

# The Parsha Discussion

TORAH TO DISCUSS WITH TEENS AND ADULTS AROUND YOUR SHABBAT TABLE

## Bereshit 5788 – “Where Art Thou?” - Seeking and Hiding



### SEEKING:

When Adam and Eve eat of the forbidden fruit, God asks them “*Ayeka* - Where are you?”(3:9) 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?”(4:9)

### Please discuss:

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

Rashi answers:

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

“To open a conversation, so that he would say “I am naked” and could not deny his sin” (Shadal)

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

### HIDING:

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)

Cain too says: “I do not know! Am I my brother's keeper?”

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 had thought that anything that she would say to me would bring me help!”

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Likewise, when Cain says to God, “Am I my brother’s 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 the “Where art thou” question to us; but instead, we hide, just like Adam, and shift blame, just like Adam and his son Cain:

“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 admission of guilt in our lives, 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?

In this regard, please read this fabulous personal confession by Jonathan Haidt in “The Righteous Mind,” ch.3, a great example of how skilled we are at “hiding”:

On February 3, 2007, shortly before lunch, I discovered that I was a chronic liar. I was at home, writing a review article on moral psychology, when my wife, Jayne, walked by my desk. In passing, she asked me not to leave dirty dishes on the counter where she prepared our baby’s food. Her request was polite but its tone added a postscript: “As I have asked you a hundred times before.”

My mouth started moving before hers had stopped. Words came out. Those words linked themselves up to say something about the baby having woken up at the same time that our

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elderly dog barked to ask for a walk and I'm sorry but I just put my breakfast dishes down wherever I could. In my family, caring for a hungry baby and an incontinent dog is a surefire case, so I was acquitted.

... So there I was at my desk, writing about how people automatically fabricate justifications of their gut feelings, when suddenly I realized that I had just done the same thing with my wife. I disliked being criticized, and I had felt a flash of negativity by the time Jayne had gotten to her third word ("Can you not..."). Even before I knew why she was criticizing me, I knew I disagreed with her (because intuitions come first). The instant I knew the content of the criticism ("...leave dirty dishes on the..."), my inner lawyer went to work searching for an excuse. It's true that I had eaten breakfast, given Max his first bottle, and let Andy out for his first walk, but these events had all happened at separate times. Only when my wife criticized me did I merge them into a composite image of a harried father with too few hands, and I created this fabrication by the time she had completed her one-sentence criticism ("...counter where I make baby food?"). I then lied so quickly and convincingly that my wife and I both believed me."

Shabbat Shalom!