The original sin: Consciousness lost in matter

In the middle of the garden God placed the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Genesis 2.9.

"You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die,” Genesis 2.16-17.

All beings are already born in the illusion, tricked by the dual division that produces the feelings of desire and repulsion for the things of this world, Bhagavad Gita, VII.27.

According to the Genesis, God created the Garden of Eden, with all kinds of “beautiful trees that gave good fruits to eat”: a creation with all different experiences. And in the middle of the garden there stood the tree of life, with its fruit that gave eternal life, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The only condition to enjoy the paradise of Creation was not to eat from the tree of the” knowledge of good and evil.”

www.yogaandchristianity.com by Nityananda
The tree of life is our own connection with Divinity, where we come from. It’s described in the Bhagavad Gita (Chapter XV), as a tree with the roots in Heaven, growing toward the physical world of the senses:

1. Asvatta, the Transmigration tree, is eternal. Its roots are in the Supreme Dwelling, and its branches grow downwards. Each leaf of this tree is a sacred hymn. Whoever knows this tree, knows the Vedas.

2. Its branches extend upwards and downwards, receiving life from the forces of Nature. Its shoots are the sensual pleasures. And its roots grow into the world of mankind, where they are the cause of actions.

The tree of life is our own consciousness, eternal, without beginning or end. If we look for where it comes from, we will not find its origin.

3. Men cannot understand the changing nature of this tree, nor do they know where does it start or where does it end, or where its roots are.

Consciousness, our being, buries its roots in the Divinity, in the Supreme Dwelling. This Supreme dwelling is what yogis call Sat-Chit-Ananda: Being-Consciousness-Joy. Joy is not something we look for, it is our own nature. We mistake joy with pleasure. Pleasure comes from the senses, and we feel it when we posses something that we like or when we avoid something that we dislike; pleasure depends of our external circumstances.

Joy, on the other hand, is unconditional, it is born inside ourselves independently of the circumstances that surround us and the experiences that we live. In India it is called ananda, the joy of the Being, the divine joy. The joy that realized masters feel unconditionally and transmit to the people around them.

We have all experienced this joy, this happiness of the soul that we feel when we are children, for no apparent reason, just for being, and because life was unconditionally beautiful.

The subdued consciousness

We come to this world from the divine consciousness, which supports us, plunging into the sensual experiences. The pure consciousness that we are descends in the form, getting tangled up with the world of the senses, in the pleasure and the pain, forgetting its own origins. Here is when we eat the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil.

Knowledge of good and evil is an state of consciousness inferior to the state of divine consciousness. In it, the experience of the creation is so strong that we forget the joy of our Being. The world activates material and instinctive forces inside us, so powerful that the superior consciousness is subdued by them, dragged by the experience of the senses, and forgetting itself.

Eve (the shakti or energetic-sensual aspect in the human being) said:

“The serpent deceived me, and I eat the fruit.” Genesis 3.13.

The serpent, the instinctive energy, prevails over the superior consciousness, dragging it to the instinctive joy (sex, food, pleasures of the senses). The primordial forces drag us toward looking for pleasure and avoiding the pain of the sensorial experience, which is so compelling and radical that it makes us forget completely our internal joy, which we once had, and which is the essence of our being.

In the Genesis story about losing Paradise we see an “animalization” process in Adam and Eve, as they become conscious of their sexual organs, which embarrasses them, and end up covering themselves with animal skins. Their original nudity is hidden, covered by the animal sheaths:
The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them,
Genesis 3:21

There is nothing inherently bad about enjoying the senses; the idea was for human beings to
enjoy the Creation, but not to the point of forgetting their Being, of forgetting their source of joy,
their innate Divinity.

The loss of the internal joy plunges the human being into duality, “the knowledge of good and
evil,” constantly pursuing pleasure and escaping pain, looking for an unattainable happiness
that only the unconditional joy of his Being can give him. This is the loss of our paradise, our
Garden of Eden. This is the human condition, the “original sin” that every human being is born
with.

The challenge for the human condition is to find again the way to Eden, cutting with the sword
of discernment the roots of the Asvatta tree, buried in the forced ties to the sensorial duality.

Men do not quite understand the changeable nature of this tree, nor do they know
where does it start or where its roots are. But the wise man who can see, wielding
the temperance sword with force, cuts down this tree of strong and deep roots,
going thus toward that path, walked by those that will never return, Bhagavad Gita
XXV.3.

Chakras and the tree of life

The seven chakras, the psycho-energetic centers that we know in Yoga, aligned on the spine,
respond to different states of consciousness. When they are fully activated (as it happens with
realized beings) they give off divine vibrations. The verse from the Gita refers to them as the
leaves of this tree of life:

At the Supreme Dwelling you find its roots, and its branches descend downwards.
Each leaf of this tree is a sacred hymn. Whoever knows this tree, knows the Vedas.

We evolve spiritually following the divine curse, that is, “earning the bread with the sweat of our
brow” (Genesis 3:19), evolving through suffering in the world of duality. This evolution slowly
activates the chakras, facilitating higher states of consciousness. All saints and realized beings of
all religions showed these heighten states of consciousness, which include abilities and powers
that we consider miraculous.

In Yoga, by controlling the vital energy through postures, meditations, mantras, breathing, etc.,
we facilitate this evolution, creating within ourselves an energy system that can support the high
vibration from higher states of consciousness. We are rebuilding the tree of life inside us.
After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life, Genesis 3.24.

The “flaming sword flashing back and forth” is our own vital energy, dispersed and jumbled. In Yoga we learn to concentrate and channel this energy toward our higher consciousness centers. We know that the tree of life’s Supreme Dwelling is in the crown chakra, on top of the head, and we try to create an energy system that will allow its activation...it is not by chance that saints and wise men from different religions have been represented with an aureole above their heads.

A saying from the Tantra affirms that “the same that makes us fall, helps us get up”...through practicing yoga we can turn that flaming sword of dispersed vital energy into a sword of concentrated energy and discernment that can help us recover our Kingdom:

Therefore, destroy with the sword of Knowledge the doubt, born from ignorance, that dwells in your heart. Take refuge in Yoga and get up, oh Arjuna!, Bhagavad Gita IV.42.

Get up then, Arjuna! Go conquer your glory, beat your enemies and rejoice in the kingdom that is yours, Bhagavad Gita XIII.33.