

D'var Torah: Parashat B'reishit

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Perhaps the oldest, most ancient game of “Hide and Seek” took place in the Garden of Eden. Just after Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit, they hear God walking, moving about the garden, and they hide, suddenly aware of their nakedness and afraid of the repercussions of their disobedience. God calls out to Adam: “*Ayeeeka?* Where *aaaare* you?”¹ – the divine equivalent of “come out, come out, wherever you are!”

This liminal pause between God’s question and Adam’s answer is a juicy one. Imagine you are Adam – the sting of fear, shame, and guilt all flashing through your blood, unsure of how to answer.

This is such a human moment, which makes sense since Adam’s very name, “*adam*” means “human” or “man.” We have all felt something like this before – knowing we have done something wrong, and deciding whether to follow our best impulses and own up to it, or succumb to our basest urges and act out further, perhaps blaming someone else – just like Adam then blames Eve, and Eve blames the serpent.

There is a Cherokee story called “The Tale of Two Wolves.” It goes like this: One evening an old Cherokee told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside people. He said, “My son, the battle is between two ‘wolves’ inside us all: One is Evil. It is anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego. The other is Good. It is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith.” The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather: “Which wolf wins?” The old Cherokee simply replied, “The one you feed.”

God’s question, “*Ayeka?* Where are you?” is not a physical one. God, of course, in all of God’s omniscience, already knows where Adam and Eve are physically located within the garden. The question is spiritual in nature, a divine check-in of sorts. Where

¹ Genesis 3:8-9

ARE you, Adam? Where is your heart at this moment, knowing you have done the wrong thing? Where will you go from here? Which wolf will you feed?

If this kind of accounting of the soul feels familiar, you are right! We just spent our holy days of *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* (and the preceding month of *Elul*) asking ourselves this exact question. Where are we now in 5783? Where did we miss the mark in the year gone by? How can we do better the next time we are confronted with a similar situation?

You might be thinking – Well, yes, Cantor; we already covered that! We’re set until next year, right? To you I say, “Aha – not so fast!” The beauty of our tradition is that while *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* are our glorious and majestic annual reminders to reflect and repent, this spiritual work does not end with the final blast of the shofar on *Yom Kippur* afternoon. We have the opportunity (and perhaps the obligation) every single day to check in with ourselves, to ask others for forgiveness, to start over, to do better.

In the *V’ahavta* prayer we recited just a short while ago, we read the words: “*V’hayu had’varim ha’eileh asher Anochi m’tzav’cha **hayom** al l’vavecha*. May these words with which I command you **today** be upon your heart.” My teacher, Cantor Ellen Dreskin, taught me many years ago that “*hayom*,” “today” is the word that jumps out at her from the page each time she recites *V’ahavta*. Every time we read or chant this prayer, no matter when we say it, it’s **today**. How will we choose to live out the commandments or our own internal knowing to do the right thing **today**?

Unlike Adam and Eve, we don’t live in the Garden of Eden, and we don’t have a divine voice calling out to us asking, “*Ayeka?*” So what do we do when we don’t have that voice from without? What do we do when *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* have come and gone, and we have no explicit reminders to reflect until next *Elul*? To where do we turn? 11th century Spanish Jewish poet, Yehuda HaLevi’s answer comes in the form of a *piyyut*, a liturgical poem entitled “*Yah Ana Emtza’acha*.” He wrote: “Where might I go to find You, [God,] Your Place is exalted and hidden? Yet where would I not go to find You,

Your Presence fills the universe! My heart cries out to You; please draw near to me. The moment I reach out for You, I find You reaching in for me.”²

And so, we turn inward. After all, each of us human beings were created *b'tzelem Elohim*, in the divine image. The moment we reach inside ourselves, we might find something holy reaching back. If we are able to quiet ourselves enough to summon that spark of holiness, perhaps we can ask ourselves “*Ayeka?*”, taking a moment to stop hiding and assess where we are, to check in spiritually, and to put a pin on our emotional and behavioral maps. Once we can take that sacred, juicy pause to be honest with ourselves about where we stand, then we will know which wolf to feed. Shabbat Shalom.

² *Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur*, p. 171