

Comforting **VIEW**

Rabbi Harold S. Kushner assures us that we're only human — and it's OK

By **KRISTEN CAMPBELL**

Religion Reporter

Some people ask all the hard questions: Who needs God? Why do bad things happen to good people? How good do we have to be?

Some people say there aren't easy answers.

Rabbi Harold S. Kushner reaches that conclusion — again — in his most recent book, "How Good Do We Have to Be? A New Understanding of Guilt and Forgiveness."

The author and rabbi laureate from Natick, Mass., is perhaps best known for his 1981 book, "When Bad Things Happen to Good People." He will speak here Tuesday at Dauphin Way United Methodist Church.

His latest book is based on a fresh interpretation of the third chapter of Genesis, in which Kushner finds not the story of original sin, but one of bravery and humanity.

"The story's always bothered me and I could never figure out why," Kushner says. As a congregational rabbi, he says, he encountered so many people who "thought they were bad because they weren't perfect."

The roots for some of that thinking, Kushner says, lie in the centuries-old text of Genesis. Most read the third chapter of the book and interpret Adam and Eve's eating fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as humankind's downfall.

Kushner disagrees.

"I am suggesting that the story of the Garden of Eden is not an account of people being punished for having made one mistake, losing Paradise because they were not perfect," he writes.

"It is the story of the first human beings graduating, evolving from the relatively uncomplicated world of animal life to the immensely complicated world of being human and knowing that there is more to life than eating and mating, that there are such things as Good and Evil. They enter a world where they will inevitably make many mistakes, not because they are weak or bad but because the

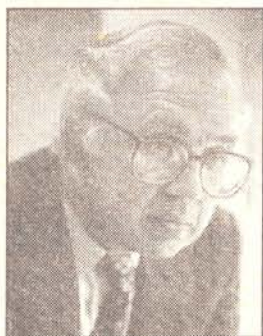


Photo by Suzette E. Kushner

FYI

WHAT: Lecture by Rabbi Harold S. Kushner

WHEN: 7 p.m. Tuesday

WHERE: Dauphin Way United Methodist Church, 1507 Dauphin St.

COST: \$10

INFO: 471-1511

choices they confront will be such difficult ones. But the satisfactions will be equally great.

"While animals can only be useful and obedient, human beings can be good. The story of the Garden of Eden is not a story of the Fall of Man, but of the Emergence of Humankind."

Such an account is one that Kushner says he expected might draw outrage from some. Reinterpretation of Scripture isn't always welcomed. But Kushner says that many like the religiously framed idea of evolution that he offers, as well as the redemption of Adam and Eve.

After explaining his interpretation of Genesis, Kushner says he hopes those who read the Bible will hear two voices — one of encouragement and one of compassion.

A prophetic voice urges readers onward and encourages them to be better people, Kushner says. And a compassionate voice comforts individuals when they fall short of their goals.

Sometimes, he says, people fail to hear the comforting voice of compassion and feel guilty for not being perfect. In turn, some find it difficult to forgive.

"We tend to equate forgiving with weakness," Kushner says. "We think it's a way of letting someone off the hook."