

Of the fruit of the tree which is in the center of the garden... you shall not eat of it and you shall not touch it lest you die. (3:3)

Rashi comments: *Hosifah al ha'tzivai*, "She added to the commandment; therefore, she came to detract from it." Hashem had only prohibited them from eating the fruit – not touching it. The serpent saw an opportunity literally begging for him to cause an incursion. The serpent "complied" by pushing Chavah against the tree. Lo and behold, she did not die. "I told you so," the serpent said to Chavah. "You touched the tree, and nothing happened. It will be likewise when you eat from it. You have nothing to be concerned about." The *Sifsei Chachamim* wonders why Chavah could not have simply countered that she had touched the tree by accident, since the serpent pushed her. Any activity that is compelled or performed under such duress that we have no control over our actions, as was the case when the serpent pushed Chavah against the tree, is not culpable. They explain that Chavah misunderstood Hashem's command prohibiting them from eating from the *Eitz HaDaas*, Tree of Knowledge, because its fruit was poisonous. Thus, she conjectured that poison is poison, and it kills equally by touch as it does by ingestion. Since she did not die by touch, it must mean that either there is no poison, or she is immune to it.

While this is all good and well, Chavah was personally acutely aware that Hashem had never prohibited her from touching the tree. As such, there was no reason for her to have been negatively affected by falling against the tree. Why would she surmise that touching was no less prohibited than eating? Who ever mentioned touching? Why would she conjecture the exact opposite of the reality, thus placing herself in mortal danger by eating from the tree?

Horav A. Henach Leibowitz, zl, explains that this is human nature. We refuse to concede to our fallibility, and we loathe acknowledging our shortcomings. We would rather lay blame and guilt at someone else's doorstep than confess our own dereliction and imperfection. A wise man once said, "Not knowing (I would add, purposely ignoring) the scope of your own ignorance is part of the human condition." Psychologists refer to this "condition" as a lack of intellectual humility. Our minds are often more imprecise and imperfect than we are willing to admit. The ability to say, "I was wrong" or "I erred," requires an element of intestinal fortitude that many in positions of leadership do not possess. Another theory is that of cognitive dissonance, which results from the discrepancy between what we believe (have convinced ourselves) happened and the reality of what actually occurred. This theory explains why some of us double down on our positions and beliefs in the face of overwhelming contrasting evidence. Thus, Chavah was prepared to eat of the *Eitz HaDaas* to prove a point: "I am in no danger in eating from it, because, after all, I touched it, and I am still alive."

Horav Gamliel Rabinowitz, Shlita, once met a man, who, for all appearances, gave the impression of being a regular layman. The man had absolutely no airs about him, and he was dressed in "standard" clothing. During their conversation, this man mentioned "in passing" that, while

the *Satmar Rebbe, Horav Yoel Teitelbaum, zl*, was alive, he would frequently visit him. Obviously, this interjection presented the layman in a new light. The average person did not mention a relationship with such an illustrious Torah giant as the *Satmar Rebbe*. Apparently, this man was not a typical layman. The man mentioned that whenever he asked the *Rebbe* for a *brachah*, personal blessing, he would ask for one thing, "I would ask that I have the strength of character to be *modeh al ha'emes* in order that I be able to perform *teshuvah sheleimah*, complete/perfect repentance." When *Rav Gamliel* heard this, he realized that he was speaking with a holy, righteous Jew, whose life's focus was to leave this world completely devout, in the sense that he maintains the intellectual humility, not to gloss over his frailties and possible derelictions, but to confront them head-on and correct when necessary.

Horav Yonah Merzbach, zl, one of the *Roshei Yeshivah* of Kol Torah, sought a *Rosh Yeshivah* whose duty it would be to guide and influence the educational endeavors of the *yeshivah* through his *shiurim*, Torah lectures, as well as his total spiritual demeanor. The *Rosh Yeshivah* had to be an individual of impeccable spiritual character which would complement his exceptional Torah knowledge. They interviewed a young man, *Horav Shlomo Zalmen Auerbach, zl*, who was but thirty-years old at the time. He came with an enviable reputation, but *Rav Yonah* knew that brilliant scholarship was not the only ingredient in becoming a great *Rosh Yeshivah*. They spoke in learning and were very impressed with *Rav Shlomo Zalmen's* breadth of knowledge. The last question was from *Rav Yonah*, who carried the final decision concerning whom to engage as *Rosh Yeshivah*. A brilliant scholar himself, *Rav Yonah* presented a detailed *halachic* query to their candidate. *Rav Shlomo Zalmen* considered the question for a few moments before he replied, "I do not have an answer."

When *Rav Shlomo Zalmen* returned home, he informed his wife that he was fairly certain that he would not be selected for the position due to his inability to give a suitable reply to *Rav Yonah's* question. While they were speaking, they heard a knock on the door. *Rav Yonah Merzbach* stood there and said, "On behalf of myself and the other *Roshei Yeshivah*, we would be delighted that his honor accept the position of *Rosh Yeshivah* of Kol Torah." *Rav Yonah* added, "You should know that at the moment you replied, "I do not know," to my question, my mind was made up that you would be the perfect *Rosh Yeshivah*. I was impressed with your humility and integrity, qualities that a *Rosh Yeshivah* should possess and with which he should imbue his students."

Rav Shlomo Zalmen added a postscript that he actually had a number of answers to the question, but none of them, in all veracity, *aliba d'emes*, impressed him. He felt more comfortable saying that he did not know.