

The Nakedness of Adam and Eve: A Modern Midrash

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...she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they perceived that they were naked; and they sewed together fig leaves...

—GENESIS 3:6-7

Some might say Adam and Eve gained self-consciousness, expressed as an awareness of being naked, a condition that doesn't bother either beasts or babies since both lack this sense of self-awareness. Others might say this self-consciousness expressed itself as an awareness of the passage of time and of one's transitory existence—in accordance with the ancient midrash which states that by eating the fruit Eve and Adam brought death into the world. However, only human beings are aware of the passage of time and of the life-long approach of death.

But here's what I think happened:

Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they perceived that they were naked—naked of good deeds, for they had disobeyed God's command. Said Eve: "Woe is me for what I have done! Cursed be this mouth which first tasted the fruit!" Said Adam: "Mine too." Eve said: "Cursed be these ears which first listened to the serpent's guile." Adam added: "Mine too—for listening to you." Eve said: "Cursed be this nose which smelled the fruit." Adam said: "Mine too." And Eve said: "Cursed be these eyes for ever having gazed longingly upon

the fruit.” And Adam said: “Mine too.” And Eve said: “Cursed be my head for ever having considered doing what I have done.” Adam: “Mine too.”

So they sewed together fig leaves, fashioning them into bags or sacks, and placed these over their heads. Then, seeing nothing, the man and his wife thought themselves hidden from the Lord God.

But the Lord 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.” Then the Lord God looked closely at them both and asked: “Who told you that you were naked—and why are you wearing sacks over your heads like that?”

The man said, “The woman You put at my side—she gave me of the tree, and I ate.” And the woman said, “The serpent duped me, and I ate. But as soon as we had eaten of the fruit, we regretted everything. We realized which organs had led us to disobey Your word and, in our shame, we covered the offending parts with these sacks.”

Said the Lord God, “You have done a terrible thing in disobeying me, however I accept your repentance and your desire to atone for your sin. But life is going to be difficult enough for you both as it is. You can’t go through life wearing sacks over your heads—you’ll need all your senses about you. Why not wear them instead around your middles where they won’t get in the way?”

So the Lord God made garments of skins for Adam and Eve, his wife, and clothed them—not with sacks over their heads as the man and woman had intended as atonement for their sin—but with loincloths around their middles, a location where the good Lord, with usual wisdom, was sure they would not cause any misunderstanding or do any harm.

And that is why, to this day, many human beings unfortunately mix together God and shame, sin and sex. God knows that was not the way it was supposed to turn out.