

Lesson

1


THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE



Adam en Eva (detail), Johann Sadeler (printmaker), after Crispijn van den Broeck, engraving, Antwerp, 1575. (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam)

Unraveling the mystery of the “Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Bad” from which Adam and Eve ate illuminates many of the questions we grapple with in our own lives. Why do we desire things that we know are bad for ourselves and for others? Why does everything we achieve require hardship and struggle? How much should we care: Is it better to be objective and true or subjective and engaged?

TEXT 1a

GENESIS 2:8–3:7 

THE GARDEN OF EDEN AND THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE (2:8–9)

- 1 G-d* Almighty planted a garden in Eden, in the east;
- 2 and He placed there the man that He had created.
- 3 And G-d Almighty made grow from the soil
- 4 every tree that is desirable to the sight and good for eating;
- 5 and the tree of life in the middle of the garden
- 6 and the tree of the knowledge of good and bad. . . .

MANKIND'S MISSION (2:15)

- 7 G-d Almighty took the man
- 8 and He put him in the Garden of Eden
- 9 to work it and to keep it.

THE COMMANDMENT (2:16–17)

- 10 And G-d Almighty commanded the man, to say:
- 11 “Of all the trees of the garden, eat you shall eat.
- 12 And of the tree of the knowledge of good and bad
- 13 do not eat of it;
- 14 because on the day you eat of it, die you shall die. . . .”

* Throughout this book, “G-d” and “L-rd” are written with a hyphen instead of an “o” (both in our own translations and when quoting others). This is one way we accord reverence to the sacred divine name. This also reminds us that, even as we seek G-d, He transcends any human effort to describe His reality.

NO SHAME (2:25)

15 They were both naked, the man and his wife;
16 and they were not ashamed.

THE SERPENT'S DECEPTION (3:1-5)

17 The serpent was the most shrewd of all animals. . . .
18 And the serpent said to the woman:
19 "No, die you will not die.
20 For G-d knows that on the day you eat from it
21 your eyes will be opened;
22 and you will be as G-d, knowers of good and bad."

THE TRANSGRESSION (3:6)

23 The woman saw that the tree is good for eating
24 and that it is luscious to the eyes
25 and the tree is desirable to make wise
26 and she took of its fruit and she ate;
27 and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.

THE FIRST CLOTHING (3:7)

28 And the eyes of the both of them were opened
29 and they knew that they were naked;
30 and they sewed the leaves of a fig tree
31 and they made themselves girdles.

*Does Judaism Believe
in Original Sin?*

A panel discussion

Rabbis Yitzchak

Breitowitz, Simon

Jacobson, and Ari Sollish:



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TEXT 1b

GENESIS 3:16-24

THE FALLOUT: PAIN OF CHILDBIRTH, THE STRUGGLE
TO EARN A LIVING, AND DEATH (3:16-19)

1 To the woman He said:
2 “Multiply I will multiply your pain and your pregnancy
3 in pain you will give birth to children;
4 and to your husband will be your desire
5 and he will rule over you.”
6 And to the man He said:
7 “. . . Cursed is the soil on your account
8 painfully you shall eat of it, all the days of your life. . . .
9 By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread
10 until you return to the soil, as from it you were taken;
11 for dust you are, and to dust you shall return. . . .”

ADAM AND EVE BANISHED FROM THE GARDEN (3:21-24)

12 G-d Almighty made coats of skin
13 for Adam and his wife
14 and He clothed them.
15 And G-d Almighty said:
16 “Here the human has become like one of us
17 to know good and bad;
18 and now, perhaps he will send forth his hand
19 and he will take also from the tree of life
20 and he will eat and live forever.”

*Handling Our Mistakes
Without Hiding*
Rabbi Aryeh Weinstein:



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- 21 And G-d Almighty sent him out
 22 from the Garden of Eden;
 23 to work the soil wherefrom he was taken. . . .

TEXT 2

NACHMANIDES, *COMMENTARY ON THE TORAH*, GENESIS 3:22 

אם הָיָה הָעֵץ טוֹב לְאָדָם לְמַאֲכָל וְנִחְמָד אֵלָיו לְהִשְׂכִּיל, לָמָּה מְנַעוּ מִמֶּנּוּ?
 וְהָאֱלֹהִים הוּא הַטוֹב וְהַמְּטִיב, לֹא יִמְנַע טוֹב לְהוֹלְכִים בְּתַמִּים.

If the tree was so good to eat, and so attractive as a source of wisdom, why did G-d withhold it from man? For G-d is good and beneficent and does not withhold goodness from those who live wholesomely!



RABBI MOSHE BEN NACHMAN
 (NACHMANIDES, RAMBAN) 1194–1270

Scholar, philosopher, author, and physician. Nachmanides was born in Spain and served as leader of Iberian Jewry. In 1263, he was summoned by King James of Aragon to a public disputation with Pablo Cristiani, a Jewish apostate. Though Nachmanides was the clear victor of the debate, he had to flee Spain because of the resulting persecution. He moved to Israel and helped reestablish communal life in Jerusalem. He authored a classic commentary on the Pentateuch and a commentary on the Talmud.

TEXT 3

MAIMONIDES, *GUIDE FOR THE PERPLEXED* 1:2 

הַקִּשָּׁה לִי אִישׁ חָכָם זֶה לֹא שָׁנִים קוֹשִׁיָה גְדוֹלָה . . . יִרְאֶה מִפְּשׁוּטוֹ שֶׁל
כְּתוּב כִּי הַפְּנוּנָה הִרְאִישׁוֹנָה בְּאָדָם שִׁיְהִיָּה כְּשֶׂאֶר בְּעֲלֵי חַיִּים אֵין שְׂכָל לֹא
בְּמַחֲשָׁבָה, וְלֹא יִבְדִּיל בֵּין הַטוֹב וּבֵין הָרַע; וְכֹאשֶׁר הַמֶּרֶה הֵבִיא לֹא מְרִיו
זֶה הַשְּׁלִמּוֹת הַגְּדוֹל הַמֵּיוֹחֵד בְּאָדָם . . . וְזֶה הַפְּלֵא שִׁיְהִיָּה עֲנִשׁוֹ עַל מְרִיו
יָתֵת לֹא שְׁלִמּוֹת שְׁלֵא הָיָה לֹא . . . וְאֵין זֶה אֶלָּא כְּדַבֵּר מִי שֶׁאָמַר כִּי אִישׁ
מִן הָאֲנָשִׁים מָרָה וְהַפְּלִיג בְּעוֹל וּלְפִיכָךְ שָׁנּוּ בְּרִיתוֹ לְטוֹב וְהוֹשִׁם כּוֹכֵב
בְּשָׁמַיִם!



RABBI MOSHE BEN MAIMON
(MAIMONIDES, RAMBAM) 1135–1204

Halachist, philosopher, author, and physician. Maimonides was born in Córdoba, Spain. After the conquest of Córdoba by the Almohads, he fled Spain and eventually settled in Cairo, Egypt. There, he became the leader of the Jewish community and served as court physician to the vizier of Egypt. He is most noted for authoring the *Mishneh Torah*, an encyclopedic arrangement of Jewish law; and for his philosophical work, *Guide for the Perplexed*. His rulings on Jewish law are integral to the formation of halachic consensus.

Some years ago, a learned man asked me a great question. . . . It would appear, from a basic reading of the Torah's words, that the human being was originally intended to be like the rest of the animal creation, without intelligence in his mind, and without the ability to distinguish between good and bad; and that Adam's disobedience is what procured him that great perfection that is the uniqueness of the human being. . . . It thus appears strange that the punishment for his disobedience should be the elevation of man to a pinnacle of perfection that he did not previously have. . . . This is like saying that a certain person was disobedient and extremely wicked, wherefore his nature was changed for the better, and he was placed as a star in the heavens!

Figure 1.1

The Locked Box Parable



Figure 1.2

The Serpent's Words: Deception or Truth?

GENESIS 3:4-5

The serpent said to the woman: "No, die you will not die.

"For G-d knows that on the day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened; and you will be as G-d, knowers of good and bad."

GENESIS 3:22

G-d Almighty said: "Here the human has become like one of us, to know good and bad; and now, perhaps he will send forth his hand, and he will take also from the tree of life, and he will eat and live forever."

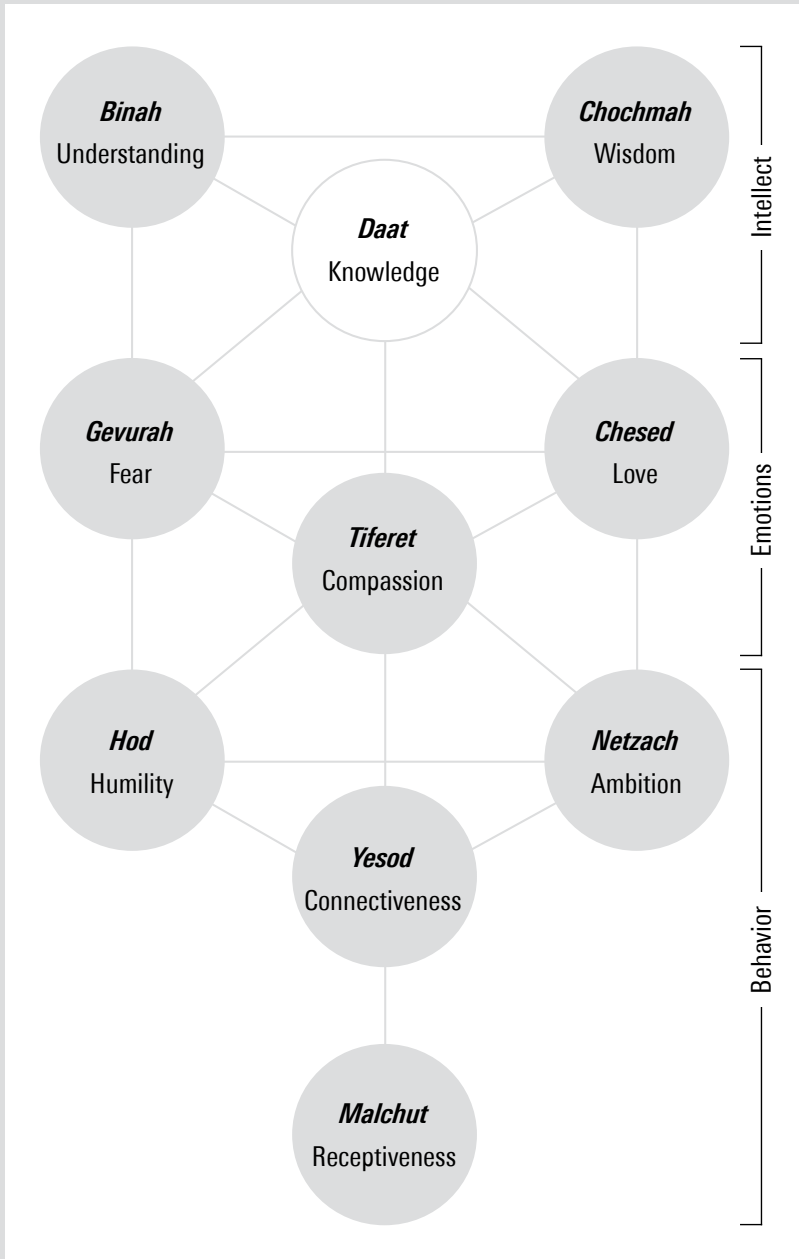
Figure 1.3

Seven Questions on the Tree of Knowledge Story

- 1** How did eating the fruit of a certain tree impart “knowledge of good and bad”?
- 2** Why was the Tree forbidden? Doesn’t G-d want us to enjoy the gifts of life?
- 3** Isn’t knowledge a good thing? Why would it be a sin or the result of sin?
- 4** Did Adam and Eve have Free Choice before they ate from the Tree?
- 5** Everything the serpent said was true. So where is the deception?
- 6** Why did eating from the Tree cause human mortality, the pain of childbirth, and the struggle to earn a living?
- 7** What is the role of nakedness, clothing, and shame in the Tree of Knowledge story?

Figure 1.4

The Ten Faculties



TEXT 4

YANKI TAUBER, *ONCE UPON A CHASSID*

(BROOKLYN: KEHOT PUBLICATION SOCIETY, 1994), P. 53 (††)

An official-looking letter, adorned with stamps and seals, arrived at a small wayside inn somewhere in the backwoods of Russia. The illiterate innkeeper ran to find the local schoolteacher in order to enlist his assistance.

As the teacher read the letter aloud, the innkeeper turned white, uttered a small cry, and fainted. For the letter contained shocking and tragic news for this simple, good-hearted man: his beloved father had passed away.

RABBI YANKI TAUBER
1965–

Chasidic scholar and author. A native of Brooklyn, N.Y., Rabbi Tauber is an internationally renowned author who specializes in adapting the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. He is a member of the JLI curriculum development team and has written numerous articles and books, including *Once Upon a Chassid* and *Beyond the Letter of the Law*.



Girl Reading a Letter by an Open Window, Johannes Vermeer, oil on canvas, c. 1659. (Dresden State Art Museum, Germany)




QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

Does our faculty of *daat* **help** us or **hinder** us in making important life decisions?

Examples:

- 1** Who can better diagnose and treat an illness—an objective professional, or a doctor who is a close friend and deeply cares about the patient?
- 2** Who will do a better job at running a business—a hired genius with a PhD in business administration, or a family member who is personally and emotionally invested in the family business?
- 3** Which would be a better judge in a criminal case—a computer that is fed all the relevant facts and algorithms, or a human judge with feelings of sympathy for the victim and outrage toward the criminal?

TEXT 5

RABBI SHNE'UR ZALMAN OF LIADI, *TORAH OR*, BEREISHIT 5C-D 

זָהוּ שְׁפָתוֹב הֵן הָאָדָם הָיָה כְּאֶחָד מִמֶּנּוּ . . . פִּירוּשׁ כְּמוֹ שֶׁבִּבְחִינַת אַחָדוּת, דְּהֵיִינוּ לְמַעַלָּה, יְדוּעַ הַטּוֹב וְרַע, כֵּן הָיָה גַם הוּא עַל יְדֵי שְׁטָעִים מַעֲפֵץ הַדַּעַת הַמַּעוּרָב טוֹב וְרַע. אֲבָל לוֹ הַדְּבָר מִזִּיק . . .

לֹא כְּמוֹ שֶׁהוּא לְמַעַלָּה, שְׂאֵף עַל פִּי שְׂיֻדְעִים גַּם אֶת הָרַע מִכֵּל מְקוֹם מוֹבְדָל הוּא וּמְרוּחָק מִן הַטּוֹב . . . אֲבָל הָאָדָם, שֶׁהוּא מִבְּחִינַת פְּנִימִי, כְּשִׂידַע גַּם הוּא מִן הָרַע אֲזִי יִתְעַרֵּב הוּא גַם הוּא מִמֶּשׁ עִם הָרַע . . . וְאִז הוּא קָשָׁה מְאֹד לְהַפְרִיד אֶת הָרַע. אֲלֵא מְלַחְמָה עֲצוּמָה הִיא, "וּלְאֵם מְלֵאָם יֵאֱמָץ", פְּעָמִים זֶה גוֹבֵר וּפְעָמִים שֶׁכִּנְגְדוּ גוֹבֵר . . .

וְלִכֵּן לֹא רָצָה הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא שְׂיֻטְעִים הָאָדָם מַעֲפֵץ הַדַּעַת . . . וְהָיָה רוֹצֵה שְׁלֹא יֵדַע מִמְצִיאת הָרַע כִּלְל וְהָיָה כּוֹלוּ קְדוֹשׁ וְלֹא רָצָה לְהַכְנִיסוֹ בְּמְלַחְמָה עֲצוּמָה הַזֹּאת.



RABBI SHNE'UR ZALMAN OF LIADI (ALTER REBBE) 1745–1812

Chasidic rebbe, halachic authority, and founder of the Chabad movement. The Alter Rebbe was born in Liozna, Belarus, and was among the principal students of the Magid of Mezeritch. His numerous works include the *Tanya*, an early classic containing the fundamentals of Chabad Chasidism; and *Shulchan Aruch HaRav*, an expanded and reworked code of Jewish law.

A Kabbalistic View of the Tree of Knowledge
Rabbi Laibl Wolf:



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This is the meaning of what [G-d] says [after Adam and Eve ate from the Tree:]: “Here, the human has become like one of us . . .” (GENESIS 3:22). Meaning that in the same way that in the Supernal Oneness there is knowledge of good and bad, so, too, has man [gained this knowledge] as a result of his tasting of the Tree of Knowledge in which good and bad are commingled. But for man, this is damaging. . . .

The way that it is Above is that although the bad is also known, it remains separate and distant from the good. . . . The human being, however, is a *penimi* (“internalizer”): when the human being knows the bad, he becomes mixed up with it . . . and then it is extremely

difficult to separate from the bad. Rather, it is a great battle, in which “kingdom overpowers kingdom”—at times one side overpowers, and at times the other side overpowers. . . .

This is why G-d did not want that man should taste from the Tree of Knowledge. . . . G-d wanted that man should not have any knowledge at all of the bad, and that man should remain exclusively holy; as G-d did not desire to cast man into this great battle.

The Temptation in the Garden of Eden, Jan Bruegel the Elder, oil on oak panel, Antwerp, c. 1600. (Victoria and Albert Museum, London)



TEXT 6

MAIMONIDES, *GUIDE FOR THE PERPLEXED* 1:2 

שֶׁהַשֵּׁכֶל אֲשֶׁר הִשְׁפִּיעַ ה' עַל הָאָדָם, שֶׁהוּא שְׁלֵמוֹתוֹ הַסּוֹפִית, הוּא אֲשֶׁר נִיתַן לָאָדָם קוֹדֵם מְרוֹתוֹ; וְעָלָיו נֶאֱמַר בּוֹ שֶׁהוּא בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹקִים וּבְדַמּוֹתוֹ, וּבְגִלְלוֹ דִּיבַר אֶתוֹ וְצוּוֹה אוֹתוֹ . . . כִּי לֹא תִהְיֶה הַצִּיּוּי לְבִהְמוֹת וְלֹא לְמִי שֵׂאִין לוֹ שֵׁכֶל. וּבְשֵׁכֶל יִבְדִּיל הָאָדָם בֵּין הָאֱמֶת וְהַשֶּׁקֶר; וְזֶה הִיא נִמְצָא בּוֹ עַל שְׁלֵמוֹתוֹ וְתַמּוּתוֹ.

אָבֵל הַ"טוֹב וְהָרַע" הוּא בְּמִפְּוֹרְסָמוֹת, לֹא בְּמוֹשְׁפָלוֹת . . . וְכֵן בְּלִשׁוֹנֵנוּ לֵאמֹר עַל הַנִּכּוֹן וְהַשְּׂוֹא "אֱמֶת וְשֶׁקֶר", וְעַל הַנָּאֵה וְהַמְּגוֹנָה "טוֹב וְרַע" . . . וְכֹאֲשֶׁר מָרָה וְנָטָה אֶל תַּאֲוֹתָיו הַדְּמִיוֹנִיּוֹת וְתַעֲנוּגוֹת חוֹשִׁיו הַגּוֹפְנִיִּים—כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַר: "כִּי טוֹב הָעֵץ לְמֵאֲכָל וְכִי תֵאָוֶה הוּא לְעֵינַיִם"—נַעֲנֵשׁ שְׁנִשְׁלָלָה מִמֶּנּוּ אוֹתָהּ הַהִשְׁגָּה הַשֵּׁכֶלִית . . . וְנִקְנִית לוֹ הַשְּׁגַת הַמְּפּוֹרְסָמוֹת וְשֶׁקֶע בְּהַבְחִנַת הָרַע וְהַטוֹב . . . וְלָזֶה נֶאֱמַר . . . "יִודְעֵי טוֹב וְרַע", וְלֹא אָמַר, "יִודְעֵי שֶׁקֶר וְאֱמֶת" אוֹ "מְשִׁיגֵי שֶׁקֶר וְאֱמֶת".

*A Text-Based Study of the
Sin of the Tree of Knowledge*
Rabbi Avrohom Bergstein:



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The intelligence that G-d imparted to man, which is man's ultimate perfection, was given to him before his disobedience. Indeed, it is because of this intelligence that it is said that man was made in the divine image and likeness, and it is due to this intelligence that G-d spoke to man and instructed him . . . as one does not commission animals or those without intelligence. With this intelligence, man was able to differentiate between truth and falsehood. This ability man possessed in fullness and perfection.

"Good" and "bad," on the other hand, are subjective conventions, not objective truths . . . When speaking of

the correct and incorrect, we use the terminology “true” and “false”; regarding what is attractive or repulsive, we use the terms “good” and “bad.” . . . When man rebelled and followed his imagined desires and the pleasure of his physical instincts—as it is written, “[The woman saw] that the tree is good for eating and that it is lusty to the eyes”—his punishment was to be deprived of that objective understanding. . . . He was inundated by the subjectivity of worldly conventions, and he sank to the level of discerning in terms of “good” and “bad.” . . . Thus, it says that [Adam and Eve became] “knowers of good and bad,” rather than “knowers of falsehood and truth” or “comprehenders of falsehood and truth.”

TEXT 7

RABBI ELIYAHU DESSLER, *MICHTAV MI'ELIYAHU*, VOL. 2, PP. 138–139

עֲכָשְׁיוֹ, בְּמִצְבַּב שְׁלֹאֲחֵר הַחֲטָא, נִשְׁמָעִים לָנוּ דְבָרֵי הַיְצָר הָרַע בְּגוֹף
 רֵאשׁוֹן: "אֲנִי" רוֹצֵה, "אֲנִי" מִתְאַוֶּה . . . אֲבָל לֹא כֵן אֶצֶל אָדָם הָרֵאשׁוֹן,
 כִּי "הָאֱלֹקִים עָשָׂה אֶת הָאָדָם יָשָׁר", וְהָיָה עוֹשֶׂה מִטְבְּעוֹ מֵה שְׁרָאוֹי
 לַעֲשׂוֹת . . . אֲשֶׁר עַל כֵּן הָיָה צְרִיף הַנְּחָשׁ לְבוֹא "מִבַּחוּץ" לְפִתּוֹתוֹ . . . בְּלִשׁוֹן
 "אֵתָה", קוֹל הַבָּא אֵלָיו מִבַּחוּץ, וְלֹא מִתּוֹךְ הַ"אֲנִי" שֶׁהָיָה מוֹשְׁרֵשׁ בְּטוֹב.



RABBI ELIYAHU DESSLER
1892–1953

Talmudic scholar and philosopher. Rabbi Dessler is best known for being the spiritual counselor of the Ponevezh Yeshiva in Israel. His pupils edited his writings and correspondence and published them in a 6-volume series titled *Michtav Mi'Eliyahu*.

Today, in the post-transgression reality, the evil inclination is an internal voice that speaks in the first person: “I want,” “I desire.” . . . This was not the original state of the human being. For “G-d created man straight” (ECCLESIASTES 7:29), as one who would naturally do the right thing. . . . Which is why the serpent had to come from the outside to entice man . . . with a “you” voice coming from without, rather than with man’s “I” voice, which was rooted in good.

TEXT 8

ZOHAR 1:27A

וַיִּקַּח ה' אֱלֹקִים אֶת הָאָדָם וַיְנַיִחֵהוּ בְּגֶן עֵדֶן וְגוֹמֵר... לְעַבְדָּהּ - בְּפִקּוּדֵי
דְעִשָּׂה, וּלְשִׁמְרָהּ - בְּפִקּוּדֵי דְלֹא תַעֲשֶׂה.

“G-d Almighty took the man, and He put him in the Garden of Eden, to work it and to keep it” (GENESIS 2:15). “To work it”—these are the positive commandments of the Torah; “and to keep it”—these are the prohibitions.



ZOHAR

The seminal work of kabbalah, Jewish mysticism. The *Zohar* is a mystical commentary on the Torah, written in Aramaic and Hebrew. According to the Arizal, the *Zohar* contains the teachings of Rabbi Shimon bar Yocha'i, who lived in the Land of Israel during the 2nd century. The *Zohar* has become one of the indispensable texts of traditional Judaism, alongside and nearly equal in stature to the Mishnah and Talmud.



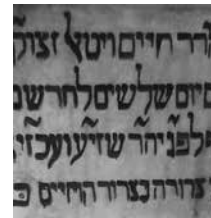
QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

Which path would you choose for your child?

TEXT 9

RABBI CHAIM VITAL, *SHAAREI KEDUSHAH* 1:1 

וַיַּדַע כִּי אַחַר שֶׁחָטָא אָדָם הָרָאוּשׁוֹן וְאָכַל מֵעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וְרַע, חוּבְרוּ נַפְשׁוֹ וְגוּפּוֹ גַם הֵם כָּל אֶחָד מֵטוֹב וְרַע . . . וְזֶהוּ שֶׁכָּתוּב (בְּרֵאשִׁית ב' י"ז) כִּי בַיּוֹם אֲכָלָה מִמְּנוֹ מוֹת תָּמוּת, מֵיַתַּת הַנֶּפֶשׁ וּמֵיַתַּת הַגּוּף . . . הִנֵּה פָאֲשֶׁר חָטָא בְּעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וְרַע, גְּרַם תַּעֲרוּבַת הַזֶּה בְּכֹל הָעוֹלָמוֹת וְאִין לָהּ דְּבָר שְׂאִינוּ כְּלוּל מֵטוֹב וְרַע.



RABBI CHAIM VITAL
C. 1542–1620

Lurianic kabbalist. Rabbi Vital was born in Israel, lived in Safed and Jerusalem, and later lived in Damascus. He was authorized by his teacher, Rabbi Yitschak Luria, the Arizal, to record his teachings. Acting on this mandate, Vital began arranging his master's teachings in written form, and his many works constitute the foundation of the Lurianic school of Jewish mysticism. His most famous work is *Ets Chaim*.


Know that after Adam sinned and ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Bad, both his soul and his body became integrated with both good and bad. . . . This is the significance of that which is written (GENESIS 2:17), “Because on the day that you eat from it, die you will die”—both the death of the soul and the death of the body. . . . [And] when he sinned with the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Bad, man caused this intermixing in all the worlds, so that there is nothing that does not include within itself both good and bad.

*Original Sin Revisited—
What Really Happened?*
Rabbi Mendel Kaplan:



MYJLI.COM/BIBLE

TEXT 10

THE REBBE, RABBI MENACHEM MENDEL SCHNEERSON,
SEFER HAMAAMARIM 5725, P. 344 

דַּעַל יְדֵי חֲטָא עֵץ הַדַּעַת נַעֲשֶׂה תַעֲרוּבוֹת טוֹב וְרַע. דְּמִצִּיאוֹת הָרַע הָיָה
גַּם קוֹדֵם הַחֲטָא, אֲלָא שְׂאָז הָיָה הָרַע מוֹבְדָל מִהַטּוֹב. וְכִידוּעַ, שְׂבִתְחִלַּת
הַבְּרִיאָה הָיָה מְדוּר הַקְּלִיפּוֹת לְמִטָּה מִהַעוֹלָמוֹת דְּקְדוּשָׁה, וְעַל יְדֵי חֲטָא
עֵץ הַדַּעַת נַעֲשֶׂה תַעֲרוּבוֹת טוֹב וְרַע בְּכָל הָעוֹלָם: שֶׁהָרַע מְעוֹרָב בְּהַטּוֹב
וְהַטּוֹב בְּהָרַע, וְעַד אֲשֶׁר אֵין טוֹב בְּלֹא רַע וְאֵין רַע בְּלֹא טוֹב.



RABBI MENACHEM MENDEL SCHNEERSON
1902–1994

The towering Jewish leader of the 20th century, known as “the Lubavitcher Rebbe,” or simply as “the Rebbe.” Born in southern Ukraine, the Rebbe escaped Nazi-occupied Europe, arriving in the U.S. in June 1941. The Rebbe inspired and guided the revival of traditional Judaism after the European devastation, impacting virtually every Jewish community the world over. The Rebbe often emphasized that the performance of just one additional good deed could usher in the era of Mashiach. The Rebbe’s scholarly talks and writings have been printed in more than 200 volumes.

*The Secret of the Snake
and the Garden of Eden*
Rabbi DovBer Pinson:



MYJLI.COM/BIBLE

As a result of the sin of the Tree of Knowledge, there was a blending of good and bad. Evil existed before the sin, but then it was separated from the good. As is known, in the beginning of Creation, the domain of *kelipah* [the “husks” that conceal G-dliness] was beneath the realms of holiness. But through the sin of the Tree of Knowledge, the entire world became a mixture of good and bad: the bad is mixed into the good, and the good is mixed into the bad, to the extent that there is no good without some bad in it, and no bad without some good in it.



QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

Are we better off or worse off as a result of Adam and Eve's deed?



QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

What life lessons can we take from the story of the Tree of Knowledge?

The Secret of the Pomegranate, Shternie Zaltzman, paint, beads and clasps on wood, Brooklyn, N.Y., 2017.



KEY POINTS

1 The plain meaning of the Torah's text and its inner mystical "soul" are interrelated. The many questions, mysteries, and dilemmas posed by the stories of the Torah are resolved when we understand the stories' mystical significance. The mystical meanings also show us how these stories are applicable to our own lives in the here and now.

2 The Torah's account of the "Tree of Knowledge" presents us with many perplexing questions. How did eating the fruit of a certain tree impart "knowledge of good and bad"? Why was the Tree forbidden? Isn't knowledge a good thing? Did Adam and Eve have Free Choice before they ate from the Tree? If everything the serpent said was true, where was the deception? How did eating from the Tree cause human mortality, the pain of childbirth, and the struggle to earn a living? What is the role of nakedness, clothing, and shame in the Tree of Knowledge story?

3 The faculty of *daat* ("knowledge") is that part of our psyche that causes us to become personally invested in what we know and experience. While our *daat* is a reflection of G-d's *daat*, there is an important distinction between the two. G-d is fully invested in His Creation,

yet remains unchanged by it. In contrast, everything that we know and experience becomes part of who and what we are.

4 Before partaking of the Tree, Adam and Eve had a perfect objective understanding of right and wrong, which fully equipped them to fulfill their mission of cultivating G-dliness in the world and rejecting evil. As a result of their transgression, their divine intellect was degraded to a subjective “*daat* of good and bad,” where personal prejudice and shortsighted cravings cloud a person’s judgment. This is why G-d forbade them to partake of the Tree of Knowledge: G-d desired to spare them the struggle and anguish that the entanglement of *daat* would bring.

5 The human being is a microcosm of the whole of Creation. By absorbing the “*daat* of good and bad” into themselves, Adam and Eve caused all of Creation to become a mishmash of good and bad, to the extent that “there is no good without some bad in it, and no bad without some good in it.”

6 The story of the Tree of Knowledge teaches us to appreciate the positive elements that exist in the “other” with whom we disagree and in the paradigms that we

reject. It encourages us to embrace the “messiness” of life as an opportunity for deeper and more meaningful engagement. It also teaches us to acknowledge our blunders, while discovering how a past negative can be transformed into a future positive.

Appendix

TEXT 11

ZOHAR, 3:152A

רבי שמעון אמר, ווי לִהְיוּא בַר נֶשׁ דְּאָמַר דְּהָא אֹרִייתָא אַתָּא לְאַחְזָאָה סְפוּרִין בְּעֵלְמָא וּמְלִין דְּהֵדְיוּטִי, דְּאִי הֵכִי אֶפִּילוּ בְּזַמְנָא דָּא אָנּוּ יְכַלִּין לְמַעַבְד אֹרִייתָא בְּמְלִין דְּהֵדְיוּטִי וּבְשִׁבְחָא יְתִיר מְכֻלָּהוּ . . . אֵלָּא כֹּל מְלִין דְּאֹרִייתָא מְלִין עֵלְאִין אֵינּוּן וְרַזִּין עֵלְאִין . . .

תָּא חֲזִי, אֵית לְבוּשָׁא דְאַתְחֲזִי לְכֻלָּא, וְאֵינּוּן טְפִשִׁין כַּד חֲמָאן לְבַר נֶשׁ בְּלְבוּשָׁא דְאַתְחֲזִי לֹון שְׁפִירָא, לֹא מְסַתְּפְלִין יְתִיר, חֲשִׁיבוּ דִּהְיוּא לְבוּשָׁא גּוּפָא, חֲשִׁיבוּתָא דְּגּוּפָא נִשְׁמַתָּא. כִּהֲאִי גּוּוּנָא אֹרִייתָא. אֵית לָהּ גּוּפָא, וְאֵינּוּן פְּקוּדֵי אֹרִייתָא . . . הֵאִי גּוּפָא מְתַלְבָּשָׁא בְּלְבוּשִׁין דְּאֵינּוּן סְפוּרִין דְּהֵאִי עֵלְמָא. טְפִשִׁין דְּעֵלְמָא לֹא מְסַתְּפְלִי אֵלָּא בְּהֵיוּא לְבוּשָׁא, דְּאֵיהּ סְפוּר דְּאֹרִייתָא, וְלֹא יְדַעֵי יְתִיר . . . אֵינּוּן דִּידְעִין יְתִיר, לֹא מְסַתְּפְלִין בְּלְבוּשָׁא אֵלָּא בְּגּוּפָא דְּאֵיהּ תְּחוּת הֵהוּא לְבוּשָׁא. חֲפִימִין עֲבָדֵי דְּמִלְכָּא עֵלְאָה, אֵינּוּן דְּקִימוּ בְּטוּרָא דְּסִינֵי, לֹא מְסַתְּפְלִי אֵלָּא בְּנִשְׁמַתָּא, דְּאֵיהּ עֵקְרָא דְּכֻלָּא אֹרִייתָא מְמִשׁ (וְלַעֲלָמָא) וְלַזְמַנָּא דְּאַתֵּי, זְמִינִין לְאַסְתְּפֵלָא בְּנִשְׁמַתָּא דְּנִשְׁמַתָּא דְּאֹרִייתָא . . .

חֲמָרָא לֹא יְתִיב אֵלָּא בְּקִנְקוּן, כִּן אֹרִייתָא לֹא יְתִיב אֵלָּא בְּלְבוּשָׁא דָּא, וְעַל דָּא לֹא בְּעֵי לְאַסְתְּפֵלָא אֵלָּא בְּמָה דְּאֵית תְּחוּת לְבוּשָׁא, וְעַל דָּא כֹּל אֵינּוּן מְלִין וְכֹל אֵינּוּן סְפוּרִין, לְבוּשִׁין אֵינּוּן.

Rabbi Shimon [bar Yocha'i] said:

Woe to the person who says that the Torah presents mere stories and ordinary words. If this were the case, we could compose a Torah right now with ordinary words, and better than any of them. . . . Rather, all the words of the Torah are sublime words and sublime secrets. . . .

Come and see: There is a garment that is visible to all. When the fools of the world see someone in a handsome garment, they look no further. Yet the significance of the garment is the body; and the significance of the body is the soul. So it is with the Torah. It has a body: the commandments of the Torah. . . . This body is clothed in garments—stories of this world. Fools look only at that garment, the story of the Torah; they know nothing more. . . . Those who know better look at the body within the garment. The truly wise—servants of the Supernal King, those who stood at Mount Sinai—look at the soul, the root of all, the real Torah. In the World to Come, they are destined to gaze at the soul of the soul of the Torah. . . .

As wine must be contained in a jug, so the Torah must be contained in these garments. But look to what is within the garments. All those words, all those stories, are garments.

TEXT 12


NACHMANIDES, *COMMENTARY ON THE TORAH*, GENESIS 3:22 

וְדַע וְהֵאמֵן כִּי גַן עֵדֶן בְּאֶרֶץ גְּבוּ עֵץ הַחַיִּים וְעֵץ הַדַּעַת וּמִשָּׁם יֵצֵא הַנָּהָר
וַיִּפְרֹד לְאַרְבַּעָה רְאשִׁים . . . אֲבָל כַּאֲשֶׁר הֵם בְּאֶרֶץ כּוֹן יֵשׁ בְּשָׁמַיִם דְּבָרִים
יִקְרְאוּ כֵן וְהֵם לְאֵלֶּה יְסוּד . . .
וְהָאָדָם חָטָא בְּפְרֵי עֵץ הַדַּעַת תַּחְתּוֹן וְעַלְיוֹן, בְּמַעֲשֵׂה וּבְמַחְשְׁבָה . . . כֹּל
אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים כְּפוּלִים, הַגְּלוּי וְהַחְתּוּם בָּהֶם אֱמֹת.

Know and believe that the Garden of Eden is a place here on earth, in which there is the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge, and from which flows the river that separates into four streams. . . . But just as these exist on earth, so are there realities in the heavens that are also called by these names, and that serve as their foundation and source. . . .

Man sinned with the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge below and above, in deed as well as in concept. . . . All the events recounted here are two-dimensional: the revealed meaning and the hidden meaning are both true.

TEXT 13

ZOHAR 1:35B 

וְהִנָּחֵשׁ, רַבִּי יִצְחָק אָמַר: דָּא יֵצֶר הָרַע. רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אָמַר: נָחֵשׁ מִמֶּשׁ.
 אֲתוּ לְקַמִּיָּה דְרַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן, אָמַר לוֹן: וְדַאי כֹּלָא חַד, וְסַמָּא "ל הוּהוּ וְאַתְחַזִּי
 עַל נָחֵשׁ.

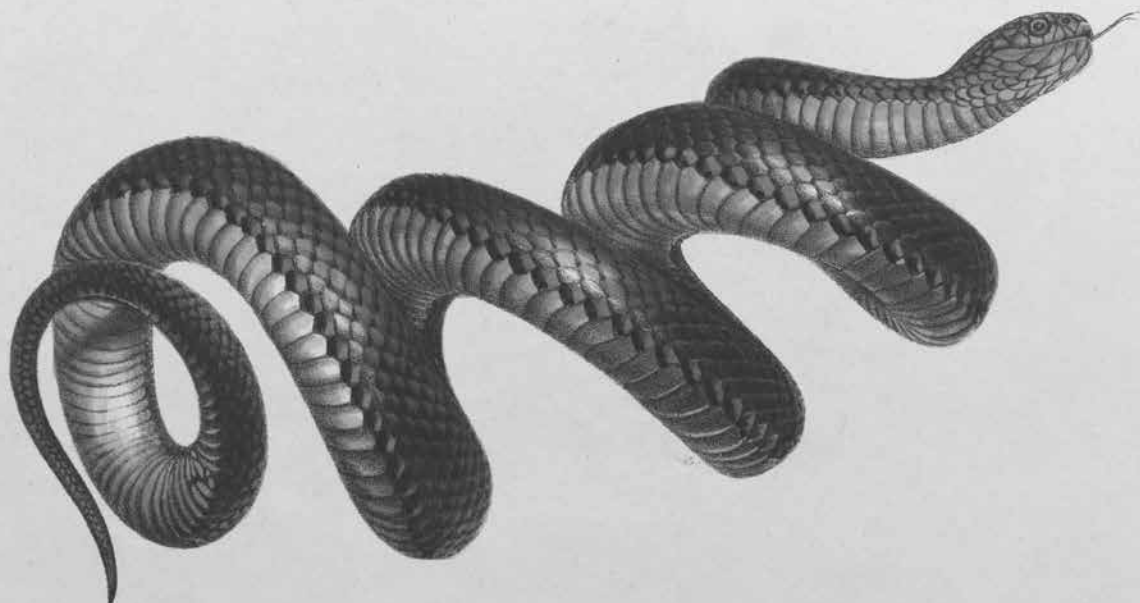
“And the serpent [was most cunning]” (GENESIS 3:1).

Rabbi Isaac said, “It was the evil inclination.”

Rabbi Judah said, “It was an actual snake.”

They came before Rabbi Shimon [bar Yocha’i], who said to them, “It was both as one; it was Samael [Satan] who appeared as a snake.”

Black Snake, Pseudechis porphyriacus, Helena Scott, ink on paper, 1869. (Museums Victoria, Carlton, Australia)



BLACK SNAKE,
Pseudechis porphyriacus.

TEXT 14

THE REBBE, RABBI MENACHEM MENDEL SCHNEERSON, *LIKUTEI SICHOT* 21

(HEBREW VERSION), PP. 40–41 (יג)

שְׁכַל חִלְקֵי הַתּוֹרָה מִרְפִּיבִים בְּיַחַד קוֹמָה שְׁלִימָה אַחַת, כְּשֵׁם שְׁכַל אַבְרָי
הָאָדָם הֵן אַבְרָי גּוּפוֹ וְהֵן אַבְרָי נַפְשׁוֹ מִרְפִּיבִים יַחְדָּיו אֶת הָאָדָם כּוֹלוּ . . .
גַּם לְגַבֵּי פְּנִימִיּוֹת הַתּוֹרָה, נִשְׁמָתָא דְאִוְרִייתָא . . . שֶׁהִיא מְאוּחָדָת
עִם הַנְּגִלָּה שֶׁבַתּוֹרָה, גּוֹפָא דְאִוְרִייתָא. עַד כְּדֵי כֵּן, שְׂרוּאִים בְּמַסְפֵּר
מְקוֹמוֹת . . . [ש] הַנְּגִלָּה שֶׁבַתּוֹרָה עֲצָמוּ מְחִיב פִּירוּשׁ שֶׁל נִשְׁמָתָא
דְאִוְרִייתָא . . . וְכֵן מֵצֵד שְׁנֵי . . . כְּפִי שְׂמוּצָאִים בְּרַבִּים מִכְּתָבֵי הָאָרִי
זְכוּרֹנוּ לְבִרְכָה פִּירוּשִׁים וְעִנְיָנִים בְּדֶרֶךְ הַפֶּשֶׁט.

All parts of the Torah comprise one integral structure, in the same way that all of a person's components—the organs and limbs of their body as well as the organs and limbs of their soul—together constitute the whole person.

In the same way, the inner part—or “soul”—of the Torah is one with the revealed part of the Torah. Indeed, we find in several places that the revealed part of Torah can only be explained by the soul of the Torah. The reverse is also the case . . . as we find in the [kabbalistic] writings of the Ari explanations of the plain meaning of the text.

TEXT 15

THE REBBE, RABBI MENACHEM MENDEL SCHNEERSON,
 LIKUTEI SICHOT 2 (HEBREW VERSION), P. 38 (††)

לְמִרוֹת שֶׁהַתּוֹרָה הִיא חֻכְמָה – פְּתוּב: “כִּי הִיא חֻכְמַתְכֶם וּבִינְתְּכֶם לְעֵינֵי
 הָעַמִּים” – אֵין הִיא נִקְרֵאת בְּשֵׁם “חֻכְמָה”, כִּי אִם בְּשֵׁם “תּוֹרָה” מְלֻשׁוֹן
 “הוֹרָאָה”. וּמִשְׁמַעוֹת הַדְּבָר, שֶׁכָּל עֲנִין הַמְּסוּפָר בַּתּוֹרָה מִשְׁמֵשׁ הוֹרָאָה
 לְתַמִּיד וּלְכָל מְקוֹם בְּחַיֵּי יוֹם יוֹם.

The Torah is our “wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations” (DEUTERONOMY 4:6). Nevertheless, the word *torah* doesn’t mean “wisdom”; rather, it means “instruction.” This tells us that every single thing that the Torah relates serves as an instruction in a person’s daily life, for all times and in every place.

TEXT 16

RABBI SHNE'UR ZALMAN OF LIADI, *TORAH OR*, BEREISHIT 5C (††)

יֵשׁ לְהַבִּין . . . מֵה שְׁאָמַר ה' אֱלֹקִים “וְעַתָּה פֶּן יִשְׁלַח יָדוֹ וְלָקַח גַּם מֵעֵץ
 הַחַיִּים וְאָכַל וְחָי לְעוֹלָם.” וַיִּמָּה אֵיכָפֶת לוֹ בְּזֶה? הֲרֵי מֵה שֶׁצִּוּוּהוּ אוֹתוֹ שֶׁלֹּא
 לֵאכֹל הוּא גַם כֵּן כְּדֵי שֶׁלֹּא יָמוּת.

It needs to be understood: Why does G-d say, “And now, perhaps he will send forth his hand, and he will also take from the tree of life, and he will eat and live forever”? Why is G-d concerned over this, when the reason why He commanded Adam not to eat [from the Tree of Knowledge] in the first place was so that he should not die?

TEXT 17

RABBI SHNE'UR ZALMAN OF LIADI, *TORAH OR*, BEREISHIT 5D (17)

אחר שִׁכָּבַר טַעַם מַעַץ הַדַּעַת וְנִתְעַרַב בְּרַע, אָז אָמַר "פֶּן יִשְׁלַח יָדוֹ וְלָקַח גַּם מַעַץ הַחַיִּים וְאָכַל וְחָי לְעוֹלָם." פִּירוּשׁ שְׁחָשׂוּ . . . וְלָקַח גַּם מַעַץ הַחַיִּים שֶׁשָּׂרְשׁוֹ מִבְּחִינָה שְׁלִמְעָלָה מִהַשְּׂבִירָה שֶׁמִּשָּׁם הוּא שֶׁהִיא הִתְחַלַּת הַמִּיתָה וְהַתְּהוּוּת עֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וְרַע . . . כִּי הָרִי בְּאֶמֶת בְּבַחֲבִינָה זֶה נֶאֱמַר "אִם צְדָקָתְךָ מִה תִּתֵּן לוֹ", "וְרַבּוֹ פִּשְׁעֶיךָ מִה תַּעֲשֶׂה לוֹ" (אִיּוֹב לה). וְאִם כֵּן אֵךְ שֶׁמְעוֹרָב בְּרַע . . . יְכוּל לְהִיּוֹת וְחָי לְעוֹלָם, וְאִז גַּם הָרַע שָׁבוּ יְהִיָּה לוֹ קִיּוּם לְעוֹלָם . . .

וְזֶהוּ הַיִּפְּךְ הַכּוֹוֹנָה שֶׁהָרִי צָרִיךְ לְהִיּוֹת . . . שֶׁיְהִיָּה וּבְעֶרְתָּ הָרַע . . . שֶׁזֶּה יְהִיָּה לִימּוֹת הַמְּשִׁיחַ. כִּי בְּכָל מִשְׁנֵי הַגְּלוּת הוּא עֵת הַבִּירוּרִים וְהַפְּרֻדַּת הָרַע . . . וְלָכֵן מִיֵּד "וַיִּשְׁלַחֵהוּ מִגֵּן עֵדֶן לְעַבְדֵי אֶת הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר לָקַח מִשָּׁם" – דְּהֵינּוּ עֲבוֹדַת הַבִּירוּרִים.

After man had already tasted of the Tree of Knowledge and became mixed up with the bad, G-d said, "Perhaps he will send forth his hand and also take from the tree of life, and eat and live forever." G-d feared that man would . . . partake also of the Tree of Life, which is rooted higher than the "shattering of the vessels" from which death originates and which generated the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Bad. . . . For regarding this level, it is said, "If your sins are multiplied, what do you do to Him?" and "If you are righteous, what do you give Him?" (JOB 35:6-7). So [if man will partake of the Tree of Life] . . . he could still live forever even though he has bad mixed in within him, and then the bad within him will also exist forever. . . .

This is against that which G-d intended, for G-d desires that ultimately the bad should be exterminated . . . as will come to pass in the times of Mashiach. [Until then,] throughout the period of exile is the time of the “work of refinement” of separating the bad [from the good]. . . . That is why immediately after [man ate from the Tree], “G-d Almighty sent him out from the Garden of Eden, to work the soil wherefrom he was taken” (GENESIS 3:23)—i.e., the work of refinement.