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## WAS NEGIAH PROHIBITED IN EDEN?

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*This Dvar Torah may not be about what you think it's about!*

Just before G-d commanded the first human, He explained our purpose(s). Since one philosophic definition of *chiyuv* (=obligation) is to fulfill one's telos (=purpose), a reasonable hypothesis is that G-d's first commands provided a way for humans to fulfill those purpose(s).

Let's approach this questions by looking carefully at Bereishit 2:15-17, with my deliberately tendentious translation.

וַיִּקַּח ה' אֶת־הָאָדָם  
 וַיְנַחֵהוּ בְּגֶן־עֵדֶן  
 לְעִבְדָּהּ וּלְשִׁמְרָהּ:  
 וַיֹּצֵא ה' אֶת־הָאָדָם מֵעֵדֶן  
 מִכָּל־עֵץ־הַגֶּן אֲכָל־תֹּאכְלֵהּ:  
 וַיֹּמַעַץ ה' הַדְּעוֹת טוֹב וְרָע  
 לֵאמֹר לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ  
 כִּי־בַיּוֹם אֲכַלְךָ מִמֶּנּוּ  
 מוֹת תָּמוּת:  
*Hashem Elokim picked up the human being  
 He put him down in the Arbor of Eden  
 P'ovdoh and P'shomroh.*

*Hashem Elokim imposed a command on the human being, as follows:*

*From all the trees of the arbor - you must eat;*

*but from the Tree of Knowledge, Good and Bad – you must not eat from it  
 because on the day of your eating from it, you will surely become mortal.*

L'ovdoh and P'shomroh are the human being's purpose(s) in the Garden. Given artistic freedom, I'd prefer to translate the phrase as "to serve and conserve it." Alas, I find it hard to read Torah as endorsing idolatry (*avodah* = service), and I'm leery of seemingly contemporary policy prescriptions (*leshomroh*=conservation), so my translation here is "to work and protect it."

To work an arbor means to make it more productive, to cultivate it. Why is cultivation a proper purpose? The sequence of events in verses 2:8-10 is suggestive.

וַיִּטֵּעַ ה' אֶת־הָאָדָם  
 וַיִּשְׁמֵר אֶת־הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר יָצָר:  
 וַיִּצְמַח ה' אֶת־הָאָדָם  
 כָּל־עֵץ נְחֻמָּד לְמִרְאֵה וְטוֹב לְמֹאכַל  
 וְעֵץ הַחַיִּים בְּתוֹךְ הַגֶּן וְעֵץ הַדְּעוֹת טוֹב וְרָע  
*Hashem Elokim planted an arbor in Eden, to the East.  
 He placed there the human that He had formed.  
 Hashem Elokim generated from the ground  
 every tree attractive to sight and good for eating  
 and the Tree of Life amid the arbor, and the Tree of Knowledge Good and*

*Bad*

G-d places Adam in the arbor after it has been planted, but before the ground generates trees. I suggest that this was so Adam would see the trees grow into being. He thereby understood that the arbor was not fixed and eternal, but rather required stimulation. He **intuited** his purpose of *P'ovdoh*.

"*The Tree of Life amid the arbor, and the Tree of Knowledge, Good and Bad*" may be

1. a subset of "all trees attractive to sight and good for eating," or
2. separately created at this time, or
3. already grown when Adam is first placed there, before any other trees are generated.

I prefer the last option. Adam would intuit that these trees require no stimulus – they need only be protected from harm.

Adam's purposes therefore are  
*P'ovdoh* = to cultivate all the ordinary trees of the garden, and  
*P'shomroh* = to preserve the central tree(s).

We can then identify the positive command "*from all the trees of the arbor you must eat*" as a fulfillment of *P'ovdoh* (one cannot eat fruits unless they have been produced), and the negative command "*but from the Tree of Knowledge, Good and Bad – you must not eat from it*" – as a fulfillment of *leshomroh*. If the positive and negative commandments are parallel. Adam would therefore understand that his obligation was to **avoid cultivating** the latter tree, with every expectation that it would not fruit.

But of course, it did fruit. Imagine poor Adam's confusion. Why would G-d command him not to cultivate the tree, if it would grow regardless?

Moreover – maybe if this tree fruited in its own, maybe all the other trees would also have fruited on their own, regardless of his efforts. Solzhenitsyn in *The Gulag Archipelago* tells of a prisoner in a labor camp who spends each day for decades turning the heavy wheel of a mill embedded in the camp wall, so that his fellow inmates could have flour. Finally released, he goes outside the wall, and sees that the mill was a sham, and the wheel connected to nothing – and promptly dies. Maybe Adam ate the fruit because he no longer saw his works as having any purpose.

G-d is not *chas veshalom* a Soviet taskmaster; He would not have assigned human beings purposeless tasks. So Adam must have misunderstood. Was it G-d's fault for not making His command clearer?

Of course not. To understand what G-d wished to happen, we need to look at the next steps of the narrative.

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל-הָאֱלֹהִים  
לֹא-טוֹב הָיְתָה הָאָדָם לְבַדּוֹ  
אֶעֱשֶׂה-לּוֹ עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ:  
Hashem Elokim said:

*It is not good, the human being by himself  
I will make him a help to counterbalance him.*

Just after G-d commands Adam, He states that Adam's current state is "not good," and then creates Eve to assist him. A reasonable hypothesis therefore is that the creation of Eve is necessary for the proper fulfillment of His command. But why does G-d command Adam when he is not yet capable of obeying?

Let's shift one chapter forward. In 3:3, Eve tells the snake that G-d commanded human beings **וְלֹא תִגְעוּ בוֹ**, usually translated as "and do not touch it." But G-d said nothing whatever about touching in Chapter 2! Why does Eve invent a prohibition?

The 19<sup>th</sup> century commentator S. D. Luzatto (SHaDaL) answers as follows:

*Perhaps there is no addition to Hashem's word here,  
because the verb negiah is used many times in the borrowed sense of  
"damage,"*

*for example "do not touch My anointed" (Tehillim 105:15)*

SHaDaL's translation radically reoriented my perception of the command. I had thought it was about protecting human beings from the tree. In his reading, it is about protecting the tree from human beings.

A second possible approach is to see Eve as overzealously extending the prohibition. She found her religious experience inferior to Adam's, who had directly experienced G-d as commander, and so felt compelled to add weight to His yoke. (She thus anticipated Dr. H. Soloveitchik's thesis about the motivation for *chumra* among Chassidei Ashkenaz and late 20<sup>th</sup> Century American Orthodoxy.)

Avot d'Rabbi Natan Version B (1:1) takes a third approach:

לֹא רָצָה אָדָם הָרִאשׁוֹן לומר לחוה  
כדרך שא"ל הקדוש ברוך הוא  
אלא כך אמר לה:  
ומפרי העץ אשר בתוך הגן אמר א-להים  
לֹא תֹאכְלוּ מִמֶּנּוּ  
וְלֹא תִגְעוּ בוֹ פֶּן תָּמוּתוּן

*The First Adam did not want to say to Eve  
in the same way that the Holy Blessed One had said to him  
rather he said to her thus:*

*"and from the tree which is amid the arbor," said G-d,  
'you must not eat from it  
and you must not touch it lest you die'"*

Adam added a prohibition when talking to Eve because he wanted to be more than just a pass-through for Torah – he wanted to contribute. Note, however, that the midrash seems to explain why Adam (in violation of Mishnah Eduyot 1:3) wanted to express the Divine command in his own words; it does not explain why Adam seemingly altered its substance.

Holding these approaches in our mind, we can move to one last mystery. Where is Adam while the snake is seducing Eve into sin?

One answer in Midrash Rabbah is that G-d had taken Adam on a world tour. This suggests that G-d deliberately gave the snake the opportunity to speak privately with Eve. Why would He do that?

So we have three questions.

1. Why is Adam commanded before Eve's creation?
2. Why does Eve tell the snake about a prohibition against *negiah* that G-d never expressed?
3. Why does G-d enable the snake to speak to Eve without Adam present?

In "Equality Lost," the eponymous essay of his book Equality Lost and maybe the most powerful dvar Torah of the past 40 years, Rav Yehudah Herzl Henkin suggests that G-d commanded Adam **before** creating Eve so that Adam would have the opportunity to share the gift of Torah with her. Eve is created as a "help to counterbalance him," but she cannot play her role as equal unless he sees Revelation as a gift to be shared rather than a source of exclusivity and power. The test of whether he had fully shared was to see whether she could now stand on her own in Torah, and so G-d had to ensure that the snake found her alone.

But why did she fail to withstand the snake? Rav Henkin contends that Adam added the "fence" of touching, without distinguishing between the initial Divine decree and the humanly legislated fence. (This parallels Maimonides' understanding that it is a Biblical violation to present Rabbinic law as having Biblical force.) When the snake touches the tree, and seemingly nothing happens, Eve becomes convinced that everything Adam had told her was unreliable, and so she cannot resist the snake.

I suggest that Adam did not **deliberately** add on to G-d's command. Rather, he misunderstood the DON'T as forbidding cultivation, and then expressed it to Eve in his own words, rather than G-d's.

The prohibition actually was against eating, and intended to protect humans from the tree. But because Eve had no access to the original text of Revelation, she propagated Adam's error, and they sinned together when his error was exposed.

"It is not good, the human being by himself" - Two heads are better than one, and in genuine discussion, the truth often emerges. G-d created Eve to be Adam's match in Torah conversation. He revealed His command to Adam before Eve was created, intending for their conversation to take place within a shared set of assumptions, without competing subjective experiences of the primary dataset (cf. **לֹא בִשְׂמִימִים הָיָא**). But Adam did not share his Torah fully with Eve. We are still paying for his mistake. So long as we fail to create genuine equality of opportunity in Torah education, we are still making his mistake – and therefore countless others.