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The Path to Follow

THE STRATEGY OF THE EVIL INCLINATION

Rabbi David Pinto Chlita

It is written, “When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes...she took of its fruit and ate, and gave also to her husband with her, and he ate” (Bereshith 3:6).

This verse describes the sin of Adam and Eve, when they ate from the Tree of Knowledge. Now we know that it was the serpent that convinced Eve to eat from it. We may want to reconsider this, however, given that Adam and Eve did not possess an evil inclination before they ate from the Tree of Knowledge. In other words, how did Eve allow herself to be convinced by the words of the serpent, which advised her to eat from it, since she did not yet possess an evil inclination?

One more thing is surprising here, something that the Midrash mentions: When the Holy One, blessed be He, asked Adam if he had eaten from the Tree of Knowledge, he replied: “I did eat, and I will eat” (Bereshith Rabba 19:12). That is, he ate from it in the past and he would eat from it again in the future. How could he dare answer G-d in this way? After all, Adam was at an incredibly high spiritual level. The Midrash states that while the serpent was enticing Eve, Adam was walking with Hashem in the Garden of Eden, which indicates just what a spiritual level he occupied. We may therefore say that Eve was also at the same level. Yet in that case – and despite not possessing an evil inclination – how could they have sinned?

The answer is that the serpent convinced Eve by telling her that once she ate from the Tree of Knowledge, she would know how to distinguish between good and evil. In the Midrash, the serpent tells her that she would be like G-d. This is surprising, for did Eve actually think that she could be like Hashem? It’s clear that nothing about such a claim could be true, for she obviously could never become like G-d. The explanation to this, as we know, is that the serpent is none other than the Satan (the numerical value of the term nachash [serpent], plus one for the word itself, is the same as that of satan). In its deceptiveness, the Satan does not tell a person to immediately transgress Hashem’s commands. On the contrary, it encourages a person to do a given mitzvah “for the sake of Heaven.” As such, it brings a person down to the abyss. The serpent did the same here too: It convinced Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge by claiming that it would allow her to distinguish between good and evil. That, in turn, would allow her to cleave to good and distance herself from evil, thus becoming capable of cleaving to the Holy One, blessed be He, and bringing Him satisfaction by creating supernal worlds. In fact

we know that when a person performs a mitzvah, he makes supernal worlds as a result, as it is written: “which G-d created to make” (Bereshith 2:3). The Holy One, blessed be He, designed creation in such a way that we too can make and fashion other worlds when we perform mitzvot and do good deeds. Hence the serpent told Eve: “You will be like gods” – you too will be able to develop and continue the work of creation by making new worlds through your ability to distinguish between good and evil.

This is why Eve, despite not having an evil inclination, allowed herself to be enticed by the serpent. It was because she thought that in heeding its words, she was acting for the sake of Heaven and bringing satisfaction to the Creator. Therein lay her mistake, one that was also committed by Adam. Although he refused to listen at first, she told him that eating from the Tree of Knowledge was for the sake of Heaven, and that it would provide him with great wisdom and the ability to distinguish between good and evil. As such, they would be able to completely distance themselves from evil and create supernal worlds to glorify the Holy One, blessed be He. Once Adam listened to Eve’s words, he agreed with her suggestion and ate the fruit. He was completely convinced that he was doing the right thing when Hashem asked him if he had eaten from the Tree of Knowledge, which is why he replied that he had, and that he would again in the future. He said this because he believed that doing so was actually a mitzvah, not a sin, and his only intention was to glorify Hashem. However we must remember that this is the evil inclination’s strategy: It makes a person believe that a sin is actually a mitzvah, thereby tricking him into committing a sin.

I once heard someone making disparaging remarks about a certain individual. When I heard it, I immediately reprimanded him, telling him that he was speaking Lashon Harah, which the Torah forbids. Yet he responded by telling me that what he was saying was for the sake of Heaven, and therefore permissible. I then reminded him that what he was saying wasn’t at all for the sake of Heaven. Instead, it was the strategy of the evil inclination, which is to make a person think that any wrong he commits is for the sake of Heaven. In fact after examining the reasons that had prompted his remarks, he admitted that they were not for the sake of Heaven, and that the evil inclination had deceived him into believing that they were. In reality, he had disparaged the person in question for personal reasons.

That being the case, what was Adam and Eve’s error? After all, once they ate from the Tree of



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**Rabbi David Hanania
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CHEVRAT PINTO

207 West 78th Street
New York - NY 10024

Tel: 1 212 721 0230

www.hevratpinto.org

hevratpinto@aol.com

Editor-in-Chief:

Hanania Soussan

Knowledge, they were able to distinguish between good and evil, knowing how to distance themselves from evil and cleave to the good, thereby bringing great satisfaction to the Holy One, blessed be He. The answer is that, having only received a single mitzvah, they wanted to add to it and do more mitzvot through their ability to distinguish between good and evil. That was the source of their error. In fact Hashem has no desire for man to create supernal worlds and make offerings to Him by transgressing His orders. To Hashem, the essential thing is for a person to act as He has commanded him, without trying to play it smart and add to His commands.

Real Life Stories

It is written, “And on the seventh day, G-d ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made” (Bereshith 2:2).

Rashi sites the Midrash in stating: “Rabbi Shimon said: [A human being of] flesh and blood, who cannot [exactly] know his times and his moments, must add from the profane to the holy [i.e., he must add some time to the Sabbath]. The Holy One, blessed be He, Who knows His times and His moments [exactly], entered it [the Sabbath] within a hairbreadth, and it therefore appeared as if He completed it [His work] on that day.”

This explanation from Rashi – which concerns human beings, who cannot know times with complete precision, the result being that part of the week must be added to the holy Sabbath – should guide us on how to welcome this holy day. In fact since we don’t know how to precisely evaluate times and its intervals, and moreover, since nobody knows what the next moment has in store for him, we must be especially vigilant and add as much of the week to the holy Sabbath in order not to profane it, G-d forbid.

In regards to this subject, the book *Barchi Nafshi* relates the following story:

A very famous Jewish lawyer, shaken and in tears, came to see me and told me of his misfortunes: “On Friday, I drove my car from Bnei Brak to Jerusalem. When I was near Motza, my car broke down, preventing me from reaching my destination. It only 1:30 pm, and there were still several hours before Shabbat started.

“I contacted my insurance company. They took down my information and promised to send a mechanic to tow my car back home as soon as possible. From the very outset of my call, I underlined that I was a Torah-observant Jew, and that under no circumstances was my car to be towed back to my home after Shabbat started. My insurance agent assured me that such a thing would never happen.

“I got back home by taxi and anxiously waited for my car to return. However it was getting late. I started trembling, filled with shame when I realized that my car wasn’t anywhere to be seen by the start of Shabbat. What I feared most then happened: At around 10 pm, my neighbors could actually hear and see the mechanic’s tow truck bringing my car back home – the car of the ‘Torah-observant’ lawyer.”

At this point in his account, the lawyer again broke down in tears. He pointed out that both religious and non-religious Jews lived in his neighborhood, and that this incident involved a chillul Hashem.

“I had been certain,” the lawyer continued, “that my car would arrive early on Friday afternoon, just as my agent had assured me. If I had the slightest doubt as to that fact, I would have left my car by the side of the road and towed it home after Shabbat ended, even if it could have been stolen during the day!”

He had come to ask me how to rectify his sin, as well as the chillul

After all that we have said, we may understand why Adam and Eve were not immediately punished when Hashem spoke to them. Instead, they were simply expelled from the Garden of Eden in this world. After they sinned, they were indeed able to distinguish between good and evil, and they were already prepared to live in this world and confront the evil inclination. The reason why they were not punished with death is that they had no intention of rebelling against G-d, for they had eaten from the Tree of Knowledge with good intentions, for the sake of Heaven.

Hashem that resulted from it. I advised him to publish his story in religious newspapers, and to conclude his account with a call for public awareness. In that case, anyone who finds himself in a similar situation would make sure to leave his car by the side of the road and not call a towing service until after Shabbat ends.

Those Who Alert Others

Let’s take this opportunity to again alert people about commercial centers located in religious neighborhoods, stores and shops that remain open until just before the start of Shabbat. Such a situation actually results in the public desecration of Shabbat.

A group of individuals has undertaken the sacred mission of announcing the start of Shabbat in the greatest number of places. Yet with great sadness, they admit: “We fulfill our responsibilities. We protest to the directors of taxi companies and warn travelers not to take to the road at a late hour. We approach merchants and encourage them to close their shops on time, but we’re not always successful. More than once, clients who ‘respect Shabbat’ maintain their stance and continue buying everything they need without considering the consequences.”

These “defenders of Shabbat” begin their mission one hour before Shabbat starts, encouraging merchants to close their shops. What do they see at that hour? Observant Jews – people who clearly look Orthodox – who nevertheless “remember” that they still have purchases to make in honor of this holy day.

Where were all these people just a few hours earlier? What urgent matters did they have to take care of, such that only now, at the last minute, they remember that certain things are missing at home for Shabbat? Likewise, what about the merchants who are obligated to wait “just another second” and then “one last second” until finally they return home after candle lighting has passed?

This is the challenge that we all face in regards to preparing for this special day. Every courageous person who finishes his preparations on time and eagerly welcomes the Shabbat Queen will also merit entering the palace of the King of kings and benefiting from the light of this holy day.

Guard Your Tongue

Lying for the Sake of Peace

If someone asks a person, “What did So-and-so say about me?” and he can find a way of answering without lying or speaking *rechilus* [talebearing], then he should do so. However if he believes that his listener will not believe him, then he is permitted to lie in order to maintain peace, but without taking an oath on it.

– Chafetz Chaim

In the Image of G-d

The great Tanna Rabbi Akiva, who famously taught that “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Vayikra 19:18) is “a great principle of the Torah,” also taught us: “Beloved is man, for he was created in the image [of G-d]. It is even a greater love that it was made known to him that he was created in the image [of G-d], as it is stated: ‘For in the image of G-d, He made man’ [Bereshith 9:6]” (Pirkei Avoth 3:14). This teaching from Rabbi Akiva also requires each of us to love others, regardless of who they may be. This teacher transmitted to succeeding generations the noble idea that we must be careful to respect others and not harm their honor, “For in the image of G-d, He made man.”

Just Don't Shame Him!

The gaon Rabbi Eliezer Menachem Shach Zatzal recounted a story that he witnessed involving Rabbi Isser Zalman Meltzer Zatzal, an account also described in full in the book *Shimusha Shel Torah*:

In the city of Slutsk there lived a generous donor who would usually be honored once a year, during the Yamim Noraim [Days of Awe], by being called up to the Torah. As things turned out, since wealth doesn't last forever, this wealthy man became impoverished. Collectors from the free-loan fund therefore went to see Rabbi Isser Zalman to ask him if they should continue to honor him as before, or if they stop calling him up to the Torah. The Rav replied, “You have absolutely no right to remove this honor from him! Think for a moment: Everything that concerns wealth is solely in the hands of Heaven, for G-d impoverishes and enriches. That is in G-d's hands. However ceasing to call someone up to the Torah – an honor that was previously acquired through wealth – and thus indirectly humiliating him, that is in your hands. It is among your responsibilities, being part of our duties towards our fellowman.” The collectors from the free-loan fund continued: “But in the past, the synagogue benefited from the donations offered by this affluent man. In fact during Mishaberach, he would usually promise to make a very large donation. Yet now that he's grown poor, he'll probably offer a paltry sum. On the other hand, if we call a wealthy man up to the Torah, we could profit from his generous donation. Do we have the right to make the synagogue incur a financial loss?”

After evaluating the situation, Rabbi Isser Zalman said to them: “If that's the case, then I'll give you the amount that you think you would lose. I'll provide you with the money, but just don't shame him!”

In the Image of his Mentor

The Chafetz Chaim was known to always carry a portrait of the tzaddik Rabbi Nachum of Horodna with him, one that he would frequently look at.

This impressed many of the Chafetz Chaim's peers, since Rabbi Nachum had never agreed to having his portrait taken. In fact people had often asked Rabbi Nachum for permission to do so, so that his image and the splendor of his sanctity could be perpetuated. However he always refused. That being the case, how did the Chafetz Chaim obtain Rabbi Nachum's portrait, the one that he constantly kept in his pocket?

The answer lies in Rabbi Nachum's conduct and way of life.

Always eager to demonstrate kindness to everyone, he once saved

a poor person from his miserable fate, as recorded in the book *Toldot Menachem*:

One day a poor man from a good family went to see the Rav of Horodna. He recounted his trials to the Rav, explaining that he had been reduced to poverty and was now unable to provide for his family. Nevertheless, he was a gifted artist with an ability to draw very true-to-life portraits. He therefore implored the Rav to convince Rabbi Nachum to let him draw his portrait, hoping that it would produce some ray of light, one that would save him from his predicament.

The Rav accepted and reached an agreement with Rabbi Nachum to help the poor man and his family. Rabbi Nachum then addressed the poor man and said, “Your work and your efforts are in vain. Why bother an old man with such useless pursuits, for who would pay as much as a cent for the portrait of a poor and lowly man such as myself?”

Nevertheless, the poor man was happy beyond measure, profusely thanking Rabbi Nachum for the favor that he had performed for him. Indeed, deep in his heart he believed that the portrait of this tzaddik would earn him many clients, which is precisely what happened. The sale of the tzaddik's portrait brought him excellent returns, leading him out of his dire situation.

Men of Faith

They Are Life [Haim] to Those Who Find Them

The following story was recounted by the tzaddik Rabbi Meir Pinto:

The city of Mogador was struck one year by a shortage of fish. Now the accepted custom, according to Kabbalah, is to eat fish on Friday night.

One Friday afternoon, Rabbi Haim Pinto summoned a fisherman and said to him: “Please go out to sea and bring me some fish.”

“But Rabbi, there hasn't been any fish in the sea for the past few weeks!” the fisherman complained.

However Rabbi Haim repeated: “Get down to the sea, and say ‘Haim’ each time that you cast your net into the waters. The fish will come.” And that's exactly what happened.

Having heard that this particular fisherman had been successful, all the residents of Mogador rushed to buy some fish from him. However the fisherman refused to sell even a single fish, saying: “These aren't mine. They belong to Rabbi Haim Pinto. I can't sell you any.”

He then brought his entire catch to Rabbi Haim, who distributed the vast majority to the residents of the city, keeping a little for himself.

Upon hearing this story, the Dayan Rabbi David ben Hazan immediately went to visit his friend and said to him: “I heard that you have life [Haim] at home.”

“In fact I do have life [Haim] at home,” was his response. When they sat down at the table, they ate a Shabbat meal and rejoiced over a serving of fish, following the recommendation of Kabbalistic works.

Fulfilling the Curse

It is written, “Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field” (Bereshith 3:18).

Rabbi Haim Vital testified that on several occasions, he witnessed his teacher asking family members to bring him wild herbs, or edible brambles and thorns. He would then eat them in order to fulfill the curse addressed to the first man: “Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field.”

Unto Dust

It is written, “For dust you are, and unto dust shall you return” (Bereshith 3:19).

The Chida was intrigued by this verse, for we know that certain tzaddikim have remained in this world even after their death, as it is said: “Jacob our patriarch is not dead” (Taanith 5b). Likewise, after Rabbi Hakadosh and other tzaddikim departed from this world, they continued returning to their homes every Friday night. How then are we to understand the expression, “and unto dust shall you return”?

The Chida explains that by cutting the foreskin and burying it, the command “unto dust shall you return” is already fulfilled. The individuals in question are thus acquitted, since a part of the body is considered as the entire person. This may be the reason why we bury the foreskin.

Two Virtues

It is written, “The man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living” (Bereshith 3:20).

The gaon Rabbi Yehoshua of Kutna gave a very clear interpretation on this verse: Our Sages teach that women possess two essential virtues: They protect us from sin, and they raise our children in the ways of the Torah.

After Eve encouraged her husband to sin by eating from the Tree of Knowledge, however, it could no longer be said that she protected her husband from sin. Hence the verse states, “The man called his wife Eve, for she was the mother of all the living.” At that point, she was but “the mother of all the living,” for “raising our children in the ways of the Torah” was the only thing that concerned her.

Leather Garments

It is written, “Hashem made for Adam and his wife garments of skin, and He clothed them” (Bereshith 3:21).

Why did G-d choose garments of skin to clothe Adam and his wife?

The author of Tzafnat Pa’aneach offers us a subtle explanation: When Adam discovered that he was naked and needed to be clothed, he was in a situation that required him to recite the Shecheyanu blessing, for he would be wearing a new garment. However the Halachah forbids a person from reciting a blessing if he is naked.

Adam was therefore faced with a dilemma: Should he recite a blessing for his first garment, and if so, how should he say it?

Hence the verse states, “Hashem G-d made for Adam and his wife garments of skin, and He clothed them.” It specifically mentions garments of skin because Shecheyanu is not recited over

leather garments, since “His mercy extends to all His creatures” (Tehillim 145:9). By fashioning garments of skin for Adam while he was still naked, Hashem exempted him from having to recite Shecheyanu.

All Very Good

It is written, “G-d saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good” (Bereshith 1:31).

Rabbi Shimon said, “Even serpents and scorpions and fleas – and all things that appear to be pests – all these are for the service of the world, yet men are not aware of it.”

In regards to “all,” it is written: “it was very good” – they serve the entire world and make it progress.

And yet men are not aware of it.

– Zohar III:107a

In the Light of the Parsha

The Power of Repentance

It is written, “Cain said to Hashem: ‘My punishment is greater than I can bear!’ ” (Bereshith 4:13).

Why did Cain not bring an offering to atone for the murder of his brother? Let’s examine the words of our Sages (Tanhuma, Bereshith 9) in order to better understand this:

Cain asked Abel, “Shall we divide the world between ourselves?” He said, “Yes.” Abel then devoted himself to raising livestock, while Cain devoted himself to cultivating the earth. They decided that no one would encroach upon the share of the other. Then, upon seeing that G-d was not pleased with his offering from the earth, Cain thought that only an offering from among the livestock could be a pleasing odor before G-d. Yet after killing his brother, Cain could not bring an offering from among the livestock, for in the agreement to divide the world, the livestock belonged to Abel. Hence Cain could not use them, for one cannot bring stolen property as an offering. What did Cain do? He knew that in the absence of offerings, prayer atones for sin, as it is written: “Our lips shall substitute for bulls” (Hosea 14:3). Our Sages add, “Israel argued: ‘When the Temple existed, we used to burn fat and certain portions of the offerings, thus obtaining atonement. Yet now we can only offer our own fat and blood and souls [through fasting and prayer]’ ” (Bamidbar Rabba 18:21). Cain therefore undertook to repent and pray, declaring: “Sovereign of the universe, my punishment is greater than I can bear! You are fully aware that I cannot bring You an offering, for I left all the livestock to my brother, to whom it belongs. I can only pray before You and admit my sin.” Because Cain did this, his sin was immediately forgiven. Our Sages point out that Cain said to Hashem, “Sovereign of the universe, You bear the upper and lower worlds, and yet You cannot bear my sin?” G-d replied, “Since you have repented, by your life, I swear that I have annulled the degree against you” (Midrash Tanhuma, Bereshith 25).

It was from Cain that Adam learned how to repent when offerings cannot be made. Hence it is said that Adam met Cain and asked, “What happened at your judgment?” He replied, “I repented and was forgiven.” When Adam heard this, he slapped himself on the face and said to Cain: ‘So great is the power of repentance, and yet I did not know!’ ” (Vayikra Rabba 10:5).

