PARASHA OF THE WEEK

Bereshit

The question that leaves room to answer

10 October 2026 · 29 Tishrei 5787 · Genesis 1:1–6:8

The Torah begins with a world coming into being. A few chapters later, it gives us a quieter beginning: God calls to a person who has hidden himself and asks where he is. Why ask a question whose answer God already knows? The way the conversation begins may tell us something about how change begins.

THE JOURNEY THROUGH THE PARSHA

Bereshit opens with the creation of heaven and earth. Light, sky, land, vegetation, the heavenly lights, animals, and humankind appear in an ordered sequence. God calls creation good, blesses human beings—made in the divine image—and rests on the seventh day. The Torah then tells a more intimate account: God places the human in the Garden of Eden to work and tend it, gives a command concerning the tree of knowledge, and forms a partner for him. [2]

A serpent persuades the woman to eat from the forbidden tree; she gives its fruit to the man, and he eats. They recognize their nakedness and hide. God questions them, and each response turns attention elsewhere. The consequences include hardship and exile from the garden. Before they leave, God makes garments for them. [2]

Their sons Cain and Abel bring offerings. Cain becomes angry when his offering is not accepted, kills Abel, and then faces God's question about his brother. The Torah follows Cain's descendants, then tells of Seth's birth and traces the generations from Adam toward Noah. By the end of the reading, human wrongdoing has spread across the earth; Noah finds favor in God's eyes. [2]

A THOUGHT TO CARRY THROUGH SHABBAT

A question, not a search

The first chapters of the Torah contain immense statements: the world is created; human beings bear the image of God; the seventh day is blessed. Then the scale becomes startlingly small. After eating from the tree, the man and woman hear God in the garden and hide among its trees. God calls to the man: “Where are you?” [2]

It cannot be a request for coordinates. Rashi says God knew where the man was. The question begins a conversation, so that he will not be startled into answering by a sudden sentence of punishment. Rashi notices the same pattern when God later asks Cain where Abel is. Even when the truth is known, the person is addressed. [3]

Or HaChaim, the Moroccan commentator, hears another layer: “Why do you hide yourself and not appear before Me?” In his reading, Adam’s sense of nakedness is more than the absence of clothing. It expresses his awareness that something in him has changed. He cannot bear to be seen as he now sees himself. [4]

What the question makes possible

Read together, these interpretations do not erase the seriousness of what happened. God still names the act and its consequences. But the question leaves a space between wrongdoing and judgment in which a human being can speak truthfully. It is possible to come out from behind the trees.

Adam’s answer begins honestly—he was afraid and hid—but soon moves toward blame. The woman gave him the fruit; then the woman points to the serpent. The text lets us hear how difficult that space is to inhabit. A chance to answer is not the same as an answer well given. [2]

Or HaChaim adds a delicate observation on God’s next question, “Who told you that you were naked?” He suggests that God speaks this way so as not to shame the man too harshly. The questions are neither ignorance nor indifference. They make room for accountability without treating humiliation as its instrument. [5]

A THOUGHT TO CARRY THROUGH SHABBAT

Beginning again after hiding

The garden is not the only place in this parsha where a question goes unanswered well. Before Cain kills Abel, God warns him that he can master the impulse at his door. After the murder comes another question: "Where is Abel your brother?" Cain replies, "Am I my brother's keeper?" [2] The question now reaches beyond the self. Another person's life is part of what Cain must answer for.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks reads the stories of Adam and Cain as failures of different kinds of responsibility: owning one's own act and recognizing one's duty toward another. His essay, *Taking Responsibility*, places both questions at the center of the opening chapters of Genesis. [6]

The small courage of an answer

That thought need not turn the table into a courtroom. We know the ordinary forms of hiding: changing the subject after a careless remark, explaining away a promise we did not keep, or insisting that nobody could have expected more of us. We also know how much can change when someone simply says, "I did that. I am sorry. What can I do now?"

This is our application of the ancient conversation, not a claim that every hurt is solved by one sentence. Some harm requires repair that takes time. Some situations require boundaries and protection. The point is more modest: without an honest answer, even the beginning of repair is difficult.

Bereshit opens with beginnings on a cosmic scale. Its human stories are less tidy. The garden is lost, Abel does not return, and the final verses show a world that has grown deeply troubled. Yet the text keeps asking questions of the living. It does not pretend that we can go back to an untouched beginning; it asks what we will do with the moment in front of us.

Perhaps that is why "Where are you?" can accompany the start of a new Torah cycle. We need not answer with a perfect account of ourselves. We can begin with a true one—and then take the next step it asks of us.

Shabbat shalom.

Let the conversation begin here

The parsha begins with a good world and quickly shows people hiding from one another. At your table, you might ask what makes it easier to tell the truth after a mistake: being confronted, being given a moment to speak, or knowing that the listener will not use shame as a weapon? A concrete story may reveal more than a general answer.

Then consider God's question to Cain. What does being "our brother's keeper" look like in the scale of an ordinary week? The conversation can stay close to home: noticing someone left out, returning a call, or making a repair we have postponed.

SOURCES & FURTHER LEARNING

[1] The week's reading
Hebcal: 10 October 2026, 29 Tishrei 5787; Israel and Diaspora.
hebcal.com · Bereshit 5787

[2] Torah: Genesis 1:1–6:8
Creation: 1:1–2:3; garden: 2:4–3:24; Cain and Abel: 4:1–16; Noah: 6:8.
sefaria.org · Genesis 1:1–6:8

[3] Rashi on Genesis 3:9
God knows Adam's location; the question opens a conversation. Rashi also cites Cain.
sefaria.org · Rashi on Genesis 3:9

[4] Or HaChaim on Genesis 3:9
The question addresses Adam's hiding and his diminished sense of himself.
sefaria.org · Or HaChaim on 3:9

[5] Or HaChaim on Genesis 3:11
God's further question avoids shaming Adam too harshly.
sefaria.org · Or HaChaim on 3:11

[6] Rabbi Jonathan Sacks
"Taking Responsibility," Covenant & Conversation, Bereishit; published essay.
rabbisacks.org · Taking Responsibility

An original editorial synthesis. Scriptural and classical claims were checked against the linked texts. The Sacks essay was consulted on its publisher's site; no video or lecture is claimed. Practical applications are our reflections. English and Spanish convey the same teaching.

PRINT: US Letter · Actual size / 100% · Double-sided, flip on long edge · 4 pages