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Adam and Eve: What was the Sin? What was the Cure? A Current-day Interpretation

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The story of the sin of Adam and Eve, as it is unfolding in the third chapter of Genesis, is well known. Simplistically summarized, the story relates how God had forbidden Adam from eating of the Tree of Knowledge, good and bad, warning him that "on the day that thou eat of it thou shall surely die" (Genesis 2:17). Seduced by the serpent, Eve, Adam's madam, defies God's command and also convince Adam to join the party: "She took of its fruit and did eat and gave also to her man with her" (Genesis 3:6). As a result of the sin, God imposes custom-made penalties on the serpent, the woman and the man, and expel Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden lest they also ate of the Tree of Life and would live forever (Genesis 3:22-24). The whole sin story is described beginning at Genesis 2:15-17 and continuing to its end at Genesis 3:1-24.

Many interpretations have been offered for this story. I will not attempt here a comprehensive review of these as they are easily accessible over the Internet. In this article, I offer an innovative interpretation (or so I believe), based on a careful examination of the Hebrew wording of the sin story and based also on links connecting the different parts of the story, as told in the Hebrew Genesis.

As a departure point, let us note that throughout the sin story, God is related to by two names:

* A composite name: *Jehovah Elohim* (in English: the Lord God);

* A partial name: *Elohim* (why this is partial and how is it indicative of the developing corruption that preceded the sin will be explained shortly).

In a separate article [1], I discuss at length the use in the Hebrew Bible of the two different names for the Divine: *Elohim* and *Jehovah*. These names may appear separately but occasionally also together (as in the sin story). I deliver here a short summary of the meanings of these names as understanding of their significance is crucial to the later understanding of the

significance of the sin, as told in Genesis.

The Bible relates to names very seriously and perceive names as representing the very essence of the named. Examples are given aplenty in the cited reference. There is however one exception. Mankind, according to Jewish tradition, does not have and cannot have direct knowledge of the Divine; except that God exists. The only possible knowledge of God is indirect, via learning of how God reveals his presence in the world. The two names for God, *Elohim* and *Jehovah*, therefore address two separate and logically unrelated concepts of God's visible and seemingly visible presence in his world:

* By **law of nature**, revealed in the Hebrew *Elohim* (God);

* By **justice combined with grace and loving kindness**, revealed in the Hebrew *Jehovah* (God).

The two names relate to two facets of God's presence in the world as the **creator**, who had imprinted the law of nature on the universe and has dominion over all forces of nature, and as a **gracious judge**, source of absolute morality and justice mitigated by love and grace. In the afore-cited source, I have explained at length, with numerous quotations from the Hebrew Bible, how these two names are consistently used throughout the Hebrew Bible to deliver precisely the intended context, as befit the mathematical precision characteristic of biblical Hebrew text [2].

Accounting for the double aspects of God's presence in the world, it is no wonder that when the narrator of the sin story relates to God in Genesis, it is always by the proper full name, *Jehovah Elohim*, reflecting God's double-sided leadership. This full name is mentioned in the verses comprising the sin story (Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-24) eleven times.

However, there are altogether 15 references to God in these verses. The other four relate to God by his partial name, *Elohim*.

Why the change?

The eleven occurrences of *Jehovah Elohim* are integrated into the narrator's "objective" description (from the narrator's perspective) of God's involvement in the sin story (what God has done or said). The other four are all part of the dialogue between the serpent and Eve, in preparation for committing the sin. This is indeed bizarre: Why use of a partial name for God, *Elohim*, where in the rest of the chapter God is always addressed as *Jehovah Elohim*?? And how the choice of *Elohim*, rather than *Jehovah*, is testimony to the real character of the sin and why the remedy (delivered by God) befits the malaise?

Answers to these questions and others may shed new light on the contents of the Original Sin: what it really was, why the prescribed remedy and what lessons the Bible does offer the reader.

Reading the unfolding of the sin story and the consequences of the sin, one may distinguish six different parts to the story:

- **Part 1:** Pre-sin moral decay, reflected in the corrupt dialogue between the serpent and the woman. The dialogue is corrupt on two counts: by its contents but also by the corrupt use of the partial name of God, namely, *Elohim* (I will elaborate on this soon);
- **Part 2:** Committing the sin, namely, eating of the forbidden fruit;
- **Part 3:** Having formerly ignoring God double-faceted presence in the world and violating his explicit command while discussing how to trick God (“And the serpent said to the woman you shall not surely die”, Genesis 3:4), now our heroes try to hide from God so that God has to “call” upon Adam and Eve: “Where are thou?” (Genesis 3:9);
- **Part 4:** Separate exchanges of “clarification talk” between God and Adam and between God and Eve, revealing the instant corruptive effects of the sin:
 - * Effect A: Escape from freedom – “It was not me who decided” (I just succumbed to others’ will or seduction);
 - * Effect B: Escape from responsibility – “That was not my responsibility, I have only followed orders” (Adam; Genesis 3:12; 3:17); “I have been seduced to eat” (Eve; Genesis 3:13). Exact quotation for the former: “And the man said: “The woman whom thou did give to me to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat” (Genesis 3:12); Note the defiance and rebellion: both God and the woman, Eve, are the culprits, to be blamed;
 - * Effect C: Slander: “The woman, whom thou did give to me to be with me, she gave me of the tree” (Genesis 3:12);
 - * Effect D: The ultimate outcome of the sin: Separation between human beings.
- **Part 5:** *Jehovah Elohim* prescribes “medication” for the distorting effects that the sin had on all involved, custom-made separately for the serpent, for Eve and for Adam (Genesis 3:14-19).
- **Part 6:** Expulsion from the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:22-24).

The following questions may now be raised and answered:

- Q1.** How is corruption revealed by the exclusive use of *Elohim* in the dialogue, pre-sin?
- Q2.** What was the real intention in committing the sin, pre-sin?
- Q3.** Why eating of the Tree of Knowledge, good and bad, resulted in corruptive effects?
- Q4.** How do the remedies delivered by the Divine heal from the corruptive effects of eating of the Tree of Knowledge, good and bad?

We will address each question separately.

Q1. How is corruption revealed by the exclusive use of *Elohim* in the pre-sin dialogue between the serpent and Eve?

Answer: Human perception of God can be realistic or corrupt. The realistic perception leads to referring to God presence in the world by the composite name, as strictly used by the “objective” narrator: *Jehovah Elohim*. By contrast, the serpent and Eve refer only to *Elohim*, the owner of all forces of nature. By their perception of the Divine, being God-like (via eating of the Tree of Knowledge) would lead to dominion over the forces of nature (being *Elohim*-like). There is no desire to be *Jehovah*-like, via eating of the forbidden fruit. This corruptive perception ultimately leads to calling God “The Great” (linked to *Elohim*), omitting the “righteous” part of God leadership (linked to *Jehovah*). The latter mode of reference to the Divine repeatedly makes appearances in the Hebrew Bible, always with a single connotation. An example: “Jehovah is righteous in her midst; he will not do iniquity: each morning he brings forth his judgment to light, none is absent; but the unjust knows no shame” (Zephaniah 3:5). Note that *Elohim*, God as owner of dominion over all forces of nature, is missing here, not coincidentally.

Q2. What was the real objective in committing the sin, pre-sin?

Answer: The true purpose of the sin is explicitly articulated by the serpent in no uncertain terms: “For Elohim knows that on the day you eat of it, then your eyes shall be opened and you shall be like Elohim, knowledgeable of good and bad” (Genesis 3:5). Note that this interpretation deviates from the traditional one, where the Hebrew “good and bad” is translated as “good and evil”. In fact, Eve and the serpent have no interest in matters of good and evil. Calling God by *Elohim* only, their sole interest in being God-like (via knowledge gained by eating of the forbidden fruit) is allowing them to distinguish between that which is good for their well-being, survival and pleasure, and that which is bad, namely, detrimental to that objective. This new interpretation is so obvious, so consistent with a later sin, that of the story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9), that I find it difficult to explain how “good and bad” were wrongly interpreted in English, and so perceived also by Jewish tradition. Reading the text, it is apparent that our heroes have no interest in matters of justice but only in the betterment of their lives via domination over the forces of nature, acquired by knowledge related to the concept of *Elohim*.

In other words, our heroes would embrace warmly Apple’s bitten apple logo.

Q3. Why eating of the Tree of Knowledge, good and bad, resulted in corruptive effects?

Answer: The corruptive effects of perceiving God exclusively as *Elohim*, ignoring the *Jehovah* element in God’s presence in the world, has been amply manifested in human history over the centuries. It had been shown in incessant religious wars in the name of “God the Great”, and it is shown today in the ever more sophisticated employment of advanced means, all the result of acquiring knowledge of nature, in order to kill and maim living beings. In the modern era, it is many times over more manifested in how knowledge of the law of nature, and the consequential control over nature, has led to means of mass murder. The immediate outcome of acquiring knowledge related to *Elohim*, while ignoring *Jehovah*, is not only immoral dominion over nature but also the corruption of human character. We had related to this earlier as we

have delineated Part 4 of the sin story. Aspiring to be *Elohim*-like, absent a desire to be *Jehovah*-like, is the great sin of humankind to this day.

Q4. How do the remedies delivered by the Divine heal from the corruptive effects of eating of the Tree of Knowledge, good and bad?

Answer: By Jewish tradition, God does not punish but only heals and correct moral distortion of character. This is explicitly conveyed to King David, when God addresses his off-spring Solomon: "I will raise up your off-spring to succeed you...He is the one who will build a house for my Name...I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he commits iniquity, I will chase him with the rod of men, and with such plagues as befall the sons of Adam" (2 Samuel 7:12-14). The English translation, as it so happens, misses the real intent of the Hebrew verse: there is no "when he commits iniquity" therein. The correct (literal) translation is: "When he distorts his ways, I will rebuke him with the rod of men" etc. No punishment, just needed correction to distortions of character. Job makes the point even more bluntly: "I have sinned and perverted that which was straight and it profited me not" (Job 33:27).

Thus, sin does not call for punishment but for a cure that will straighten that which had been perverted. And God's cure for Adam and Eve is obvious:

"You, Adam and Eve, have thought that being God-like means domination over nature. And you intended to achieve that goal via acquiring knowledge (of the law of nature). But you have forgotten Jehovah. Therefore, here is a taste of what is awaiting you: You will eventually acquire knowledge of the law of nature, and you will be able to differentiate between the "Good" (favorable to your survival and pleasure) and the "Bad". But you will have to work hard and agonize through it for many years to come, with much hardship. Until, at the end of the road, you will perfect your corrupt character to recognize that you need to aspire to know God's conduct in its entirety, *Elohim* and *Jehovah*;

And know you will:

- "And I will give them a heart to know me that I am Jehovah, and they shall be my people, and I will be their Elohim; for they shall return to me with all their heart" (Jeremiah 24:7);
- "Thus said Jehovah: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; But let him that glories glory in this, learning and knowing me, that I am Jehovah exercising grace, justice and righteousness on Earth, for in these I delight", says Jehovah" (Jeremiah 9:22-23);
- "Behold, days are coming, says Jehovah God, when I will send starvation in the land, not starvation for bread neither thirst for water, but for hearing the words of Jehovah" (Amos 8:11).

The sin of Adam and Eve was recognizing God as *Elohim* only, aspiring to be *Elohim*-like by tasting of the Tree of Knowledge, consequently leading to discovering the law of nature and domination over nature. The cure was an agonizing war-laden and atrocity-laden human history, through which a Tikun is slowly being implemented until *Jehovah* is finally recognized.

And a new aspiration to be Jehovah-like is born.

References:

[1] Shore, H. (2014a). "And God spoke to Moses and said to him: I am God". An article posted in [Professor Haim Shore Blog](#).

[2] Shore, H. (2014b). The mathematical precision of biblical Hebrew. An article posted in [Professor Haim Shore Blog](#).

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