

If a Snake Offers You an Apple:

An exploration of the snake, the tree of life, and the tree of knowledge and Genesis 3's implications for human nature.

The Torah is the most foundational entity in Judaism. Jews and their ancestors have been reading its text for more than two millennia. Yet, even if all of us could read and understand biblical Hebrew perfectly, the language of the Torah is complex, at times odd and, at the same time, both bare and detailed. These two factors combined with the traditional notion of divine inspiration and authorship result in a Torah that is seemingly endlessly deep and, despite the more than 2,000 years of commentary, still evokes and needs more explanation.

Commentary on the Torah began almost as soon as the different aspects of the Bible were written down. From this text, the earliest Rabbis drew out meaning and elucidated both Halakhah, Jewish Law, and Aggadah, non-legal materials. In addition to the simpler explication of the mitzvot found in the Torah, these earliest Rabbis engaged in a process of biblical interpretation built on the concept of the divine quality of the language, that there was more meaning than the literal, face-value words. Out of this process came midrash, which developed into its own corpus, and, along with the more halakhic works, came to be thought of as the Oral Torah, whose contents were on par with that of the Written Torah even if the quality of the text was not. After these – the Midrashim, Mishnah, Talmud and Tosefot – were canonized, rabbinic study turned towards and relied upon these early rabbinic works.

Of course, commentary directly on the Bible never ceased and continues to this day. However, the next major source of commentary – that of the Rabbis from the Medieval Ages,

10th through 16th or so centuries – took on a different character. Instead of attempting to draw out meaning from the text, their primary purpose was to provide the proper reading of the text. This “proper” reading could be one of four types, each of which uses a slightly different process, and an individual Torah passage could contain multiple of these four types. These four types of readings can be summarized by one word, an acronym, PaRDeS, literally meaning “orchard” and often associated with paradise. This stands for *P’shat*, *Remez*, *D’rash*, and *Sod*. I have previously mentioned, briefly, the first two which are also the simplest and most common. *P’shat*, “simple” or “surface,” is the closest we can come to the literal meaning of the text. What the words mean individually and what the verse/story means when put together. *D’rash*, “seeking,” is the aforementioned process of midrashic interpretation, and certain commentators rely heavily on the already established canon of Midrashim. A common explanation, even though it is an oversimplification, of *d’rash* or *midrash* is reading the text in an attempt to fill in the white spaces of the Torah. *Remez*, “hint,” and *sod*, “secret,” are deeper levels of meaning and understanding. *Remez* can be thought of as allusion. That the text is hinting at or alluding to something beyond the scope of its literal or even midrashic meaning. *Sod* is deeper still. This is often of a mystical meaning, something of which true understanding is reserved for a select few and, perhaps, may at times be better left unexplained. In our study of Genesis Chapter 3 – the story of the Garden of Eden and man’s expulsion from it – and its interpretation by the Medieval Commentators, we will see at least one example of each of these types of meaning, *P’shat*, *Remez*, *D’rash*, and *Sod*.

This story, the Garden of Eden, is one of the earliest Bible stories we are taught and for good reason. It’s a captivating story that is easily adaptable for little kids and it teaches some great lessons: don’t talk to strangers and don’t accept candy from them, listen to God, and follow

the rules. However, is this really all there is to this chapter? Of course not. I have already presented four types of meaning, and this version does not fall into any of them. In reading the biblical text itself, which is how we will begin in just a moment, we might find that we remember the story differently and, hopefully, this will bring up some questions for us.

(Read Genesis Chapter 3)

So, after reading this chapter, what questions do you have about the story? What challenged you? What was confusing? What was difficult to understand? What is bothering you? (Great questions.) This is how the commentators begin and is a helpful way to approach their writing. As we read the Medieval Commentators, we need to keep in mind, “What is bothering Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Ramban, or Sforno (these are the main four from whom we will read), when they comment on the respective verses and phrases?” There are many such questions to discuss, so, instead of moving verse by verse in a surface manner, we will delve deeply into two topics: the snake and the tree of knowledge. Who/what are they? What are their natures? And what does this tell us about God’s/our natures? This may result in us jumping around, but keep this framework in mind as we explore the commentaries. Additionally, as we move through the text, we remember the acronym, PaRDeS, *p’shat*, *d’rash*, *remez*, and *sod*, which we set up earlier and try to consider which type of meaning/exegesis the commentator is elucidating. However, also remember that each commentator is providing, in their opinion, the correct meaning, *p’shat*, of the text, even if we might place it under a different category.

We begin at the beginning, Genesis 3:1, and, as is common, we begin with Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzkhak, 11th CE in France), who is considered one of the greatest exegetes of Jewish tradition. Commenting on “NOW THE SERPENT WAS MORE CUNNING,” Rashi asks “What is this matter doing mentioned here? It should have juxtaposed ‘And [God] made for Adam and

his wife garments of skin and He clothed them' (3:21).” Rashi, here, is bothered by what he sees as a break in thought. In Rashi’s commentary to verse 20 we read, “Scripture has returned to its original subject, ‘and the man assigned names’ (2:20).” Essentially, Rashi believes that the story at the end of chapter 2 leads directly into this verse, 3:20, skipping the story of the snake, so, he asks, why are these 19 verses about the Garden of Eden placed here. Returning to Rashi on 3:1, he explains, “But, [this placement] has taught you out of what notion the snake jumped at them; he saw them naked and engaging in relations, visible to all, and he desired her.” In other words, the placement of this story teaches us the intent of the snake – sexual attraction to Eve – in the story, and, in doing so, Rashi explains the catalyst for the expulsion from Eden, why this occurred at all.

Before we continue, let us go back and look at the actual text of the Bible, including the last verse of the previous chapter. Rashi says that the snake “desired” Eve. This is reiterated by Rashi on verse 15, “You (the snake) had no intention but that Adam should die when he would eat of the fruit first and you would marry Eve, and you only spoke to Eve first because women are easily persuaded, and they know how to persuade their husbands.” In any of these verses, 2:25-3:15, does the biblical text indicate that the snake desired the woman? They do not, and, therefore, Rashi is not explicating the literal meaning of the Torah. If this is not *p’shat*, the literal meaning, what is it and from where did Rashi get this interpretation? This is an example of *d’rash*, midrashic exegesis, and, specifically, Rashi is drawing from Genesis Rabbah, a major, canonical work of Midrash. This type of reference is common for Rashi. He is one of the commentators who most often brings in the *d’rash* and relies heavily upon established midrashim. In fact, the majority of his commentary on these first fifteen verse draw from Genesis Rabbah and consist of his filling in and clarifying the somewhat bizarre conversations of

this section. Even so, by bringing this *d'rash*, Rashi has begun to elucidate not only the location of this story but the nature of the snake itself.

Rashi adds some *p'shat* to this *d'rash* in verse 14. He explains, from the verse, “UPON YOUR BELLY SHALL YOU GO. It [the snake] had legs and they were cut off.” This is the simplest, most literal explanation of this verse. If the snake was cursed to crawl on its belly, it stands to reason that it previously had the ability to walk on legs. Moreover, this explanation seems to indicate that Rashi believed that the animal we know now as a snake was indeed the snake of this story. It may have been in its pre-cursed form, but this *nachash* was a snake – a physical, corporeal, separate entity – nonetheless. Although this seems to be the *p'shat* understanding, not all commentators agree on this point.

Sforno's (Rabbi Ovadia be Ya'akov Sforno, from 15th and 16th century Italy) understanding of the *nachash*, the snake, is dramatically different. On verse 1, he tells us, “AND THE SNAKE is another word for Satan, which is itself a way of describing the evil urge. (Baba Batra 16).” Like Rashi, Sforno is relying upon an external source to provide a midrashic understanding of the *nachash*, this time as a metaphor for Satan and one's internal evil urge. He continues, explaining this metaphor, “The reason why this evil urge is compared to a serpent is that just like a serpent which makes itself as invisible as possible, blending in with its environment, and yet causes more damage than the most prominently visible obstacles, so the evil urge lurks where one does not suspect to find it.”

This conceptual understanding of the *nachash* completely alters the nature of this story, particularly the conversation between the woman and the snake in verses 1 through 6. Rashi continues to use Genesis Rabbah to fill some of the holes in this conversation and create a ‘more complete’ text, but this remains an interaction between two entities, the snake and the woman.

For Sforino, verses 1 through 6 are the woman struggling with Satan and her inner evil urge, not an external dialogue, rather her internal monologue. This is Sforino's intent in verse 1, "AND HE SPOKE TO THE WOMAN, her relatively weak intellect was too lazy to understand that the images dangled before her eyes were a *fatah morgana*, illusion," i.e. there was no physical snake before her. Sforino actually gives voice to this inner monologue, for the woman said to herself, "even though God has said not to eat from the tree of knowledge, in order that you do not die, this is not true, you will not die." Then, he explains that "Once the 'serpent,' i.e. her power of imagination, had sown the seed of doubt in her mind, so that her intelligence had already been undermined, she said ..." and her self-argumentation continues until, according to Sforino, she finally convinces herself to eat the fruit in verse 5. The woman reasoned, "God did not forbid this fruit because it is lethal, but because He knows that through eating it you [I] will attain additional knowledge so that you [I] will be just like God, possessing total knowledge." Thus, to Sforino, the snake is not a physical entity but a metaphoric representation of the woman's own evil urge coupled with Satan.

Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra (11th and 12th CE Spain) gives no credence to the opinion of Sforino, for he believes the Biblical text itself contradicts this interpretation. In his commentary to verse 1, he states plainly, "Some say that the woman understood and knew the language of the animals. They interpret *and the serpent said* as meaning, that the serpent spoke through signs. Others say that the serpent was in reality Satan. Now why don't they look as what scripture states at the close of this chapter (v. 14 and v. 15)? How is Satan to crawl upon his belly or eat the dust of the ground? Furthermore, what meaning is there to the curse *they shall bruise they head* if the reference is to Satan?" Ibn Ezra points out that Satan, a divine being, cannot be punished in this way, so the snake cannot be identified with Satan, as Sforino and other

commentaries would like to claim. He continues with his own interpretation, “It appears to me that we are to interpret the account of the serpent literally. The serpent spoke and walked in an upright position. The One who gave intelligence to man also gave it to the serpent. Scripture itself bears witness that the serpent, although not as intelligent as man, *was more subtle* (*arum*) *than any beast of the field*. The meaning of *arum* (subtle) is wise, i.e. one who conducts his affairs intelligently.” This is *p’shat* at its best.

Ibn Ezra addresses another aspect of this very first verse. He notices a linguistic similarity between the word mentioned above, *arum*, “subtle” or “wise,” in this verse, 3:1, and the word “naked,” *arummim*, in the last verse of chapter 2. However, he delineates, “Now don’t be surprised that Scripture uses the term *arum* (subtle, in v. 1) after *arummim* (naked in Gen. 2:25) when each of these words has a different meaning. Scripture is being poetic. Similarly...,” and Ibn Ezra goes on to cite other examples of such linguistic behavior. This is fairly typical of Ibn Ezra, providing a linguistic/grammatical explanation for some aspect of the text. While he addresses these issues regularly, here he also prevents a possibility for midrashic explanation using these words, which it would appear he considers an inappropriate avenue for *d’rash*. Either way, Ibn Ezra makes a strong case that the *nachash* cannot be anything other than a snake, a physical creature which God initially created with intelligence and the ability to walk.

Although there is still more that could be addressed regarding the snake, and we will briefly return to one example at the very end, I want to switch now to investigate the two trees, for they have more impact on our understanding of the nature of humanity and God. Let’s start with the simplest question, what type of tree was the Tree of Knowledge. We often see it represented as an apple or pomegranate tree, but, on verse 7, Rashi states clearly, “A FIG LEAF. That is the tree from which they ate. By the very thing through which they came to ruin, they

were corrected.” However, on the previous verse, Ibn Ezra makes his own claim, explicating that “Many commentators say that the tree of knowledge was a fig tree. They base their assertion on *and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves girdles* (v. 7). However, if this interpretation were correct, the Torah would say, ‘and they sewed leaves of the tree of the knowledge.’ Many others say that it was a wheat plant. However, in my opinion the two trees in the midst of the garden were unique species not found anywhere else on the face of the earth.” Although interesting, the type of tree does not affect nor provide insight into the effect eating of its fruits had on humanity.

For this, we must turn back to the first mention of the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge, Chapter 2 Verse 9. Let’s start with the tree of life and build from there. Ramban (Nachmanides, Rabbi Moses ben Nachman, 13th CE Spain), and subsequently Ibn Ezra, are very clear on this topic. On 2:9, Ramban states, “AND THE TREE OF LIFE. This was a tree the fruit of which gave those who ate it long life.” Ibn Ezra confirms this in his commentary to 3:7; however, he continues “*Le-olam* (v. 22) does not mean forever.” Thus, while Ramban does not directly address the issue of immortality here, as does Ibn Ezra, they both agree that the Tree of life causes life. Therefore, if we set these two trees up in contrast with one another, while Tree of Life causes life, the Tree of Knowledge, as its opposite, causes death, which seems to be the case, “but as for the tree of knowledge of good and evil, you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die” (Genesis 2:17).

From this comparison, it would appear that the fruit itself is the cause of death, though what type of death is still unclear. Sforno seems to agree with this comparison in his commentary on 2:17 and confirms this in 3:19, stating, “YOU WILL REVERT TO DUST, just as I (God) had informed you when I commanded and said *on the day you eat from it you shall*

die, that you will be prepared for death at the end” i.e. you will become mortal. However, Ramban and Ibn Ezra both disagree with Sforno on this source of the cause of death, not the fruit but their sin of breaking God’s command. Ramban explains on 2:17 that “At the time you eat of it, you will be condemned to die. ... This does not mean that he is going to die immediately on that day; nor does it refer to his mere knowledge thereof, namely that he is to know that he will die eventually *for all the living know that they shall die* (Eccl. 9:5). ... Their intent is but only that they will be liable to death and will die on account of this sin of theirs.” Likewise, Ibn Ezra comments on 3:22, “The Holy One, blessed be He, wanted His decree concerning the death of Adam to be fulfilled, and if he were to eat of the tree of life which was created to give everlasting life to those who ate of its fruit, the decree would be nullified; for either he would not die at all or his day of death would not come at the time it was decreed for him and his descendants to die.” Although Sforno, Ramban, and Ibn Ezra disagree on the specifics, all three indicate that, despite what the verse says, the death is not immediate.

In these comments, all three also reference man’s mortality in one manner or another. Sforno essentially states and Ramban hints that the result of eating of the Tree of Knowledge was man becoming mortal. This, then, begs the question, was man immortal before this event? Sforno certainly seems to indicate that man was indeed immortal prior to their punishment, again, “that you will be prepared for death at the end” i.e. you will become mortal. Ramban, however, seems split, for he presents two different viewpoints with regard to 2:17. First, the scientific view:

“Now in the opinion of men versed in the sciences of nature, man was destined to die from the beginning of his formation on account of his being a composite. But now He decreed that if he will sin he will die on account of his sins, like those who are liable to death at the hands of Heaven ... the intent is that they will die prematurely on account of their

sin. This is why in stating the punishment He said, *till thou return to the ground; for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return* (3:19), by your nature.”

For men of science, man was never immortal, but this sin shortened man’s life. Then, there is the Rabbinic and faith-based view:

“But in the opinion of our Rabbis,” referring to Shabbat 58b, “if Adam had not sinned he would have never died, since the higher soul bestows life forever, and the Will of God which is in him at the time of his formation would always cleave to him and he would exist forever.... Men of faith who say that the world was created by the simple Will of God, its existence will also continue forever as long as it is His desire. This is clear truth. That being so, *In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die* means that then you will be condemned to die since you will no longer exist forever by My Will.”

This Rabbinic view is the option which Ramban seems to prefer. Ibn Ezra, however, despite being a Rabbi, corresponds with the men of science. He expounds (3:6), even referring specifically to a man of science:

“Some commentators insist that the verse *for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die* (2:17) indicates that man was created immortal and that he became mortal as a punishment for his sin.... Now this is absurd. Man and beast both share a common spirit (life force) through which they live and experience sensations in this world. As animals are destined to die, so must man die. ... A Greek physician has proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that it is impossible for man to live forever.”

This leaves us with two options. Either man was immortal at first and became mortal through eating of the tree, whether due to the fruit itself or as a punishment, or man was always mortal but is now destined to die, perhaps earlier, on account of Adam and Eve’s sin.

Of course, in addition to causing death, the tree also gives the “knowledge of good and evil.” In the same way we asked about man’s immortality prior to Genesis 3, so too must we ask

about man's knowledge. What knowledge does this tree bestow upon man that humankind was lacking prior to eating of its fruit? Sforno addresses this on 2:9, "AND THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE, a tree whose fruit results in those who eat from it gaining greater understanding of the relationship of good and evil. ... In our verse we are told that the words *da'at, yada* (knowledge) do not primarily refer to factual knowledge but conceptual knowledge." From this we understand that man had understanding prior to this point, but this ability increased, with regards to conceptual not factual knowledge. He continues, specifically addressing and elucidating "GOOD AND EVIL, to choose that which appeared as appealing to the senses even though it would prove harmful, and to despise anything which did not appeal to his senses although he knew it to be useful to him." This is hedonism. Sforno suggests that eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil gave man a predilection towards that which pleases one's senses, choosing only that which seems good for one's physical being and completely ignoring one's spiritual existence.

Sforno's definition of hedonism may have included Ibn Ezra's definition as well. On 2:17, Ibn Ezra explains, "Note that Adam was an intelligent being, for God would not direct commands to one who was unintelligent. He was deficient in the knowledge of *good and evil* of only one thing." Although he continues and provides evidence for Adam's intelligence, Ibn Ezra does not reveal this "one thing" until Genesis 3:6. "One of them the tree of knowledge, possessed the power to instill sexual desire. Therefore, the man and woman covered their nakedness. ... Upon eating of the tree of knowledge, Adam knew (*yada*) his wife. *Yada* (knew) is a euphemism for sexual intercourse." To Ibn Ezra, knowledge of good and evil equates sexual desire. Interestingly, Ibn Ezra uses circular logic to defend this position, "Sexual intercourse is called 'knowledge' because sexual desire came from the tree of knowledge. Moreover, a young man

begins to have sexual desire at the age at which he begins to ‘know’ good and evil,” which is why this tree is specifically known as the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Again, Ramban and Ibn Ezra disagree, for the Ramban says with regards to 2:9, “The commentators have said that the fruit thereof caused those who ate it to have a desire for sexual intercourse, ... But in my opinion this interpretation is not correct since the serpent said, *and ye shall be as Elohim, knowing good and evil* (3:5). And if you say the serpent lied to her, *And the Eternal God said, ‘behold man has become like one of us knowing good and evil’* (3:22).” Since the fruit of this tree makes one like the divine beings and since divine beings have no sexual desire, the knowledge of good and evil cannot be sexual knowledge. Instead, Ramban suggests, “The proper interpretation appears to me to be that man’s original nature was such that he did whatever was proper for him to do naturally, just as the heavens and all their hosts do ... and in whose deeds there is no love or hatred.” In other words, man lived by instinct and obedience alone. However, “Now it was the fruit of this tree that gave rise to will and desire, that those who ate it should choose a thing or its opposite, for good or for evil. This is why it was called *‘etz hada’ath’* (*the tree of knowledge*) *of good and evil*, for *da’ath* in our language is used to express will.” Thus, knowledge of good and evil equates to the power of desire, choice and freewill, all of which man would have lacked prior to Genesis 3. Ramban confirms this opinion in the next chapter on verse 6.

Here too, actually one verse later 3:7, Rashi makes a similar point to the Ramban. He explains, “AND WERE OPENED. Regarding the matter of wisdom did the verse speak, and not regarding the matter of actual sight.” Rashi does not clarify here what he means by wisdom, but it seems to trend more towards Ramban’s view than that of Ibn Ezra. The closest Rashi gets to defining this quality may be in verse 5. In comparison to God, Rashi exegetes, “FOR [GOD]

KNOWS. [The serpent said] ‘Every craftsman hates others of his craft; [God] ate from the tree and created the world.’ AND YOU WILL BE LIKE GOD. Fashioner of worlds.” Again, building off of Genesis Rabbah, Rashi equates this knowledge, the result of eating the fruit to the power of creation, which differs from Ramban (freewill), Ibn Ezra (sexual desire) and Sforno (conceptual knowledge and hedonistic tendencies).

This comment by Rashi may cause more problems than it helps solve, for, although he is not presently concerned with God’s infinite power in this verse, suggesting God ate from the tree of knowledge in order to create the world is a serious limit to God’s power and role in Creation. What does this story teach us about man with regard to God’s nature? The best place to engage with this question is with verse 22, where man is being expelled from the garden because “he has become like one of Us.” Rashi shifts focus and explains, “See now that he is unique in the lower realms as I am unique in the higher realms. And what is his uniqueness? ‘To know good and bad,’ (the power of creation?) which is not true of animals and beasts.” Thus, one option to describe this verse is that man and God are unique in the power of creation, which justifies the expulsion. According to Rashi, “once he were to live forever, see now that he would be close to leading people astray to saying that he, too, is a god,” which breaks a major (future) commandment.

Sforno takes a different direction. This verse, 22, does not mean that they would be like God, rather that they still looked like God. He explains, “he will know good and evil even while continuing to wear ‘our image.’ This would be an intolerable situation, as despite his tendency to give in to his evil urge he would live on forever. In such circumstances, this Adam whose evil urge was active, would continue to chase the material blessings of this world, something which would prevent him from reaching the spiritual aims set for him on earth when God made him in

the divine image.” This is a lengthy way of saying that man, who is made in the image of God, ought not be a hedonist, as it is bad for him, the world and God, and mortality is a main deterrent to such a life. Ramban and Ibn Ezra both take different routes as well. Ramban, as mentioned previously, explains that the reason man had to be expelled was to maintain God’s dictum that he should die as a result of eating of the tree, see comment on 3:22. Ibn Ezra suggests that this verse does not refer to God at all, but to the angels/divine beings, just as it does when the snake uses this similar phrase in verse 5.

To this point we have covered several verses and experienced both *p’shat* and *d’rash*. We have explored the nature of the *nachash*, whether as a snake or as a metaphor for Satan and the evil urge, and we have examined the nature of the trees of life and knowledge of good and evil as well as their impact on human nature. In this examination, we focused on what mankind lost and gained as a result of eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. We lost immortality, or perhaps just an extended lifespan, but what did we gain? Ibn Ezra suggested sexual desire, which according to the Rabbis is not a good thing. Likewise, a hedonistic drive, as per Sforno, is not a good thing either, though his suggestion of better conceptual knowledge may be beneficial. On the other hand, Ramban’s suggestion, that we gained freewill through eating of the tree of knowledge, is absolutely and unequivocally a positive gain.

This, however, raises an important question, why was something positive forbidden to humanity. With this, we have arrived in the realm of *sod*, secrecy. Ramban does address, or at least raise, this question and another problem he sees in the text, about the snake. Towards the end of his commentary on this chapter, 3:22, he says,

“Now if the fruit of the tree were good for the food and he desired it to become wise, why did He withhold it from him? Indeed, God is kind and

dealeth kindly; *He will withhold no good thing from them that walk uprightly!* (Ps 84:12) The serpent moreover, has today no speaking faculty, and if it did have it at first, He would surely have mentioned in His curse that its mouth become dumb, as this would have been the most grievous curse of all. But all these things are twofold in meaning, the overt and the concealed in them both being true.”

While these questions are troubling Ramban, he makes no attempt to elucidate either of these issues. Instead, he simply hints that there is a “concealed” meaning, *sod*, behind the literal, *p’shat*. Similarly, Ibn Ezra concludes his commentary on this chapter, 3:24, with such inquiry. He expounds beyond the *p’shat* or even the *d’rash*, jumping to both *sod*, the secret meaning, and *remez*, the allusions of this passage. After this, we will have seen examples of each PaRDeS and explored in depth two important aspects of this story through the eyes of the Medieval Rabbinic commentators, primarily Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Ramban and Sforno. Since this final passage by Ibn Ezra is so complex and returns us to the larger context of the story we will end here, and I will not even attempt to elucidate the meaning of this final comment. Instead, I leave it to each of you to ponder Ibn Ezra’s final thought on the Garden of Eden.

“Note, the story of the garden of Eden is to be interpreted literally. There is no doubt that it happened exactly as described in Scripture. Nevertheless, it also has a secret meaning (*sod*). It alludes to the following: Intellect (the Garden of Eden) gave birth to desire (the tree of knowledge). Desire gave birth to man’s actions. It is via his actions that man can elevate himself, for the force that propels his desire is in from of him (one’s genitals). The fig leaves prove this. Man’s actions are also called the testing ground, for by them man is tried. Intellect and desire are only potential. The one who understands the secrets of the tree of knowledge will understand the secret of the four rivers that divide into four parts (2:10). This is the secret of the Garden of Eden and the garments of skin. There is also an allusion in all this to man’s potential immortality (the tree of life). The intelligent will understand that this is the ultimate purpose of man’s life on earth.”

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