

**III. Eating the Fruits**  
Second Morning of Rosh HaShanah  
Friday, September 14, 2007

**High Holy Days 5768**  
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Ohr Shalom Synagogue

Oil. Housing Market. Disposable Income. Chocolates in the Candy Box. Cupboard Space. Seats in the sanctuary. Time. Supply and Demand.

We live in a world with limited resources. At least we are told that all the time. I don't think it is true.

People will often ask me, with surprise or even disdain in their voice, why I am so drawn to the Jewish mystical tradition. One of the reasons I find the Jewish mystical tradition so compelling is that it fundamentally rejects the image that this world is a world of scarcity, a view often just below the surface with the rabbis of the Talmud.

The rabbis of the mystical tradition live in a different world entirely. They live in a world of great affluence, great abundance, abounding resources.

That is a much prettier world. That is truly the world in which we live.

I want to keep reading the creation story this morning.

Wednesday night we focused on the single verse:

וְנָהָר יֵצֵא מֵעֵדֶן לְהַשְׁקוֹת אֶת-הַגָּן:

And a river flows from Eden to water the garden.

We talked about God being the Eden source, the water being the flow of God's blessing into this world, which is constantly flowing, the river being the bridge between Eden and this world, and we are the garden. We talked about creating a life such that our roots will be constantly nourished by the river.

Yesterday morning, we read carefully the passages concerning being created in the Divine Image and discovered that in the second story of creation, we are not created in the Divine Image from the beginning, but rather grow into resembling God through our actions later.

And finally, this morning I want to talk about food. Not a surprise. I hope everyone is well fed over the past day and a half, and the good news, between Yontiff and Shabbos we have at least another day and a half of eating really well!

Food is obviously essential to life, and equally essential to Jewish life. How was your challah? Apples and honey? And I hope the rest of the meal has been sumptuous as well.

And it certainly is not just Rosh HaShanah. Please God, may we be written in the Book of Life, and share latkes and sufganiyot at Chanukah; fruits and nuts at our Tu Bishvat Seder, hamentashen for Purim; matzah, charoset, kenadelach at Pesach; blintzes at Shavuot, and so on.

And it is not just the holidays. In the past year we have gathered together in Shiva homes, and fed the mourners symbolic foods at their time of sadness. We have feasted with bride and groom, bar and bat mitzvah, and many other joyous events.

As a community, we eat quite well.

So God placed Adam in the Garden, and in the Garden there were a great many different kinds of trees from which to eat.

וַיִּצַו ה' אֱלֹקִים עַל-הָאָדָם לֵאמֹר מִכָּל עֵץ-הַגָּן אָכַל תֹּאכַל:  
And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden you will surely eat.

So Adam's world, our world, is a world of great abundance and even diversity. In this world, God does not just give us permission to eat of the trees, God actually commands it. And the command is not just concerning some of the trees of the Garden, God commands us to eat of ALL of the trees. I would change your translation "you may freely eat" to read the emphatic "you will surely eat."

Now we know from a little before in the text that God created two trees that were different than the rest.

וַיִּצְמַח ה' אֱלֹקִים מִן-הַגֶּזֶן כָּל-עֵץ נֹחַד לְמַרְאֵה וְטוֹב לְמַאֲכָל  
וְעֵץ הַחַיִּים בְּתוֹךְ הַגָּן וְעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וְרָע:  
And out of the ground made the Lord God every tree to grow 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.

So these two are special, though we are not told what about them is special, nor are we told the names of the other trees in the Garden. Keep processing in the back of your minds, we will come back to naming other trees in the Garden.

So the Tree of Life is בְּתוֹךְ, in the midst of the Garden. The Zohar teaches us that this Tree was not just in the midst of the Garden, it is in the center. See text number one on the handout. And it is very, very tall. Its height is equivalent to the distance of a five hundred year journey. I don't know if that is by foot, horse or camel, but that is a tall tree.

Why does the Zohar picture the Tree of Life as so incredibly tall? Because it connects the worlds. Remember the river that flows, this Tree is the river bed, the channel that brings God's flow into the physical world. So the pipe must extend all the way to the source, the well-spring. And why is it in the middle? Because from this Tree all the other trees receive their Divine flow. The river that flows, flows through the Tree of Life and into the rest of creation.

The Living Waters that you and I imbibe when we stand in the Divine Flow, the waters that bring us life and blessing, pass through the Tree of Life as the conduit, the pipe, connecting the source to us the destination.

So why is Torah called the Tree of Life? Because Torah is understood to do exactly that, to bring the flow from the world above, from God, into the world below, into us. And we imbibe from the waters, or words, of Torah, the Tree of Life, when we study those words and when we live those words.

So the waters flow through the Tree of Life to nourish every living thing in the Garden – the people and the trees.

So why are fruits and vegetables so healthy? They are more directly connected to the Living Waters. They are nourished from the waters that pass through the Tree of Life. So living foods possess greater blessings of life than processed foods. Why are we healthier when we eat natural, raw and organic foods? Because we are more closely connected to the Tree of Life and through it to the Source of Life.

Don't misunderstand me, we could have a whole lecture on vitamins, minerals, phytochemicals, fiber and much more. We actually have a nutritionist in the congregation who could help all of us improve our eating for Life.

All of the science of nutrition, all of the medical research that supports eating at least nine servings of fruits and vegetables each day, all of it is another vocabulary to describe in the scientific mind, what the Zohar recognizes in the mystical mind.

And it goes further. The Zohar understands that we are commanded not just to eat from the Tree of Life, or to eat from the trees that we like, or aren't mushy, we are commanded to eat from ALL of the trees: וַיֵּצֵא מִכָּל עֵץ־הַגָּן אֶכְלָה וְתֹאכְלָה

Again, not only do our doctors and nutritionists tell us to eat fruits and vegetables, we are commanded to eat a diversity of them. Lots of different colors every day.

Now let's talk about the other trees in the Garden. Let's name them. What are the trees from which we are commanded to eat? Let's broaden from the world of general nutrition. God placed us in this world and commanded us to eat of what fruits?

Anybody here taste the fruits of the Tree of Joy? How about the Tree of Laughter? Tree of Wisdom? What other trees have you eaten from, that connect you to the Tree of Life, since it waters them, and connects you to the Divine Flow? That's a question. Let's get some volunteers to name more trees in the garden. (Tree of Sorrow, Tree of Pain, Tree of Loss—Not all trees are Disneyland, but all are connected)

And God commands us to eat from all of them. Obviously, we can't eat from them all at once, probably get a stomach ache, but over the course of a lifetime, we are commanded to eat from all of them.

And that is how we stay connected to the Tree of Life, the Divine Flow, and the Ultimate Water Source. And Torah is a map and a guide to help us discover the trees of the Garden.

But there is one more tree in the Garden that we are avoiding. One other tree that merits in the Torah to be mentioned by name. One more tree about which we receive an additional commandment.

וּמֵעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וְרָע לֹא תֹאכְלָה מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי בְיוֹם אֲכָלְהָ מָמוֹת מוֹת תָּמוּת:

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it; for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.

What does this mean? And why this tree? Generally, we accept that this means that Adam and Eve were commanded to not eat of the fruit of this tree. Seems strange, if God did not want them to eat it, why did God place it, and nourish it in the Garden? At least, couldn't there have been a fence around it?

It should not be surprising to us now, the Zohar has a different understanding of this tree. First it notes that the Tree of Life was in the middle, as explained above, but the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was not.

See text number two.

THE TREE OF GOOD AND EVIL- This tree was not in the middle. It is called by this name because it draws sustenance from two opposite sides, which it distinguishes as clearly as one distinguishes sweet and bitter, and therefore it is called "good and evil".

So unlike the Tree of Life, which receives all of its nourishment from God, the Good, this tree receives some of its nourishment from the Sitra Achra – the other side. This side is still energy from God, but it is not the energy of goodness. It is the energy that nourishes and incites the Yetzer HaRa, our inclination to do evil.

It is critical to understand that our inclination to do evil, is not evil, it is part of us. It includes the instinctive pieces of the ego, selfishness, vanity and so forth. The expression of these traits is problematic at best, sinful at worst, but the inclination is part of being human.

The Talmud goes so far as to teach that were it not for the Yetzer HaRa people would not get married and have children. That is, these negative energies are critical to life, and can be sublimated to have holy expression.

So the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is nourished from these energies as well. Interesting, but the real genius arrives on the next page of the Zohar. See text number 3 on your handout.

On the next page of the Zohar, in a very careful reading of the Genesis verses, the Zohar makes the claim that God did not forbid the eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. In fact God commanded eating from all of the trees –  
וַיֵּצֵא מִכָּל עֵץ הַגָּן אֶכְל תֹּאכֵל.

Abraham ate from this tree. Isaac ate from it. Jacob ate from it. The prophets ate from it.

The Zohar sees the command concerning this tree to be focused on the singular nature of the command. Look carefully at verse 17 in Genesis 2, your text number 2, God is commanding concerning the eating of "it," and the Zohar goes to pains to explain that the prohibition is against eating it **BY ITSELF**. As part of a well-balanced meal, as it were, this tree is commanded like all the others, but as the sole staple in the diet, it is poison.

The sin is not eating the Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, the sin is eating it to the exclusion of all the other fruit. To do so would separate a person out from the community, to separate the shoots, as it were.

The other trees are commanded to be eaten together, but we are not told about any other tree that it is poison when ingested by itself. Why? What is in the nature of this tree that makes it poison on its own?

Two suggestions:

One: Knowledge of Good and Evil leads one to pass moral judgment on Good versus Evil. This is a good, but dangerous thing. Remember, we repeat it all the time, based on strict judgment, the we would all be found lacking, the world would come up short, and it would be destroyed. But moral judgment, contextualized with mercy, compassion, empathy and other moral virtues makes it possible for us to be forgiven during these days.

Just like these ten days when we stand before the Holy Judge, so too when we stand as judge, we cannot judge simply based on good versus evil, right versus wrong. We cannot draw only from this one tree. We need to include what we have learned from the nourishment of all the trees.

And two: the Knowledge of Good and Evil is deeply implanted in our heads. To eat strictly from this tree is to nourish strictly the head. If you want to look ahead at text number 6 for Kol Nidre, you will see the story of a great sage, who in order to live only in his head, buries himself in sand, as if he was only a talking head. This turns out not to be a good thing for him or for the world – more on that at Kol Nidre.

But God commands us to eat from all the trees nourished by the Tree of Life. The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil has its place as one of many, but not as the only one. We cannot live a life purely of the mind, we need to live a life, and that includes much more.

So, on this first day of the New Year, as we begin our travels, our hike, through the Garden of Life and the Garden of this Year, we pray that as we are nourished from God's waters, that we should receive blessings from many, many different trees growing in the garden, and that we should eat from the Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, with care, as part of a well-balanced diet, being certain that as we eat from the fruit that is also nourished partially by the Sitra Achra, that we should allow our Yezter to blossom in a manner to contribute to the beauty and strength of the garden, rather than for my selfish desires to the detriment of the garden.

May this be a year in which we are open to a bountiful flow of blessing, and juicy ripe fruits from the Garden.

Ken yihi ratzon.

