



Forbidden Fruit

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***Parshas Kedoshim* mentions the prohibition against *orlah*, which forbids benefitting from the fruit of a tree for the first three years after it is planted. This prohibition applies even if such a tree becomes confused with ordinary trees. Thus the *Mishnah* states:**

When a plant which is *orlah*... becomes mixed with other plants, one should not harvest [any of the fruit]. If one *did* harvest, the prohibited [fruit] becomes *batul* (nullified) when it is mixed with a permitted substance 201 times greater. The *Mishnah* teaches that when a plant which is *orlah* becomes mixed with other plants, one should not harvest any of the fruit, for we follow the principle: "At the outset, one should not nullify a forbidden substance." But when the forbidden plant is mixed with 201 permitted plants (for unlike other substances prohibited by the Torah, which become nullified when mixed with 60 times more of a permitted substance, *orlah* requires 201 times its size) and the fruit has already been harvested, it can be eaten.

The implication is that *orlah* cannot become nullified until after it is harvested. While the fruit is on the tree, neither it nor the tree itself can be nullified, reflecting the principle: Whenever a plant is *mechubar*, connected to its source, it cannot become nullified.

Retaining Identity

All the laws stated in *nigleh*, the revealed dimension of the Torah, contain lessons for our Divine service. Similarly, the concept that a substance can become *batul* when mixed with a large quantity of another substance teaches us several lessons. For example: Since the Jews are "the smallest among the nations," one might wonder how it is possible for them not to become mixed together with the rest of humanity.

The law stated above helps resolve this quandry. Jews are *always* "connected to their source of nurture." Wherever a Jew lives, he is connected to G-d, and therefore his existence will never become nullified. Even though we live among the nations, we are "a nation which dwells alone, not to be reckoned among [other] nations."

It is written: "I, G-d, have not changed, nor have you, children of Yaakov, been destroyed." Just as it is impossible for G-d to change, for He exists in the past, present, and future without variation, so too the Jewish people have not been -- and cannot be -- destroyed. It is written: "And you who cling to G-d... are all alive today."

Retaining Identity

It is also possible to offer a non-literal interpretation of the above verse. *Kelisem*, translated as "destroyed," also relates to the term *kalus hanefesh*, the expiration of the soul in yearning for G-d. In this context, the verse can be interpreted as a rhetorical question. Since the Jews see that "I, G-d, have not changed," the question arises: Why doesn't this motivate them to yearn for G-d until their souls expire?

All the interpretations of a verse are connected to each other. Even a Jew who is not moved to *kalus hanefesh* by the knowledge that G-d has not changed (the second interpretation of the verse) is still connected to his source. As such, his Jewish identity will not be nullified by the influence of secular society (the first interpretation of the verse).

It is, however, necessary for the Jews' connection to G-d to be openly displayed, as it is written: "And all the nations of the world shall see that the name of G-d is called upon you." When the nations see the Jews' connection with G-d, neither they nor any other element of creation will oppose the Jews. Instead, they will be in awe of G-d's people, and offer them assistance in fulfilling their Divine service.

Indeed, this is the purpose of all existence, as the *Mishnah* teaches: "[All these elements of existence] were created solely to serve me; and I was created solely to serve my Creator."

Rectifying the Sin of the Tree of Knowledge

The foregoing concept -- that an entity connected to its source cannot be nullified -- is taught by the *Mishnah* with regard to *orlah*. As explained, the observance of this prohibition compensates for the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge. In the teachings of *Kabbalah* and *Chassidus*, it is explained that the Sin of the Tree of Knowledge caused the powers of *kelipah* to oppose the powers of holiness. *Kelipah* had existed before the sin, but did not contend with holiness. On the contrary, like a shell which protects the fruit, *kelipah* had a positive purpose.

By absorbing the lesson to be derived from the laws of *orlah*, and emphasizing the connection between the Jews and G-d, we can correct the damage brought about by the Sin of the Tree of Knowledge. And then, not only will the Jews not become assimilated among the nations, but the gentiles will appreciate that the purpose of their existence is to assist the Jews, recreating the state before the sin, when *kelipah* served as a positive influence.

This will lead to the coming of the ultimate Redemption, led by *Mashiach*, when we will witness the fulfillment of the prophecy: "And foreigners will arise and pasture your sheep." May it take place in the immediate future.