

Parshat Breishit
Showing Up for God
Yael Keller - Class of 2022

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At the very start of the Torah, God does something startling - God asks a question:

וַיִּקְרָא ה' אֶלְקִים אֶל־הָאָדָם וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אַיֶּכָּה:

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

We just learned that Adam and Chava ate from the Tree of Knowledge, something forbidden by God. After eating the fruit, Adam and Chava hear God “*mithalech bagan*” - walking in the Garden - and they hide among the trees. When they hide, God calls out, asking where Adam is.

These are unusual God activities - taking walks, asking questions. How do we make sense of these actions? We see the same concept in Parshat Bechukotai. There, God promises the people that if they keep God’s commandments:

I will walk in your midst...

וְהִתְהַלַּכְתִּי בְּתוֹכְכֶם ...

Rashi connects this pasuk to our parsha. God is promising that the people could have a second chance to be *as if* they were in Gan Eden, as long as they keep God’s commands. Unlike in our parsha, where God walks and Adam and Chava hide, the people are offered this picture of partnership where people keep the commandments and God dwells amongst them.

But how does God walk and why is God walking significant in thinking about our relationship with God?

One clue might be in the grammar. The word “*halach*” in both instances is in the hitpael, which is usually a reflexive form. For example, “*lhitlabesh*” means you are getting yourself dressed. In our case, God “*mithalach*” means God would walk God’s Self amongst Adam and Chava in Gan Eden, or in Bechukotai, God would walk God’s Self amongst Bnei Yisrael.

But, the hitpael form can often be used for mutual action as well. For example, “*lhitkasher*” in modern Hebrew means two people calling each other. Walking in hitpael could then mean we are walking together. God came to Gan Eden offering Adam and Chava a chance to walk with God. And it is then, that the text tells us Adam and Chava were hiding. There is no mutual action. God was inviting Adam and Chava to take a walk and instead they hide.

Rabbi Fohrman, founder of Aleph Beta, argues if God really wanted to know where Adam and Chava were *physically* God would have asked “איפה” which is a concrete “where” question. When one asks “איפה” he is asking “what happened to you?”

Perhaps the hitpael form in our pasuk is a broken hitpael, not reciprocated by man. It is God showing up for us, asking to take a walk and we are nowhere to be found. Perhaps driven by

fear, Adam and Chava couldn't or wouldn't think about their relationship with God as one that has room for mutuality. This damage lasts for centuries- years of slavery, years of wandering in the desert - until Bnai Yisrael realize that God is here, waiting to walk with us if we are here, waiting to be in partnership with God. It is only when we have formed a nation and are on the precipice of entering the land of Israel that we are ready for this experience.

The Sforno explains the hitpa'el is meant to indicate that **ההולך אנה ואנה לא אל מקום אחד בלבד** God will walk anywhere, not just to one holy spot. God will not limit Himself to the mikdash or mishkan, or even to modern day synagogues. Instead, God will be wherever righteousness can be found. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel states that God is searching for us as much as the other way round and in order for us to find God, we must position ourselves, spiritually, in a place where we can be found, walking in God's ways.

As we begin the first parsha of this first book of the Torah, it is important to remember that sometimes we hide. We hide from relationships with God, and from relationships with ourselves and with others. As we enter into a new Jewish year, this seems like a powerful model of relationship that can extend from the Divine to our interpersonal relationships. It is hard to confront our own shortcomings, to acknowledge we have them. But, when we hide, we hurt our chance at open and strong relationships. As God showed Adam and Chava, God was there all along to walk with them. Their mistake was in assuming that God would just punish them instead of listening, asking questions and repairing their wrongdoing. When we are in the wrong, as I know I will be many times throughout the year, it is important to be able to own our choices and errors and not hide from them.

And, when we find that those whom we love and with whom we connect have erred, we must ask questions and be willing to "walk with" them. We should hold back anger or strong judgement and remember to ask questions first and allow for dialogue and reciprocity. And, when our own error is surfaced by someone else, we should try and find the questions in their reaction, to respond openly, and to always be present and ready to walk side by side.

By looking ahead to Parshat Bechukotai at this moment, we can remember God is always here, ready to walk **אנה ואנה**, if we will only recognize His presence. And it is then, that we can take a walk together.



Yael Keller is the former Director of Operations at Maharat. She earned a Masters in Public Policy from the Heller School for Social Policy and Management and a Masters in Jewish Professional Leadership at the Hornstein Jewish Professional Leadership Program at Brandeis University. Upon graduation, she was the Director of Programming at Uri L'Tzedek, the Orthodox Social Justice movement. In graduate school she was an intern at the Joint Distribution Committee in Israel, where she worked on the grant writing team, advocating for Jews at risk throughout the world and a site educator at Impact Boston, where she facilitated a teen experience focused on social action, community service and advocacy. Before graduate school, Yael spent three years in Washington, DC, working at the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington and Hillel's Schusterman International Center. She also spent a semester in Israel studying at the Pardes Institute of Judaic Studies before attending the Hornstein Program. Yael earned

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