

Who Needs the Tree?

By Rabbi David Wolpe

If God wished Adam and Eve not to eat from the tree in Eden, why create the tree?

One among many possible answers: all real life is deciding. Wanting, weighing and choosing are the essence of being human. The fruit dangles from the tree, and even the choice not to decide is a decision.

The essayist Gilbert Highet quotes "'a wise man' who said the Greeks' greatest legacy to the world's welfare was 'on the one hand and on the other hand.'" The constant weighing of options can be maddening; after listening to his advisors offer him conflicting economic advice Harry Truman burst out in frustration, "Can someone get me a one handed economist!" Of course not. If there were one choice, one path, vitality would be drained from the world. The gift of possibility entails arguing, failing, reevaluating, feeling the constant frustrating yearning to do better.

God could have fashioned a garden without a tree. Eve and Adam would never have eaten and never have left. Eden would be their permanent, perfect address. It would have been a beautiful place to exist. But it would have been no place to live.