



RABBI AARON Editor, Torah Tidbits

GOLDSCHIEDER

In the coming cycle of Parshat Hashavua I am humbled and proud, be"H, to share teachings from Rav Yosef Dov HaLevi Soloveitchik zt"l (1903-1993). For many of us in our community 'the Rav' continues to serve as the inspirational figure who guides us to a path of dedication to Torah study, chesed, and devotion to the Land of Israel.

Insurgence in the Garden

They were clearly warned by the Almighty not to eat from the *Etz Hada'at*, the Tree of Knowledge. However, as we know well, *Adam* and *Chava* woefully succumb to their desire and eat from the forbidden fruit.

What was so alluring that propelled them to sin?

Many interpretations have been offered regarding the sin of the *Etz Hada'at*. Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik zt"l (1903-1993) framed the issue this way: "What was the substance of the original sin? *Prima facie*, *Adam* simply wished to acquire a little intelligence. Why was that culpable?" (*Noraot Harav*, Vol. 9, p.71)

The Rav suggested that *Adam* and *Chava* were not drawn to acquire

more knowledge, rather, they wanted something else - they wanted to be the ones to determine what is good and what is evil. "They themselves wanted to determine what constitutes a crime and what does not constitute a crime; what is culpable and what is good; what is morally deserving and what is immoral. In a word, man wanted to write his own moral code. This was man's rebellion against God. Man was unwilling to submit himself to God's commandments."

Citing the Rambam's *Moreh Nevuchim* (1:2), the Rav pointed out that the effect of the forbidden fruit was that it induced *tov ve'rah*, good and evil. It does not say that the effect was *emet ve'sheker*, truth and falsehood. Apparently it was precisely in the domain of good and evil that man wanted to have control.¹

1 *The Torah describes Chava's interface with the Tree of Knowledge: "And the woman perceived that the tree was good for eating and that it was a delight (ta'avah) to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a means of wisdom (le'haskil), and she took the fruit and ate..." (3:6). The combination of ta'avah, that she was drawn to it in a lustful manner and its wisdom (le'haskil) - seems to support the Rav's formulation that Chava and Adam wanted to be decisors of good and bad in the areas that they desired (for a detailed exposition of the terms employed*

The first man, emblematic of all humankind, wished to write his own moral code. He asked, “Why must I be bound by doctrines and practices that run counter to my sensibilities and logic?”

In a word, this was a rebellion against the will of the Divine and His code for living.

One particular psalm recited on the night of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur (and daily on the first day of the week) gives voice to the idea of God’s Mastery over the world. It famously opens by stating: “The earth is the Lord’s and all it contains.” The Rav was intrigued by a verse that appears at the end of this psalm (24): “The gates should raise their heads, open the doors of eternity and allow the King of Dignity to enter.” Two distinct terms are employed : *Sha’ar* (gate) and *Petach* (opening). How do they differ? The Rav answered that there are nations that have shut the gates on allowing faith in God to enter their surroundings. The Rav cited examples of communist Russia and China where God was completely barred from these cultures: “Marxism expresses itself through its denial of God’s sovereignty and its substitution of man’s sovereignty in place of God’s.”

However, there are countries where the *gates are* not closed. There is no gate at all. They have an opening for God. A *petach* surely exists - but the opening is so narrow that God cannot easily enter. “Their concept of divinity is so narrow, so middle class, so selfish and so superficial, that God does

in this verse see ‘The Emergence of Ethical Man’, Chapter 6 pp. 95-128)

not wish to squeeze through this opening.” (Ibid. p.82) The Rav refers to the culture of Western societies that have also rebelled against God. “They have rebelled against morality, against the fact that the human being must surrender himself to God and give God his full obedience. (Ibid p.83)

In this context the Rav made the observation that Rosh Hashanah is arguably the most exalted day in the calendar in that it sets in place the basic principles of *emunah*, faith. The celebrated motif of the day is expressing our relationship to our one and only King and the coronation of our Ruler - *Ve’yitnu lecha keter meluchah*, ‘Give God the crown of sovereignty.’ (Noraot HaRav, Vol. 9, p 61)

With these words a Jew declares that God is the Creator who prescribes the code of behavior for all of nature - and that God has the right to prescribe the patterns of behavior for man as well. This is exactly how we ‘place the crown on the head of the King.’ Namely, when our actions are in service to the King and we are dedicated to fulfilling His Divine Will.

The Rav once related the following personal story which exemplifies this notion in an address on Conversion in 1975:

“The Torah summons the Jew to live heroically. We cannot allow a married woman, no matter how tragic the case is, to remarry without a *get*. We cannot allow a kohen to marry a *giyoret* [convert]. Sometimes these cases are very tragic. I know this from my own experience. I had a case in Rochester, N.Y. of a gentile girl who

became a *giyoret ha-zedek* [righteous convert] before she met the boy. She did not join the nation because she wanted to marry somebody. Then she met a Jewish boy who came from an alienated background and had absolutely no knowledge of *Yahadut* [Judaism] . She brought him close to *Yahadut* and they became engaged. Since he was now close to *Yahadut*, the boy wanted to find out more about his family, so he visited the cemetery where his grandfather was buried. He saw a strange symbol on the tombstone - ten fingers with thumbs and forefingers nearly forming a triangle. So he began to ask - he thought it was a mystical symbol - and he discovered that he was a kohen.

What can we do? This is the halacha. A kohen may not marry a convert [*Shulchan Aruch, Even Ha-ezer 6:8*]. We surrender to the will of the Almighty.

On the other hand, to say that the halacha is not sensitive to problems and is not responsive to the needs of people is an outright falsehood. The halacha is responsive to the needs of both the community and the individual. However, the halacha has its own orbit, moves at a certain definitive speed, has its own pattern of responding to a challenge, and possesses its own criteria and principles.

I come from a rabbinical house - the *bet ha-Rav*. This is the house into which I was born. Believe me, Reb Chaim used to try his best to be *meikil*

[lenient in his halachic decisions]. But there were limits even to Reb Chaim's *kulot* [lenient rulings]. When you reach the boundary line, all you can say is: "I surrender to the will of the Almighty."

With sadness in my heart, I shared in the suffering of the poor young girl. She was instrumental in bringing him back to the fold and then she had to lose him. She lost him. She walked away." (The Rav Vol. 2 Rabbi Rakeffet pp. 35-36)

Just a few short weeks ago we recited the soaring *malchuyot* prayers of Rosh Hashanah which center around the very notion of fully accepting God and His will. The Rav was quick to point out that there is an uplifting and ennobling motif intertwined in these prayers, namely, the faith Judaism has in man. With all of man's faults and shortcomings he uplifts himself and reaches for holiness. "It [Judaism] believes that man will finally change, and man on his own accord will recognize his folly and will begin to strive for God and move towards God." (*Noraot HaRav*, *ibid.* p.73).

A striking statement penned by the Rambam in his '*Laws of Teshuva*' expresses this idea: "The Torah has already promised that, ultimately, Israel will repent towards the end of her exile and, immediately, she will be redeemed..." (*Hilchot Teshuva* 7:5). Along these same lines the Rambam interpreted the verse toward the end of the Torah, "You shall return to Hashem", not as a command but rather as a guarantee and as a promise!

God's faith in man's ability to return is spotlighted during the episode of Adam and Chava following their sin. After their disastrous downfall, *Adam* and *Chava* quickly fashion clothing for themselves. They now realize that they are naked and pick fig leaves to cover their bodies. The Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 70b) claims that these leaves came from the very tree with which they sinned. According to the Rav, the act of taking its leaves represented the idea that they now "identified with the hedonic pseudo-personality that they had created through eating the fruit." (*Chumash Mesorat HaRav*, Bereishis' p.35). In other words, man and woman had further distanced themselves from God, preferring to indulge in pleasures and self indulgence.

The Rav taught that the Torah affirms that although man veers from the will of the Almighty, and even worse is guilty of rebelling against His word, the Almighty never forsakes or gives up on man. The Rav cites the following striking midrash conveying this notion (*B'reishit Rabbah* 20:21).

"And the Lord God made for *Adam* and for his wife coats of skin." Following their transgression, once *Adam and Chava* had made clothing for themselves, why was it necessary for God to offer them another set of clothing? One explanation in Rashi is that these were warmer clothing that protected them from the cooler weather. However, the midrash offers a radically different reading. In the Torah scroll of Rabbi Meir the word עור, skin or leather, was spelled with an *aleph* אור, meaning

light. God had provided a light for man and woman which was meant to shine and illuminate their true essence. God has faith in man. Man has been imbued with the fortitude and resilience to accentuate his positive and ethical inclinations. Man will eventually express his loyalty to his Creator. (*Yemei Zikaron* pp. 204-208)

The Rav's Lesson

Two significant 'beginnings' mark these special days in the Jewish calendar: The observance of the New Year and the commencing of the reading of the cycle of *Kriat HaTorah*. Both share a common motif.

The days of Rosh Hashanah are meant to reawaken within us a deep and lasting awareness of God's sovereignty. It demands of us that we affirm an absolute dedication to His will and gear our lives fully to fulfilling His word.

The other 'beginning' we engage in at the time is recommencing the cycle of the *Kriat HaTorah*. We begin by reading about the tragic insurgency in the Garden of Eden. The episode relays a story of desire - man own's desire to follow his own wants because he alone wishes to determine 'good and bad'.

The Torah begins with this foundational lesson: Surrender to the Halacha, the will of God, which enhances and ennobles the life of the Jew. This is an essential quality in becoming a "Halachic Man". When we heroically hold fast to Divine truth we attain sanctity and forge a union with the Almighty Himself. ■