

# IN THE BIAS OF THE BEHOLDER

*by Rabbi Yaakov Menken*

*"And the woman saw that the tree was good to eat, and it was desirable to the eyes and appealing to the mind, and she took from its fruit and ate, and she also gave to her husband with her, and he ate."*  
[3:6]

Rashi explains why she gave her husband some of the fruit -- namely, in order that he not live forever after her death, and go on to marry another. She did not want to die and be replaced and forgotten.

In the Yalkut Lekach Tov, the author wonders about this. Chava [Eve] was seduced by the snake into believing that the fruit was not deadly! So what is she worried about now? Why is she suddenly concerned that she will die after all, and her husband will remain immortal and go on to marry someone else? To answer this question, he recounts the following story.

There was a certain land that was divided into provinces, and the provincial governors would gather annually to conduct their affairs. At one of these gatherings, the governor of one of the small provinces told the others about a "holy Jew" who lived in his region. He claimed that this righteous Jew was able to reveal the future, and that his prophecies had already been fulfilled many times.

The governor of the largest province could not tolerate the idea that one of his juniors should have something to brag about that he did not, and he insisted that next time the other governor should bring the Jew along with him. The Jew was immediately very frightened to be ordered to come along, but he had no choice but to obey, praying constantly as he went.

When they arrived, a podium had been set up, and the governor of the largest province called the Jew to join him upon it. And then he asked, to the laughter of the assembled, "tell me now, Jew, on what day will you die?" The governor had planned this question carefully with a group of co-conspirators -- and had a dagger in his cloak. If the Jew would say he would die on any other day, the governor planned to kill him immediately -- and should the Jew say he would die that same day, then the governor would hold him until evening.

The Jew paused a moment from his prayers, and said, "I will die on the same day that you do." The governor froze. Despite the urgent whispers of his advisors, he simply could not move. And when they asked him afterwards why he didn't go through with his murderous plan, he said, "you fools! Didn't you hear him predict that on the same day that he will die, I am going to die as well? So how could I be so insane as to kill him? I would have died the same day!"

This, writes the Yalkut Lekach Tov, is the power of a personal bias. Initially, the governor's bias was one of pride, and his pride told him not to believe the claims that this Jew could tell the future -- and as long as this was his bias, the governor truly did not believe it. But then, all of a sudden, his bias changed -- now he was responding to his natural desire to remain alive. In that instant his perspective changed, and now he was more than willing to entertain the idea that this Jew really was a prophet.

And this, of course, also explains what happened in Chava's mind as well. When she saw the fruit as "desirable to the eyes," she was tempted by it, and seduced into believing the words of the snake that it would not cause her to die. But as soon as she ate it, that temptation, that bias, immediately vanished. And just as quickly, she began to worry that the snake was wrong after all, and that now she would die, her husband would marry another, and he and his wife would live forever while she was forgotten.

This is the power of a personal bias. In every situation, our desires and interests have a profound effect on the way we look at things, and we don't even realize that our outlook would change completely if our biases were different. Perhaps if we remain aware of this fact, we can at least summon up the strength to attempt a more impartial outlook -- and that will have a positive impact in countless areas of our lives!

Good Shabbos,

Rabbi Yaakov Menken

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