

# IT'S ALL ABOUT REDEMPTION PART III

*by Rabbi Aron Tendler*

## In Search of Discipline

In last week's issue (Noach) we explained that eating from the Tree Of The Knowledge Of Good and Evil resulted in total loss and zero gain for Adam and Chava. The only knowledge they acquired was that they could never regain their one Mitzvah (commandment) of not eating. They were now "naked of their one Mitzvah!" Moreover, they had lost their innocence of intent in exploring the majesty of G-d's world. Before the forbidden fruit their sole motivation was exploring, experimenting, experiencing, and thereby recognizing and knowing the Creator. No other personal motive yet existed. As such, whatever they would do, except eating from the forbidden fruit, was inherently good and positive. Whatever they did was a means of further getting to know the greatness and majesty of Hashem (G-d).

After eating from the forbidden fruit their motivation for doing whatever they would do became suspect. Were they exploring and experiencing life for the sake of knowing Hashem or were they doing so to fulfill their own desires and interests? After eating of the forbidden fruit humans would always have to question if their exploration was the stuff of curiosity for the sake of knowing the Creator or curiosity for the sake of self-need and want. The first is a fulfillment of human destiny and the purpose of creation; the later is the beginnings of idolatry.

The contrast between self-service and service for the sake of knowing G-d requires further elaboration. To begin, let us revisit the Rambam's (Maimonides) clarification of the two Mitzvos, Loving G-d and Being In Awe of G-d.

The Rambam explains that the two Mitzvos are distinct but related. Loving Hashem involves becoming aware of how G-d maintains the universe. Through observing His actions we should realize that He truly cares for us. We should recognize and acknowledge the totality of our dependency on Him, express our appreciation through prayer and action, and grow to love Him. (This is the same manner of love that a child has for a parent who lovingly cares for every detail of their well-being.)

We become "in awe of G-d" when we realize that G-d cares for everything in the universe as completely as He does for each of us. G-d's ability to do so reveals the unlimited capacity of His power and love. That overwhelmingly humbling reality is called "Being in Awe of G-d."

The Rambam (Laws of Yisodei Hatorah 2:1) concludes that the Love + Awe equation makes it clear that the only absolutely significant entity and therefore value in the universe is G-d and we should therefore desire nothing else but closeness to His essence. In the physically limiting reality of our world such closeness can only be realized by listening to His commandments in contrast to doing as we desire. It is the meaning of the Mishnah in Avos, "Be as servants who serve their master not for the sake of receiving a reward." Reward is what we crave, and it is perfectly OK to crave deserved reward; however, the motivation for serving Hashem should never be the reward; it should always be the service. The fact that G-d rewards those who serve Him is the secondary gain in having a relationship with G-d rather than the goal of the service.

Before eating from the forbidden fruit, service to Hashem was "to serve and to safe keep." Whatever Adam and Chava would do would be in service to Hashem. Whatever pleasure they would derive would also be "in service to Hashem." However; upon eating from the forbidden fruit, Adam and Chava interjected selfishness into their motivation. They experienced doing something not in the service of G-d and it proved to be pleasurable and fulfilling - unfortunately, it was also forbidden. (That's when guilt was created.) The introduction of selfishness into their motivation irreparably damaged their innocence. They no longer possessed their Laiv Tahor - pure heart. Sin had been introduced into the universe.

With the introduction of sin, the need for instruction in how to distinguish between self-service and service to G-d became essential. As taught by the Nachash (serpent), ("...and you will be like G-d...") sin is not always obvious. Most people do not sin for the sake of rebelling. Most of us sin because of Tayvah - the desire to do what we feel like doing rather than imposing on ourselves the super-ego of G-d's law. Because we do not sin for the sake of rebellion we seek to rationalize why we are not listening to Hashem; why we are not restricting our desires. That is the real meaning of the "and their eyes were opened and they knew they were naked."

Let me explain.

The forbidden fruit was not magical. It had no magical powers to grant knowledge or divinity. In essence, the forbidden fruit could have been anything because G-d's purpose was to challenge humanity to listen to Him rather than do as they desire. In other words, because it is human tendency to desire that which is forbidden, even when everything else in the world is permitted; G-d nevertheless said, "Do not do as you desire because I told you not to do so." Simply put, the only difference between sin and service, between good and evil, between service to self and service to G-d, is obeying or not obeying G-d's commandments.

What is the Tikun? What can correct the irreversible introduction of selfish motive (sin) into the workings of human motivation?

We have stated that the loss of Adam and Chava's one Mitzvah, left humanity naked of Mitzvos. Their "nakedness" left them without direction as how to purely and selflessly serve G-d. They could

no longer depend on their natural inclinations to be in the service of Hashem. Therefore, they needed more Mitzvos. The introduction of the Seven Mitzvos given to the Sons of Noach was the beginning of fixing the irreversible damage of Adam and Chava's sin.

How were these new Mitzvos presented and what did they accomplish?

The medium through which the new Mitzvos were given was prophecy, and their purposes were more than obvious. The most obvious advantage was the knowledge of what G-d wanted and how to serve Him. The less obvious advantages involved such distinctions and processes as "doing Mitzvos for self-serving reasons but still getting credit for serving G-d." In other words, doing a Mitzvah "not for the sake of Heaven," and it was still a Mitzvah. The nature of humanity is such that Hashem expected us to struggle with the imposition of His will over and above our own. G-d did not expect immediate perfection of motive or performance. Instead, as the true behaviorist that He is, G-d was content to wait for pure motive to catch up. (See the Rambam's introduction to Moreh Nivuchim.) (Naaseh before Nishmah) Hashem is confident that the discipline and consistency of performance will eventually result in doing Mitzvos L'ishmah (for the sake of serving Hashem). Actions will create the emotions. (Rambam's clarification of Love and Awe.)

Furthermore, by defining specific commandments G-d allowed for the creation of a life style that frames human behavior in purpose and service. Before the Forbidden Fruit all behavior was framed in purpose and service. After the introduction of selfishness (sin) all actions were suspect. With the commandment of Mitzvos, G-d again allowed humanity the ease of exploration and discovery so long as they maintained the basic tenets of their life style. Hashem did not ask for much.

The method of presenting the Mitzvos was prophecy. G-d spoke to Adam, Chanoch, Misushelach, Lemech and Noach and told them what He wanted. They in turn told their immediate families and all who cared to know (and many who didn't) what G-d had commanded. So began the classic concept of the Mesora (transmission of Divine will from generation to generation).

As with the Mitzvos themselves, the Mesora had obvious and not so obvious advantages. The obvious advantages were the presentation of G-d's commandments. How else would humanity know what to do and what not to do? The less obvious advantage was the osmotic training humanity would receive toward greater discipline and acceptance of authority. If sin means the lack of discipline in imposing divine will over our own, then training toward greater discipline and acceptance is a significant component of the correction process. The notion of G-d speaking to one or a few individuals and everyone else having to accept their teachings as the truth was that intended training.

Some basics of prophecy and transmission.

G-d does not speak to everyone. More accurately put, not everyone can hear G-d speak. Because G-d only speaks to a few individuals, the individuals so gifted must transmit G-d's words and instructions. For the prophet to do anything less is a denial of G-d's intentions and the forfeiting of his

own life. The rest of humanity then has a choice. To listen or not to listen - that is the choice.

Regardless of whether humanity listens or not, humanity must still ascertain the purpose of their existence and the values they will espouse as truth. If they choose not to listen to the prophet they must create their own truths and values. If they choose to design their own truth they must also accept that the subsequent generations will do the same, changing the truths of the past in favor of their own "designer truths." Unfortunately, human history has proven through great suffering and tragedy that designer truths are but an elegant presentation of chaos and anarchy. Seldom if ever are the initial motives pure and truthful, and even if they start as pure and true they result in self-service and evil.

The alternative is to accept that there is absolute truths in the universe commanded by the existence of a Creator to the gifted recipients of His prophecy. For the prophet the absolutes are simple. "G-d spoke to me therefore I know that He exists and that His commandments are true."

For the rest of humanity the absolutes are more challenging. First you must believe that G-d exists. Secondly you must believe that G-d speaks to prophets. Thirdly, you must believe that the information being transmitted to you by the prophet is accurate and unaltered.

Let's consider another scenario. You are not a prophet and G-d does not speak to you. Yet, you are a seeker of truth and in search of absolutes that transcend time and circumstance. What is a good person to do? How is that person supposed to find the absolutes? We must assume that one of two things will happen. Either G-d will bring you in contact with one of His prophets or He will reward your goodness and motives by making you a prophet. However, what does the seeker of truth, the good person, do in the interim?

The only possible answer is for the seeker to attempt to design truths to the best of his ability and hope for the best. Therein lays the overview of Torah history from Noach to Nimrod to Avraham to Avimelech to the Akeidah with everything else in between. G-d willing, the next issues will elaborate on the history of absolute truths as they relate to the transmission of G-d's laws and the search for redemption.

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The author is the Rabbi of Shaarey Zedek Congregation, Valley Village, CA, and Assistant Principal of YULA.