

## Some Answered Questions, Adam and Eve

'Abdu'l-Bahá

Translated. Original Persian



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### Adam and Eve

Question: What is the truth of the story of Adam and His eating from the tree?

Answer: It is recorded in the Torah that God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden to work and tend it, and said to Him: "Eat freely of every tree of the garden, save for the tree of good and evil, for if thou wert to eat thereof thou wouldst surely die." Then it is said that God caused Adam to sleep, took a bone from His ribs, and created a woman to be His companion. Further on it is said that the serpent tempted the woman to eat of the tree, saying: "God has forbidden you to eat from the tree, that your eyes may not be opened and that you may not discern good from evil." Then Eve ate from the tree and gave unto Adam, who also ate. Whereupon their eyes were opened, they found themselves naked, and they covered their nakedness with leaves. God then reproached them, saying to Adam: "Hast Thou eaten of the forbidden tree?" Adam answered: "Eve tempted Me." God then reproved Eve, who said: "The serpent tempted me." For this the serpent was cursed, and enmity was established between the serpent and Eve and between their descendants. And God said: "The man is become like unto Us, knowing good and evil. Perhaps He will eat of the tree of life and live forever." So God guarded the tree of life.

If we were to take this account according to the literal meaning of the words as indicated by their common usage, it would indeed be exceedingly strange, and human minds would be excused from accepting, affirming, or imagining it. For such elaborate arrangements and details, such statements and reproaches would be implausible even coming from an intelligent person, let alone from the Divinity Himself, Who has arranged this infinite universe in the most perfect form and arrayed its countless beings in the utmost order, soundness, and perfection.

One must pause awhile to reflect: If the outward meaning of this account were to be attributed to a wise man, all men of wisdom would assuredly deny it, arguing that such a scheme and arrangement could not possibly have proceeded from such a person. The account of Adam and Eve, their eating from the tree, and their expulsion from Paradise are therefore symbols and divine mysteries. They have all-embracing meanings and marvellous interpretations, but only the intimates of the divine mysteries and the well-favoured of the all-sufficing Lord are aware of the true significance of these symbols.

These verses of the Torah have therefore numerous meanings. We will explain one of them and will say that by "Adam" is meant the spirit of Adam and by "Eve" is meant His self. For in certain passages of the Sacred Scriptures where women are mentioned, the intended meaning is the



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human self. By “the tree of good and evil” is meant the material world, for the heavenly realm of the spirit is pure goodness and absolute radiance, but in the material world light and darkness, good and evil, and all manner of opposing realities are to be found.

The meaning of the serpent is attachment to the material world. This attachment of the spirit to the material world led to the banishment of the self and spirit of Adam from the realm of freedom to the world of bondage and caused Him to turn from the kingdom of Divine Unity to the world of human existence. When once the self and spirit of Adam entered the material world, He departed from the paradise of freedom and descended into the realm of bondage. He had abided in the heights of sanctity and absolute goodness, and set foot thereafter in the world of good and evil.

By “the tree of life” is meant the highest degree of the world of existence, that is, the station of the Word of God and His universal Manifestation. That station was indeed well guarded, until it appeared and shone forth in the supreme revelation of His universal Manifestation. For the station of Adam, with regard to the appearance and manifestation of the divine perfections, was that of the embryo; the station of Christ was that of coming of age and maturation; and the dawning of the Most Great Luminary was the station of the perfection of the essence and the attributes. That is why in the all-highest Paradise the tree of life alludes to the focal centre of absolute sanctity and purity, that is, the universal Manifestation of God. For from the days of Adam until the time of Christ there was little mention of life eternal and of the all-embracing perfections of the Kingdom on high. This tree of life alludes to the station of the reality of Christ: It was planted in His Dispensation and adorned with everlasting fruits.

Now consider how closely this interpretation conforms to reality: For when the spirit and the self of Adam became attached to the material world, they passed from the realm of freedom into the realm of bondage; this condition was perpetuated with each succeeding generation, and this attachment of spirit and self to the material world—which is sin—was inherited by His descendants. This attachment is the serpent which will forever be in the midst of, and at enmity with, the spirits of the descendants of Adam, for attachment to the world has become the cause of the bondage of the spirits. This bondage is that sin which has been transmitted from Adam to His descendants, for it has deprived men of recognizing their essential spirituality and attaining to exalted stations.

When the holy breaths of Christ and the sanctified lights of the Most Great Luminary were spread abroad, human realities—that is, those souls who turned towards the Word of God and partook of His manifold grace—were saved from this attachment and sin, were granted eternal life, were delivered from the chains of bondage, and entered the realm of freedom. They were purged of earthly vices and endowed with heavenly virtues. This is the meaning of Christ’s words that I gave My blood for the life of the world. That is, I chose to bear all these trials, afflictions, and calamities, even the most great martyrdom, to attain this ultimate objective and to ensure the remission of sins—that is, the detachment of spirits from the material world and their attraction to the divine realm—that souls may arise who will be the very essence of guidance and the manifestations of the perfections of the Kingdom on high.

Note that if these words were taken literally, as imagined by the people of the Book, it would be sheer injustice and absolute predestination. If Adam sinned in approaching the forbidden tree,

what then was the sin of glorious Abraham, the Friend of God, and the error of Moses, Who conversed with God? What was the offence of Noah the Prophet and the transgression of truth-speaking Joseph? What was the fault of the Prophets of God and the failure of John the Chaste? Would divine justice have suffered these luminous Manifestations to endure, by reason of Adam's sin, the torment of hell until such time as Christ should come and by His sacrifice rescue them from the nethermost fire? Such a notion is beyond the pale of every rule and principle, and no rational person can ever accept it.

Rather, the meaning is that which was already mentioned: Adam is the spirit of Adam and Eve His self; the tree is the material world and the serpent is attachment to it. This attachment, which is sin, has been transmitted to the descendants of Adam. Through the breaths of holiness, Christ rescued souls from this attachment and delivered them from this sin.

This sin in Adam, moreover, is relative to His station: Although this worldly attachment produced substantial results, yet in relation to attachment to the spiritual realm it is nonetheless regarded as a sin, and the truth of the saying, "The good deeds of the righteous are the sins of the near ones" is established. Again, it is like the power of the body, which is imperfect in relation to the power of the spirit—indeed, it is sheer weakness in comparison. Likewise, material life, compared to eternal existence and the life of the Kingdom, is regarded as death. Thus Christ referred to this material life as death and said, "let the dead bury their dead". Although those souls enjoyed material life, yet in His eyes that life was even as death.

This is but one of the meanings of the biblical account of Adam. Reflect, that you may discover the others.