

Rabbi David Wolpe's

Off The Pulpit

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Are You Really Sure?

The human mind inclines toward certainty. Having been involved in my share of arguments, beginning with the childhood dinner table (an excellent place to learn both the skills of debate and the fine art of going only slightly too far), I know that arguing is mostly a process of persuading oneself that one was right in the first place. Who has not heard scientists extol the certainties of scientific knowledge, religious people astonishingly secure in their understanding of God, and all of us pronounce others "simply wrong" with no more prompting or expertise than the skill of thumping a fist and nodding a head?

The Talmud advises we teach our tongues to say, "I don't know." But in a world in which knowledge proliferates at an astonishing pace, we are always claiming to know things we really

don't. We offer each other diet tips, medical remedies, consumer advice, spiritual guidance, and sagely nod our heads about the foolish choices of others.

Next time you are very sure of your position, try to argue the other side (a useful exercise), remember that there are always many more ways of being wrong than right, and spend at least a moment in the difficult but enlightening place of self-doubt. It will be illuminating. I'm certain of it.