

Rambam on Man in the Garden of Eden

Notes by Natan Slifkin¹

There are two places in the *Guide* where Rambam discusses the episode of man in the Garden of Eden. The first is towards the beginning of Part One.

Part One, Chapter II: Some years ago a learned man asked me a question of great importance; the problem and the solution which we gave in our reply deserve the closest attention. (Here Rambam inserts a prefatory comment that we are omitting here, but which we shall cite and discuss later.) "It would appear from Scripture at first sight," said the objector, "that man was originally intended to be perfectly equal to the rest of the animal creation, which is not endowed with intellect, reason, or power of distinguishing between good and evil: but that Adam's disobedience to the command of God procured him that great perfection which is the peculiarity of man, viz., the power of distinguishing between good and evil—the noblest of all the faculties of our nature, the essential characteristic of the human race. It thus appears strange that the punishment for rebelliousness should be the means of elevating man to a pinnacle of perfection to which he had not attained previously. This is equivalent to saying that a certain man was rebellious and extremely wicked, wherefore his nature was changed for the better, and he was made to shine as a star in the heavens."

The questioner is asking as follows: Before the sin, man did not know good and evil, and thus was surely like an animal in lacking intellectual development. After the sin, man knows good and evil, and is thus intellectually developed, and became unlike an animal, and more like God. So how did man possess the image of God before the sin? And in which way was he punished?

Such was the purport and subject of the question, though not in the exact words of the inquirer. Now mark our reply, which was as follows: "You appear to have studied the matter superficially, and nevertheless you imagine that you can understand a book which has been the guide of past and present generations, when you for a moment withdraw from your lusts and appetites, and glance over its contents as if you were reading a historical work or some poetical composition. Collect your thoughts and examine the matter carefully, for it is not to be understood as you at first sight think, but as you will find after due deliberation; namely, the intellect which was granted to man as the highest endowment, was bestowed on him before his disobedience. With reference to this gift the Bible states that "man was created in the image and likeness of God."

¹ Adapted from a lecture series by Dr. Esti Eisenman, Machon Lander, and from Marvin Fox, *Interpreting Maimonides* (University of Chicago Press 1990). Translations of the *Guide* taken from the Friedlander edition—a poor translation, but available in the public domain.

In Part I Chapter 1 of the *Guide*, Rambam explained that *to'ar* is the word for physical appearance. *Tzelem*, on the other hand, refers to the essence. *Tzelem Elokim* is the *sechel*, the rational faculty. Man was certainly created from the outset with this.

On account of this gift of intellect man was addressed by God, and received His commandments, as it is said: "And the Lord God commanded Adam" (Gen. ii. 16)--for no commandments are given to the brute creation or to those who are devoid of understanding. Through the intellect man distinguishes between the true and the false. This faculty Adam possessed perfectly and completely.

Rambam answers that there is a difference between knowing good and evil and knowing truth and falsehood. Even though man, before the sin, could not distinguish between good and evil, he nevertheless possessed an intellect, and as such was qualitatively different from an animal. There is evidence of this in that he was able to receive a commandment. One cannot command an animal. One can only *train* an animal – reinforcing desired behavior with reward and punishment.

The right and the wrong are terms employed in the science of accepted conventions (*mefursamot*), not in that of rational knowledge (*muskalot*), as, e.g., it is not correct to say, in reference to the proposition "the heavens are spherical," it is "good" or to declare the assertion that "the earth is flat" to be "bad": but we say of the one it is true, of the other it is false. Similarly our language expresses the idea of true and false by the terms *emet* and *sheker*, but of the morally right and the morally wrong, by *tov* and *ra*. Thus it is the function of the intellect to discriminate between the true and the false--a distinction which is applicable to all objects of intellectual perception.

In Rambam's system (based on Aristotle, and in contrast to Plato), there are four different types of knowledge:

1. Rational knowledge (*muskalot*).

This knowledge is objective and unchanging, relating to truth and falsehood, and is entirely independent of man. The laws of nature fall into this category.

2. Sensory knowledge (*muchashot*).

A person's hands can feel warmth – this is sensory knowledge.

3. Knowledge acquired via tradition (*mekubalot*).

An example would be the knowledge that we have acquired from the Torah.

4. Accepted conventions (*mefursamot*).

These are universally understood ethical norms, established by common consent – e.g. that killing, stealing is bad. These differ from *mekubalot* in that they have inherent sense to them and are found across all cultures, albeit with some variation. But they are not related to the intellect and are not a matter of true or false; stealing is not "false." Judaism is also a system of *mefursamot*, albeit of a superior nature due to it being divinely instructed. Thus, with religious laws, there is no true/false, only good/bad. The process of enforcing this knowledge is training, just like with an animal.

When Adam was yet in a state of innocence, and was guided solely by reflection and reason--on account of which it is said: "You have made him (man) little lower than the angels" (Ps. viii. 6)--he was not at all able to follow or to understand the principles of *mefursamot*; the most manifest impropriety, viz., to appear in a state of nudity, was nothing unbecoming according to his idea: he could not comprehend why it should be so. After man's disobedience, however, when he began to give way to desires which had their source in his imagination and to the gratification of his bodily appetites, as it is said, "And the wife saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to the eyes" (Gen. iii. 6), he was punished by the loss of part of that intellectual faculty which he had previously possessed. He therefore transgressed a command with which he had been charged on the score of his reason; and having obtained a knowledge of the *mefursamot*, he was wholly absorbed in the study of what is proper and what improper. Then he fully understood the magnitude of the loss he had sustained, what he had forfeited, and in what situation he was thereby placed.

The questioner was wrong to think that not knowing good and evil is a deficiency. It signifies an advantage. Being naked is not "false," hence there is nothing wrong with it. Man was created as a being preoccupied with the life of the intellect, without passions, and thus with no need or concern for *mefursamot*.

But then man sinned – which Rambam describes as following after what appeared good to the eye – i.e. the sin started way before actually eating. Man is not just raw intellect, he also has a physical body, and he can choose what sort of existence he wants. Man departs from absolute evaluations of the intellect, and moves to an existence involving subjective desires and passions. Before sin, man would not smoke – what relevance does giving pleasure have?! As a result of his fall, he needs rules of conduct.

Hence we read, "And ye shall be like *elohim*, knowing good and evil," and not knowing or discerning the true and the false: while with *muskalot* we can only apply the words "true and false," not "good and evil."

This is the key point, but there is much hidden meaning that must be extracted here. The questioner read the Torah as saying that the snake told Eve that she will be like God, knowing good and evil. But according to Rambam, this is incorrect. God does *not* know good and evil, only true and false. And according to Rambam, the snake is not telling Eve that she will be like God; indeed, the snake does not say, "you will become like Him," but rather, he says that she will be like *elohim*. And if we look at the prefatory comment that Rambam gives at the beginning of this chapter, we see that he prepared the ground for this:

Before, however, entering upon this problem and its solution I must premise that every Hebrew knows that the term *Elohim* is a homonym, and denotes God, angels, judges, and the rulers of countries, and that Onkelos the proselyte explained it in the true and correct manner by taking *Elohim* in the sentence, "and you shall be like *Elohim*" (Gen. iii. 5) in the last-mentioned meaning, and rendering the sentence "and ye shall be like princes." Having pointed out the homonymity of the term "*Elohim*" we return to the question under consideration.

Accordingly, this verse is not stating that man will become like God. But what about Genesis 3:22, where God says that “הָאָדָם הָיָה כְּאֶחָד מִמֶּנּוּ לְדַעַת טוֹב וָרָע” man has become like one of us, knowing good and bad”? Rambam in *Shemonah Perakim* 8, based on Onkelos, explains this verse differently.² He reads it as saying, “הָאָדָם הָיָה כְּאֶחָד” Behold, now man is like one” – he is unique, in that “לְדַעַת טוֹב וָרָע” from him, there is knowledge of good and evil” – that man generates definitions of *mefursamot*, of moral norms.³

Thus, when the snake says that “you shall be like *elohim*,” it means that man will become like those rulers who use conventions to set standards of behavior, in response to the drives of human passion, which is itself caused by the imaginative faculty.⁴ From God’s point of view, this is death; but from the snake’s point of view, this is passionate life.⁵

Further observe the passage, "And the eyes of both were opened, and they knew they were naked" (Gen. iii. 7): it is not said, "And the eyes of both were opened, and they saw"; for what the man had seen previously and what he saw after this circumstance was precisely the same: there had been no blindness which was now removed, but he received a new faculty whereby he found things wrong which previously he had not regarded as wrong. Besides, you must know that the Hebrew word *pakach* used in this passage is exclusively employed in the figurative sense of receiving new sources of knowledge, not in that of regaining the sense of sight. Comp., "God opened her eyes" (Gen. xxi. 19). "Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened" (Isaiah xxxviii. 8). "Open ears, he hears not" (*ibid.* Xlii. 20), similar in sense to the verse, "Which have eyes to see, and see not" (Ezek. xii. 2).

When, however, Scripture says of Adam, "He changed his face (*panav*) and thou sentest him forth" Job xiv. 20), it must be understood in the following way: On account of the change of his original aim he was sent away. For *panim*, the Hebrew equivalent of face, is derived from the verb *panah*, "he turned," and signifies also "aim," because man generally turns his face towards the thing he desires. In accordance with this interpretation, our text suggests that Adam, as he altered his intention and directed his thoughts to the acquisition of what he was forbidden, he was banished from Paradise: this was his punishment; it was measure for measure. At first he had the privilege of tasting pleasure and happiness, and of enjoying repose and security; but as his appetites grew stronger, and he followed his desires and impulses, (as we have already stated above), and partook of the food he was forbidden to taste, he was deprived of everything, was doomed to subsist on the meanest kind of food, such as he never tasted before, and this even only after exertion and labour, as it is said, "Thorns and thistles

² הָאָדָם הָיָה כְּאֶחָד מִמֶּנּוּ לְדַעַת טוֹב וָרָע", וכבר באר התרגום בפירושו שהרצון בו ממנו לדעת טוב ורע, רצוני לומר, שהוא היה אחד בעולם, רצוני לומר, מין שאין כמוהו מין אחד שישתתף עמו בזה הענין אשר נמצא בו, והוא שמעצמו ומנפשו ידע הטוב והרע ויעשה איזה מהם שירצה ואין מונע לו מהם, ואחר שהוא כן אפשר שישלח ידו ויקח מזה ואכל והי לעולם:

³ Marvin Fox gives a different interpretation – that “good” and “evil” here mean the same as they do in the six days of creation; “effective at its purpose.” Man can now choose which type of life he wants, and will be able to choose the means to accomplish whichever type he chooses.

⁴ There are no such rulers yet; it is a projection into the future. In contrast, Shalom Rosenberg sees it as a reference to God, and as a false statement.

⁵ Marvin Fox points out that in Plato’s *Phaedo*, Socrates says that the philosopher is the person who is always seeking death, whereupon Simmias says that most people regard philosophers as half-dead already!

shall grow up for you" (Gen. iii. 18), "By the sweat of your brow," etc., and in explanation of this the text continues, "And the Lord God drove him from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground whence he was taken." He was now with respect to food and many other requirements brought to the level of the lower animals: comp., "You shall eat the grass of the field" (Gen. iii. 18). Reflecting on his condition, the Psalmist says, "Adam unable to dwell in dignity, was brought to the level of the dumb beast" (Ps. xlix. 13)." May the Almighty be praised, whose design and wisdom cannot be fathomed."

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In the *Guide for the Perplexed* 2:30, Rambam starts dropping clues about the basic nature of the story:

Part Two, Chapter 30: ...The account of the six days of creation contains, in reference to the creation of man, the statement: "Male and female He created them" (1:27), and concludes with the words: "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them" (2:1), and yet the portion which follows describes the creation of Eve from Adam, the tree of life, and the tree of knowledge, the history of the serpent and the events connected therewith, and all this as having taken place after Adam had been placed in the Garden of Eden. All our Sages agree that this took place on the sixth day, and that nothing new was created after the close of the six days. None of the things mentioned above is therefore impossible, because the laws of Nature were then not yet permanently fixed. There are, however, some utterances of our Sages on this subject [which apparently imply a different view]. I will gather them from their different sources and place them before you, and I will refer also to certain things by mere hints, just as has been done by the Sages. You must know that their words, which I am about to quote, are most perfect, most accurate, and clear to those for whom they were said. I will therefore not add long explanations, lest I make their statements plain, and I might thus become "a revealer of secrets," but I will give them in a certain order, accompanied with a few remarks, which will suffice for readers like you.

Chazal say that this all happened on day six. Rambam says that "none of this is impossible, because the laws of nature were not yet fixed; but there are some utterances of the Sages." Rambam is saying that the story of the sin in Eden is part of creation—part of an account of the fundamental nature of reality, not a historical account of an individual. History begins with *Zeh sefer toldot ha-Adam*. The "utterances of the Sages" are, in relationship to the theoretical aspect of the Written Torah, what the Talmud is to the practical aspect of the Written Torah.

One of these utterances is this: "Adam and Eve were at first created as one being, having their backs united: they were then separated, and one half was removed and brought before Adam as Eve." The term *mizal'otav* (lit. "of his ribs") signifies "of his sides." The meaning of the word is proved by referring to *zel'a*, "the side" of the tabernacle (Exod. xxvi. 20), which Onkelos renders *setar* ("side"), and so also *mizal'otav* is rendered by him "*mi-sitrohi*" (of his sides). Note also how clearly it has been stated that Adam and Eve were two in some respects, and yet they remained one, according to the words, "Bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. ii. 23). The unity of the two is proved by the fact that both have the same name, for she is called *ishshah* (woman), because she was taken out of *ish* (man), also by the words, "And shall

cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh" (ii. 24). How great is the ignorance of those who do not see that all this necessarily includes some [other] idea [besides the literal meaning of the words]. This is now clear.

Chazal tell us that *tzela* is not a rib, or any bone, but rather a *tzad* – an aspect. Rambam is citing all these things to tell us that woman here is an aspect of man. Much earlier, in the Guide 1:6, Rambam has explained another meaning of the term. There, Rambam says that *ishah* can refer to a female human, and also to a female animal.⁶ But he also gives us a third meaning – that of something that must be joined to a partner. The Torah will describe joining materials as “*ishah el ahotah*” – even though the material alone would never be described as *ishah*.

In the *Guide* 1:17 Rambam presents the view of Plato that male is form and female is substance.⁷ The substance of gold can take on many forms – a ring, a statue, a scepter – but it can never become a frog. Rambam also introduces the concept of *he'eder*. Everything in the world has three fundamental components – its substance (= *ishah*), form (= *ish*, that form which it takes on), and *he'eder* (its absent alternatives, i.e. its potential for alternate forms). A chair has its female aspect (e.g. metal or wood), its male aspect (the shape of a chair) and its potential to be made into something else.

Putting all this together, we see that the account of the creation of man in chapter two of Genesis is elaborating upon the account given in chapter one. It is telling us that within every person, there is the male aspect and the female aspect. There is never form without substance or substance without form. Adam is the intellect. Chavah is the substance, the integral animal component of man. Woman is substance, and just as the term *ishah* refers to something that is always seeking to be joined to a partner, substance always requires form. Thus, in the story, it is the woman who is subject to temptation. Man's original and

⁶ *Guide* 1:6: “The two Hebrew nouns *ish* and *ishshah* were originally employed to designate the "male and female" of human beings, but were afterwards applied to the "male and female" of the other species of the animal creation. For instance, we read, "Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens," *ish ve-ishto* (Gen. Vii. 2), in the same sense as *ish ve-ishshah*, "male and female." The term *zakar u-nekebah* was afterwards applied to anything designed and prepared for union with another object Thus we read, "The five curtains shall be coupled together, one (*ishshah*) to the other" (*ahotah*) (Exod. xxvi. 3). It will easily be seen that the Hebrew equivalents for "brother and sister" are likewise treated as homonyms, and used, in a figurative sense, like *ish* and *ishshah*”

⁷ *Guide* 1:17: “Do not imagine that only Metaphysics should be taught with reserve to the common people and to the uninitiated: for the same is also the case with the greater part of Natural Science. In this sense we have repeatedly made use of the expression of the Sages, "Do not expound the chapter on the Creation in the presence of two". This principle was not peculiar to our Sages: ancient philosophers and scholars of other nations were likewise wont to treat of the *principia rerum* obscurely, and to use figurative language in discussing such subjects. Thus Plato and his predecessors called Substance the female, and Form the male. (You are aware that the *principia* of all existing transient things are three, viz., Substance, Form, and Absence of a particular form; the last-named principle is always inherent in the substance, for otherwise the substance would be incapable of receiving a new form: and it is from this point of view that absence [of a particular form] is included among the *principia*. As soon, then, as a substance has received a certain form, the privation of that form, namely, of that which has just been received, has ceased, and is replaced by the privation of another form, and so on with all possible forms, as is explained in treatises on natural philosophy.)”

essential form is his intellect. Eve's temptation is to take on different form, that of passion, desire and imagination.

Another noteworthy Midrashic remark of our Sages is the following: "The serpent had a rider, the rider was as big as a camel, and it was the rider that enticed Eve: this rider was Samaël." Samaël is the name generally applied by our Sages to Satan. Thus they say in several places that Satan desired to entice Abraham to sin, and to abstain from binding Isaac, and he desired also to persuade Isaac not to obey his father. At the same time they also say, in reference to the same subject, viz., the *Akedah* ("the binding of Isaac"), that *Samaël* came to Abraham and said to him, "What! hast thou, being an old man, lost thy senses?" etc. This shows that Samaël and Satan are identical. There is a meaning in this name [Samaël], as there is also in the name *nachash* ("serpent"). In describing how the serpent came to entice Eve, our sages say: "Samaël was riding on it, and God was laughing at both the camel and its rider."

It is especially of importance to notice that the serpent did not approach or address Adam, but all his attempts were directed against Eve, and it was through her that the serpent caused injury and death to Adam. The greatest hatred exists between the serpent and Eve, and between his seed and her seed; her seed being undoubtedly also the seed of man. More remarkable still is the way in which the serpent is joined to Eve, or rather his seed to her seed; the head of the one touches the heel of the other. Eve defeats the serpent by crushing its head, whilst the serpent defeats her by wounding her heel. This is likewise clear.

Samael is Satan, which according to Chazal is an aspect of man. In the story of the *akeidah*, Satan takes on different forms to talk Avraham out of it. He is the force driving man away from good – the *yetzer hara*. When the *yetzer hara* gets its teeth into the material aspect of man – the *ishah* – sin happens.

In the beginning of *Shemonah Perakim*, Rambam explains (based on a scheme that originated with Aristotle and was modified by Al-Farabi) that a person possesses five faculties: nutritive, sensory, imaginative, appetitive, and rational.

1. The **nutritive** faculty (כח הזון). This also exists with animals, and even with plants.
2. The **sensory** faculty (כח החוש). This involves all five senses, and also exists with animals.
3. The **imaginative** faculty (כח הדמיון). This is based on combination of imagination and memory (can only imagine that which one has some experiences with). Higher animals also have this.
4. The **appetitive** faculty (כח המתעורר). As Rambam writes in *Shemonah Perakim*: "The appetitive is that faculty by which a man desires, or loathes a thing, and from which there arise the following activities: the pursuit of an object or flight from it, inclination and avoidance, anger and affection, fear and courage, cruelty and compassion, love and hate, and many other similar psychic qualities. All parts of the body are subservient to these activities, such as the ability of the hand to grasp, that of the foot to walk, that of the eye to see, and that of the heart to make one bold

or timid. Similarly, the other members of the body, whether external or internal, are instruments of the appetitive faculty.”

5. The **rational** faculty (כח השכל). This is unique to man. A person is ideally supposed to have his rational intellect directing him.

Rambam cites Chazal as speaking of Satan riding upon the snake. “Riding” can mean “controlling” (see *Guide* 1:70). Rambam equates the imaginative faculty with Satan (see *Guide* 2:12). The snake—the appetitive faculty—was being controlled by the imaginative faculty instead of by the intellect.⁸ Man was making decisions based on what he was attracted to, what was desirable to him. “He shall bite you on the heel, and you shall crush his head” – you need to try to control it.

The following is also a remarkable passage, most absurd in its literal sense; but as an allegory it contains wonderful wisdom, and fully agrees with real facts, as will be found by those who understand all the chapters of this treatise. When the serpent came to Eve he infected her with poison; the Israelites, who stood at Mount Sinai, removed that poison; idolaters, who did not stand at Mount Sinai, have not got rid of it. Note this likewise.

Some people can free themselves from an animalistic lifestyle, such as Avraham Avinu (who, according to Rambam, did not have or keep the Torah, but nevertheless led an elevated life). But most cannot. A code of *mefursamot*, a convention of moral norms, is not the ideal, but every culture needs it in order to regulate behavior and prevent anarchy. Once man has left the realm of the intellect, and passions rule, order needs to be imposed. When there is a desire for property, there must be regulations concerning ownership and theft.

In the *Guide* 2:40, Rambam talks about three different types of leadership—that of rulers, scholars, and prophets. Rulers can lead people via their imaginative faculty, but not via their rational intellect.⁹ What makes stealing wrong? One can say that this is enacted out of self-interest; I don’t want people to steal from me, so I won’t steal from them. There

⁸ Note: this is all according to Efodi, Shem Tov, etc. According to Narvoni, the snake is the imaginative faculty and Satan is the appetitive faculty.

⁹ *Guide* 2:40: “Some persons are therefore inspired with theories of legislation, such as prophets and lawgivers: others possess the power of enforcing the dictates of the former, and of compelling people to obey them, and to act accordingly. Such are kings, who accept the code of lawgivers, and [rulers] who pretend to be prophets, and accept, either entirely or partly, the teaching of the prophets. They accept one part while rejecting another part, either because this course appears to them more convenient, or out of ambition, because it might lead people to believe that the rulers themselves had been prophetically inspired with these laws, and did not copy them from others. For when we like a certain perfection, find pleasure in it, and wish to possess it, we sometimes desire to make others believe that we possess that virtue, although we are fully aware that we do not possess it... You will find that the sole object of certain laws, in accordance with the intention of their author, who well considered their effect, is to establish the good order of the state and its affairs, to free it from all mischief and wrong: these laws do not deal with philosophic problems, contain no teaching for the perfecting of our logical faculties, and are not concerned about the existence of sound or unsound opinions. Their sole object is to arrange, under all circumstances, the relations of men to each other, and to secure their well-being, in accordance with the view of the author of these laws. These laws are political, and their author belongs, as has been stated above, to the third class, viz., to those who only distinguish themselves by the perfection of their imaginative faculties.”

can be other types of self-interest – a powerful ruler isn't afraid that people will steal from him, but he wants to be honored as a benevolent ruler. Thus, one can have a ruler and have a system of rules that effectively creates morality, but which is based upon self-interest.

Scholars, on the other hand, can lead people via their rational intellect, but not via their imaginative faculty. They are thus they are only suited to the elite.

But prophets can lead via both: they know how to relate to people's imaginative faculty and desires. This is the leadership of Torah. It takes man out of his animalistic state and enables him to live a life based on his rational intellect.

The idea of the snake infecting mankind with its venom is that people are born thinking about what they want, what looks desirable, and so on. This poison was removed at Sinai; Torah regulates our lives and thereby enables us to focus upon what is true and false, not what is desirable and undesirable. Torah is thus a means to an end, not an end unto itself.

Again they said: "The tree of life extends over an area of five hundred years' journey, and it is from beneath it that all the waters of the creation sprang forth": and they added the explanation that this measure referred to the thickness of its body, and not to the extent of its branches, for they continue thus: "Not the extent of the branches thereof, but the stem thereof [*korato*, lit., 'its beam,' signifying here 'its stem') has a thickness of five hundred years' journey." This is now sufficiently clear.

In the *Guide* 3:14 Rambam also refers to a distance of five hundred years' journey, which is what the Talmud gives as the thickness of each of the spheres. The knowledge of the spheres is the first stage towards metaphysics, which Rambam considers to be the highest form of knowledge. Thus, the trunk of the tree of life is astronomy, and the branches are metaphysics.

In *Guide* 1:30 Rambam explains that “eating” can refer to acquiring intellectual knowledge,¹⁰ and “water” alludes to wisdom. Thus, the idea of the waters of creation springing forth from beneath the tree is that the tree is the source of wisdom, and eating from it refers to the acquisition of knowledge. The tree of life is thus a symbol of how one can connect with God (thereby attaining eternal life) via absorbing knowledge. A person can eat from the Tree of Life and live forever. When God states regarding the Tree of Life *וְאָכַל מִפְּרֵי הָעֵץ וְחַי לְעֹלָם* - this is not negative, it is just stating a possibility.

¹⁰ *Guide* 1:30: “In its primary meaning *akal* (to eat) is used in the sense of taking food by animals: this needs no illustration. It was afterwards observed that eating includes two processes--(1) the loss of the food, i.e., the destruction of its form, which first takes place; (2) the growth of animals, the preservation of their strength and their existence, and the support of all the forces of their body, caused by the food they take... With reference to the second effect of the act of eating, the verb "to eat" is figuratively used in the sense of "acquiring wisdom," "learning"; in short, for all intellectual perceptions. These preserve the human form (intellect) constantly in the most perfect manner, in the same way as food preserves the body in its best condition...”

Again: "God has never shown the tree of knowledge [of good and evil] to man, nor will He ever show it." This is correct, for it must be so according to the nature of the Universe.

With regard to the Tree of Knowledge, man reaches it via his desires. "מִמֶּנּוּ לְדַעַת טוֹב וָרָע" from *him*, there is knowledge of good and evil." These states do not exist with God.

Another noteworthy saying is this: "And the Lord God took the man, i.e., raised him, and placed him in the Garden of Eden," i.e., He gave him rest. The words "He took him," "He gave him," have no reference to position in space, but they indicate his position in rank among transient beings, and the prominent character of his existence.

Makom can be a situation in life as well as a physical place (cf. Guide 1:10 regarding the words "ascend" and "descend"). Man was originally in an idyllic state in which the rational faculty reigned supreme. Being expelled from the Garden of Eden means being reduced to a lesser state. The account of Adam in Eden is not a historical account of a particular person who failed a test (which would make it irrelevant to everyone else) but rather a description of the nature of every person. We were created as a being that is out of the Garden of Eden.