

Candied Apples

We celebrated the Jewish New Year last week – known as Rosh Hashanah – and in reading up on its customs I learned that one pleasant practice is to bite into a honey coated apple – possibly to anticipate a sweeter new year. At once I was reminded of the block parties of my childhood.

Before the sprawling suburbs of later years many of us lived in row house neighborhoods. Each block of row houses was like a village. You knew almost everybody on the block, would converse from porch to porch. The narrow streets not crowded by parked cars became the children's playground. And a few times a year there would be a block party – streets closed to drivers, tables set up for adult games of chance, food displays, a dance space cordoned off and a quartet of instruments supplying the music. And then there were treats for the kids – the whole event financed by the block residents. And among the treats were candied apples, all red and glistening and tempting to bite.

I never gave much thought to the symbolism of apples – or bitten apples – but they figure in a lot of stories as in the case of Snow White. Her adventures begin with her wicked stepmother offering her a poisoned – and beautiful – apple to bite; and off falls Snow White into a deep sleep. And of course there is the forbidden fruit of the Garden of Eden. Later generations and most paintings of the Eden event interpret the fruit to be an apple of mixed potential – good and bad. As such it becomes even more tempting to bite – which Adam and Eve do – and wind up wise but also of poisoned inclinations; drawn to things while also suspicious of things – at odds with their very selves. And the Garden disappears.

At Rosh Hashanah Jewish tradition ponders that Eden episode – our tendency to fall – which may be why next week the tradition schedules its Yom Kippur – its Day of Atonement - for sins committed to date. But again there's that introduction to sweetened apples to lighten the bitterness of past sin and conjure up a sweeter future.

And while thinking these thoughts what do I behold? Here I am sitting in front of a computer whose logo is a gigantic apple minus a bite – the logo of Apple Inc.! I doubt whether the designer of that logo was aware of the centuries of lore in which an apple plays a crucial role – but the logo plays right into the role of Eden's *Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil*. For what is a computer? It's an electronic device that can be the source of an infinite amount of useful information and profound knowledge at your fingertips like apples hanging from a tree. But it can also be a source of insidious stuff, lies, cybernetic violence, theft, disinformation that can disturb the minds and even lives of millions of people worldwide.

Technologically, if we persist in thinking that the computer and computation in general can tell us the *whole* truth about this world we live in, we may one day have to face up to the same words that conclude the Eden story: *Cursed be the ground because of you.*

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