

DA'AT TEVUNOT - SECTION 3: CHAPTER 16

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Let's return to the "scene of the crime" if you will, Adam's situation in the Garden of Eden, and expand upon the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (which he and Eve ate from) and its opposite, the Tree of Life. They were both quite literally physical trees as the Torah indicates, and Adam and Eve actually ate some very real fruit that grew on the Tree of Knowledge.

But we're also to understand that the sort of eating they did was of a more ethereal kind than what we're used to, and that the fruit was of a whole other sort and far more sublime than any fruit we can imagine [1]. Yet just as common trees produce fruit that have properties that can benefit or harm anyone who eats them, the "fruit" of these two trees had their own special properties.

Anyone who'd eat from the Tree of Life would be granted instantaneous insight into G-d's being and ways in this world, he'd love and cling onto Him, and he'd be repelled by physical pleasures, as Adam and Even would have had they done that. They ate instead from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and thus came to love and cling onto physicality as a consequence right there and then, and to prove to be mortal -- until they would undo all that by repenting and being what they could have been from the first.

Ramchal's point is that we also demean ourselves when we do wrong by clinging onto the world rather than G-d. Nonetheless, we too can undo that by making the right choices from the first, or by repenting and setting our sights once again on G-d and His plans for us in this life after the fact.

But as we'd already pointed out, doing wrong not only belittles our spiritual stature, it actually does us harm, as we'll see [2].

[1] Their "eating" would be analogous to our "digesting" and "absorbing" ideas and information (which would themselves be the sort of "fruit" they ate).

[2] See 3:13:1.

Rabbi Yaakov Feldman has translated and commented upon "The Gates of Repentance", "The Path of the Just", and "The Duties of the Heart" (Jason Aronson Publishers). His works are available in bookstores and in various locations on the Web.