

# Toronto Torah

## Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Bereishit

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This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Ruth and Gerald Warner  
in memory of Ruth's dear parents,  
Margaret and Mike Smaye ז"ל ויהיאל מיכל בן יהושע ז"ל

### A Lesson from the Fruit

The Torah begins anew with the beginning of our parshah. This affords us the opportunity to revisit the familiar stories of Sefer Bereshit. As comfortable as it is to reread a story many of us can retell by heart, there is actually a great risk with this. Rabbi David Fohrman, in his book *The Beast that Crouches at the Door*, notes that when we read familiar stories, we suffer from "The Lullaby Effect." He writes, "The Lullaby Effect blocks our ability to ask, or even to see, the really important questions that the Bible begs us to ask it." (pg. 1) It is possible for us to know a story *too* well. Hopefully this year, with a fresh look, we can arrive at deeper understandings of these opening narratives to the Torah. For now, let's look at Adam and Chavah's eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, the very first sin.

#### A Fresh Look at the Tree

The Torah tells us that G-d planted the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (2:9) and promptly forbade Adam from eating of it. (2:17) Of course, Adam and Chavah *do* eat of this tree (3:6-7) and are immediately filled with embarrassment (3:7-10). A surface read of the text indicates that eating the fruit of this tree endowed Adam and Chavah with some additional knowledge. Indeed, Rashi (2:25) suggests that before partaking of the fruit, Adam and Chavah lacked the ability to discern between right and wrong.

Rashi's explanation is the way many of us understand this narrative. Had Adam and Chavah never sinned, we

would still be in Gan Eden, blissfully unaware of even the concept of sin. This explanation is intuitive, especially given the name "Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil." What would the tree supply, if not a new knowledge of good and evil?

#### Rabbi Hirsch's Challenge to Rashi

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch highlights the flaw with this approach, in his commentary to the Torah. He writes (2:9, Feldheim translation), "Had man been unaware of the concept of good and evil, G-d could not have assigned him a prohibition; and once man had violated the prohibition, G-d could not have held him responsible and punished him." In other words: if, at the time they were prohibited from eating from this tree, Adam and Chavah lacked the ability to discern good from evil, then how could they be held responsible for performing an evil act and disobeying G-d? Rabbi Hirsch continues (2:9), "It must be, then, that he possessed a sense of duty, and could distinguish between forbidden and permitted – and this is none other than the knowledge of good and evil." Unlike the first interpretation, Rabbi Hirsch suggests that Adam and Chavah always knew right from wrong.

#### Rabbi Hirsch's explanation

If the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil didn't provide knowledge of good and evil, then what did it provide? Rabbi Hirsch offers that the name "Good and Evil" stems not from the nature of the tree, but from G-d's instructions about it. In other words, there was nothing inherently "good" or "evil" here.

### Rabbi Jared Anstandig

However, once G-d outlawed its fruit, it *became* bad.

The tree and its fruit demonstrate that even though something looks appealing, it may still be objectionable to G-d. As Rabbi Hirsch writes (2:9), "From this tree we learn that in judging what is good or evil, man should not rely on his own senses, his own imagination, or his own intelligence; rather he should obey the revealed Will of G-d and follow the lead of His wisdom." G-d is the ultimate arbiter of Good and Evil. Not us.

With this understanding, the story of Adam and Chavah serves as an important warning. As far back as Gan Eden, we humans liked to buck external instruction, preferring instead to rely on our own rationalizations. Here, at the very outset of the Torah before any mitzvot have been given, G-d warns against that tendency. Our goal is not to determine for ourselves what mitzvot make sense for us to keep and what to ignore. Instead, we are charged to humbly accept G-d's instructions.

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**Summary**

The chapter opens with Aramean king Ben-Haddad and his army preparing to attack Shomron, telling King Achav that Israel's valuables and women belong to him. (20:1-3) Achav replies, "I and all that I have are yours." Ben-Haddad clarifies that he will send in his troops the next day to search houses and take everything of value. (20:4-6)

Achav gathers his elders to discuss their options and the elders agree that Shomron should not surrender to Aram. Following an exchange of insults, Ben-Haddad orders his army to advance. (20:7-12)

A prophet approaches Achav, letting him know that Hashem will deliver victory to Shomron through the aid of his provincial governors, provided that Achav begins the battle. Achav leads Israel's troops just as Ben-Haddad is drinking with his own allies. (20:8-16)

Ben-Haddad's scouts report that troops are marching from Shomron, but by the time he responds to the news, his allies have already fled. The Aramean army flees as Ben-Haddad himself escapes on a horse. Achav attacks those who are fleeing, and the prophet tells him to continue this, as Ben-Haddad will at-

tack again next year. (20:17-22)

Meanwhile, the Aramean ministers regroup and conclude that since the Israelite deity is a god of mountains, they will have better luck if they battle in a valley. They advise Ben-Haddad to rebuild his forces and fight on a more advantageous terrain, which he does before advancing his troops once again. (20:23-26)

The prophet reassures the Israelites that they will win the upcoming battle, and they do. (20: 27-29) The Aramean survivors flee to the town of Afek, where a wall collapses on them as Ben-Haddad makes it to safety inside the town. His ministers suggest surrendering to Achav, which they do. Achav accepts their surrender and asks if Ben-Haddad is still alive as "he is my brother." The ministers respond affirmatively and go to fetch him. Ben-Haddad agrees to return land that his father took, and Achav pledges to spare his life in return. Ben-Haddad is sent away after the peace treaty is signed. (20:27-34)

Our scene then shifts. At the behest of Hashem, a student prophet asks someone to strike him, but is refused. He tells the man that a lion will strike

him down for his refusal - and this happens. He tells another man to strike him, and he listens. The student prophet then disguises himself and waits by the road as Achav passes. He tells Achav he was told to watch a man, and that if he goes missing it would cost the disguised student prophet's life - but the man had disappeared. Then the student prophet removes his disguise so Achav will recognize him as a prophet. He tells Achav that because he allowed Ben-Haddad to live, he forfeited his own life and people. Achav returns to his palace, depressed. (20: 35-43)

**Insight**

Rabbi David Altschuler (Metzudat David on Melachim 1:20:32) comments that the Arameans assumed that the Israelite deity was only a god of mountains because the Torah was given on Mt. Sinai. This assumption is consistent with the general Ancient Near Eastern belief in localized deities. Part of what made Judaism so unique was the fact that our G-d defied those assumptions by protecting His people no matter where we were.

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All times ET. Classes are free & open to all, unless otherwise noted.**

**Monday-Thursday**

**10:00 AM - Noon: Adult Seder Boker with Rabbi Moshe Yeres on Zoom at <http://tiny.cc/sederboker> (men)**

**Monday/Wednesday: Talmud Succah, Orot haTeshuvah of Rav Kook**

**Tuesday/Thursday: Parshah, Tanach: Sefer Melachim**

**Shabbat Oct 2**

**After minchah Idan Rakovsky, The Creation Story Meets Sigmund Freud, Shaarei Tefillah**

**After minchah R' Mordechai Torczyner, Gemara Ketuvot, BAYT: Simcha Suite (men)**

**Monday Oct 4 Choref Zman Begins!**

**8:00 PM Idan Rakovsky, Postmodernist Jewish Thought, 3636 Bathurst Apt 1605**

**8:30 PM R' Moshe Yeres, Talmud Shabbat (Chap. 15), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/talmud>**

**Tuesday Oct 5**

**1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, King Solomon's Arc, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (men) - FIRST WEEK!**

**8:00 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 5), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (men) - NOTE TIME**

**Wednesday Oct 6**

**7:00 PM Idan Rakovsky, Introduction to Talmud, Week 1 of 5, Shaarei Tefillah**

**Thursday Oct 7**

**1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 21), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (women)**

**Friday Oct 8**

**10:30 AM R' Jared Anstandig, R' Mordechai Torczyner, R' Yehuda Mann, Bava Batra Perek 2 advanced In-person at 159 Almore Ave (vaccinated-only), on Zoom at <http://tiny.cc/frishiur>**