

And the woman perceived that the tree was good for eating and that it was a delight for the eyes... and she took of its fruit and ate. (3:6)

A horrible tragedy occurred in Telshe, Lithuania, during the tenure of *Horav Yosef Yehudah Leib Bloch, zl*, as *Rosh Yeshivah* and *Rav* (about one hundred years ago). A secular Jewish student with no ties whatsoever to religion rented an attic apartment in town and succumbed to the severe depression that plagued him. Following the incident, the owners of the house in which the deed was done would hear and then see plaster fall from the ceiling. The owner of the house was himself also not an observant Jew, so, at first, he ignored it. (A religious Jew takes nothing at face value. Whatever occurs in his life, he views as a message, however subtle, from which he should learn or gain perspective). At the time, Telshe was going through the pangs of *Haskalah*, the Jewish Enlightenment movement, which taught that Torah was archaic and its disseminators deadbeat parasites who refused to come to terms with modernity and a world that was moving progressively forward. The landlord of this house was a card-carrying *Haskalah* member, proudly spewing his misplaced (it was really self-loathing) animus against anything that smacked of religion. After a few weeks of observing his ceiling deteriorate before his very eyes, he finally relented and deferred to the advice offered by his more common-sensical friends: Go see the *Telzer Rav* and ask his sage advice.

The (*Alter*) *Rav* explained to the landlord, "It is quite possible that when the student abruptly ended his life, some of the blood seeped into the wooden floorboards – and these blood droplets want to be buried in a Jewish cemetery. Therefore, whenever a drop of blood descends from the ceiling, some plaster also falls down to cover it." The landlord thought that the *Rav* had lost his mind, until he came home and looked beneath the fallen plaster and discovered blood! They buried the blood-soaked floorboard, and everything turned back to normal; no more plaster fell.

Obviously, the incident took the city by storm. The community hummed with conversation; everyone was impressed with the *Rav's* penetrating Torah knowledge. They agreed that the *Rav's* unusual insight was the result of his vast Torah knowledge. A few days later, the *Rav* was "accosted" by one of the city's well-known *kofrim*, heretics, a Jew who had fallen prey to the *Haskalah* rhetoric. The man remarked to the *Rav*, "I refused to enter the house to view the spectacle, because I feared that I would become impressed and influenced to become a believer."

The *Rav* smiled and countered, "You need not worry. Miracles do not impress you. Every day, you see the sun rise in the sky. It nourishes and sustains the world. You look up at the sky and see the wonderful clouds which provide the necessary moisture for vegetation to grow. You are not blind. You see miracles every day. They are miracles, because no human can possibly replicate what they are doing. You observe how an infant picks up words and, over time, begins to speak and become proficient in a language. Yet, you have remained a heretic. This proves that you want to disbelieve. The miracle in the house would not impress you because you refuse to be impressed.

You know the truth, but you refuse to concede to it.”

A similar incident happened concerning Chavah. Imagine *Gan Eden*. We have before us every luscious fruit; all sorts of vegetation; the nourishment that anything we could consume would be beyond comprehension; and, the best part is, it is all ours for the picking. There is one slight catch: one tree, the Tree of Knowledge; its fruit is off limits. In fact, to eat it brings about death. No problem. It is not as if we have nothing else to eat. We can have everything, but – one fruit. It should not be a major challenge.

Everything was fine until the *nachash ha'kadmoni*, ancient serpent, entered onto the scene and commenced with his awesome salesmanship. He succeeded in swaying Chavah. She ate; she was a good wife and fed her husband, and the result was banishment from *Gan Eden*, death, difficulty in earning a livelihood and all of the adversity with which we have lived from the beginning of time. How did this happen? They had it all, but one fruit. How did Chavah fall for the serpent's blandishments? What was her misstep? The Torah relates the sequence of her downfall. “She perceived that the tree was good for eating. And that it was a delight for the eyes.” What does taste have to do with it? The snake never mentioned food/taste. He talked about opening up her eyes, knowing the difference between good and bad. How did food enter into the equation?

Rav Yitzchak Hershkowitz, Shlita, explains this with a story. A student in one of the mainstream *yeshivos* was not holding his own in learning. While he had not been dealt a large helping of acumen, he did not even bother to make the attempt. Slowly, his learning followed and, soon afterwards, his commitment dwindled away to just about nothing. He left the *yeshivah* and joined the world of fun and misery, becoming totally alienated from Torah and *mitzvos*. Years passed, and one day he was walking down the street when he confronted his *Rosh Yeshivah*. Having nowhere to hide, he dug in and said, “*Shalom*.” The contrast between the *Rosh Yeshivah*, long beard, dressed in the black regalia of a distinguished Torah scholar, and the young man with a long ponytail, tee-shirt and jeans, was palpable.

“Where did you go?” the *Rosh Yeshivah* asked. “One day, I looked around, and you were gone. No good-bye, nothing. I thought I deserved better than that.”

“*Rebbe*, I had questions and doubts. Finally, I decided that this way of life was just not for me,” the young man replied.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* smiled, “Trust me, if you had questions, I had answers. I do not think that this was the sequence you followed. You decided that you would like to try to live a life of abandon, to see what it was like not to learn, not to *daven*, not to observe *Shabbos* and *kashrus*. You tried it, and it felt good. Now you needed an excuse to justify renegeing the Torah. ‘Suddenly,’ now you have questions. Veritably, you have no questions because then I could give you answers. You have all the answers. I have no answers to your answers!”

This is what the Torah is teaching us. Chavah saw, and Chavah smelled. Chavah had an implacable desire to eat. Once she ate, she blamed it on the serpent's presentation of a life of greater knowledge, of good and evil. Truthfully, it was not about intellectual pursuits. It was about eating a tasty fruit. And we are still paying for her experience.