



The Smiling Maven

Grace for Grace (John 1:16)

חסד על חסד (ירחנן א'טו)



This Relentless, Magnificent, Grace (Part I)

How Did This Jewish Boy from Long Island End Up Believing in Jesus?

In this issue we complete a three-part series on "This Relentless Magnificent Grace". The articles have been given in reverse chronological order. This article shares how the author first came to believe in Jesus.

I did not want to believe in Jesus. It was never my intention to end up believing in Jesus. To this day, I often ponder the simple reality that somehow, for some reason, my heart has opened to the scriptures, and to the message and salvation of the simple carpenter from Nazareth.

1974 was the year of my bar-mitzvah. I was quite zealous at this time. Normally, a bar-mitzvah boy chants the Haftorah portion, and maybe shares a short speech. I did these two things, but also led the Musaf service, which is the second half of the Shabbat service. After my bar-mitzvah, I continued to attend services on a regular basis. The Shabbat service is full of form and ritual. There are sections (such as the torah reading) where side conversations are not unacceptable. Often at these times, I would think and ponder about God. I realized that our forefathers such as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses, David, Daniel, etc., walked closely with God. They had a personal connection with God. God was important to them. As I reflected on the ritual and form of the synagogue, I realized that there could be a difference between going through the religious motions; and genuinely believing in, and wanting to follow God.



In High School, I fell out of the pattern of attending Shabbat services regularly. I was a rather typical, secular-minded, student. spiritual thought, synagogue etc. all took a back seat. In 1980, I started my first year of college. I had a non-Jewish friend named Bob. He was not a "born-again" Christian, nor did he express anything like that. One night he invited me to go bowling with some friends of his. I did not know them, but he thought that I would like them. They turned out to be "Christians". They had a small Bible reading and devotional before we left. I felt like a fish out of water. On the way to the bowling alley, one of these "Christians",

(to me, he was like a ring leader) asked me; "so Art, what do you think about Jesus?" I put up my hands like a stop sign and said, "I'm Jewish". I was hoping that answer would end the conversation. It did not. He said, "okay, you are Jewish, but you did not answer my question, what do you believe about Jesus?" I answered something like, "maybe he was a good teacher or a prophet, but I do not believe He is the son of God." The conversation did not go much further, but I began to realize that these "Christians" were different. They had a peace, a confidence, and a love that was different. I also began to recognize that for them, the issue of Jesus was not a matter of religious affiliation; it was a matter of historical and spiritual reality. Either He was the Son of God or not. Either He was alive, or He was not. My belief or unbelief did not change that reality. Yet, there was no desire to affiliate with them, no desire to ask questions, not the slightest thought or imagination that someday I might believe what they believe.

Throughout my college years, my life seemed to be salted and peppered with more of these "Christians". Their convictions, and confidence in Jesus, did not make me want to jump on their bandwagon. Yet, their conviction about a knowable God did impress me. Going to church, or reading the New Testament did not attract me. So, I did what it seems a lot of Jewish people do when confronted with the gospel; I began searching for God and truth, in non-western, non-Judeo-Christian sources. I read about Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism, Confucius' writings, and even some of the Koran. Each time, I read some literature, I tried to go as close to the source as possible. I did not want to read someone else's comments about Buddhism or Taoism, etc.. I wanted to read as close to the original writings as possible, using established English translations, I read them with an open heart, genuinely wanting to connect with God, or a life force or whatever was really out there. I did believe that if God was God, and that if He was knowable, and if He wanted to be known, He would be able, and wanting, to show me what was true. I also knew that if I was genuinely open to various sources, I would also need to be open to reading the Bible, probably Old

and New Testament.

Though the Christians kept saying that the Old Testament (or Hebrew Scriptures) prophesied about Jesus, I never asked them to show me these passages. I was not interested in their "slanted" view of scripture. Though I doubted that Jesus was part of the message of the Hebrew Scriptures, I would be open to Jesus if the scriptures themselves indicated this without pressure or interpretation from someone else. I did not want my mind "twisted" by the Christian's "pre-conceived" notions about Jesus. I also knew that if I went to a rabbi, he would have the opposite "pre-conceived" notion about Jesus, and might interpret scripture in a way to argue against Jesus. I knew that I should eventually read the Bible, but I was not excited about dealing with this issue. Then, an interesting conversation happened.

It was the spring of 1983. I was at my parent's home during a break from school. I was sitting around our kitchen table with my maternal grandfather. He was not academically well educated, but wise in years, wise in common sense, and had a sincere heart towards spiritual things. I told him about my "spiritual searching"; how I was reading Eastern Philosophy and such. In my pride; I thought it was quite impressive. I am not so sure he was impressed. In all my life, I never remember him giving me direct advice, except at this time. He was a quiet man, and not quick to voice his opinion or give advice. He looked at me and said very directly and earnestly, "Arthur, you know what you should do; you should read the Bible, the Old Testament, and the New Testament". His giving direct advice in this manner was alone surprising, the reading the Bible was not that amazing, but his advice about reading the New Testament was a real stunner. I asked him about it. It turned out that he had read the New Testament, and he believed it was a good book, maybe even scripture. He believed that Jesus was a prophet, a good teacher, and his teachings were very good. His positive view towards the New Testament and toward Jesus seemed quite unusual.

Though I was thinking that I would even-



tually read the Bible, his advice encouraged me, and gave me a greater openness towards the New Testament and towards Jesus. It was not long after this conversation that I began reading the Hebrew Scriptures. I had been given a copy of the scriptures (translated to English) at my bar mitzvah. My desire or goal as I read the scriptures was to allow God to lead me and guide me, to show me what He wanted to show me. As I read cover to cover from Genesis to 2Chronicles (the tradition order of the Hebrew Scriptures), there were two things that especially impressed my heart. The first thing was something about the Jewish people. Yes, the nation of Israel was called and chosen by God. Yes, God wrought wonderful miracles amongst our people. Yet, as the scriptures indicated, despite God's calling, and working amongst us, we were spiritually stiff-necked and stubborn. It was very easy for us to walk contrary to God, rather than with Him. This was the case from Jacob through the prophets. It was not unusual for the majority of Israel, to be cold to the genuine message of God Himself. God's care, and love, and purpose for Israel remained solid; yet, our receptivity to God was often an issue. It was conceivable that this pattern could have continued beyond the Biblical period, and even to our present age.

The second thing that impressed me was the existence of prophetic passages that sounded something like the Jesus that the Christians believed in. At the time, I knew nothing about quoting chapter and verse in the scripture; but I did keep track of these passages by underlining them and writing down their page numbers in the over-leaf of the Bible. Though no Christians had shown them to me, these are some of the passages that I listed by page number in a column titled "pro-Jesus": Deuteronomy 18:15, Isaiah 9:1-6, Isaiah 11:10, Isaiah 42, Isaiah 53, Proverbs 30:1-4. These references were all significant messianic passages.

After reading the Hebrew Scriptures, I knew that I would read the New Testament. At this time, I was in my last year of college. I was an English minor; I was reading a lot of classic literature conceived and written by excellent human authors. In my heart, I knew that the Hebrew Scriptures were not the same. There was a different quality to them. They were not written and conceived by human authors, even the best of human authors. As I began reading the gospels, my heart knew that this too was like the Hebrew Scriptures. Men had not conceived or contrived this account of Jesus. His words were not man's words. In the Hebrew Scriptures, I had been given a taste of the character of God. He was the Maker of heaven and earth. He was "I am

who I am" that appeared to Moses at the burning bush. He was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. As I read the words of Jesus, my heart saw and sensed the same eternal One. I was still not excited about following this Jesus who seemed so contrary to Jewish thinking, but I also knew that He was who He claimed to be: The Messiah, the Son of the Living God. My heart yielded, I began to ask Him into my life, to be my direction, and my savior. This was the spring of 1984.

Throughout my college years I had become a bicycling enthusiast. I would take longer and longer trips, often traveling 35-70 miles in a day. In the spring and the summer of 1984, I took my first over-night bicycle trips, often camping in a small tent. In the late summer of 1984 I embarked on a solo bicycle trip from Bar Harbor, Maine to Miami Florida. Each morning and evening I would spend time reading a small pocket Bible (including Old and New Testaments). My understanding and faith continued to grow. This was away from church influence, away from Christian influence. As I traveled and camped, I just kept praying and reading the Bible. It was also during this trip, while bicycling, I experienced what is called the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

After completing the trip, I decided to spend a year in Florida. In Florida, I first met other Jewish people who believed in Jesus or Y'shua. I began to worship and fellowship with them regularly. I continued to grow in my faith, and began to see that many of the things that I had learned from my own time before the scriptures were things commonly believed by others who genuinely believe in Jesus. Though my faith in Jesus was to cause tremendous tsouris in my family; and has been a source of rejection from other Jewish people, "I Know in Whom I have believed" (2Tim. 1:12). It was never my intention to become a follower of Jesus. Yet, I cannot say that the sky is not blue. I cannot say that the sun revolves around the



As you can see, this article required most of our two page newsletter. The Apologetics section has been dropped for this issue. It is scheduled to return in the March 2007 issue.

Our website (smilingmaven.com) contains additional articles. Part II and Part III of "This Relentless, Magnificent Grace" are also available on the website.



The Smiling Maven

The Smiling Maven is a bi-monthly Jewish flavored newsletter sharing God's incredible grace. There is a desire to communicate God's grace with Jews and Gentiles. There is coming a spiritual atomic bomb of that incredible grace. It is an imminent spiritual explosion soon to happen in Israel that will have a wonderfully awesome affect in Israel and all the world.

Maven is a Yiddish word that means a person with special knowledge or experience. Evidence of God's grace should be characterized by an ability to smile. The Smiling Maven newsletter is an encouragement for all of us to be smiling mavens, smiling people with special knowledge of God's amazing grace.

EditorArthur Weiner
Someone needing to Smile More

Copy Editor.....Peter Toeg
Making sure that our newsletter layout, and our use of the English Language keep people smiling.

Production Assistant.....Ruthe Weiner
Often producing more smiles than her dad.

Quality Control.....Caleb Weiner
Maintaining smiles, especially when he is playing on the computer.

Comments are always welcome. Contact us at smilingmaven@yahoo.com or at The Smiling Maven 2816 Eshcol Avenue, Zion IL 60099. Both current and previous issues of the Smiling Maven are available upon request.

The Smiling Maven Newsletter is now a division of Smiling Maven Ministries NFP, a not for profit corporation of the State of Illinois. Smiling Maven Ministries is supported by the gracious gifts and donations of those who have experienced the wonderful grace of Messiah Y'shua.

For those who have not yet appreciated or received the magnificence of God's gracious gift through Messiah, we would ask you not to give in this way. Before you give to support a ministry like ours, we believe that you should carefully consider the tremendous gift that the Almighty has given through Messiah Y'shua. Receiving that eternal gift is infinitely more important than giving any financial gift.

