



# The Smiling Maven

Grace for Grace (John 1:16)  
חסד על חסד (יוחנן א'טו)

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## The Battle of Two Trees

The first four chapters of Genesis could be the four most important chapters of the Hebrew Scriptures. These pages contain the wonder of creation, the original reality and awesome wonder of man created in God's image, the deception of Satan, and the horrible result of Adam and Eve's failure to believe God rather than the devil. The issue was not their obedience, it was their faith, their belief in God and what God said.

As recorded in Genesis two and three, there were two significant trees in the garden: the Tree of Life, and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Yet, it is likely that if most people are asked what tree or trees were in the Garden of Eden, many would reply the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and neglect to remember that the Tree of Life was there. And it was not only there – it was in the center of the Garden. It was the centerpiece, in the midst of the garden. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was not the focus or center point. Here is the second half of Genesis 2:9:

erw bwj tedh Uew Ngh Kwth Myyhx Uew  
A literal translation reads: "The tree of life in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Most translations fail to express this correctly, many seem to indicate that the Tree of Life was "also"<sup>1</sup> there, almost as an afterthought, yet

the Hebrew clearly indicates that the Tree of Life was Kwth (in the midst) of the garden. It may be that the translations of this passage, and our understanding continues to be affected negatively by what happened in Genesis 3. The serpent, and Adam and Eve's yielding to his encouragement rather than to God's instruction, has so twisted our understanding. It could be said that the Fall completely turned our understanding upside down. **The human race has continued to suffer with this upside down understanding since the Fall in the garden.**

It takes the cross and the power of God's redemption to flip our understanding upside down again so that it is right side up. The Tree of Life was, and still is, in the midst, in the center, of the garden. Revelation 22:2 reads: "In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." The Tree of Life is in the midst of the Garden!!!! (Notice there is no mention of the other tree – Hallelujah!)

God gave important instruction concerning the trees in the garden (Genesis 2:16-17) And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: And\* of the tree of the

knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. (\*most translations say "but". The Hebrew prefix or word "w" can be translated "and" or "but"; yet it is more often and regularly translated "and". The translation of "w" as "but" in this verse can create the implication that God was holding out on Adam and Eve, he was keeping something from them. (This was part of the serpent's argument, which was not true). These verses are often explained as prohibition. Yet, if that is true then there is a contradiction between verse 16 and 17. God was not prohibiting them; He was instructing them.

**Instruction that concerns things that could harm us, does not necessary imply that the one sharing the instruction is holding out on us, or looking for a way to punish. us.** Here is an example: a parent tells a young child do not play with the fire on top of the stove, if you do play with it, you will be burned. A child who does not heed this instruction would be burned. They are not burned because the parent is angry or because they are punishing the child. Playing with the fire on the stove has a natural consequence. God told Adam that in the day that He ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, he would die, not because

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## Meet Amit Bhatia

Amit Bhatia is an associate pastor at North Shore Assembly of God in Skokie IL. Prior to this position, he served as pastoral intern and associate pastor at a Messianic congregation. I interviewed Amit in preparation for this article. I greatly appreciate Amit's understanding about what it means to be Jewish.



Editor – Tell us about your background.

Amit – I grew up in Bombay, India in a Hindu family. We were secular Hindus.

Editor- What was your first exposure to Jewish People?

Amit - In a 7th grade school class, I had a fellow student and a History teacher who were Indian Jews. This made me begin to wonder what it means to be Jewish.

Editor- When did you come to the United States, and how did you become a believer in Y'shua?

Amit – I came to the US in 1987 as a college student in Computer Science. I had a roommate, Steve Engstrom that was a Christian. He introduced me to Ofer Amitai, an Israeli believer, and a minister at the Zion Faith Homes. I was especially interested in Ofer's spiritual journey. He had spent time in India searching for the truth, prior to his encounter with Y'shua. Ofer's faith in Y'shua as a Jewish person also intrigued me. Jewish people, and the question of what it meant to be a Jew continued to tug at my heart. Over a course of time, Steve, Ofer and others shared their faith with me. In time, Ofer helped me to give my heart to the greatest Jew, Y'shua, the Messiah.

Editor – How did you end up ministering at a Messianic Congregation?

Amit – I was working on my masters degree at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and needed to do a practical internship. The door

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God wanted to punish him, but because the **natural consequence** of eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is death! God had instructed Adam concerning the horrible consequences of partaking of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Unfortunately, Adam and Eve did eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The consequence was death, both physical and spiritual. The spiritual death happened immediately, their understanding was now subject to the Knowledge of Good and Evil. This in itself is spiritual death. God cast them out of the garden, out of His presence, outside of the presence of the creator is spiritual death as well. This was not a punishment as many often think or believe. It was actually a consequence, which was actually their protection from something even worse. Had they stayed in the garden, and then eaten from the Tree of Life, they would have continued forever in the horrible condition they were now in; there would have been no chance for redemption. Physical death happened in due time as they now lived away and apart from the Tree of Life. Death came just as God had told them.

Adam and Eve chose to believe that the

Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was good. But in reality, it brought death, just as God said. Every descendant of these two earthly parents naturally partakes of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It is not until we encounter Y'shua, the only one since Adam and Eve who did not have two earthly parents, for us to see that true life is not according to the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, but rather comes from the Tree of Life. Y'shua and His redemption through the cross is the only way that we find the way back to the Tree of Life..



The failure to understand that God's command is first and foremost instruction, not prohibition or restriction, leads to a misunderstanding of God. Many times disobedience is expressed as the great failure in the garden. No, no, no; the great failure was in believing the serpent's words and instruction rather than God. We will naturally obey whom we believe. If Adam and Eve had believed God rather than the serpent, they would not have eaten from the tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. A result of

the Fall is that Adam and Eve's descendants naturally believe and obey Satan rather than God, and are natural partakers of the fruit of the knowledge of Good and Evil. **All the vices (really all of man's problems) can be traced to a form of the knowledge of good and evil and the deceitful influence of Satan. Man's capacity to think evil and figure out good ways to escape legal ramifications are a fruit from this tree. Even within religious mindsets, knowledge of right and wrong behavior, right and wrong theology, right and wrong observance can plague and inhibit people from receiving the simple love of Messiah as revealed at the cross.** Without Messiah, the human race is in truly terrible condition. Most significantly without Messiah one is without a proper understanding of what God is truly like. When Y'shua walked on earth, He showed and demonstrated God's goodness and God's mercy. He radically demonstrated that mercy at the cross. As our heart opens to the revelation of the cross, our understanding of what God is like changes (flipped upside down, so it is right side up) and we can start to believe Him because we begin to see him as He is.



*Meet Amit Bhatia (continued from page 1)*

opened for me to minister at a Adat Hatikvah in Skokie IL

Editor – Tell us about your experience there.

Amit – I learned a lot. I started some small groups, and I worked with the Youth. I was also involved in evangelism. Overall it was a positive experience. I had a phenomenal time. I also learned a lot about Biblical Feasts, Jewish ritual, and Jewish liturgical worship.

Editor – Why did you leave?

Amit – My time there was up. The Lord began to open other doors for me. Interestingly, I run into more Jewish people now than when I was in the Messianic congregation. I continue to be drawn to Jewish people.

Editor – Share with us your thoughts about what it means to be Jewish, to be a Jewish believer.

Amit – It means to live out the life of Messiah. To live that life out around ordinary folks. Living out the life of Y'shua means to be a blessing. To be a blessing, has nothing to do with keeping Feasts, keeping kosher, what you study, keeping the law etc. It has everything to do with the life of Y'shua shining through. He turned everything upside down. He broke down the legalistic understanding of the religious leaders of his day. Sometimes there is a conflict here, when

believers begin to celebrate their Jewishness. When the focus becomes Jewish things that define Jewish-ness, it is no longer about Y'shua. True Jewish-ness is about celebrating God, not celebrating Jewish-ness, but celebrating God Himself. Jewish-ness and Messianic Jewish-ness should be not be defined by being non-churchy, or non-Gentile. (which unfortunately, seems to be the case sometimes). For example, anti-British sentiment used to be so much a part of the thinking of Indians that one could fall into the trap of defining what it means to be Indian as being anti-British or non-British. Yet this was never a proper way of looking at things. Jewish-ness is not defined by the orthodox community, or defined by not being Christian or Gentile. It is not about holding onto something, especially Jewish things. Y'shua, the greatest Jew, and rightfully the most Jewish of Jews, gave this understanding. "He who loses His life will find it."



Notes: (Battle of Two Trees)

1. w" is a Hebrew word/prefix that can be translated "and", "but", "also". It is most frequently translated "and". Many translations translated it at the beginning of the second half of Genesis 2:9 as "also" rather than "and". This can weaken the significance of the Tree of Life being in the midst. Translating "w" as "and" in this passage helps maintain the significance of the Tree of Life.

**The Smiling Maven** is a bi-monthly Jewish flavored newsletter sharing God's incredible grace. 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.

Life is often hard. Suffering is a real part of life. Sometimes suffering enables us to see more clearly the reality that God loves us. He loves us unconditionally; it is not based on how we are doing. We may begin to understand the wonder of God's salvation through Messiah Y'shua. Grace might actually be breaking through into our lives. It is the experience of grace that can generate the most genuine smiles. 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.

Editor .....Arthur Weiner  
Someone needing to Smile More

Copy Editor.....Peter Toeg  
Making sure that our English keeps people smiling.

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

Quality Control.....Caleb Weiner  
Smiling, especially while playing on the computer.

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