Global Day of Jewish Learning
Curriculum: Heroes and Villains, Saints and Fools

NOV.16.14
www.theglobalday.org
A Project of the Aleph Society
Introduction (5 minutes)

Ask participants what words come to mind when they think about Eve. Some of the words will probably be negative. You may wish to list the following words on a whiteboard or paper and ask participants if they have heard Eve described in this way: mother, temptress, seductress, sinner, gardener, helpmate.

Let’s set aside our prior understandings of Eve. Together we can look at the texts with fresh eyes to get a new understanding of her, Adam, and the Garden of Eden.

Part One: The Creation of Man and Woman (20 minutes)

We begin with the story of the Creation of Man and Woman. Actually, there are two differing accounts of creation that appear in the book of Genesis. In Chapter 1, a man and a woman are created at the same time (“male and female He created them”). In Chapter 2, a woman is created from a part of a man’s body. Traditional commentators struggle with this contradiction, which we will explore in the following sources.

Text #1: Genesis 1:26–27

26 And God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth.” 27 And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.
7 The LORD God formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being. 8 The LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom He had formed…

15 The LORD God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it. 16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree in the garden you are free to eat; 17 but as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die.” 18 The LORD God said, “It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him.” 19 And the LORD God formed out of the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that would be its name. And the man gave names to all the cattle and to the birds of the sky and to all the wild beasts; but for Adam no fitting helper was found. 21 So the LORD God cast a deep sleep upon the man; and, while he slept, He took of one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot.

23 And the LORD God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman; and He brought her to the man.

24 Then the man said, “This one at last Is bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called Woman, For from man was she taken.” 25 The two of them were naked, the man and his wife, yet they felt no shame.
The following discussion explores the implications of the creation of a woman through separation, and the resulting goal of reunification and oneness.

**Ask:**

1. What are the differences between the two accounts of the creation of woman?
2. Why is it “not good for man to be alone”?
3. Describe the process of the creation of Woman in Chapter 2. Why do you think Woman was created through a process of separation from Man?
4. Why does Man (Ish) call this new creature Woman (Isha)?
5. According to verse 24, what is the ultimate goal for man and woman? Is that goal in accord with your personal understanding of Man and Woman’s ultimate goal? Society’s? How is it similar or different?

**Ask your participants to form groups of two or three for the chevruta style of learning. Chevruta, or partnered learning, has the added benefit of two people sharing ideas and insights as they learn together.**

**Ask your chevruta pairs to read Text #3 and discuss the questions that follow.**

Genesis Rabbah is a systematic commentary on Genesis, estimated to be from the 5th century.

**Text #3: Genesis Rabbah 8:1.** English translation adapted from Soncino Press edition.

עֲרַֽמָּשְתָּנָה בַּעֲלָֽמָּה אֲחַר מֵאָדָם שָׁבֹֽעַ אֲשֶׁר שָׁבֹֽעַ בַּעֲדָֽמִים בִּלְבָדָּה וְזֶה אֱלֹהִים אֶלָֽמִישׁ הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר גָּ职业技术 בַּעֲדָֽמִים וְזֶה אֱלֹהִים הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר גָּ职业技术 בַּעֲדָֽמִים וְזֶה אֱלֹהִים הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר גָּ职业技术 בַּעֲדָֽמִים וְזֶה אֱלֹהִים הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר גָּ职业技术 בַּעֲדָֽמִים וְזֶה אֱלֹהִים הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר גָּ职业技术 בַּעֲדָֽמִים וְזֶה אֱלֹהִים הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר גָּ职业技术 בַּעֲדָֽמִים וְזֶה אֱלֹהִים הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר גָּ职业技术 בַּעֲדָֽמִים וְזֶה אֱלֹהִים הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר גָּ职业技术 בַּעֲדָֽמִים וְזֶה אֱלֹהִים הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר גָּ职业技术 בַּעֲדָֽמִים וְזֶה אֱלֹהִים הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר גָּ职业技术 בַּעֲדָֽמִים וְזֶה אֱלֹהִים הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר גָּ职业技术 בַּעֲדָֽמִים וְזֶה אֱלֹהִים הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר גָּ职业技术 בַּעֲדָֽמִים וְזֶה אֱלֹהִים הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר גָּ职业技术 בַּעֲדָֽמִים וְזֶה אֱלֹהִים הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר גָּ职业技术 בַּעֲדָֽמִים וְזֶה אֱלֹהִים הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר גָּ职业技术 בַּעֲדָֽמִים וְזֶה אֱלֹהִים הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר גָּ职业技术 בַּעֲדָֽמִים וְזֶה אֱלֹהִים הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר גָּ职业技术 בַּעֲדָֽמִים וְזֶה אֱלֹהִים הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר גָּ楪

Rabbi Yirmiyah ben Elazar said: When the Holy One Blessed Be He, created Adam, [God] created him a hermaphrodite (having both male and female characteristics), for it is said, “male and female He created them” [Genesis 5:2], Rabbi Shmuel ben Nachman said: God created Adam double-faced, then [God] split him and made him of two backs, one back on this side and one back on the other side.

**Ask:**

1. How does this midrash resolve the contradiction between the accounts of the creation of woman in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2?
2. What were man and woman missing when they were created as one being with two faces? What did they gain by becoming separated? What did they lose?
3. Was it important for Man and Woman to be created as one being at first? Why?
4. What is the significance of their separation? How could you understand this separation as more than a physical division? How does this cast verse 24 in a different light?
Ask a participant to read Text #4 aloud.


The idea of creation as separation recurs both in the Scriptures themselves, and, afterward, throughout Jewish literature. Hence, the upshot is that the relationship between men and women in all times and places has the character of the quest for something lost, to use the Talmudic expression. Male and female are essentially parts of a single whole, originally created as one being; but for various reasons—principally the establishment of a different, more complex, and perhaps deeper kind of connection between the two—the whole body is divided. The two half bodies are constantly in search of one another and find no fulfillment until they are rejoined, in a new and different entity.

Ask:

1. Do you agree that wholeness after division is “different, more complex, and perhaps deeper” than a wholeness that has never been ruptured? How can that be?
2. What are some of the dangers inherent in this new state of affairs—existing as two halves of a formerly whole entity?

Part Two: Eating from the Tree (25 minutes)

In Part Two, we will explore the tensions created by this division, and the challenges that stand in the way of Man and Woman reuniting as “one flesh.”

In Genesis Chapter 3, the story of the creation of human beings continues as they become independent, separate beings with desires that can conflict with those of others. Woman begins to grapple with these tensions when the snake presents her with a tempting offer. Eve and Adam start to realize the difficulties of achieving oneness in a world of separation and conflicting desires.

Text #5: Genesis 3:1–7
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Text #5: Genesis 3:1–7

Title

1 Now the serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild beasts that LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say: You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?”

2 The woman replied to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the other trees of the garden. It is only about fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said: ‘You shall not eat of it or touch it, lest you die.’”

3 And the serpent said to the woman, “You are not going to die, but God knows that as soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like divine beings who know good and bad.”

4 When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate.

5 Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they perceived that they were naked; and they sewed together fig leaves and made themselves loincloths.

Ask:

1. What are some words you would use to describe the woman in this section?
2. Why do you think the woman ate from the tree?
3. Why did the woman give the fruit to the man?
4. How are the woman’s actions usually portrayed in our culture?
5. Look closely at the text. Do you think the Torah views this act as positive or negative? Why?

Peter Pitzele (21st century, United States) is one of the founders of Bibliodrama—an interpretive, role-playing approach to close textual study of the Bible.

In the following Bibliodrama, participants are asked to play the roles of Eve and Snake and imagine their conversation. Ask for two volunteers to act out this modern midrash. Alternatively, if it is more appropriate for your group, the dialogue can be read in chevruta pairs. In either case, address the questions which follow in the full group.

This exercise should prompt your group to think more deeply about Eve’s choice to eat from the tree. Note that we are told that it is not good for man to be alone, and therefore Woman is created; now Woman eats from the tree of knowledge of good and bad.

Text #6: Peter Pitzele. Our Fathers’ Wells.

Snake: Must be pretty boring in this garden.
Eve: No, not really. And besides I have Adam.
Snake: Yes, right, Adam. . . By the way, where is Adam?
Eve: Oh, I don’t know . . . off somewhere.
Snake: Talking to God?
Eve: Yes; quite possibly, talking to God. They talk often.
Snake: God ever talk to you?
Eve: No. Adam tells me everything.
Snake: Everything?
Eve: Of course, Adam and I are one. What he knows I know. What he feels I feel. His God is my God.
Snake: You are very trusting.
Eve: This is the garden. What’s not to trust?
Snake: You are quite right. Everything here is to be trusted. Me, for instance.
Eve: I trust you.
Snake: And you can talk to me.
Eve: Yes, you are the only other creature I can actually speak with. How amazing.
Snake: I am like Adam in that way. I am also like God, for God, too, speaks.
Eve: Are you a God?
Snake: I know what God knows.
Eve: Really?
Snake: I know about this tree, for example.
Eve: We are not supposed to touch that tree; we’ll die if we do.
Snake: Do I look dead to you?
Eve: No. Not at all. You’re quite alive.
Snake: You like my scales, I see; you like the way they flash.
Eve: Really quite amazing and beautiful.
Snake: And this tree? Quite beautiful also, no?
Eve: Yes.
Snake: This is the tree, Eve.
Eve: I know.
Snake: Ah, you know . . . but you do not really know. Someday, Eve, you will taste the fruit of this tree.
Eve: No, never.
Snake: Never . . . ah, Eve, what a long time is never. No, my only friend, you will come back here many times, and each time you come you will linger a little longer. For when you have explored every aspect of the garden and every pleasure with Adam, only this tree will remain a mystery. In time it will seem to you the garden is a prison and Adam not a helpmate but an inmate with you.
Eve: Why me? Why not Adam?
Snake: Because, Eve, you have a hunger for power and wisdom. It’s the hunger of the denied.
Eve: I don’t understand.
Snake: You have been told you were created from Adam’s rib, right? Well, count his ribs. He has the same number as you. Yet he and his God have made up this fib about the rib. Why? Adam talks to God, but God doesn’t talk to you. Why? I tell you, Eve, a time will come when all this fibbing and ribbing will begin to rub you the wrong way.
Eve: Never.
Snake: When that time comes, you will feel desire. Your own desire for wisdom and knowledge, for truth. It will be different from your desire for Adam. It will become a desire for this fruit, and for the fruit of this fruit which is understanding. You will want what I have.
Eve: Never.
Snake: You will want to act. You will want your freedom.
Eve: Never.
Snake: Never is a long time, Eve. Too long for a creature who can dream. Too long to dream without acting. One day, in that endless never, you will act.

Ask:

1. According to this piece, what would motivate Eve to eat from the tree?
2. How does Snake play on Eve’s separateness to convince her to eat from the tree?
3. Does this Bibliodrama change your opinion about Eve’s actions?
4. If you were Eve, what would you have done?
Text #7 returns us to Genesis and continues the story of what happens after Eve and Adam eat the fruit.

**Text #7: Genesis 3:8–21**

8 They heard the sound of the LORD God moving about in the garden at the breezy time of day; and the man and his wife hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9 The LORD God called out to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” 10 He replied, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.” 11 Then He asked, “Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat of the tree from which I had forbidden you to eat?” 12 The man said, “The woman You put at my side—she gave me of the tree, and I ate.” 13 And the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done!” The woman replied, “The serpent duped me, and I ate.” 14 Then the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you did this, More cursed shall you be Than all cattle And all the wild beasts: On your belly shall you crawl And dirt shall you eat All the days of your life.

15 I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your offspring and hers; They shall strike at your head, And you shall strike at their heel.” 16 And to the woman He said, “I will make most severe Your pangs in childbearing; In pain shall you bear children. Yet your urge shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you.” 17 To Adam He said, “Because you did as your wife said and ate of the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ Cursed be the ground because of you; By toil shall you eat of it All the days of your life. 18 Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you. But your food shall be the grasses of the field; 19 By the sweat of your brow Shall you get bread to eat, Until you return to the ground—For from it you were taken. For dust you are, And to dust shall you return.” 20 The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all the living.

21 And the LORD God made garments of skins for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.
This part of the discussion focuses on Adam and Eve’s denial of responsibility, and their attempts to blame others.

Ask:

1. What do Adam and Eve do when God confronts them? Why?
2. How would you describe the relationship between Adam and Eve at this point? Have they succeeded in becoming “one flesh”?
3. Why does Adam give the woman the new name of Eve (Chava)? How does this reflect his growing understanding of her as a separate being?

Some commentators read the story of eating from the tree as a natural progression in the process of becoming human, acquiring desire, self-awareness and free choice, and not a sin at all. However, once Man and Woman eat from the tree and understand themselves as separate beings, they have an opportunity to “cleave to one another and become one flesh.” Yet Man and Woman do the exact opposite: They deny responsibility for their actions and instead cast blame on others. In this way, they squander the tremendous potential that becoming separate and eating from the tree has given them. They could have used their free will to assume responsibility for their own actions and their partner’s welfare; instead they choose to protect their own individual interests.

Read Texts #8 and #9.

Rabbi Moses ben Nachman (1194–1270), known as Ramban or Nachmanides, was a scholar, rabbi, philosopher, physician, kabbalist, and biblical commentator who lived most of his life in Catalonia, Spain.

Text #8: Ramban. Commentary on Genesis 3:12.


“The woman you put at my side”: In other words, “The woman that You gave me as a helpmate, she gave me from the tree, and I figured anything she says to me would be for my benefit and help…” The Sages call this ‘ingratitude’… for [Adam] responded to Him [God], “It is You who caused me this stumbling block, for You have given me a woman as a helpmate and she advised me to sin.”

Noam Zion, a research fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute, and his co-authors collaborated on “A Help Mate?” which was published in Jerusalem in 2000. In Text #9 they expound on Ramban’s comment.

According to another approach the serious sin was not the eating from the tree of knowledge—indeed, everyone transgresses from time to time—but, rather, the shirking of responsibility and shifting the blame on another. The man blames the woman, who in turn blames the snake...: “The serpent seduced me, then I ate” is not yet a confession of her guilt. Yet she neither blames the Man—who did not object to eating—nor God. She, at least, limits her excuses.

Ask:

1. Both the man and the woman shirk their responsibilities, yet they defend themselves in different ways. How do their responses indicate the different ways each one understands him/herself as a separate, independent being?
2. Why do you think the woman does not blame the man or God?

Part Three: Implications for Today (10 minutes)

In Genesis Chapter 2, man and woman are physically separated. In Genesis Chapter 3, they achieve an understanding of themselves as separate beings with separate desires and self-interests. Their challenge is to “cleave to each other” and become “one flesh” despite their differences. However, they fail to do so, instead blaming each other for transgressing God’s command. It remains for later Biblical characters—and for generations to come—to try to achieve wholeness and oneness despite different self-interests and desires.

Give your participants a chance to reflect. Ask them to answer the following questions in writing or in chevruta.

Ask:

1. What essential human conflicts does the story of the Garden of Eden portray?
2. Does this story give us any insights into the nature of desire and self-interest? How can we apply those to create “oneness” in our relationships with each other and the world?

Ask participants to share some responses with the group.
Part One: The Creation of Man and Woman

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Text #2: Genesis 2:7–8, 15–25
7 The LORD God formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being. 8 The LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom He had formed...

15 The LORD God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it. 16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree in the garden you are free to eat; 17 but as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die.” 18 The LORD God said, “It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him.” 19 And the LORD God formed out of the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that would be its name. 20 And the man gave names to all the cattle and to the birds of the sky and to all the wild beasts; but for Adam no fitting helper was found. 21 So the LORD God cast a deep sleep upon the man; and, while he slept, He took of one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot. 22 And the LORD God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman; and He brought her to the man. 23 Then the man said, “This one at last Is bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called Woman, For from man was she taken.” 24 Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh. 25 The two of them were naked, the man and his wife, yet they felt no shame.


"בראשית רבה, א:"
אמר רב נחמיה בן נחמן, אמר רבי ירמיה בן אלעזר, והיה בראת התokit בורק, והיה אלה התארשים אנדרוגנים ברא את התארשים wurde בברא, והיה לפני הערשה,
ונפער עAws טב לולא ונכד לאט.

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understanding. You will want what I have.
Eve: Never.
Snake: You will want to act. You will want your freedom.
Eve: Never.
Snake: Never is a long time, Eve. Too long for a creature who can dream. Too long to dream without acting. One day, in
that endless never, you will act.
They heard the sound of the LORD God moving about in the garden at the breezy time of day; and the man and his wife hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9 The LORD God called out to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” 10 He replied, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.” 11 Then He asked, “Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat of the tree from which I had forbidden you to eat?” 12 The man said, “The woman You put at my side—she gave me of the tree, and I ate.” 13 And the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done!” The woman replied, “The serpent duped me, and I ate.” 14 Then the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you did this, More cursed shall you be Than all cattle And all the wild beasts: On your belly shall you crawl And dirt shall you eat All the days of your life. 15 I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your offspring and hers’ They shall strike at your head, And you shall strike at their heel.” 16 And to the woman He said, “I will make most sever Your pangs in childbearing; In pain shall you bear children. Yet your urge shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you.” 17 To Adam He said, “Because you did as your wife said and ate of the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ Cursed be the ground because of you; By toil shall you eat of it All the days of your life: 18 Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you. But your food shall be the grasses of the field; 19 By the sweat of your brow Shall you get bread to eat, Until you return to the ground—For from it you were taken. For dust you are, And to dust shall you return.” 20 The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all the living. 21 And the LORD God made garments of skins for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.
Text #8: Ramban. Commentary on Genesis 3:12.

"The woman that You gave me as a helpmate, she gave me from the tree, and I figured anything she says to me would be for my benefit and help...The Sages call this ‘ingratitude’... for [Adam] responded to Him [God], “It is You who caused me this stumbling block, for You have given me a woman as a helpmate and she advised me to sin.”


[According to another approach the serious sin was not the eating from the tree of knowledge—indeed, everyone transgresses from time to time—but, rather, the shirking of responsibility and shifting the blame on another. The man blames the woman, who in turn blames the snake...: “The serpent seduced me, then I ate” is not yet a confession of her guilt. Yet she neither blame the Man—who did not object to eating—nor God. She, at least, limits her excuses.