

The Garden: What Went Wrong

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The first couple's first meeting was so beautiful and so romantic! With such a start, what can possibly go wrong? Sadly, most movies end with the couple riding into the sunset, when in reality, that's when the real, hard work actually starts. Indeed, it turns out, no matter what, challenges will always come our way, even in the most perfect place in the world.

For some reason, in spite of the initial oneness, the woman was alone in the Garden. Was she physically strolling on her own, or did she feel a greater loneliness already? Where can he be, always when she needs him... The sages tell us that the man and the woman just finished making love and Adam – fell asleep. Even though we think we know what's coming, we should likewise note and be bothered that the story goes from “flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone”, to her now wandering in the Garden without him, being open to engage in a new, doubtful interaction. Between us and ourselves, we might wonder, how far does our mutual responsibility go when joining with another in a life journey? Where is the balance between tuning to walk together, and between independence and self-exploration?

One way or another, the woman was alone, an opportunity the serpent must have looked for. Some say, he looked to replace Adam, and be her mate. And others – say he looked to replace the woman and be the one next to Adam, who is described in some *midrashim* as the most phenomenal being – tall, handsome and very capable. The serpent then posed her with a famous question, so famous we miss how stupid it is: “Had G-d told you not to eat from any tree in the Garden?” (Genesis 3:2) Of course not, and the serpent knows it too. But he uses a complicated conversation starter, one of those sophisticated statements, not like ‘hey gorgeous, how is it going’ or ‘what time is it’ which she would know to ignore, but rather, one that she can't ignore, one that is thought provoking: Has G-d told us not to eat from any tree in the Garden? You mean, do you know about what G-d tells us? Do you know what He says? And what are you saying? Are you saying that, perhaps, there other places outside the Garden (as in, in the Garden, you can't eat but maybe elsewhere, you could) that we can explore more freely? Is there a world outside of what we know here?

Anyone who's been subject to street comments knows the ones that can easily be ignored and the more complex ones, and with such an opening, he was hard to ignore. The sages tell us that of the two humans, she was the more inquisitive, curious and social being. When Adam asks about things, he is still used to being the ‘center of the universe’. He notices the animals, but mostly because they shed a light on his loneliness. God tells him what to eat and what not – and he accepts. She wasn't alone with G-d in the Garden and doesn't take things for granted. She wants to know what else can we do; what are our possibilities. She also doesn't know that

there is a potential for evil in the world. The serpent from him end, presents the subject in the lowly manner: “*af ki...*” has God really...? Or maybe also – so what if G-d said that...? He sets the stage of doubt and defensiveness for her. Maybe he has seen them eat to their hearts delight from all the other trees, Adam guiding her carefully, because as we shall see, she was given the instruction directly. Further, waking up in the finished Garden without additional time to watch the different creatures, she might have been unaware to who the serpent was, what was his task and what he knew.

Was he really thinking that they cannot eat from any tree in the Garden? She tried to correct his “little” mistake: “We can eat from any tree in the Garden, but from the tree which is in the midst of the Garden, God said that we should not eat, neither should we touch it for we will die” (Genesis 3:2-3). Is that really what G-d said? Reading back we notice a small breakdown in communication between the man and the woman. First, that is not what G-d said. Second, G-d didn’t say it to her but to him. Third, rather than go back and wake Adam up, she takes the initiative and offers her opinion to a stranger in an authoritative manner on a subject she doesn’t know.

Why did she tell the serpent, “... neither should we touch it” when the commandment was only regarding eating? Why did she add it? The sages don’t think she was trying to add stringencies but rather that she really not know otherwise, as Adam didn’t communicate exactly what was given to him. We don’t know if he told her how important it was to fulfill God’s commandments as a mean to be closer to each other and to Him, or did he maybe add a “fence” to the law because he didn’t trust her?

The Midrash tells us that once she added that ‘do not touch it’, the serpent pushed her to the tree. She touched it and nothing happened to her. Now the serpent could say, ‘see?! Likewise, nothing will happen to you if you eat it either!’ Anyway the serpent proved more knowledgeable and reliable than Adam! Perhaps if she added the ‘do not touch it’ piece on her own, she would have now known that the serpent was wrong. She didn’t. And she was not personally commanded. She didn’t have the original “proof text”. Now, instead of doubting the serpent, the woman began to doubt her man. And God’s words.

Next, the serpent, who just showed her he knows better than God and Adam, promised her that eating from the fruit will not cause death either but make her and Adam like God. Is that how God gets His powers? If so, what if she ate some, and what if she gave Adam some, and what if Adam would be just a little more like God, independent, able to make his own decisions instead of taking commands from another, ever-present (‘where is he, always when I need him?’), all powerful (‘wouldn’t it be nice if he did more than just walk around the Garden, or sleep under the trees?’) and all-knowing (‘I wish he’d understood me better!’). The woman had already touched the tree and she was quite well, thank you, with no harm. She heard the

serpent; maybe he kept talking and talking, hissing and hissing, confusing her like a good salesperson more and more. She could see the tree looked nice; it was probably tasty – and it has positive powers. The serpent was working on all her senses. Everything she wanted for herself and her man was in this tree: knowledge, creativity, power, pleasure, independence. She held it. Maybe bounced it in her palms a couple of times, rolling it from hand to the other. Then she took a bite. As soon as she did, something happened. Things will never be the same.

She went back to Adam, or did he wake up and join her in the Garden? She gave him from the fruit to eat with her. We have to wonder, why did he eat? Surely, he actually knew what fruit it was. Why didn't he say 'no'? Why didn't he object?? A moment of immense drama and tension is folded in the one Hebrew word, "and he ate"; a drama that isn't described anywhere, but left to us to guess. I can see Adam gazing in disbelief, his eyes darting from the fruit to her, back and forth. In that one instance he knows that once the woman ate the fruit she is destined to die while he would live on in his lonely world again, or worse, be given yet another "partner", replacing her. The total special oneness they shared was shattered. Their mutual fate from now on would be possible only if he too ate from the fruit. Perhaps she already knew his weakest point: his attachment to her. He could not imagine being alone again without his mate. Fears of death and separation crept into him. At that moment he had to make a choice between her and God. Was he fooled or did he let himself be fooled because the alternatives were so much worse? Is that the first time someone decided to skip the temptation to be "right" but opt instead for their relationship. In a moment of rare, pure love, they chose each other "for better or worse".

The sages debated, exactly what fruit was it. Opinions vary with no agreement, perhaps because the type of fruit it was is secondary. Some say it was wheat, symbolizing substance, nourishment and therefore, knowledge. Some say it was a fig, the leaves of which are what Adam and the woman used to cover themselves. Figs are eaten because of the taste and not nutritional value, therefore symbolizing indulgence in unnecessary physical pleasures rather than spiritual. Some say it might have been grapes or an *etrog* (kind of citron). Either way, nowhere in the Jewish tradition is an apple mentioned.

Afterwards

Afterwards, things were never quite the same. Christianity tells us about original sin and associates it with sex. The rabbis, on the other hand, point out that sexual relations existed long before and were considered desirable and good. So what changed? Before – Adam and the woman naturally were able to be one. After – their oneness broke. They went from "flesh of my flesh" to blaming each other. What could have started as a mistake and misunderstanding turned into a giant rift between them. Whatever they hoped to gain by eating the fruit of the tree might not have been a bad thing per-se, be it knowledge or power. Requesting those

things might have expressed dissatisfaction with God's creation, ungratefulness and lack of appreciation. And yet, if they really wanted something so badly, they should have asked God for it, not the serpent. Now, their bodies became subject to limitations of the physical world, expressed by the threat of death, and the struggle to use their bodies for spiritual purposes became much more difficult. The Talmud says that if people used their physical desires only to serve God, they would have remained immortal.

Yet, transgressing God's one and only simple commandment was not the only problem. When God then called on Adam, using one short word "*ayeka*" for 'where are you', sort of like the angry parent yelling from the front porch for his rambunctious kid, Adam, instead of answering perhaps with a "*hineni*", a 'here I am' as other, later leaders, Abraham, Joseph and Moses did, started a list of excuses. First, he blamed the woman: it was not his fault, not at all. It was clearly hers. And what more, he then implied that he never really wanted her in the first place, describing her as "the woman whom You gave me", going on to accuse God. Adam forgot all about his happiness with the perfect match he got, with his joy at "this one, this time". He didn't even admit to his own part in the action. The woman for her part similarly passed the blame to the serpent. It wasn't her fault. The serpent gave her the fruit, and whose idea was it to have a serpent in the Garden??

As we know, this pattern hasn't changed much. When we make a mistake in a relationship, we often fall into the same behaviors. We need "space" or "independence" or any form of 'just give me a break already'; we put ourselves and our comfort first, as with Adam sleeping, rather than the other, and our partner, feeling alone, is subject to unnecessary opportunities which can be destructive to us. We mess up on being clear in our communication, and wonder why the other person fills in the blanks. We are embarrassed when we don't know something and – for various reasons – don't ask who we should, but seek support elsewhere. Many relationships go quickly from 'happily ever after' to shirking responsibilities and mutual accusations. Addressing an interaction like a Torah text or a modern skit and examining it carefully might shed a brighter light on what happened, how we got to where we are so we can together unravel the situation and rebuild the relationship.

As we probably already know, God didn't buy into their mutual accusations (which should give us a hint when we engage in the like), but very sadly, someone did buy the story, and, as is often the case, did so without being fully aware of it. These were Cain and Abel, the first two children, who inherited these behaviors, learning to shake responsibilities in exchange for reciprocal accusations. One turned out to be a perpetrator and the other – a victim. One –acts and causes harm, and his brother – the passive one who has things 'happen to him'. Their fate painfully shows that neither path is acceptable. Adam and his woman, by then named Havah, will have a third son who will in turn be the father of humanity.

The Consequences

God, as a good parent or mighty king, listened to the cacophony of accusations and then pronounced his verdict and his “punishment”. I put punishment in quotation marks since it is important to remember that although people may punish each other, and do so often out of revenge, using horrible methods, for all sorts of wrong (often selfish) reasons, God, the way we understand God, does not. Whenever God punishes, His goal is to educate the person as well as to provide a vehicle through which he or she can rectify whatever it is they did wrong. The insightful Hebrew plays on similarity in the words *onesh* – punishment, and *enosh* – a human. In the Psalms we find that a person who is “punished” but also “shaped” by God – is lucky. On that background we can look into – and better understand - what the Divine jury here decided.

The woman was originally created to be Adam’s partner in perfecting the world through specific gifts, yet, she misdirected her potential. In retrospect we must wonder: what was so urgent in her communication with the serpent that couldn’t wait? Couldn’t she have “paused” and asked Adam to explain her regarding the one forbidden fruit? Only one in a whole Garden where everything was available to them! Or perhaps, and he sat down to “explain” in his over-bearing manner? Then why didn’t she ask God directly, by herself? Did she think she can’t, that spiritual communication is “his department”?

God therefore told her: “I will greatly increase your pain and your travail (of childbirth). In pain \ sorrow you shall bear children and your passion shall be to your man, and he shall dominate you”. She would have to learn how to correct this part in herself. Her ability to seduce him will always be associated with potential pain, and sexuality for her will be a complex experience that relates to a mixture of pleasant and unpleasant. She would be vulnerable in pregnancy and childbirth. We are told that there are ten changes which God brought to the woman: childbirth would be painful; there would be discomfort during pregnancy; women would have a menstrual cycle; they will have anguish during child rearing years, and more. Those were considered “curses” since they all felt bad and they all interfered with her natural, flowing, peaceful attachment to her man. They were meant to help the woman correct and perfect their ability to nurture properly, a quality unique to her. We know from our history that in many cases, difficulties during these life trials drew women closer to God. This is often not easy to understand but worthwhile to note that the Jewish tradition has given women special commandments to observe in order to bring back that spirituality that was lost back in the Garden. There might be other practices that acknowledges both the place where the seam has been unraveled and what path to correct it in a healthy, respectful manner to the woman and her environment.

The desired balance is very (very!) delicate: A story tells us about a scholar who poured out his heart to his teacher: my wife is ruling over me, he said, and my opinions and wishes are like nothing in front of hers. The rabbi answered: ‘check yourself very carefully because it is all up to you. The Torah has taught us what is natural: “the woman’s desire is to her husband and (only then) he is her command” (Genesis 3:16). When the order is reversed, that means that the desire is in the husband and she has the rule”. Namely, his rule depends on her desire of him so he can only rule as much as she allows him. In order to be king of the house, he will have to make her queen first. He will have to cultivate her desire for him since his “sovereignty” depends on her. The dance continues. The see-saw keeps going up and down, seeking the point of equilibrium.

Adam was not spared God’s ideas for restructure and re-education. He was given his own set of opportunities to regain his spiritual heights: “by the sweat of your brow you will eat bread until your return...” return? What return?? Some explain until Adam returns to God, by repenting and doing complete *teshuvah* (repentance). Adam was also changed in ten areas, among them his look, no longer the tallest and most handsome being on earth, and the fact that he will have to labor in order to provide for himself and his woman. He used to be the lord and master of the whole world; in fact, the world was created just for him. Now he can barely hope to achieve mastery of his home and his field. And, he will only be lord to his household if he acquired his wife’s desire to do so.

Last but not least, the serpent was told there will be animosity between him and the woman and his offspring and her offspring, so much for being terrified of what’s out there. The serpent was also told he will crawl from now on, on the ground, which leads us to believe that before he could walk, maybe even upright, being possibly more human than modern day “snakes”, and therefore not unlikely that he symbolizes a valid competition for either the man or the woman in the original union, cunningly conspiring how to take their place next to the other one and be endowed with all their gifts.

And her name shall be...

Honey? Sweetie? Darling? What did Adam call her all this time? Or did he not need to call her anything because they were so tuned to each other, so together?

Only at this point in the Biblical story, after the occurrences in the Garden, Adam names his woman –Hava (with a guttural opening “H”), as Adam is the one who named all the creatures on earth. Tradition has it that each letter holds meaning and by putting them together, Adam expressed each animal’s qualities. The most classic is the dog, which in Hebrew is *kelev*, and means – like a heart, implying dog’s core quality as loyal, man’s best friend. Busy with linguistics, that’s when Adam discovered that there is no match, no “help-meet” against him.

The English translation named Hava Eve, which I deeply dislike, as it seems to be connected to evil, while Hava, though more challenging to pronounce in English, shares its roots with “life” (chai) and “experiential being” (chavaya), was given to her because she was going to be “mother of all living things”. Some say that from here on, her primary role would shift from being “the woman” to being a mother. This was her way of making up for her mistake, now bringing life to the world. Further, the man and the woman could not be busy anymore with just each other but had to care for future generations. Still, some commentaries do not see her name, Hava, as significantly different from her role so far. According to them, she was named Hava because she gave meaningful life to Adam’s existence by being his help-meet and bearing his offspring for generations thereafter. She was created closer to the Divine, and able to direct her man in that direction. Therefore her name is closer to God’s name, both coming out of the root – to be, to exist. Yet, say others, she can also turn into a “haviya”, which is Aramaic for serpent; she can also be misleading, since she has done to Adam what the serpent has done to her. Hava’s name also shares root letters with the word “conversation” to remind her to use the gift and power of speech in order to provide him with her good counsel.

Indeed, Hava is called “the mother of all living”. In Hebrew, mother is “em”, with the letter *alef*. Almost the same sounding word with a different letter, *ayin*, would change the meaning of the sentence to “with all living”. From here, the rabbis taught that “a woman goes up with her husband (in richness) but not down (in poverty)” for she is part of life, joy and well-being, not of destitute, which is equated with death.

It is interesting to note that from here on, Adam’s job as the one naming those around him is completed. When their children are born, it will be Hava who will give them their names. Giving names is a particularly important task in the Bible since the name given often indicates who is the person – or creature – involved, and what is its role, character and destiny. Being able to name someone shows a modicum of insight, wisdom and understanding. For example, Cain’s name, Kayin, is from the same root as the Hebrew kinyan, meaning possession and indeed, Cain was more interested in having things than giving them. His offering to God was meager and stingy. His brother, Abel, is called Hevel, which means a puff of air or nothingness. What kind of name is “nothingness” for a child? Abel was not thinking highly of worldly affairs. He didn’t mind offering the choicest of his flock and giving up his material “stuff” for God. As we know and mentioned earlier, neither extreme is desirable.

And Adam knew Hava...

And so, Adam and Hava were banished, together, from the Garden of Eden, of oneness and perfection, to work and achieve this spiritual state again on their own. That’s when we’re told that “Adam knew Hava, his woman”. Didn’t he know her by now? The Biblical “know” implies having relations, not recognition and being acquaintances. But traditional commentaries all

agree that this too happened before between Adam and the woman. Yet, sexuality takes a new aspect. There are other words used throughout the Bible to describe this act, but it is mentioned here as “knowing”, using the same root that is used for *etz hada’at*, the Tree of Knowledge. The Tree of Knowledge thus represents not so much the loss of the primal innocence of Eden but rather the loss of one set of relationship and their replacement by another, quite different. Things become good and bad. Sexuality too, has the potential now to be used by the evil impulse; to be a desire which cannot be quenched, unlike thirst or hunger, and seeks nothing but its own gratification, even if it means one’s destruction. The fact that there are so many sexual prohibitions in every culture shows how sensitive and even strange this drive can be. And yet, at the same time, sexuality also has the potential of being godly and creating life, and of making two people one again, overcoming their separateness and tying them in a connection which surpasses all others, as a culmination of their total relationship.

The star

While traveling in Nepal many years ago, I noticed graffiti on the walls including some familiar symbols. Surprisingly, among them was a six points star, commonly known as “The Star of David”. Were the Nepali people ancient Jews? Not necessarily. Turns out, “David’s Shield” is an ancient, mystical symbol with new meanings.

This shape can be just a six points star, or we can also see it as two equally sized, equal lateral triangles: One has broad shoulders to carry the household responsibilities; the other – a broad lap to nurture the young ones. One is “rooted in the sky”, if that is possible, and might be preoccupied with lofty causes like, how China should vote in the U.N. and what should South Africa do about foreign policy, while the other is “rooted in the ground”, referred to as “mother earth”, making sure there is food on the table and mended clothes to wear. Or perhaps, it’s the other way around and one is earthy and concerned with material livelihood and survival; the other – intuitive and attuned to life’s godly flow within and without. Shortly, one triangle represents male qualities, and the other – female.

Male and female. What is the meaning of these two words? I once again retrieve to the Hebrew. First we must learn that there is no “it” in Hebrew. Everything that in English would be an “it” is also either “he” or “she”, no matter if it’s a table (he), balcony (she), window (he) or door (she). But some things can have both male and female forms, like boy and girl, man and woman, male horse and female horse and so on. In those cases, the rule is that in order to change a word from male to female one (usually) needs to add an “*ah*” sound at the end of the word. So, for example, if we say “*yeled*” for a boy, a girl would be “*yalda*”; *ish* – is man, while *isha* – a woman; *sus* is a male horse, and *susa* is the female; *chatul* is a male cat, and *chatula* – female.

So far so good. But what are the Hebrew words for male and female themselves? Based on the rule above, if I told you male is “*zachar*”, you would be right to guess that female is “*zachara*” or some sort of combination on that. Alternatively, if female is “*nekeva*”, perhaps male is “*nekev*”? Except – it’s not.

“Male” and “female” are each unique words that are not even remotely related, they don’t even share the same root. *Zachar*, male, gets its root from “memory”, “remembrance” while *nekeva* (female) - comes from “set firmly”, “perforate”. Therefore, a modern true to the Hebrew text translation should quote Genesis chapter 1: 27 saying: “And God created the human being, remembrance and hole He created them”...

When pointed out, most of us, native Hebrew speakers, shrug in somewhat embarrassment and jot that to the fact that we speak an ancient language and who knows what happened to it in thousands of years of usage. But what if it’s not just a linguistic coincidence and there is more to it?

Let’s check what does it actually mean to “remember”. “Re-member”, to connect something yet again. We find that the same root is grammatically immediately related to “reminder” (*lehazkir*), which is almost the same as “secretary” which, in some places, can indicate historian (*mazkir*) as in Secretary of State position or the Secretary of the U.N., all implying the one who is the bearer of tradition. In some cases the same root appears as part of a sacrifice (*minchat zikaron, maskeret avon* – “an offering of remembrance, reminder of an iniquity”, in Numbers 5:15 and Exodus 34:19) The same root (z.k.r.) isn’t too far from “engage in”, blocked, closed (s.g.r.), dam (as in water), shut, seal (s.ch.r.). To remember is “to store in memory”. Is there a masculine imagery here, related to the *zera*, Hebrew for seed and sperm, a carrier of the past and potential for future? I’m thinking of Woody Allen’s “Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Sex and Was Afraid to Ask”, the little helmeted sperm waiting to be ejected, carrying with him all he is and came from, aiming to make sure that all that he is, reaches the future. This force, this power, translated into diverse ways of expression – is a unique quality that indicates ‘masculine’.

Female or “*nekeva*” shares its root with other words that imply “set firmly”: making a hole, penetrating (and hammer, a penetrating tool), particularizing; deciding, naming. Interestingly, she symbolizes stability on one hand, and on the other - space, emptiness, and thus a receptive vessel. As such, she is definitely not a “him” with an “*ah*” sound in the end. She is a unique existence all by herself, with her own qualities, presence, presents and needs. She doesn’t need to eject into space all that is past, present and future. She has the capabilities – and the need - to nurture, to sustain, to hold in place, to receive and thus to give.

Of course, these are generalizations. Of course, there are male and female qualities in each of us. And yet, the Torah in the creation story and the Hebrew language through its roots and grammar, convey some critical ideas. These do not speak about “strong” and “weak” on the one hand. They also don’t let us think that the man and the woman will be identical twins with matching plumbing like any other pipe system. They are two totally different beings. At times, I wonder: what did God have in mind when he created us like this? How is “remembrance” supposed to communicate with a “hole”? How would the “force” talk with the “vessel”? Man are from Mars... indeed! How is supposed to work?

At other times, I marvel at the perfection of the idea, like two porcupines... if only they learned to hug each other from the soft side instead of trying to get to the other through the pointy thorns on the back! Like with the star, made of two triangles, the two shapes have to line up in a particular way to create a star in order to provide in areas where the other is lacking. The system is not bullet-proof: while life’s tests are opportunities to express our connection to each other and to God, we should try to stay away from unnecessary tests; exploring that which we don’t understand is both good and bad, and comes with a price. Blessing and curses can be the same thing from a different angle.

At times, people think that paradise is a place without rules, being able to freely do “whatever we *feel* like”. Here we see that although there was only one rule which should have been easy to comply with (there must have been lots of other wonderful trees in the Gardens), that was “too much”. Even Paradise cannot exist without some boundaries; and when we try to push through that, expecting to win it all, we lose everything. We get exile and a flipping, burning sword separating us from eternity, preventing us from ever going back.

There is something “bitter-sweet” in the first man and woman’s story: it contains so much pain, and yet, could it have really happen any other way? What would like be like in the Garden of Eden? What would we be doing with our eternal time, if we didn’t have any wisdom, any “knowing” to distinguish between good and evil, to choose, and ultimately to act as partners in God’s creation??

Last but not least: We could argue what is exactly the Torah’s definition of a human being. The Aramaic translation calls us a “speaking creature” therefore delineating the development of speech as the cut-off point. We know we’re not merely a “tool making monkey”. Regardless, both historically and from a Torah perspective, there must have been other people around. After all, Adam and Hava’s sons will beget children with other women. There is a reference to God’s people. Who are they? We don’t know. We can just assume there were others around.

And yet.

For Adam and Hava there was no one else. On some level this is the way it should be for every couple, and this is why, at a Jewish wedding, one of the blessings says: "Let the loving couple be very happy, just as You made those You created in the Garden of Eden happy". Were Adam and Hava happy? After the ordeal at Eden, blame, accusations, shame and expulsion, they lost eternity for a compromised relationship, labor for their livelihood and continuity. One of their sons killed the other, and the murderer had to wander the earth, doomed and marked on his forehead forever. Let's pause and imagine: How did family get together look in this family?

And yet.

They didn't see anyone else. The option of, 'this is hard, I've had it, maybe the neighbor's daughter \ wife \ mother is better for me' – was not there. And so – we pray and bless every man to see his wife as the poet later describes in Proverbs (31:29): "Many women have done well, but you outshine them all". This is what we say at a wedding: let the loving couple be like this. Regardless of the challenges, they should view their union as if they are the only ones to each other in a fabulous, magical, eternal place. Setting our expectations in place and posing ourselves for success might be half the journey to achieving it.