

Rabbi's Article III

Hand it on to 'THE' Tree

Our parsha has a verse (-Deuteronomy 21:22), "If a man commits a sin for which he is sentenced to death, and he is put to death, you shall [then] hang him on a pole," teaching us that specific cases of capital punishment, in which the corpse is then to be hung, "so that they will see and learn." Rabbi Isaac Luria, known as the Arizal (-[Link](#)) used this verse in the eulogy for his study-partner, Rabbi Moshe Cordova, known as the RaMaC (-[Link](#)). To understand what the Arizal said, let us first have the literal translation of the verse, "When a person will have a sin with a judgement of death, and he will be killed, and you shall hang him on the tree." The word for "sin" in this verse is *chet*, which is also used to mean *lacking*¹. The word for "(...hang) him" is *ohtoh*, which also means *it*. Hence, the Arizal said, "When one is 'lacking' a reason (judgement) to die --for he has done no sins, so why should he die²-- and he died, that you should 'hang it' --his death, blame it-- on the Tree --the Tree of Knowledge, through which there was the decree of death upon mankind-- this (alone) is why he died." Simply speaking, the Arizal's interpretation of the verse is similar to the saying of our sages (-Shabbat 55b), "There were four³ who --being that they had no sins-- had died from the 'Advice of the Serpent --which convinced Eve to eat from the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge.'" However, in truth, not only is the Arizal's homiletic teaching on the verse referring to "Died from the 'Advice of the Serpent,'" but additionally, the Arizal is innovating a new understanding with his teaching.

The difference between, "Died from the 'Advice of the Serpent'," and, "Hang it upon the tree," is, not just one of semantics, but also one of context. The Advice of the Serpent to Eve was to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, meaning the Advice of the Serpent was actual evil, and advice to sin. While the Arizal's words of, "Hang it upon the tree," speaks only of the item through which Adam sinned. However, the tree itself was not a problem. Quite the contrary! Rashi teaches us (-Genesis 3:7), that according to the *Simple Meaning of the Text*, "this tree was a fig tree, which is one of the *Seven Kinds*⁴ (of produce) with which the Land of Israel is praised! Plus, the name of the tree was, "of Knowledge," was to bring the novelty of Knowledge, and the sin to eat from this tree of Knowledge," according to our sages (-Sha"CH on the Torah, Leviticus 19:23, d"h *Oid V'nitatem*), was only for the three hours from when Adam and Eve were placed into the garden of Eden on Friday, until Shabbat would begin! Meaning, that the Arizal was only speaking of a "cause to a cause --the tree which made possible the sin, if he would eat from it while it was still (for the three hours) a compilation of good and evil," but not of the sin itself, which directly caused the decree of death upon mankind.

In other words, in accordance with the language of the Midrash (-Tachuma, Vayeishev 4): At the time of creation⁵, it was already the thought of G-d that there be death in the world. Therefore, already on the first day of creation, G-d created the Angel of Death. However, being that (-Psalms 66:5), "Awesome (nora: also terrifying) are His plots upon mankind," it was established that the actual decree of death would come through Adam. G-d therefore placed an overwhelmingly difficult test of the tree of Knowledge upon Adam, planting the tree in the garden of Eden, where it was part of the (-Genesis 2:9), "Every tree pleasant to see and good to eat," only because through this shall be the actual decree of death in the world.

This then is the difference between the Revealed Teachings --the Talmud, which speaks of the revealed and actual concept of death, while the Hidden Teachings --of the Arizal, a kabbalist, in his speaking of the RaMaC, also a kabbalist, which speaks of the Advice of the Serpent, but of the Tree, the Tree of Knowledge, with which G-d tested Adam with, for the sake of G-d's blessed will and intention for creation.

Deeper Yet: "Died from the 'Advice of the Serpent'," and, "Hang it upon the tree," speak of two different types of Righteous Ones. "Died from the 'Advice of the Serpent'," refers to the Righteous, who even though they do not sin, nevertheless, their death is the outcome of their being effected by the "Filth of the Serpent". The Alter Rebbe explains (-Torah Ohr, end of Parshat Mishpatim) that these four Righteous Ones were not able to completely remove from themselves the consciousness of self, ego in its most refined level, which is of what the Filth of the Serpent brought into mankind. Hence, these four, although absolutely righteous, holy, and clean of sin, nevertheless, they died by the "Advice of the Serpent", meaning, they still had within themselves some dust of the "Filth of the Snake" which was the reason of their death. Greater than this are those whose death were from, "Hang it upon the tree". Just as the Flaw of Sin can only effect the exterior of a Jew, while his interior remains complete, so too, the "Filth of the Serpent", ego, can only effect the exterior of a Jew, not his interior. Therefore, when the interior of a Jew's soul is openly illuminating him, as far as to also penetrate his exterior, then for him there exists no, "Died by the 'Advice of the Serpent'". Thus, when the Arizal said, "There is by him no reason for death," he was including even the reason of the, "Serpents Advice -Filth"! Therefore, what exists for such a Righteous One is only the, "Hang it upon the tree," and, "Awesome are His plots upon mankind". Therefore, this is connected with the Arizal and the RaMaC, whose essence were the revelation of the Hidden Teachings, which is connected with the revelation of the Hidden --interior-- of the Soul. And as it is known (-Raya M'hemna, Naso, 124b) that the Hidden Teachings are the Tree of Life, which is higher than, and untouchable by, the Tree of Knowledge, which is the Revealed Teachings.

Amazingly enough, since the work of the Arizal, when it now became a, "Mitzva to reveal this (Hidden) Wisdom," which reveals the Hidden of the Soul, we are all connected to the, "Hang it on the tree"! For the, "Advice of the Serpent," which depends upon the refinement of the Exterior of our Soul, is reachable by the Righteous Ones. While the "Hang it on the tree," which depends upon the Hidden of the Soul, which is by every Jew is complete, and is now revealed, through the study of the, "Mitzva to reveal this (Hidden) Wisdom," to the point that it transforms his Exterior of the Soul, as well!!!

The Lesson: We must learn and teach the Wellsprings of Chassidus, to touch and transform the Exterior, cleansing us of sin, which is the cause of our exile, and thus, to bring Moshiach now!

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1. See for example in Kings I (-1:21), " *And I and my son Solomon shall be chatoim,*" Rashi: "Chatoim': *Lacking.*"
2. Originally, the human, like the sun, moon, etc. were meant to not die, and exist forever. It is only when Adam sinned, eating the forbidden fruit of the *Tree of Knowledge*, which now became part of his *flesh and blood*, that the human could no longer live forever.
3. "And they are: *Benjamin, son of Jacob; Amram, father of Moses; Yishai, father of David; and Kilab, son of David.*"
4. Wheat, barley, grapes, pomegranates, grapes, olives, dates and figs ([Link](#)).
5. The Tanchuma brings its proof from the fact that, "The Torah preceded the world by 2,000 years," and in the Torah it is already written (-Numbers 19:14), "When a man dies in a tent..."