

Our trial earlier this evening was not really just about Eve, or Adam, but about our views of human nature.

Eve took the fruit, but the lurking suspicion that God was aware of the consequences of placing those trees in the garden, as many Jewish commentators insist, makes it hard not to see the whole thing as a set-up. Though Eve isn't blamed for later sins in Jewish theology, nor even mentioned again in the Hebrew Scriptures, our thinking on this has been shaped by Christian thought, where Adam and Eve become significant in a way they are not for us. Where past sins are harped on in Jewish tradition, it is usually the Israelite's rebellion in worshipping the Golden Calf or their refusal to enter the Promised Land in the incident of the 12 spies. It is these key moments which are mentioned again and again in the Jewish Bible.

And yet, later Jewish tradition and especially the prayer book refers to their being in us some wayward spirit, something which prevents us from doing the right thing, even when we recognize what it is.

The Jewish view of human nature is neither that of the Enlightenment nor of Western Christianity. Christianity insists that human beings are sinful creatures, while the Enlightenment proclaimed that the newborn infant is a blank slate. The

Jewish view is neither. Judaism does not teach that we are born in sin, but neither does it see us as innocents. Instead, Judaism notes that by our nature we are pulled in different directions—we are caring but prone to jealousy, capable of thinking deeply but swept away at times into decisions that hurt others and ourselves. The essence of our humanity is our constantly having to make choices about our own behavior. That is why, according to Jewish tradition, the jury is still out on the question of whether we can say about the creation of Ha Adam , the earthling, , ki tov, and it was good. Of all of creation, it is about the creation of the human being alone that this refrain is missing and God does not offer that seal of approval.

The Jury is still out on humanity as a whole, but tonight, in the dark of this late evening service, it is our standing as individuals, that is the focus of our attention. The punishments at the end of the Garden of Eden story are not so much curses as descriptions of the challenges that we face and the context in which we live. Nothing is easy. Like Adam and Eve, we leave our childhoods behind and live outside the garden. In this real world, we struggle, we work, we endure pain and passion, see new life and suffer loss. In this imperfect world we make the choices that both reflect and shape our characters.

Whether we experience judgement as being outside ourselves, a transcendent being, or as a voice calling within, if we are honest with ourselves we know that we come up short. For none of us, wrapped as we are in our concern for ourselves, can a year go by without our having hurt another person.

Acknowledgement is the first step of repentance, and so we begin this evening, confessing our wrongdoings and reaching for our higher selves. We cannot lay the blame with Adam and Eve, nor even with the circumstances of our lives.

Reviewing the choices we have made, we take responsibility. We move to repair, and reach out towards our highest selves.