

“Their Eyes were Opened”

Rabbi Lester Bronstein, D’var Torah for Par’shat B’resheet October 1, 2021

One of the funkiest Hebrew words in the Torah appears in our parashah for today: *vatipakakhnah*. Meaning “and they were opened.”

Here is the verse: *vatipakakhnah eyney sh’neyhem, vayeyd’u*. “And the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew.”

Who are the “they?” Adam and Eve. What did they know? Says the Torah: They knew they were naked, and so they proceeded to cover themselves with skins and fig leaves.

What does it mean? There are libraries full of commentary on this passage.

But one fairly obvious implication of “and they knew” is that they knew they had been found out. Not “found out” for eating the forbidden fruit, though that seems to be the plot line. Rather, they had been found out for trying to close their eyes to the truths all around them.

What truths? First, the truth about whether it mattered if they lied to themselves or to each other. Would anyone know? Yes, it turns out. *They* would know. Fine, God would know. But libraries full of commentaries deal with the fact that God already “knows” everything, as it were. In which case, the only ones who could go from not knowing to knowing – from not seeing to seeing – would be them.

Second, they learn the truth that they can spend the rest of their lives pointing the finger of blame at one another, or at the serpent, or at the garden itself, or at God. Go ahead! Do and say what you want! You have free will!

At the end of the day, an open-eyed person comes to “know” that all the blame in the world does not reduce one’s own responsibility for what one has done, or what one has neglected to do.

True, others are also responsible, and others are also culpable. But still, one must tell the truth to one’s own self, and this turns out to be the most liberating thing a human can do, but also the most difficult thing a human can do.

All of which leads to the big question: “Where are you?” In Hebrew, *ayekah*. God pads around the garden looking for the humans. They (or maybe it’s just Adam) are hiding in the bushes. Probably the same bushes that provided them with delicious berries to munch on, but also thick brush to hide behind.

God asks: *ayekah*. “Where are you?” Which, as we know from those libraries full of commentary, is an absurd question, since God, as it were, knows precisely where they are, both physically and ethically.

What I think the Torah is telling us is that “the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew” means, among other things, that they now knew what the question “where are you” meant. And, that they knew they had the power to face that question or continue running away from it. They had total free will to continue living a lie or living the truth.

At that point, I’d like to think, the best of human history began. “Began,” but didn’t get very far very fast.

Now we come ‘round the bend of another chapter in the COVID saga. Putting aside what you or I may think about anyone else’s version of scientific and epidemiological truth, I think all of our eyes have been opened a bit to the suffering that goes on in our own back yards.

Yesterday a big truck from Feeding Westchester spent the morning here loading up all of the groceries we had brought in the past two weeks. The bringing was our way of commemorating these holy days beyond the beautiful rituals and songs.

It was, if you will, our way of trying to keep our eyes open to the awful and ugly truth that surrounds us along with the blessings that abound in our lives.

So, I offer this blessing in the jussive spirit of Jewish liturgy: “May we not close our eyes to the hunger, the unemployment, the inequity, the loneliness of those around us – and of our own selves – even as we move away from sickness and toward healing. Away from masking – literally and figuratively - and toward the joyous and honest showing of our faces to one another.

