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## **Correcting the Sin of Adam** by Rabbi Zvi Alon

Our Sages make a famous and well-known assertion that the first two thousand years of the world's existence were years of desolation, while the next two thousand years were years of Torah (Sanhedrin 97a). According to our Sages, these years of Torah started with Avraham and Sarah. Last week's Torah portion speaks of "the souls which they acquired in Haran" (B'reishit 12:5). From the moment that Avraham and Sarah together began to teach belief in God, the era of Torah began.

It seems to me that we can understand "two thousand years of desolation" to mean two thousand years of sin and spiritual confusion. But from the minute that Avraham appears on stage, the world undergoes a radical change.

On the very day Adam is created, he manages to sin, eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. On the same day it is decreed: "The land is cursed on your account" and "You will give birth with great sorrow" (3:16-17). And, of course, Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden of Eden.

The question that always bothered me is: why doesn't God give Adam and Eve another chance? Why are the gates of repentance locked? Is it possible that God, on account of one sin involving eating (which, psychologically speaking, is the strongest human desire of all), would mete out such a harsh punishment to humanity?

Rav Kook, in a well-known section in Orot HaKodesh called "Searching for the True Self", gives an answer to this difficult question. With it he lays down a fundamental principle for humanity in general and for the Jewish nation in particular. Rav Kook maintains that we should not make the mistake of thinking that Adam is punished for eating from the Tree of Knowledge. Rather, he is punished for something far more severe.

Before we present Rav Kook's answer, we will give a brief introduction. After Adam and Eve eat, they immediately understand that they are naked. Thus their reaction is (verse 8): "And Adam and his wife hid from God among the trees of the Garden." (It is interesting to note their hiding place. This is like a bank robber who robs a bank and then hides in the bank's safe. As the Hebrew proverb puts it, "The hat burns on the robber's head" – i.e., he calls attention to his crime.) We must ask: does Adam really think for even one minute that it is possible to hide from God? Isn't that a very childish and superficial understanding? Suddenly God appears and asks man (verse 9), "Where are you?" Wonderful! Here we have the first game of Hide and Seek in history. Adam and Eve are hiding and God Himself plays along and is "it".

As the story continues, Adam supplies a surprising answer: he was afraid of God

because he was naked. (We see again that "The hat burns on the head of the robber.") Now comes God's question. In order to make the question clearer, I will illustrate with a familiar example which everyone experiences during childhood.

Let us suppose that Hirscheleh gets home from school, enters the kitchen, opens the refrigerator, and sees Swiss chocolate. He is a well-trained child, and asks his mother if he can have some. His mother responds, "Hirscheleh, first eat lunch, and afterwards you can have some chocolate." At that very moment, Hirscheleh's younger brother in the next room starts crying, and Mom runs to find out what happened. Hirscheleh takes advantage of the moment and grabs the chocolate. Afterwards, Mom opens the refrigerator and asks Hirscheleh: "Hirscheleh, sweetie, where is the chocolate?" Hirscheleh, who understands his situation, responds innocently: "I really don't know. It's unbelievable! It was here just a minute ago, and now it isn't." Mom won't punish him just yet. She asks, "Hirscheleh, sweetie, did you by any chance eat from the chocolate which I told you not to eat from?" Hirscheleh understands that Mom knows everything, and he answers, "Yes, Mom, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to, I lost control. ..."

God comes and asks Adam a similar question to that of Hirscheleh's Mom (verse 11): "Did you eat from the tree which I commanded you not to eat from?" Wonderful! Even four-year-old Hirscheleh knows the answer to this

question. But Adam does not. "And Adam said, 'The woman whom You gave me - she gave me from the tree and I ate'" (verse 12). How difficult this is! "It wasn't me! It's the woman who is guilty, and really . . . You are too!"

Rav Kook writes: "The sin of Adam is that he is alienated from himself, and is unable to give a clear answer to the question, 'Where are you?'" This is the worst of all sins - being unable to give an answer to the simplest and yet most difficult question in the world, "Where are you?" It means: how are you? Did you sin? No big deal. Recognize the sin. Recognize your weakness. Only thus can you move forward. But never ever be alienated from yourself. (According to Rav Kook, *avoda zara* - literally "foreign worship" - means worship of that which is alien to you.)

Two thousand years after Adam, the world was still waiting for the answer to the monumental question, "Where are you?" No one has succeeded in answering this question - neither Adam nor Kayin, neither No'ach nor Cham, neither Nimrod nor the generation of the Tower of Babel. All are alienated from themselves. None of them know their place in the world. Until our father Avraham comes along and teaches them the answer to this question.

"And it came to pass after these things that God tested Avraham. He said to him, 'Avraham?' and he responded, 'Here I am'" (22:1). In my humble opinion, the true and deep meaning of the verse is that this exchange is the test. Afterwards will come the call to the Akeida (sacrifice of Yitzchak, itself a test). But for now, God's test is to see if

someone can finally rescue the world from its desolation - a world where no one knows who he is, a world which Rav Kook describes as: "Since there is no me, there is no him, and certainly there is no you." God's test is to see if someone can say loud and clear, "Here I am! I am here, I am ready, I am aware, and I ask myself every day where I stand." The answer to "Where are you?" can be "I am weak, I messed up, I need to try harder, I ate something forbidden." No big deal. You are human, you are allowed to make mistakes - as long as you can recognize them afterwards.

It turns out that Adam is not punished for his sin of eating. It happens! We are all human, even Adam. He was punished because he could not give a clear answer to the question of "Where are you?" 