

בְּרֵאשִׁית

BERESHITH/*In the Beginning* Bereshith/Genesis 1:1-6:8

The following are mostly excerpts from Rabbi David Fohrman's book, "The Beast that Crouches at the Door", with a few additional comments I have made from the Brit Chadasha. It's a great book and it can be found on Amazon or through his website - <https://www.alephbeta.org/>

So, let's begin!

A description of the trees in the garden is found in Bereshith 2:16-17:

Bereshith 2:16 And יהוה Elohim commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat;¹⁷ "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Interestingly, the next verses concern the beasts of the field and the fact that all animals were rejected as soul mates:

Bereshith 2:18 And יהוה Elohim said, "*It is* not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."¹⁹ Out of the ground יהוה Elohim formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought *them* to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that *was* its name.²⁰ So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him.

Was it necessary that Adam be convinced that he would never be one with the animal world? What was the difference between Adam and the animals? The Creator speaks to animals through passions, desires, and instincts. When they follow the voice of instinct, they obey their Creator. For animals, the Voice of Elohim is not found in **Words**.

So the question is asked...how does יהוה speak to you? Is it primarily through passions and instincts? Are you able to stand outside of your passions when making a decision? Can you rise above your desires?

The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil appealed to Eve aesthetically at the level of beauty and desire – good to eat, delight to the eyes, and desirable to make one wise:

Bereshith 3:6 So when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make *one* wise, she took of its fruit and ate.

Compare with the words of 1 John:

1 John 2:16 For all that *is* in the world -- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life -- is not of the Father but is of the world.

So eating from the tree meant giving in to your fleshly desires, your instincts... acting almost like any creature of the animal kingdom.

What does it mean to “know good and evil”? According to Maimonides, before eating from the tree, virtuous choices would have been called “true,” and reprehensible choices would have been labeled “false.” So, doing the right thing was called “truth”; and doing the wrong thing was called “falsehood.” How does this differ from “good and evil”?

When I say something is true, I’m describing objective reality. I’m telling you that something is out there; it’s real. $2 + 2 = 4$ It’s real whether I like it or not. If morality is a matter of true and false, this means that making moral choices involves discerning something objective. It involves figuring out what the right thing to do is, what my Maker expects of me – and then trying to align my behavior with that “truth,” whether I like it or not. That truth is absolute and cannot be changed by “what is right in my own mind.”

While the word “true” has a core meaning of “real,” the word “good” is not quite as objective a term. For example, what else does “good” mean besides “that which is ethically correct”? Its other meaning is: “that which is pleasing.” When I say that something is good (in my mind), what I am really telling you, in a subtle way, is that I approve of it, that it is desirable.

Consider how the word good (tov) was used in the beginning. When Elohim saw the light and it was “good”, what did that mean? When Elohim said that it was not “good” for man to be alone, what did that mean? The Creator seems to be saying that the light was *desirable*, and that it was not *desirable* for the human to remain a solitary being. To call something “good” is to approve of it... to say that the thing conforms to my desires. **Good** in the Creator’s eyes is ALWAYS the same as **truth**. Not so with us. Now we can understand Yeshua’s question:

Mark 10:18 Yeshua said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.

So...perhaps we can now see how the eating of the fruit from the tree caused a shift from a world of “true and false” to a world of “good and evil.” Before eating, Adam and Eve were able to stand outside of their desires to look at choices

objectively (and according to the Creator's truth). However after eating the forbidden fruit, man began to look at the world through the eyes of desire. Before eating, desire did not intrude on the terrain of the intellect. They could discern clearly what Elohim wanted and their own desires, while powerful, did not cloud that vision. They could see what was "true" and choose it. After eating, that clarity was lost. Man's desire now intrudes and became an inescapable part of his moral dilemma.

To repeat, the Tree of Knowledge was deeply associated with desire. It appealed to Eve at all conceivable aesthetic levels, from the most base (taste) to the most profound (mind). If the mysterious Tree of Knowledge was really a tree of desire, then to eat from it was literally to bring desire inside herself; to identify with it. Whereas previously, desire was something outside of her sense of self, something she *possessed*, now she could delude herself into thinking that desire was something she *was*.

Eating from the tree meant a change in equilibrium. Before eating the fruit, desire was a natural part of Adam and Eve, but it was recognizable as a mere part of who they were, and that part was in equilibrium with the rest of them. After eating, that balance could no longer be taken for granted. Desire became a center of gravity; it was always a force to be reckoned with. It became a lens through which man viewed things. No longer would man be able to see a clear world of "true" and "false"; now he would see something that is ever so slightly different. He sees "good" and "evil" – terms that blur the distinction between virtue and desire.

When we sin, we are missing the mark. We have failed to align ourselves with the reality called the Will of our Creator. Thus, when the Torah speaks of "knowing good and evil," it is using shorthand for a new way of looking at moral choices. I may be trying to figure out what יהוה wants of me, but there's another factor that can potentially cloud my vision. It's not *only* about what I want. My own desires are now an inescapable part of the picture because now I see each decision through the veil of my desire. I can rise above these desires, but doing so is not always easy.

That which is merely "good" – desirable to me – can easily masquerade self-righteously as the "true." When I am looking at life through the filter of my own subjectivity, I may *think* I know what Elohim wants, but perhaps it's really just what I want.

Now here is something else very interesting. Where does the Bible say the two trees were located?

Bereshith 2:9 And out of the ground made יהוה Elohim to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the Tree of Life also in the midst of the garden, and the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil.

The verse states that the Tree of Life was in the midst of the garden. According to Hebrew scholars, the phrase “in the midst of the garden” modifies only the first tree, not the second one. If they were both really in the same place, the way to say it would have been: “...the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge in the middle of the Garden.”

For יהוה, His focus was on the Tree of Life. Now look at what Eve has to say later after eating the fruit:

Bereshith 3:3 "but of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, Elohim has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.' "

Eve has lost her focus. For her, the tree she CAN'T eat from, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, becomes the tree “in the midst of the garden.” Her desire has focused on the forbidden. The rest of the story is history!

The Torah commandments are designed to direct passion towards productive ends. They are not meant to destroy your passions, but direct them in the way of life. Steer them, don't let them steer you.

After sin, merely the awareness of Yah's Voice prompted Adam's anxiety...a reminder that יהוה speaks to man through WORDS, not just desire. A question for Adam:

Bereshith 3:9 Then יהוה Elohim called to Adam and said to him, "Where *are* you?"

יהוה Elohim seems to imply yesterday you were with me and my knowledge. And now you are with the knowledge of the snake.

The story of Adam and Eve in the Garden ends with two final acts of Elohim:

1. The Almighty fashions clothes from animal skins for Adam and Eve to replace the more primitive coverings they had made out of leaves.
2. After sending Adam and Eve out of the Garden, “lest they eat from the Tree of Life,” Elohim stations angels, cherubs with flaming swords, at the entrance to Eden to guard the way back to the Tree of Life.

יהוה kills the first animal for the skin to cover Adam and Eve...perhaps a lamb?

Cherubs appear just twice in the Torah. The only other time we find them is when their likeness adorns the top of the Holy Ark in the Tabernacle, where they guard the Tablets of the Law. Proverbs describes these tablets as another Tree of Life:

Proverbs 3:18 She *is* a tree of life to those who take hold of her, And happy *are all* who retain her.

Both the skins and the Tree of Life are such gift of life. A future Lamb would take away all the sins of mankind and the Torah, the Tree of Life would guide and direct man so that his passions would line up with the passion, zeal and the perfect will of His Creator. The new Tree of Life (the Torah) was designed to help people cope with a new world – a world in which passion could cloud the mind's eye, obscuring what is genuinely right and what is genuinely wrong. The Torah is a guide to יהוה's will, a tool to come back to the Tree of Life. We know that Yeshua lived this out perfectly!

The Tree of Life finally makes another appearance in the book of Revelation. Notice in chapter two how the tree is once again properly located:

Revelation 2:7 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the **tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of Yah.**"

And will be in the eternal Jerusalem:

Revelation 22:1 And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of Yah and of the Lamb. ² In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, *was* the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each *tree* yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree *were* for the healing of the nations

So we've come full circle it seems. Back to Paradise, the Lamb, and the Tree of Life. Baruch HaShem!

Shabbat Shalom,
Ardelle