

LBT's From Light to Liberation: *Desire*

Week of January 3, 2021 / 19 Tevet 5781

These texts are designed to be engaged in chevruta (with a partner), with a larger group, or on your own as part of your journey from Light to Liberation. As you approach these texts, you are invited to let the discussions and thoughts they foster live with you and be part of you. If you are reading these on your own or with others, we encourage you to read aloud.

Framing: Our tradition teaches that we have two types of desire: the *yetzer ha-tov* -- the desire for good -- and the *yetzer ha-rah* -- the desire for evil. As human beings, it is our task to figure out how to balance our desires as we seek to make our world one that is more just and compassionate. Both have their value. The story of Adam and Eve eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil can be interpreted as the story of the evolutionary leap of human beings from animals to a species that could perceive good and evil in the world. At the heart of that evolutionary leap is desire.

בראשית ב':ט"ז-י"ז

(טז) וַיִּצְוֵ יי אֱלֹהִים עַל־הָאָדָם לֵאמֹר מִכָּל עֵץ־הַגֶּן אֲכַל תֹּאכַל: (יז) וּמֵעֵץ הַדְּעִית טוֹב וְרָע לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי בַיּוֹם אֲכַלְךָ מִמֶּנּוּ מוֹת תָּמוּת:

Genesis 2:16-17

(16) And the Eternal God commanded the Earthling, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat; (17) but as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die."

בראשית ג':ד'-ז'

(ד) וַיֹּאמֶר הַנְּחַשׁ אֶל־הָאִשָּׁה לֵאמֹר לֹא־מוֹת תָּמוּתוּן: (ה) כִּי יֵדַע אֱלֹהִים כִּי בַיּוֹם אֲכַלְכֶם מִמֶּנּוּ וּנְפַקְחוּ עֵינֵיכֶם וְהִייתֶם כַּאֲלֹהִים יֹדְעֵי טוֹב וְרָע: (ו) וַתֵּרָא הָאִשָּׁה כִּי טוֹב הָעֵץ לְמֹאכַל וְכִי תֹאווֶה־הִוא לְעֵינֵיָם וְנִחְמַד הָעֵץ לְהַשְׁכִּיל וַתִּקַּח מִפְּרִיו וַתֹּאכַל וַתִּתֵּן גַּם־לְאִישָׁהּ עִמָּה וַיֹּאכַל: (ז) וַתִּפְקַחְנָה עֵינֵי שְׁנֵיהֶם וַיֵּדְעוּ כִּי עֲרֻמִּם הֵם וַיִּתְּפְרוּ עָלֶיהָ תְּאֵנָה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם חִגְרֹת:

Genesis 3:4-7

(4) And the serpent said to the woman, "You are not going to die, (5) but God knows that as soon as you eat of [the tree of knowledge of good and bad] your eyes will be opened and you will be like divine beings who know good and bad." (6) When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom, she took its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her man, and he ate. (7) Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they perceived that they were naked; and they sewed together fig leaves and made themselves loincloths.

Questions for Reflection:

1. The forbidden tree is simultaneously called "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" and "a source of wisdom." What wisdom do you see in knowledge of good and evil? What role has desire played in your learning of good and evil?
2. After Adam and Eve eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, their first reported action was to make clothes and to cover themselves. Why did they desire to cover themselves? When has the revelation of knowledge, good or evil, catalyzed your desire to conceal, literally or metaphorically?
3. When you quiet your mind, what desires (good and less good) arise? Can you recall when you first ascribed good or bad valences to your desires? How have your desires served you well and when have they been detrimental to your well being?