

Schachter-Shalomi will lead us to look in detail at the process by which Eve, and humanity through her, moves from that state of innocence to a new state of consciousness and new capabilities, the start of all the psychological and spiritual evolution to come.

The Set-up

But first he interrupts the narrative temporarily to bring out something that to him is a key turning point in the parable that the Biblical narrative is presenting.

This whole scenario has God making a point of forbidding the one tree, and allowing the snake to make the argument it does, so that Eve (representing the human creature and its evolution) will violate the express command, risking (or being willing to accept) death as a price for a wisdom and a fuller and more godlike life. This whole scenario, Schachter-Shalomi will say, is a set-up.

But what is the point of the set-up? He gives two examples to illustrate the central psycho-spiritual truth he wants to assert about this transgressive moment.

Now I want to stop for a moment with text and raise another thing. When women's liberation first began I gave a talk (I was living in Winnipeg Manitoba at that time) to a sisterhood. Question period came, one of the woman raised her hand and said, "Rabbi, there was the old testament and then there was the new testament, can't we now have a women's testament?" I said "I absolutely forbid it." She got angry and said "Who are you to forbid it?" [Schachter-Shalomi exclaims his reply:] "You got the point!"

He continues, addressing the participants at the Primal Myths retreat, with the insight spelled out.

You cannot give liberation to someone as a gift. No parent can give a child freedom as a gift. That has to be taken, it has to be owned, it has to be conquered. Women

cannot get from loving husbands, with their nice ribbon and a rose on top, liberation for their anniversary. It can't come as a gift. It has to be something that is owned, that is taken, it has to go through the separation.

His second example refers to what was at the time a painful break with Lubavitcher Chasidism.⁴

As I read this I get overwhelmed by a feeling about that. When I last time came to a *farbrengen*⁵ with the present Lubavitcher rebbe, and there came to be this kind of thing in which separation happened. In moments when I feel strong and aware, I give him credit for having had the strength to make that attitude that allowed for the break.

Get that sense. It's a set-up! We are dealing with a set-up here.

God can't just give humankind the fruit of knowledge of good and evil, and all that follows from that knowledge. Central to the jump to a new level of psychological and spiritual maturity is the forceful taking of it, the courage to judge for oneself and be willing to take the consequences of asserting one's choice. Something will be lost, perhaps something precious. But the thing to be gained must be taken in an act of transformation.

That act may feel as powerful as this moment in which the human creatures, who seem to have paradise, risk it all to disobey the one command of the presumably all-powerful deity who created them.

4 See section on Schachter-Shalomi's life and work in the appendix. The break with Lubavitch occurred in 1968.

5 **Farbrengen** פֿאַרברענגען. Yiddish. Literally, a get-together. Used by Chabad Lubavitch communities as gatherings for inspiration, heart-opening, and self-examination, in which Torah and Chasidic philosophy are discussed, stories told, Chasidic melodies sung, and a certain amount of alcohol consumed as toasts to life.