

# FALL - AND GET BACK UP!

*by Rabbi Naftali Reich*

Since the dawn of human history, mankind has faced, in one guise or another, the same temptations that confronted the very first man and woman, Adam and Chava. After giving us the details of their creation, the Torah describes the challenge they faced in the blissful spiritual existence Hashem provided for them in the Garden of Eden. They were expressly prohibited to eat from the eitz hadaas, the tree of knowledge, yet its delightful fruit proved irresistible to Eve. The Torah describes the nature of the temptation. "It was desirable to be eaten and beautiful to behold"! The challenge Adam and Chava faced echoes and re-echoes as each and every generation confronts its unique 'eitz hadaas' in an ever-changing and often bewildering variation of guises.

Our generation has its own enticing 'tree of knowledge' that glistens alluringly, urging us to sample its illicit fruits. Its appeal has tragically proven irresistible to so many of our youth. Can they be blamed for surrendering to the tantalizing attraction? Religious rules seem so onerous, rigid and inhibiting to a generation that has been nurtured with an inherent sense of personal entitlement. Don't we deserve it, and don't we deserve it now? Freedom of expression and freedom of choice have been elevated to the highest status in society's scale of values.

How then are we to protect both ourselves and our children from the shimmering 'tree of knowledge' whose fruits appear 'so good to eat and so delightful to the eye'?

In the first verse of this week's Torah portion, Moshe Rabbeinu in his parting message to the Jewish people provides them with an eternal answer. "Behold! I have placed before you today the blessing and the curse. The blessing is that you shall listen to the words of Hashem your G-d, and the curse is when you do not hearken to His voice".

Living in our Creator's embrace and following His dictates is defined as a life of blessing. Living outside its pale is defined as a life of curse. Herein Moshe Rabbeinu frames the arena of life and articulates the challenge that we mortals in every age and in every society are forced to grapple with.

But how can we imbibe this important message when all our senses and feelings experience and see just the opposite?

Perhaps we can explain this with a verse in last week's Torah portion. (Chapter 10 verse 12): "And now, Israel, what does Hashem your G-d ask of you? Only to see/fear Him, to walk in all His ways, to love Him and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul". The Talmud questions the word

"only"; is this long list such a simple request? Isn't it disingenuous to request from us the relatively simple assignment of seeing and thus fearing Hasher, immediately followed by a string of complex and challenging spiritual demands?

A doting father and mother were tearfully watching their sick son's vitality drain from him as he lay in bed. His temperature continued to soar. His burning fever robbed him of his appetite; he steadfastly refused the delicious food they put before him as well as all medicine. All their exhortations and pleas were futile. They begged a specialist to come to their home to treat their beloved son. The specialist came and saw that the child's prognosis was very serious. He extracted a strong medicine from his briefcase and told the child that he will only ask him to swallow the medicine a single time. Hearing that this was only a one- time request, the child acquiesced and reluctantly sipped a measure of the life giving elixir. As the doctor walked towards the door, the child's mother burst out crying. "Dr." she exclaimed, "he has only agreed to take it this one time, what will we do tonight when you're gone?"

"Don't worry," the doctor reassured her. "Now that he has drunk from this medicine, his appetite will be restored. Once he begins ingesting food, he will regain his appreciation for its taste. Before long you can be assured that he will be willing to take the necessary medicine every day until he is fully recovered".

With this parable, the Dubna Maggid explains the meaning of our verse about the Torah's expectation: We are asked "only" to "see" and fear G-d. If we only 'see and fear' our Creator a single time, we will be naturally inclined towards continuing our pathway towards spiritual growth. We will be primed and ready to see the blessing in living a spiritual life.

Once we experience the sublime joy of 'seeing' Hashem and having a heart-to-heart dialogue with Him; once we taste the pleasure of a true Shabbat; once we absorb the self-fulfillment that overtakes every fiber of our being as we extend ourselves to the less fortunate, we will encounter His precious blessings. The allure of tree of knowledge's artificial stimulants will no longer exert their magnetic draw. At that point, the distinction between the blessing and the curse will be abundantly clear.

This then, is perhaps what Moshe meant at the beginning of our Torah portion. Re'eh, 'see' that I present you today with a blessing and a curse. Only after we have seen and experienced the light and delight of a spiritual life pathway will we be able to make a crystal clear distinction in our life choice. How true the maxim that "a little light banishes a great deal of darkness." By infusing our homes with a joyous life in the presence of Hasher, we will ensure that we will always delight in the kosher fruits of our Garden of Eden.

Wishing you a wonderful Shabbos,

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