

“Accursed is the ground because of you...For you are dust, and to dust shall you return.” (3:17,19)

It is difficult to understand the way in which Adam HaRishon, the crown of Creation, Hashem's handiwork, transgressed His explicit command, a command that was punishable by death. If this is so, as the Rambam states in his Moreh Nevuchim (1,2), why was he punished so severely? Anybody can err. Furthermore, why did Chavah believe the serpent's assurances over Hashem's explicit warning? Indeed, something was wrong with her reply to the snake, “Lest we die” (Bereishis 3:3). Did Hashem not say that death would clearly be the punishment?

In his Madreigos Ha'Adam, the Alter, zl, m'Novardok, Horav Yosef Yozel Horowitz, zl, explains that there are two ways of relating to evil. The first is a recognition that does not arouse a craving for that which is evil. The second does. An example of the former is the way we think about drugs. While we are aware that certain drugs are mind-altering and pleasure inducing, this knowledge does not increase our desire to join the ranks of its users. The pleasure does not override the awareness of the inherent danger in using drugs. This acknowledgment is tangible. Drugs do not appeal to us because of the explicit danger involved in using them. This is an example of an evil for which there is no craving.

Not so, in regard to kavod, honor, or the desire to increase one's wealth. It is an all-consuming desire that envelops us and controls our lives, despite the fact that we are aware that these desires can drive us out of the world. Nonetheless, the potency of this knowledge does not impact upon our inner selves to protect us from succumbing to these desires. The information about the danger of these deficient character traits remains theoretical and does not prevent us from acting in a negative manner.

Adam's intellect prior to his sin was comprised of pure logic, unaffected by previous experiences. He understood evil by perceiving it. He was only able to do good – because that was the logical

thing to do. What he desired neither influenced his reasoning, nor mediated his comprehension of good and evil. If he understood something to be wrong – his own desire did not play a role in his actions, which were predicated upon reason. He was like an angel, although he was dressed in the physical garb of his eternal body. He was naked and unashamed, because rationally he had nothing about which to be ashamed.

He differed from an angel in one area: free will. An angel cannot choose. It must do good. It cannot choose to do evil. Adam, however, was given the ability to choose, to cease being like an angel. Although his mind was pure and unbiased, he had the opportunity to think outside the box in order to do what he wanted. If he desired to live a life without spiritual danger, then he would have to be careful not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge. If he stayed away from the tree, he would live a life of awareness of the clear distinction between good and evil, never descending into evil. If, however, he sought a life of conflict, a life in which he could wage war against his lusts and desires, then he could eat from the tree. Thus, his passions would be aroused, and the war between reason and emotion would begin within him.

As in every question, there are two sides. If Adam were to remain in the realm of status quo and not eat of the tree, he would remain forever in this spiritual state. His spiritual status would not rise. If he were to eat of the tree, he would be compelled to struggle between his longings and prejudices, against his intellect and its forces. Thus, the warning not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge was good advice rather than prohibition. Eating of the tree could result in death. This is why Chavah said, “Lest you die.” It was not a “done deal.” It was entirely possible that they would not die, but that they would emerge victorious. The snake encouraged her to eat, arguing that in this way she might ascend spiritually as never before. He assured her of success; he guaranteed victory. She listened. That was her mistake.

Moreover, the snake convinced her that even after eating from the tree, the newly integrated lusts and desires would not take immediate effect. They would remain an abstract awareness which would not impose on her thought process. Considering this, the risk remained small. She realized she was wrong when, as soon as they ate from the fruit, she and Adam realized that they were naked. Before the sin, the body was the garment over man’s pure soul. Now, he and his body became one entity, and he was naked. Immediately, this reality awakened uncontrollable lusts. Man sought to cover his body in order to quell his desires.

Adam had gone too far. He was now in a situation in which constant testing was a way of life. The battle against the senses became a bequest handed down to future generations. For us, instincts and desires are in control, and it has become a struggle to be victorious over them. The intellect that had been so powerful has become a tool of the emotion. This is the curse that has befallen mankind.