

Hashem Elokim called out to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” ... The woman whom You gave to be with me – she gave me of the tree... The woman said, “The serpent deceived me.” (3:9,12,13)

What really was the nature of Adam and Chavah's sin, such that it necessitated their expulsion from *Gan Eden*? Ostensibly, it is because they ate of the *Eitz HaDaas*, Tree of Knowledge. This is what, at first glance, is gleaned from the *pesukim*. Hashem did not, however, banish them until after He had had a dialogue with them. Something in that conversation was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. Something ensued from that conversation that made it evident to Hashem that they had to go. Hashem “searched” for Adam and He called out, “Ayeca?” Where are you? Clearly, Hashem knew exactly where Adam was positioned. He simply wanted to start a dialogue. Perhaps Adam would confess his sin and repent.

Adam did not bite. He wasted the opportunity. Instead of explaining to Hashem that he was “hiding” out of shame, because he had committed a grave error, he replied somewhat audaciously to Hashem's query, “Did you eat from the tree which I commanded you not to eat from?”, “The woman whom You gave to be with me – she gave me of the tree.” When Hashem turned to Chavah and questioned her, she immediately retorted, “It was the serpent's fault. He convinced me to eat.”

Both Adam and Chavah passed the buck. They refused to accept blame for their own actions. They refused to accept responsibility for their actions. Can one imagine what would have occurred had they replied, “We did it. We were wrong. We are sorry!” But they did not. Life is much harder for us as a result of their unwillingness to accept responsibility.

Denial that one did something wrong is a natural tendency. How often do we attempt to gloss over our actions, to justify them in any number of ways? This is a great mistake – both in practical life and concerning Torah observance. There is a popular dictum that would be well-placed in front of our eyes at all times as a constant reminder of this folly: “Never defend a mistake.” Attempts at justifying what we did wrong often lead to further rationalizations that are viewed as patently false by everyone – but ourselves. This leads to further bending of the truth and other cover-ups. What is worse is that the more we rationalize, the more we begin to believe that it is true. We are innocent. We are victims. Why is everybody picking on me? As a result, *teshuvah*, repentance from our misdeeds, eludes us. After all, if we did not sin, why should we repent?

We forget that while not taking responsibility may be less demanding, less painful, and less time spent worrying about the unknown, we always pay a price for it. It may be more comfortable – now – but when one does not assume responsibility for his actions, he basically relinquishes his personal power. It will ultimately destroy his self-esteem. When we blame others for the bad things

that happen in our lives, we develop a victim mentality, constantly cowering and obsequious. Relationships, ambitions and achievements suffer, as we revert back into our little cocoon of comfort. The hurt will never go away until we take steps to assume responsibility for our lives.

Some have a more serious problem. This refers to the individual who does not even realize what he is doing. We all like to feel important and have others maintain a high opinion of us. Some more than others develop an over-inflated, over-exaggerated opinion of themselves. As a result of these tendencies, they wrap themselves up in what we may call "denial." This creates a false perception of oneself and the inability to accept the truth concerning oneself. It becomes painful to accept that mistakes are possible and they do happen. When they occur, we impulsively point the finger of blame on someone else. We refuse to think objectively and accept any responsibility for our own actions.

What is the cause of this reluctance to accept responsibility? It comes from insecurity. To the simple-minded, accepting responsibility is a sign of weakness, infirmity, or an opportunity to lose the respect of others. Some even feel that they will lose their sense of value and importance. What they do not realize is that accepting responsibility increases one's respectability, elevating him in the eyes of others. We cannot be perfect all of the time. We all make mistakes at one time or another. By owning up to these errors, one establishes his own self-worth and elevates his self-esteem. With this foundation, we are able to build our own self-confidence and, ultimately, learn to conquer our fears.