

Meeting the Enemy Within and Without

Parshas Berashis includes the story of *Hashem's* most noble creation - man. The *Torah* tells us that man was created in the image of G-d and was originally placed in the Garden of Eden where he was to be served by the rest of creation as the master of *Hashem's* entire world. The story quickly takes a turn where the evil inclination depicted as the cunning serpent seduces *Chava*, Eve, into eating from the Tree of Knowledge. She, in turn, involves Adam and the future of mankind is altered for all of time.

We learn this story as very young children, and we must adjust and update our understanding of this *Torah* lesson as we mature. The purpose of the *Torah's* narration is not to entertain; it is to teach us practical lessons for life. We intuit that there is great depth to this story, but we must seek some level of understanding to be able to gain the self-awareness that is necessary to deal with our evil inclination.

Rav Samson R. Hirsch (1808-1888, leading Rabbi and *Chumash* commentator in Germany) understands that this story is a cautionary tale about how man's physical sensuousness entices him. We are tempted by the allure of physical pleasure to forget our morals. This temptation often leads us to rationalization. We can become quite philosophical when we justify depraved behavior, but the real rationale is the seeking of pleasure.

Rav Yisroel Salanter (1809 – 1883), the father of the *Mussar* movement, describes this as the internal *Yetzer Hara* - Evil Inclination. This is our natural gravitation to satisfy our animal spirit which lusts for pleasure. There are other internal tempters which he identifies as emerging from our imagination. We dream up all kinds of realities to strive for and many of them can destroy us. Ambition, greed, jealousy and lust for power are all forces in our psyche which can have a very positive function; yet they can also wreak havoc with our lives.

Reb Yisroel points out that this story also describes an external tempter. The serpent is the outside influence which introduces us to unseen temptation and to unknown influences. These can be societal pressure, a poorly chosen friend or an unexpected encounter with temptation which throws us off our equilibrium. We must recognize these as well and understand the potential harm these external temptations can have on us.

We are told this story as a cautionary tale. *Hashem* wants us to understand the enemy within and without so that we can be strategic and stay away from trouble before it happens. We have turned a new page after the exalted days of *Tishrei*, and when we head back into our daily lives we should strive to use this lesson well.