**Parashat Bereshit**

Most are familiar with the story of Adam and Chava in Gan Eden. In short, Adam and Chava were permitted by God to eat from all of the trees in the garden, except for the *Etz Hadaat Tov v’Ra,* Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Soon enough, they gave into their temptations, ate from the *Etz Hadaat Tov v’Ra*, knew that they were naked, and were thus banished from Gan Eden and sentenced to a life of mortality. This story and the punishment that ensued is commonly perceived in a negative light, however, was it really a bad thing?

Before eating from the tree, man used to live in a purely objective mental paradigm. He did what he was told, knew the objective truth, and life was simple. Man lived in a world of true and false, *emet v׳sheker*. Once Adam and Chava ate from the *Etz Hadaat*, however, their paradigm shifted from an objective perspective of “true and false” to having a subjective perspective of “*tov v’ra*,” knowing between good and evil (מורה נבוכים: חלק א, פרק ב). Eating from the *Etz Hadaat*, added another dimension to our existence: originally we were like primitive animals, doing what was necessary for survival, but after eating from the *Etz Hadaat*, humanity gained the capacity for passion, desire, and joy, among other qualities that come along with a more advanced existence.

Reverting back to my original question- was eating from the *Etz Hadaat* a bad thing? Living in a world where we need to decipher between good and evil is definitely more difficult than living in a totally objective world of black and white- of true and false- *emet v’sheker*; however this added responsibility is a gift. As the *nachash* convinces Chava to eat from the tree, it states:

"...כִּ֗י בְּיוֹם֙ אֲכלְכֶ֣ם מִמֶּ֔נּוּ וְנִפְקְח֖וּ עֵֽינֵיכֶ֑ם וִהְיִיתֶם֙ כֵּֽאלֹקים יֹדְעֵ֖י ט֥וֹב וָרָֽע׃"

“...as soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like divine beings who knowgood and bad” (בראשית ג:ו).

In this context, committing oneself to a life of learning to “know good and bad” is a divine quality. Although eating from *Etz Hadaat* caused mankind to be removed from Gan Eden, it also allowed us to gain the ability to choose between good and bad, a quality which beforehand was not given to humanity. As a result of eating from *Etz Hadaat*, the potential for both good and evil lives within all of us, and it is our choice to choose. “*Daat Tov v’Ra*” is a responsibility, and a scary one at that, but it’s one we nonetheless have to undertake. The choice is a difficult one, but we find meaning in making the right choices, emulating God, choosing *tov* over *ra*. Thus, if we view the *Etz Hadaat* story with this mindset it can be viewed in positive light and not only negative.

Although it can seem overwhelming to have the responsibility to always choose good over evil, we have God’s help by our side through His gift of the Torah. Last week, on Simchat Torah, we not only celebrated the conclusion of the reading of the Torah, but we also started reading it anew. As we restart the parashah cycle, we should learn to appreciate the Torah and acknowledge this gift from God as our moral guidebook which helps us navigate through the challenges of life and directs us towards ‘the good,’ in the way of God.

Growing up in the Yeshivah of Flatbush community has helped Sarah Greenberg foster a deep passion for learning and leadership, as well as instilled within her strong family and religious values that she will uphold for a lifetime. Sarah played on the girls’ varsity basketball team and served on Flatbush High School’s Senior Council, where she organized the seniors’ activities throughout the past year. She devoted hours of her time throughout the year to helping others, including organizing programs such as the biannual blood drive and Yachad programs for the whole school. Her love for learning and desire to grow in her Judaic knowledge stemmed from her favorite class– Inquiry Bet Midrash. Different from the regular classroom environment, this class enabled her to question the basis of the texts, probing the things that were always accepted as true and analyzing them to eventually come up with her own conclusions. Sarah hopes to continue to learn and to strengthen her religious values at Midreshet Moriah next year and through the Allegra Franco program.