



# TORAH & TEA

## THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER

### LESSON 1

#### The Forbidden Fruit

The Book of Genesis famously recounts how Adam and Eve disobeyed G-d's command by dining on the forbidden fruit from the "Tree of Knowledge." What *type of fruit* was the forbidden fruit?

#### Question for Discussion

Can you suggest examples of negative developments that were successfully redirected into positive gains?

#### Text 1

Genesis 2:15–17

וַיִּקַּח ה' אֱלֹקִים אֶת הָאָדָם, וַיִּנְחֵהוּ בְּגַן עֵדֶן לְעַבְדָּהּ וּלְשִׁמְרָהּ.  
וַיֹּצֵה ה' אֱלֹקִים עַל הָאָדָם לֵאמֹר: מִכָּל עֵץ הַגָּן אָכַל תֹּאכַל. וּמֵעֵץ הַדַּעַת  
טוֹב וָרָע לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ.

G-d took the human and placed him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to preserve it.

G-d commanded the human: "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat. But of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, you shall not eat."

#### Text 2

Talmud, Berachot 40a

אֵילָן שֶׁאָכַל מִמֶּנּוּ אָדָם הִרְאִישׁוֹ: רַבִּי מֵאִיר אָמַר: גִּפְנוֹ הִיא, שְׂאִין לָהּ  
דָּבָר שֶׁמּוֹבִיא יְלָלָה עַל הָאָדָם אֲלֵא יִי, שְׂנֵאָמַר: (בְּרַאשִׁית ט, כא) "וַיֵּשֶׁת  
מִן הַיַּיִן וַיִּשְׂכֶּר."  
רַבִּי נְחֵמְיָה אָמַר: תְּאֵנָה הִיא, שֶׁבְּדָבָר שֶׁנִּתְקַלְקְלוּ בוֹ נִתְקַנּוּ, שְׂנֵאָמַר  
(בְּרַאשִׁית ג, ז) "וַיִּתְּפְרוּ עֲלֶיהָ תְּאֵנָה".

What kind of tree was the tree from which the first human ate?

Rabbi Meir stated that it was a grapevine, because no substance brings calamity upon humans like wine. For it is stated further (Genesis 3:21), "Noah consumed wine and became drunk," leading to the undesirable consequences described there.

Rabbi Nechemiah stated that it was a fig tree. For it was with the very item with which they sinned that they subsequently rectified the consequence of their sin—their nakedness. As it is stated (Genesis 3:7), "They sewed together fig leaves" as clothing, to cover their nakedness.

### Text 3

Midrash, *Bereishit Rabah* 15:7

רבי יהושע בן לוי אָמר: חס וְשְׁלוֹם! לֹא גָלָה הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אוֹתוֹ  
אֵילָן לְאָדָם, וְלֹא עֲתִיד לְגַלוֹתוֹ . . . וְאִם עַל כְּבוֹד תּוֹלְדוֹתָיו חָס הַמָּקוֹם,  
עַל כְּבוֹדוֹ עַל אַחַת כַּמָּה וְכַמָּה, אֶתְמַהָּא.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi stated: "Heaven forbid that we identify the fruit! G-d never revealed the identity of that tree to any person, and He never will. . . . If G-d is careful to safeguard the dignity of Adam's descendants, He is certainly careful to protect the dignity of Adam himself!"

### Let's *Rebrew* It!

1. Contemporary cultural references to the Tree of Knowledge depict it as an apple tree. However, there are no Jewish sources to justify this designation.
2. One Talmudic view identifies the fruit as a fig, in which case the object of sin subsequently became a source of healing (their garments). This reminds us that even things that cause us pain, stress, or sorrow can become sources of comfort, joy, and healing.
3. Another Talmudic view insists that the fruit's identity was deliberately undisclosed. This teaches us that even individuals with major moral failings deserve fair treatment and dignity.