

Eve, meet Greta. The world is on fire. Now what?

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Long ago in a Garden far away, Eve ate from the tree of knowledge, the *Etz ha Da'at*. This was the *one* tree, of all the trees in the Garden, that she and Adam were instructed not to eat from. Was Eve a temptress? A seductress? An ambassador of evil? Did Eve want her partner to misstep? Why was she provoking Gd to throw her and Adam out of the Garden?

Rashi steps in - an 11th century medieval French commentator. Rabbi Shlomi Yitzhaki, Rashi, says about Chapter 5 verse 3: Eve wanted to *k'Elohim*. Like Gd. A creator of worlds - *yotzrei olam'ot*. After all we know that in Genesis 1:26 Gd says, **נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצִלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ** we are made b'tzelem Elohim, in Gd's image.

It wasn't that Eve misunderstood Gd's instruction.

Eve understood so deeply that in order for her beautiful garden, our world to keep growing, she needed to become one with the architect, one with the designer, one with the creator, one with the Mother, one with the life sustaining force that is Nature. The knowledge, the da'at, that Eve tasted is that the earth is a living organism and there is an ecological interconnection of all beings. We don't simply dwell on the earth. We are made of earth.

The Torah has three descriptions of the creation of humanity. Each of these descriptions underlines this idea that we are literally “earthlings.”

In the first creation story Gd builds us out of earth, *adama*, gathered together from the corners of the earth, to be *adam* אָדָם אֶתֶם, בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים, וַיִּבְרָא - an androgynous being of transgender, trans-everything and symbiotic partner and steward in harmony with the garden.

In the second creation story: *Adam* longs for companionship so Gd takes part of our very being and creates for us a helpmate, a *hevruta*, a partner in life and tending of the garden.

The third creation story is when we as humans lose track of our responsibility and Gd presses reset. Gd saves sets of animals and seeds so that we may all try again to live more compassionately with our Mother Earth.

Eve was on to something. It is increasingly urgent that we eat from the tree of knowledge, that we become connected, responsible, integrated with our garden. Our earth is burning.

Eve, we need you! Teach us to eat again from Etz haDa’at, the tree of knowledge. Remind us of the wisdom, to be a creator within creation. Show us how to recommit to our garden, to our planet!

I think Eve is with us and that her name might just be Greta Thunberg. A Swedish activist at 16 years old, many of us

watched Greta's TEDxStockholm Talk¹ along with 3 million other viewers. In it Greta explained:

When I was about eight years old, I first heard about something called climate change or global warming. Apparently, that was something humans had created by our way of living. I was told to turn off the lights to save energy and to recycle paper to save resources.

I remember thinking that it was very strange that humans, who are an animal species among others, could be capable of changing the Earth's climate. Because if we were, and if it was really happening, we wouldn't be talking about anything else. As soon as you'd turn on the TV, everything would be about that. Headlines, radio, newspapers, you would never read or hear about anything else, as if there was a world war going on.

But as we know, the crisis rages on, we are inseparable from our consumption of fossil fuels, destroying forests, even those which have been preserved are no being ravaged. Our oceans are polluted and cities of trash float freely, collecting daily evidence of our abuse and ambivalence.

At 11 Greta became ill and fell into a depression. She stopped talking and lost over 22 pounds in two months. Greta was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome, OCD and selective mutism. Meaning, as she says, "I only speak when I think it's necessary. Now is one of those moments."

¹https://www.ted.com/talks/greta_thunberg_the_disarming_case_to_act_right_now_on_climate?utm_campaign=tedsread&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=tocomshare

While watching and listening to Greta I felt like I heard the voice of Eve, who's name means Life. *Havah*.

This was the name I gave to my Aunty Joyce when she was severely ill. In these moments she was all-live, all love, all real connection. Like Greta, my Aunty Joyce meant business. She didn't believe in mops and rather got down on hands and knees to wash her kitchen floor. She talked straight. Asked more questions than gave answers and lived courageous even with severe illness.

Greta is living with challenge and she is challenging us. Like many who live on the spectrum she tells the truth and does not mince words. Neither did Eve.

Her clear seeing and truth-telling led her to bold action to eat from the Tree. We have the knowledge. We do not only have the tree of life; we have the knowledge. We are the descendants of Eve, her *havayah* lives within us.

As Greta reminds us: There are no gray areas when it comes to survival. Either we go on as a civilization or we don't. We have to change.

Paris Accord demands that the United States reduce emissions by at least 15 percent each year so we stay below a two-degree warming target to get to zero emissions within 6 to 12 years.

The greenhouse gases already locked in our ecosystem are such that even when we stop burning fossil fuels, if we do, our levels of warming will still need to be addressed.

Said another way, our lungs are black. Even if we stop smoking now it is unclear that our lungs will ever recover. 200 species go extinct every single day. This extinction rate is between 1,000 and 10,000 times higher than what is seen as normal.

According to Jewish tradition, tonight, the world was created. In Hebrew this day is called, *Ha Yom Harat haOlam*, the day the world was born. The president of my seminary, Rabbi Sharon Cohen Anisfeld, who's blessing this congregation offered to me when I began this summer as your rabbi, reminded me

I've been thinking a lot lately about our role in all of this, and the following quote from Gus Speth, former dean of the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Science:

"I used to think the top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse, and climate change, but I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed, and apathy, and to deal with those we need a spiritual and cultural transformation . . . We scientists don't know how to do that."

During these Days of Awe it is critical that we reclaim this sense of awe and mystery about this world that was born, today. I believe evolution and the discoveries of science to be the unfolding of revelation, of the wisdom and Torah within our universe. Gd and Torah are *not in contest or contrast* with microscopes and quantum physics. Science,

from quantum physics to microbiology, is a tool to discover and savor the magic and mystery of creation and existence.

The crisis whether it be climate, guns, hate speech this will not be solved by the facts and statistics, we need the *da'at*, the deep knowing, that Eve was seeking. The knowing such that we recognize ourselves as of Gd, creators and within a larger organism that is a living earth. We are Adam, we are of the *adama*. It is this type of religiosity, not only spirituality but deeply felt and lived religiosity that will create change.

The connection between *Adam* and *Adama* is religious as in integral, contained within and created by our sense as earthlings.

As Leviticus 26:32-34 relates, "If you don't obey Me, (if you are out of alignment) ...I will scatter you among the nations and bring out my sword against you. Your land will become desolate, and your cities will lie in ruins."

Jeremiah 4:23-26 speaks: I looked at the earth, and it was empty and formless. I looked at the heavens, and there was no light. I looked at the mountains and hills, and they trembled and shook. I looked, and all the people were gone. All the birds of the sky had flown away. I looked, and the fertile fields had become a wilderness."

These verses describe our world today. There are implications to the way we are living on, rather than with, this land. We are out of sync with Source.

In Hebrew, one of Gd's name is Y-H-W-H. We actually cannot pronounce it, although we try and say *Adonai*. These four letters stem from the same root letters that construct the verb "to be" in Hebrew. This "Being" underlies and unifies all that is. My teacher and founder of my rabbinical school, Rabbi Arthur Green describes Gd, or the One, as "transcendence dwelling within immanence."² This is the Gd I talk with, believe in and seek. I believe this is the Gd, this is the Eve wanted to know.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, the great theologian and activist, rescued from the jowls of the Shoah, said that "Religion is the result of what [a person] does with [their] ultimate wonder, with the moments of awe and the sense of mystery ... The root of religion is the question of what to do with the feeling for the mystery of living, what to do with awe, wonder and amazement. Religion begins with the consciousness that something is being asked of us."³

Hazon is the Hebrew word for vision. Hazon is also the largest Jewish environmental organization in the country, started in 2000 in New York. As the Jewish lab for sustainability, Hazon is building a movement that strengthens Jewish life and contributes to a more environmentally sustainable world for all.

I have proudly participated in its early development, its New York and California bike rides, beit midrash and food conference gatherings, community sustained agriculture initiatives and contribute thought leadership and financial

² Radical Judaism, Rabbi Arthur Green, p. 18.

³ Gd in Search of Man, p. 162.

support. Hazon is creating the Jewish networks so critically needed for change in the realm of sustainability.

Hazon has declared 5780, this year, the year of Environmental T'shuva and has created a Jewish Climate Coalition with the Jewish Climate Action Network, The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, many JCCs around the country and I would love to see if we can become involved. I invite you to check out the significant resources at hazon.org and let me know.

What are your personal next steps, what will you as a family do this year and what is your recommendations for how BCC can make a difference in this area. By 2022, in only three years, when BCC celebrates its 50th, the seven-year, shmita, cycle will end and Hazon aims to have

- 50,000 people have participated in a Jewish experience that shifted their understanding of what it means to be Jewish
- A network of 600 JOFEE - Jewish environmental - leaders to have the skills and support they need to engage people in a national movement
- At least 180 Jewish organizations and 10,000 Jewish people have made specific commitments, with a particular focus on a more ethical, sustainable food system.

In Exodus we read, "*Shal ni'alecha m'al raglecha ki ha Makom asher atah omeid alav, adamat kodesh hu.*" Take off your shoes from upon your feet because the ground you are standing on, She is holy. These were Gd's words to Moshe as he began to walk towards the burning bush

where he encountered Gd. We too must remove our shoes, our luxury of cynicism, stubbornness and resignation that each of us make an impact. We must walk closer if we are to put out the fire. The earth is indeed today's burning bush.

It is time, urgently, for Jews and those committed to the sacred to draw upon our tradition, our Torah and our ethics, to do *tshuvah* and turn towards the earth.

We must awaken to the verses of the Torah that call on us to *tend*, as well as till, the soil.

Our Torah is filled with principles to inspire us.

- *Shmita* is the seven year cycle that determines when the land is not be planted so that it can replenish.
- Shabbat is a weekly *shmita* of sorts where we humans and animals unplug and refresh.
- *Bal tashit* is the principle reminding us not to destroy.
- *Tzaar baalei chaim* is a restriction on causing cruelty to animals.
- *Kashrut* reminds us not to mix life and death, milk and meat, to eat fresh and living fruits and vegetables remembering that Adam and Eve were vegetarian in the Garden of Eden.

- It's time to awaken our sense of awe and wonder, to step up to the Talmudic-challenge to say 100 *brachot*, blessings, every day.

These great riches of our tradition that must be marshaled to renew our sense of awe and action to ensure the protection of our sacred earth.

We have a newly emboldened Social Action Team lead by Jessica Donath and Kenna Love. Others are stepping in to step up our connection with the Religious Action Center in DC and locally to see what issues we want to take on this year as a BCC community.

Cantor Juval and I are looking at the Jewish calendar through an ecological lens. Next weekend you're invited to help us build our Sukkah, honoring our harvest and our farmers. We will celebrate our animals on Shabbat Noah, Tu b'Shvat with our Shabbat School hopefully in the trees and much more. I encourage each of you to reach out to us, your Clergy, to create sacred-eco-ritual and ceremony. To join our Social Action Team and become involved. Whether it's on issues of climate, gun violence, homelessness, or the upcoming elections, we have got to take a stand.

In 1955 Rabbi Heschel prophetically wrote, "As civilization advances, the sense of wonder declines. Such decline is an alarming symptom of our state of mind. Humankind will not perish for want of information; but only for want of appreciation." (God in Search of Man, p. 46)

My prayer for each of us is that we find ways to awaken our sense of awe. These are the *Yamin Noraim*, the Days of Wonder and Awe so let us recommit.

Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:13 tells us, *“When the Holy One create primordial Adam, the Holy One took Adam and toured around all the Garden of Eden and said to Adam, “Look at My works! How beautiful and praiseworthy they are! And everything I made, I created for you. Be careful [though] that you don’t spoil or destroy my world—because if you spoil it, there is nobody after you to fix it.”*

The world is our home, our body, our sacred temple. This year, let us pray for the courage to live with Awe and action. Gd’s very name is afire within the burning bush of our earth. Let us as a community, take off our shoes, come closer to one another, walk gently, put our hands in the soil and think small and courageously about all we might do with our radical amazement.

Greta reminds us that in the year 2078, she will celebrate her 75th birthday. If she has children or grandchildren, maybe they will spend that day with her. Maybe they will ask her about us, the people who were around, back in 2019. Maybe they will ask why we didn't do anything while there still was time to act.

In 1965 Rabbi Heschel marched with Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. in Selma, and proclaimed: *“For many of us the march from Selma to Montgomery was about protest and prayer. Legs are not lips and walking is not kneeling.*

And yet our legs uttered songs. Even without words, our march was worship. I felt my legs were praying."

It is time to pray with our feet and our deeds! What we do or don't do right now will affect the future many of us will not see, but the next generations will. Eve and Greta agree and charge us: "The one thing we need more than hope is action. Once we start to act, hope is everywhere."