



The Pardes Parsha Discussion by Rabbi Alex Israel

Bereshit: Where Art Thou?

“God called out to the man and said to him, “Where are you?”

He replied, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.”

He asked, “Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat of the tree from which I had forbidden you to eat?”

The man said, “The woman You put at my side—she gave me of the tree, and I ate.”

When Adam and Eve eat of the forbidden fruit, God asks them “*Ayeka* - Where are you?” Does God not know where Adam is? Why does he ask this question?

When Kayin/Cain kills his brother, God approaches him and asks: “Where is your brother Abel?” Cain intensifies his guilt by saying: “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” He denies any responsibility, and certainly the guilt of murder!

So please discuss:

- Why does God ask these leading questions?
- What is God trying to achieve?

“Where are you: He knew where he was, but He asked him this to enter into conversation with him.”(Rashi)

Adam responded to God: “I was scared because I am naked.” (3:10)

Shadal explains: “Adam would not confess the real reason for his fear. He still thought he could hide his sin.”

- How did God hope that Adam would respond?
- How should Cain have responded? Why would this have been better?
- Why didn't they confess their sin to God? What stopped them?

In fact, Adam shifts the blame away from himself. He says: "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat." (3:12)

Ramban/Nachamanides suggests that Adam cynically places some of the blame on God:

"The woman who You gave "as a helpmeet", she gave me from the tree. I would have thought that anything that would say to me would bring me help!"

Likewise, when Cain says to God, "Am I my brothers keeper?" Might he be saying:

"Am I my brother's guardian? Are not You [God,] meant to preserve Man from natural disasters?" (Malbim)

What do Adam's response and Cain's response have in common? They don't merely deny wrongdoing. They go further.

- Who does Adam blame? Do you agree with Ramban that he blames God in some way for giving him woman?
- Why do people shift blame from themselves?

Martin Buber suggests that all of us should feel that God is addressing this question to us:

"You yourself are Adam, you are the man whom God asks: 'Where art thou?' ... God does not expect to learn something he does not know; what he wants is to produce an effect in man which can only be produced by just such a question, provided that it reaches man's heart — that man allows it to reach his heart.

Adam hides himself to avoid rendering accounts, to escape responsibility for his way of living. Every man hides for this purpose, for every man is Adam and finds himself in Adam's situation. To escape responsibility for his life, he turns existence into a system of hideouts. And in thus hiding again and again "from the face of God," he enmeshes himself more and more deeply in perversity... but in trying to hide from Him, he is hiding from himself." (Martin Buber. The Way of Man pg.8-10)

- In what manner do we avoid guilt just like Adam?
- Do we find ourselves blaming others?
- What other mechanisms do we have to shift blame from ourselves?
- Why is this a problem?

Shabbat Shalom!