

"The snake was the craftiest of all the wild animals." (3:1)

The "first sin" stands as the paradigm of all sin. As *Horav Eli Munk z.l.*, notes, sin begins with a dialogue between the animal instinct and the human conscience. The deciding factor of sin is, which one will prevail? How one responds to this question determines his own personal destiny and that of future generations. In the final analysis, the success or failure of mankind is dependent upon man's attitude towards ethics and morality.

The *Torah's* narrative regarding man's first breach in obedience is the story of all moral failings. Animals respond only to their instinct, while man is blessed with the ability to choose between right and wrong. The question which has "plagued" mankind is, what is the definition of right and wrong? The development of a strict code of morality has perplexed some of history's greatest minds. We are taught to believe that the only absolute code of ethics can be found in the code "authored" by Hashem, Who is the absolute Supreme Being, totally removed from any form of limited corporeality.

Man lives in this world bound by the command, *vraku vscgk*, "to till it and preserve it". This is interpreted by the *Targum Yonasan* as referring to man's responsibility to "cultivate" spiritual values and observe the Divine imperatives. Man's own physical nature can not dictate; it must serve. It can not be the deciding factor for his deeds. Sensual pleasures and self-gratification are not the standard for gauging "good." Although natural instinct would so designate it, the Divine imperative defines it as evil.

The *Eitz Ha'daas* was replete with everything that could gratify one's senses. Natural instinct would deem it as "good," but Hashem condemns it as "evil." The tree serves as the paradigm and monitor of the "knowledge of good and evil." Good is defined by Hashem. How man responds to this Divine definition ascertains his level of morality. Hence, the contrast between man and animal becomes apparent in the pattern of human morality.