this narrative: *God in Search of Man*.

We are the ones who have hidden ourselves from the presence of God. In our fallen and rebellious state, in our place of sentience, self-awareness and self-determination, we are unable to bear the presence of God.

Where is God? This is the wrong question. The real question is, where are we?

Middot U'Mitzvot (Character and Deeds)

Sex and Monogamy

The Torah says that "the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed" (Genesis 2:25). This is the Torah's view of sexuality. God does not see sex as something sinful, shameful or

perverse. He made it. He designed it to be a beautiful and fulfilling part of paradise. Consider the simple innocence of our first mother and father in the midst of Eden, the garden of delight. Today it is common for people to go through several sexual partners before committing to marriage. It is also common for marriages to end in divorce. Things are completely out of kilter. God wants us to experience and enjoy sexuality within a committed, monogamous marriage, just like our first father and mother. When that happens, we experience a small portion of the joy of Eden. When we take sex out of that context, we twist it into something ugly and destructive. The Torah says that husband and wife, when joined together in marriage, are "one flesh." In the Bible, the term "flesh" means "human body." This is the amazing mystery of marriage. When a man and a woman are married, they are spiritually and physically united. They in essence become one new human body. Henceforth, neither one is complete without the other. That's why marriage can be so wonderful. That's why divorce is traumatic and tragic. This also explains why infidelity and sexual relationships outside of marriage are so damaging. The apostle says, "Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Hebrews 13:4). We are not designed for multiple partners. We are physically and spiritually designed for a committed, monogamous relationship.