

## “The Human Dichotomy: Good and Evil”

The reality of Good and Evil expresses itself differently in Judaism, than in other religious traditions. Good and evil is not a strict duality in Jewish belief. Rather, they are seen as coming from the same basic source, God's Will.

Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, thereby bringing them both into the world, by their actions. The act of assimilating the knowledge of good and evil produced its emergence in the world. In other words, good and evil was a potential that was brought into the world by man's conscious decision. It was an act of will on mankind's part. It did not have to be made manifest. In fact, God specifically had told the couple not to do so.

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil stood at the heart of the garden of Eden. Therefore, it had a legitimate place within the structure of Creation. However, that was not meant for mankind to assimilate. God says so directly. He prohibits them from eating of the fruit of that tree. The Knowledge of Good and Evil, the full understanding of the polar principles that govern the functioning of the universe, was not meant for human beings to take upon themselves.

Once, having done so, the basic polarity of existence was fundamentally changed, as far as human experience is concerned. Now, humanity was able to make subjective determinations. Everything would be seen through the focus of positive and negative, good and evil. Yet, much of this viewpoint is purely subjective. What is good for one person, may be evil for another. What is beneficial to one group of people, may be detrimental or devastating to another. What benefits one group, may be doing so at the expense of another. When we make value judgements, we are overlaying connotations of good or bad on the basic duality of the world.

Everything in Creation is polarized into dualities. Living beings are either male or female. Space is polarized into left and right, forward and backward, up and down. Energy is the dualism of electricity and magnetism. Life takes place by movement within time and space. The basic duality of existence is inescapable.

So, what did Adam and Eve do when they ate of the Tree? They introduced subjective value judgment into the equation. Now, instead of seeing right and left or this and that as neutral and natural, they saw everything as good or bad. This added perception produces great distortion. If one is looking at two apples, one fresh and one that is rotting, it is not necessarily true to assume that the former one is good and the latter apple is bad.

The rotting apple may fall to the ground and serve as badly needed fertilizer, which is good from nature's standpoint. Whereas, there may too many apples on the tree, and the ripening one being considered, is draining off much needed resources from the other fruit. This prevents the apples on the tree from coming to full fruition. Hence, the whole crop of apples ultimately, will be ruined.

Goodness and Evil, good and bad are not always appropriate considerations. Much in life is actually neutral or a balanced admixture of positive and negative. Good or bad is merely a function of how something is being viewed.

Very little in nature is either good or bad per se. Rather, something becomes good or bad based upon how it is used. Enormous harm and tremendous evil have been done to countless people and nations over the millennia, in the name of what was thought to be the ultimate good.

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil stood in the Garden of Eden to regulate the balance of the opposing forces, that constitute the very makeup of the world. That force of regulation was planted by God. The Tree was meant to serve Creation on a level of its own, beyond the pale of human comprehension and human thought. When Adam and Eve ate of the Tree, they took it upon themselves to decide, what in the world was good and what was evil. The making of such distinctions would inevitably derive strictly from their own narrow frame of reference. This was the sin of mankind. We set ourselves up as the ultimate judges of what is and what is not reality. Moreover, we continue to make such decisions, and we are doing so through the distorted lens of subjective value judgment.

By setting ourselves up as judges, we are preempting God, the true, eternal judge. Our distorted perceptions lead to inappropriate action, causing harm, damage and destruction on many levels. We are bringing evil into the world, through actions precipitated by confusion and misconception.

How do we escape this unending cycle of good and evil, progress and retrogression? The answer is implied in the Book of Job. At the end of the story, at the point where Job admits he cannot fathom evil and suffering, God forces the issue. God demands to know why Job or anyone else, for that matter, thinks they can know the mind and intent of God. The true roots of good and evil lie deep in the very fabric of Creation, in the Will of God. This is far beyond the scope of human comprehension. No human explanation will ever be adequate to even remotely approximate the true reality. Why does man persist in distorting the world and human experience by playing God and making subjective judgments and then casting them in terms of good and evil?

A return to Eden involves the surrender by humanity of this dualistic view of the universe, and the permanent release of judgmentalism. Mankind must move beyond the cycle of good and evil, that has dominated human experience from the beginning. We need to return to the original pattern of experience, symbolized by Eden. Mankind must allow itself to be guided by God directly, rather than by the limited insight of our own reason.

The question then, is how exactly is this achieved? Before mankind was created, God judged all of Creation to be good. The universe is innately good, according to the Torah. No mention of evil is made at all, in the description of Creation.

This suggests, that there is a universal Good that transcends both good and evil as we understand it. There is a transcendent Good that is at the core of all Creation. Good and evil are relative to each other. They are interdependent. Without one, the other ceases to exist. This relative good, that we usually experience then, is only a reflection of the transcendent Good that underlies Creation.

The dichotomy of good and evil that mankind brought into the world interferes with our ability to experience the true Good. According to the Book of Deuteronomy, good and evil is really a set of choices that we are forced to make continually. Choose life and good or death and evil. Choose to serve God or choose to abandon God. Do not assume that understanding what God wants from us is hidden away somewhere or far beyond our reach. That is not the case. God's Will is very near to us. It is within our hearts and souls.

This is what the Torah teaches us. To reach the Good, we must pass through the dichotomy of good and evil. We must first strive for the good, listen to our hearts, study the Torah and work to serve God. We must remain firm in our convictions and resist the temptations of ego and misplaced emotion that lead to sin and destructive behavior. By working through the good and resisting the inclination to do evil, we move in the direction of connecting with the transcendent Good, the light of holiness and joy, that is beyond good and evil as we understand it.

The Transcendent Good stands alone. It is eternal. It is the underlying force in all Creation. This is the goodness, light and love that will one day rule all life on earth, when evil has passed away and the Kingdom of God is finally established. May our lives reflect that coming reality. May our daily existence be filled with a striving for the good, so that we each lay down a small part of the foundation of God's everlasting kingdom, little by little, in our everyday life. If we do this, we become one with God and God's Will.

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