

EATING FROM THE TREE; A DEEPER LOOK

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

G-d took Man and placed him in the Garden of Eden to work it, and to watch over it. G-d commanded the Man, saying, "You may eat from every tree in the Garden, except from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. If you do, you will certainly die ..." (Bereishis 2:15-17)

It seemed so simple. One commandment to keep, and immortality would have been ours forever. To make matters more painful, all Adam had to do was wait until Shabbos came in--a matter of three hours (even 2 hours would have been enough, because of the holiness of Shabbos; Pri Tzaddik, Yom Kippur 1)--and then he would have been allowed to eat with G-d's blessing!

What went wrong, and how did it happen?

The episode of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is one of the most esoteric in the entire Torah, which is why so many commentators over the ages have left it alone, focussing instead on what comes after, since being of the post-expulsion generation it is what concerns us most. However, as other commentators have pointed out, there are some very important lessons to learn from what went wrong that fateful day, for they are lessons that affect us all. Furthermore, if 6,000 years of history is meant to rectify what Adam damaged by disobeying G-d and eating the forbidden fruit, it is difficult to simply look the other way when it comes to gaining insight into this seminal event in the history of mankind.

Any discussion about the eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil requires a preamble about Adam himself. (Bear in mind that what follows is a simplification, and in some cases, an over-simplification, of some very, very deep ideas.)

To begin with, the Talmud describes Adam as follows:

Adam HaRishon spanned from the Earth until the Heaven ... He spanned from one end of the world until the other end ... He spanned from one end of Heaven until the other ... (Chagigah 12a)

It is hard to imagine a person being so large. Where would he lie down to sleep? If he rolled over, would he fall off the earth?

The answer is no, because these measurements are not of the physical world, but of the spiritual

world. The rabbis of the Talmud are not describing Adam's physical stature (although that too must have been awesome to behold); the rabbis are referring to the first man's ability to spiritually span between Heaven and Earth, by virtue of his essential, pre-sin state of holiness. Even the physical body Adam possessed at that stage of time more resembled a soul, not a body as we know it; for, it was made of light (and had the appearance of a fingernail).

As Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto writes:

"When Adam was first formed, he was precisely in the state that we have discussed until now, composed of two equal opposites, the body and the soul. His environment contained both good and evil, and he was balanced between the two to choose whichever he wished ... If Adam had not sinned, he would have been able to attain this [perfection] without restraint. His soul would have purified his body step-by-step, until he reached the level required to permanently partake of everlasting bliss..." (Derech Hashem 1:3:6-8)

The truth is, as the Ramchal explained, even the world in which Adam lived was very different. The environment we live within daily, in which both good and evil are quite at home, is really just the result of the sin. Before the sin, only good was at home in this world, and evil was contained and kept separate "below" in an area of its own, because creation existed on a higher spiritual plain. The result of the chet was to plunge the physical world into one of spiritual "filth," and to undo much of the perfection achieved in the first six days of creation. We are born into that submerged world, and have to fight off evil daily, as the Talmud says:

Rebi Shimon son of Levi said: A person's yetzer tries to overcome him and everyday wishes to kill him ... And were it not that The Holy One, Blessed is He, helps him [against it], he would not prevail.(Kiddushin 30b)

However, the first man and woman lived completely "above" that lowly state, and all five levels of their souls (Nefesh, Ruach, Neshamah, Chiyah, Yechidah) were intimately connected. Adam literally walked with his head in Heaven, because that is how high he spiritually reached.

Exactly. If Adam was so holy, how did he sin?

Shabbos Day:

As usual, Kabbalah supplies us with some important missing pieces. First of all, the command to not eat from the tree was just one part of the mitzvah. The rest included waiting until after Shabbos before procreating (since Chava was considered ritually impure after the entire episode, and Shabbos would have purified her). It was procreation under the effects of the transgression that resulted in Kayin (Cain), a son born within whom good and evil was mixed. This made it possible for

him to murder his brother, Hevel (Abel), shortly after being expelled from the Garden.

However, even before this, Adam was commanded to not look at the tree, since evil was associated with it. This is something which definitely applies to all people, because it is the nature of man to become attached to something that he sees. The eyes are powerful tools for building relationships, which is why the Torah commands us not to "follow after your eyes ..." Eyes are called "windows of the soul," with the power to penetrate to the depths of another person more than any other of the five senses. Seeing is often the first stage of bonding with another person or thing.

However, Adam did look, and with the intention to understand the nature of the tree, and to "conquer" the evil it represented--for all the right reasons. Instead, as history testifies, Adam's plan met with disastrous results. The rabbis explain that like many after him (which include the likes of Dovid HaMelech and Shlomo HaMelech), he thought that his spiritual greatness was enough to withstand any test he created for himself, and sought to make rectifications to creation that could hasten the end of history.

However, the Kabbalists explain that Adam's greatness had been given to him, a gift from G-d into which he had yet to grow. For this reason, when he entered the world of spiritual impurity, he succumbed instead to its pull, and lost his spiritual way. By the time Chava gave her husband some forbidden fruit, Adam was a spiritual "mess" so-to-speak. This is why the rabbis advise: Don't assume too much about yourself until the day you die."

To think that all of this happened because of a look. It was this looking that gave the snake the ability to enter the Garden and entice Chava. Previous to this, the world and mankind had been too holy for the likes of the sly snake. But Adam's entry into the world of spiritual impurity lowered the world sufficient enough that even the snake could gain entry into the Garden. This is why Adam, and not Chava, is held responsible for the entire sin--even though Chava ate first and then "gave to her husband."

However, even still, things were not so bad as to make rectification within the Garden impossible. In fact, even after eating from the Tree (which transformed their physical appearance from one of light to one of skin, as it is now), there was the chance for rectification without being expelled from the Garden. G-d had even begun to rectify the mistake even without Adam's involvement.

What ended the chapter on that period of history was the birth of a child while Chava remained in her state of spiritual impurity. Until the birth of Kayin, good and evil, though mixed conceptually, lacked a physical embodiment. However, the birth of Kayin provided precisely this, and this meant that the transgression was complete. Expulsion from the Garden had become inevitable.

Had the chet not occurred, then the world would have become completely rectified immediately at the first Shabbos. The Ohr HaGanuz (Hidden Light of creation; see Parashas Zos HaBrochah, Shabbos Day) would never have been hidden! But once Adam descended to such a low level, it became impossible for him to fully correct what he damaged. Six millennia, instead, have been

laying, and continue to lay the groundwork for the Ultimate Rectification.

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

As a result of the chet, three types of damage occurred, for which over 5,758 years of history have yet to fully rectify. First of all, the world descended and was distanced from the Infinite Light of G-d. Secondly, the forces of spiritual evil were made stronger by virtue of the fact that man was plunged down to their level. Thirdly, good and evil became mixed together, separable only through death.

"When Adam sinned, however, this was greatly altered ... At first it was very easy for man to overcome his natural faults and attain perfection ... When Adam sinned, however, he himself caused the further concealment of perfection and increase of evil. Man himself thus became the cause of the evil that existed in him, and it therefore became much more difficult for him to abandon it ..."
(Derech Hashem 1:3:6-8)

This is what G-d commented in the time of Noach:

The inclinations of the heart of man are evil from his youth. (Bereishis 8:21)

This is also the intent of the Talmud when it states:

Four died because of the bite of the Snake, and they were: Binyomin son of Ya'akov, Amram the father of Moshe, Yishai the father of Dovid, and Kalav son of Dovid. (Shabbos 55b)

That is, they were so perfect that had not death been ordained as a rectification of the chet of Adam HaRishon, these four people would have passed from this world straight to the World-to-Come.

Not to mention the incredible insanity that we accept as part-and-parcel of everyday life. There are many ways to describe the damage Adam and Chava did that sixth day of creation, some more sophisticated and esoteric than others. However, the greatest way to measure the damage is by how inobvious the hand of G-d has become to human beings in everyday life, in every aspect of everyday life.

She took some of its fruit, and ate. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate ... Then they heard the voice of G-d moving through the garden like the day breeze, and the man and his wife hid from G-d among the trees of the garden. G-d called out to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard Your voice in the Garden. I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid." (Bereishis 3:7-10)

This was the greatest damage to creation. G-d made all of creation, every last single star in the universe to allow man to act godly, and to become close to His Creator as a matter of free-will choices. Instead of reaching for the stars, man was now mired in the muck, very much human, and "hidden" from G-d. It was the exact opposite scenario that we strive to achieve when we say the Shema: Hear O Israel, the L-rd our G-d, the L-rd is One. He is "One" to be sure, but in the minds of

men, the wedge between G-d and His physical, "natural" creation had been driven in; 5,758 years, for the most part, have only seemed to widen the gap.

However. However, as the following quotes make clear, as we approach the end of history as we know it, rectification may not be as far off as many may think:

"If you change a little bit the laws of nature, or you change a little bit the constants of nature-like the charge on the electron-then the way the universe develops is so changed, it is very likely that intelligent life would not have been able to develop."(Dr. Dennis Scania, head of Cambridge University Observatories)

"If we nudge one of these constants just a few percent in one direction, stars burn out within a million years of their formation, and there is no time for evolution. If we nudge it a few percent in the other direction, then no elements heavier than helium form. No carbon, no life. Not even any chemistry. No complexity at all ... If anyone claims not to be surprised by the special features that the universe has, he is hiding his head in the sand. These special features ARE surprising and unlikely." (Dr. David D. Deutsch, Institute of Mathematics, Oxford University)

"The really amazing thing is not that life on Earth is balanced on a knife-edge, but that the entire universe is balanced on a knife-edge, and would be total chaos if any of the natural 'constants' were off even slightly. You see, even if you dismiss man as a chance happening, the fact remains that the universe seems unreasonably suited to the existence of life-almost contrived-you might say a 'put-up job.' " (Dr. Paul Davies, noted author and professor of theoretical physics at Newcastle University)

(When Fred Hoyle was researching how carbon came to be in the "blast-furnaces" of the stars, his calculations indicated that it is very difficult to explain how the stars generated the necessary quantity of carbon upon which life on earth depends. Hoyle found that there were numerous "fortunate" one-time occurrences which seemed to indicate that purposeful "adjustments" had been made in the laws of physics and chemistry in order to produce the necessary carbon.) "A common sense interpretation of the facts suggests that a superintendent has monkeyed with the physics, as well as chemistry and biology, and that there are no blind forces worth speaking about in nature, I do not believe that any physicist who examined the evidence could fail to draw the inference that the laws of nuclear physics have been deliberately designed with regard to the consequences they produce within stars." (Sir Fred Hoyle)

"The fact that the universe exhibits many features that foster organic life-such as precisely those physical constants that result in planets and long-lived stars-also has led some scientists to speculate that some divine influence may be present." ("Science and G-d: A Warming Trend?" Science; August 1997)

"The remarkable fact is that the values of these numbers (i.e. the constants of physics) seem to have been very finely adjusted to make possible the development of life. For example, if the electric charge of the electron had been only slightly different, stars would have been unable to burn

world.

Noach's secret was his chayn, which the Ohr HaChayim HaKodesh points out is the reverse spelling of Noach (nun-ches ... ches, nun). Interestingly enough, Noach boarded the ark and left it a year later in the month of MarCheshvan (mem, raish, ches, shin, vav, nun), whose letters can be arranged to spell, "shomer chayn," the guardian of chayn. This might explain why Noach found chayn "in the eyes of Hashem," because eyes can also reflect back-in reverse-what is looking into them. Hence, the posuk can be explained to mean:

When Noach looked in the eyes of G-d, he found chayn, i.e., a reverse image of himself.

"Eyes" represent a person's vision, or outlook-hashkofa. As Rashi points out, Noach learned Torah (7:2), and Torah is G-d's vision of creation and all that is supposed to transpire. As it says, "When G-d decided to make creation, He looked into the Torah as if it were a blueprint" (Bereishis Rabbah 1:1). Hence, when Noach looked into Torah-G-d's eyes-he found chayn-a reflection of himself, that is, his inner essence ... his godliness.

In fact, the question is raised: Why did the waters of the Flood rise above the highest mountains 15 cubits (Bereishis 7:20)? The answer is, because, by not acting in the image of G-d, the Generation of the Flood defiled the yud-heh (equal to 15) of Elokim, leaving behind the letters, aleph, lamed, mem, which spell the world e-leim-a deaf and dumb person-the spiritual status of a person who does not live in the image of G-d.

Noach, however, acted differently, and this is what saved him, and this is what saves any person from Divine justice. While Society looked at itself and saw a reflection of a physical body with physical potential, it designed a physical lifestyle to accommodate this reality of man. However, when Noach, with the help of Torah, saw past his body and into his inner being-his soul, the true source of chayn-he understood his true essence, and lived his life accordingly.

Since this will, b"H, arrive in advance of Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah, I wish the joy of G-d's Holy Light and Torah. May it touch you, and elevate you, and cause to be revealed to you the depth and beauty of Divine wisdom--especially during the hakafos (seven circuits around the bimah with the Sefer Torah), when we draw down the Infinite Light of G-d upon us.

Have a good Shabbos,

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