

ONE TORAH FOR ALL

Zerubbabel ben Emunah

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The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil

Who Decides What is Right and Wrong?

B'reshit (Genesis) 2:16-17

And YHWH Elohim commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it; for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

It is a rather amazing thing that when people discuss this tree it tends to be a one-sided discussion. It tends to focus upon what is evil. However, the majority of those who eat from this tree today do so when they decide what is good and right. As we discuss this tree below it is important for us to keep squarely in our minds that the knowledge of this tree is two-fold; i.e., both good and evil. Let us begin our study by examining the tree and its attributes.

The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil

B'reshit [Genesis] 3:6

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he did eat.

This passage lists three attributes of this tree. Let us list them below.

1. Good for food
2. Delight to the eyes
3. Desired to make one wise

We must realize that these attributes were placed in the fruit of this tree by the Creator Himself. YHWH created this tree for the very purpose of testing Adam and Chavah to see if they loved Him more than themselves. It is quite revealing for us to see that each of these attributes is good. What this reveals to us is that the knowledge of good from this tree can be and is very deceptive in nature, perhaps even more deceptive than the evil that this tree can deliver.

Our Creator made us to need food to eat on a regular basis, otherwise we will die. It is necessary for us to eat. However, He has directed us through His Torah what is acceptable in His eyes for us to eat and what is not acceptable in His eyes. Just because something looks and smells good does not mean that we should eat it. Just because we can, does not mean that we should. While each person has the option to decide for himself what is good and what is evil, to exercise this choice is to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

YHWH has told us in His Torah that He is the One who should make those choices for us. He is the only One who can see the big picture and know what is best for us not only in the short term, but in the long run as well. The question is: do we trust Him enough to make that decision for us?

Not only was this fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil good for food, but it was a delight to the eyes. It was pleasing to look at. Now mind you there was nothing wrong in looking at this fruit. There was no commandment forbidding this. However, looking tends to cause longing, and when the gaze moves from a mere beholding to a yearning, then one has crossed the line and entered into sin.

Shemot [Exodus] 20:17

“You shall not covet your neighbor's house, you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is your neighbor's.”

Elohim had commanded Adam and Chavah that they could eat of any tree except for the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. That tree was the exclusive property of Elohim. However, the fruit of this tree was quite appealing to look at. However, the gaze upon this fruit quickly turned into coveting. They wanted this fruit, a fruit that, while it looked good, would cost them their lives in the end. That was some pretty expensive eating, wouldn't you say?

Not only was the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil good for food and appealing to the eye, it also had a benefit that was more than just a little enticing; it could make one wise. Now I ask you, what is wrong with being wise? Is this not something that Scripture admonishes us: to be wise? So how could it be wrong to eat this fruit to gain wisdom? We will discuss this more below, but for now let us simply state that true and righteous wisdom cannot be gained through rebellious sin! It can only be gained through one's obedience to His commandments.

As we can see, at least on the surface, the fruit of this tree appears to be something that would be very good for us to eat. In fact, there are times when we are examining something and of which we are considering partaking that for all intents and purposes looks to be nothing but good. That is the way

that the fruit of this tree appeared to Adam and Chavah. It was good for food and they did need to eat. It was even delicious for the eyes to feast upon. If they ate this fruit it would make them wise. Then, surely they would be able to follow and obey Elohim so much better. So why not eat it? Wouldn't Elohim be pleased with their efforts to serve Him and follow Him with greater wisdom?

Discerning Wisdom

Mishle [Proverbs] 3:13

***Happy is the man that finds wisdom,
And the man that gets understanding.***

This passage by itself illustrates the need to understand Scripture in its proper context. Without further passages of Scripture to help us understand the meaning of this passage one could easily wrongly conclude that wisdom, any kind of wisdom, can make a person happy. And if that were true, then what is the big deal about Adam and Chavah gaining wisdom through the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil? And for that matter, what would be wrong in us today eating from that same tree?

Mishle [Proverbs] 9:10

***The fear of YHWH is the beginning of wisdom;
And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.***

In this passage we see that it is not just any kind of wisdom that we should be after or that we should pursue gaining. If the wisdom that we are pursuing is not based upon the fear of YHWH, then it is the wrong kind of wisdom!

Ya'aqov [James] 1:5

***But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of YHWH, who gives to all liberally and without reproach;
and it shall be given him.***

YHWH expects us to ask Him for wisdom. He does not want us get wisdom on our own or with our own strength. This was one of the errors that Adam and Chavah made in attempting to gain wisdom through the eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Whenever a person attempts to gain wisdom through some other means than through YHWH alone, it will always be the wrong kind of wisdom.

However, if we do go to YHWH and ask for wisdom, He will give it to us!

Ya'aqov [James] 3:15-17

***15 This wisdom is not a wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, sensual, and demonic.
16 For where jealousy and factions are, there is confusion and every vile deed.***

17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

Let us note several truths about wisdom from this passage. First, there are actually two types of wisdom available to us; there is earthly wisdom which is of a demonic origin and nature. Then there is the wisdom that comes down from above; i.e., from our heavenly Father YHWH.

Let us keep those thoughts in mind and bring into our discussion the following verse.

Yochanan Aleph [1st John] 2:16

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

Now then let us compare and chart B'reshit 3:6, Ya'aqov 3:15, and Yochanan Aleph 2:16.

B'reshit 3:6	Yochanan Aleph 2:16	Ya'aqov 3:15
Good for food	Lust of the flesh	Earthly
Delight to the eyes	Lust of the eyes	Sensual
Desired to make one wise	Boastful pride of life	Demonic

The correlation between these three verses is quite astounding when viewed together. As we can see the wisdom that comes with the pursuit of the things of this world is nothing short of demonic in nature. What this should teach us is to make sure that the wisdom that we are pursuing is actually from YHWH and not of our own making and design. Before we move on, let us add a column to our chart; one that will show a supporting verse for each row to show that we need to exercise great discernment in our wisdom as to its source.

B'reshit 3:6	Yochanan Aleph 2:16	Ya'aqov 3:15	
Good for food	Lust of the flesh	Earthly	Devarim 8:3
Delight to the eyes	Lust of the eyes	Sensual	Shemot 20:17
Desired to make one wise	Boastful pride of life	Demonic	Mishle 14:12

Devarim [Deuteronomy] 8:3

“And He humbled you, and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna, which you knew not, neither did your fathers know; that He might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of YHWH does man live.”

While we do need to eat, our life must consist of more than just our daily sustenance. Our lives should be so focused upon YHWH that we realize that it is from Him that we gain our lives and without Him we die, even if we do have enough physical food to eat.

Yeshua Mashiach, when tempted by Satan, quoted this verse in defense of not feeding His hungry flesh.

Matithyah [Matthew] 4:4

***“But He answered and said, “It is written,
Man shall not live by bread alone,
But by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of YHWH.”***

As we proceed we will see that Yeshua during the time of His wilderness temptation was tempted in these three points. It can be illustrated that all temptations can be placed into one of these three categories. He overcame all these temptations because His wisdom was from above and He did not use earthly wisdom to combat the temptations!

Not only is this wisdom earthly, but it is sensual in nature as well.

Shemot [Exodus] 20:17

“You shall not covet your neighbor's house, you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is your neighbor's.”

If one does not properly guard the gates of his eyes, then covetousness will enter into his mind and heart. Once covetousness has entered into a person, he will find it that much more difficult to overcome the temptation that is before him. The eye-gate is one of the strongest lures into sin that Satan uses to ensnare us.

Just look at the advertising world and the way in which it portrays its wares to the consuming public. Its use of pictures is paramount to hooking the buyer into purchasing its products. These advertising gurus have made a science out of their profession. If anyone understands the lure of the eyes it is the advertising industry. But should we not be as aware of this as they? Should we not understand the spiritual implications of this even better than they do? To be sure! But do we? I fear not as well as we should!

Once again, Yeshua Mashiach, when He was tempted a second time in the wilderness, answered this temptation of the eyes with the following passage.

Matithyah [Matthew] 4:7

***Yeshua said to him, “Again it is written,
You shall not test YHWH your Elohim.”***

Yeshua is quoting from Devarim 6:16. Let us recall what it was that Satan was tempting Yeshua to grasp. Satan was trying to get Yeshua to throw Himself off of the top of the Temple. Of course, there would have been many people in the Temple courtyard as there always were. What a fabulous sight that would have been, to see malakim (angels) catch Him and gently set Him on the ground. Surely then they would have accepted His Messiahship! The lust of the eyes is powerful to be sure!

Not only is this wisdom earthly and sensual, but it is actually demonic and leads only to death.

Mishle [Proverbs] 14:12

***There is a way which seems right to a man;
But its end is the way of death.***

The thing about the wrong kind of wisdom is that it seems so legitimate! It seems so reasonable. After all, does not YHWH say to us:

Yeshayah [Isaiah] 1:18

“Come now, and let us reason together,” says YHWH; “though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

YHWH is reasonable. His Torah is reasonable. All of His Scripture is reasonable. He is not illogical, nor is any of His Scripture. That said, we need to be very careful that we do not reason His Torah away! This is exactly what happens when the flesh rears its head and begins to have its own way.

Can we be honest enough with ourselves here to admit that if given a choice we nearly always choose the wrong way, the way of the flesh? That is, when we make choices apart from His Spirit. Yeshua, when He was tempted in like manner in the wilderness the third time, responded by quoting another verse from the Torah.

Matithyah [Matthew] 4:10

***Then says Yeshua to him, “Be gone, Satan; for it is written,
You shall worship YHWH your Elohim,
And Him only shall you serve.”***

Let us recall that in this temptation Satan attempted to coerce Yeshua into bowing down before him in worship in exchange for the kingdoms of the earth. There are several important aspects that we should set before us in this discussion of this temptation.

Just exactly what was the temptation that Yeshua had to overcome in this instance? As the Creator, didn't these kingdoms already belong to Him? Well, yes and no. What we are really dealing with here is a matter of timing. It was not yet time for Him to rule directly over all the kingdoms of the earth and then to turn them over to His Father. It appears that the actual temptation that He was being offered was to forgo the coming suffering and jump right to the kingship.

The next thing of interest for us is to look at the Hebrew text from the Shem Tov, Matithyah 4:9.

and he said to Him, "All these things will I give you, if you will bare your head to me."	וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ כָּל אֱלֹהִים אֶתֶן לְךָ אִם תִּפְרַע אֵלַי
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Most other translations have this verse translated as:

and he said to Him, "All these things will I give you, if you will fall down and worship me."

The concept is the same in both; the only difference is that in the text from Shem Tov we learn some very valuable information, that being that Yeshua normally had His head covered. Furthermore, to worship Satan involves the uncovering of a person's head. It would seem that in some fashion Satan is glorified when a person uncovers his head in worship and YHWH is glorified when a person covers his head in worship. Covering the head is an act of submission. Whereas, uncovering the head is an act of rebellion.

One of the many things that is in hot debate at present is the question of men's head coverings. What each person should do is to lay down his own personal agenda and simple allow Scripture to say what it says. When we do this we do not eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. However, when a person decides for himself what is right and what is wrong, then this is eating of the deadly fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Let us compare these passages again in a chart.

B'reshit 3:6	Yochanan Aleph 2:16	Ya'aqov 3:15	Matithyah 4 Yeshua's Temptation
Good for food	Lust of the flesh	Earthly	Turn stones to bread
Delight to the eyes	Lust of the eyes	Sensual	Throw Himself down
Desired to make one wise	Boastful pride of life	Demonic	Worship Satan

Earlier we stated that these three areas cover every possible sin in a person's life. The three possible areas in which a person can be tempted to sin are the body, soul, and spirit. (For an explanation of the difference between the soul and the spirit please see the study [What is Your Mindset.](#))

Let us now include this information in our chart.

B'reshit 3:6	Yochanan Aleph 2:16	Ya'aqov 3:15	Matithyah 4 Yeshua's Temptation	Area of our Temptation
Good for food	Lust of the flesh	Earthly	Turn stones to bread	Body
Delight to the eyes	Lust of the eyes	Sensual	Throw Himself down	Soul
Desired to make one wise	Boastful pride of life	Demonic	Worship Satan	Spirit

Please prayerfully consider this next passage.

Ivrim [Hebrews] 4:15

For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that has been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

This series of temptations that Yeshua faced in the wilderness were not by any means the only temptations that He faced. However, these He underwent and overcame specifically for us so that we could know that there was a way to overcome temptations, whatever they may be. We just need to look to our High Priest for help and strength.

This is especially true when it comes to the temptation to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. This is an easy tree from which to eat, particularly if we do not guard ourselves with all diligence not to eat from it. It seems that the default is eating from this tree regularly. This is true for all people of all ages. However, those who eat from it more than most it seems are parents. What?! Now wait just a minute here; our teenagers are regular visitors to this tree, and are you suggesting that we as parents eat more often than they? Yes. From whom do you think they learned it? We are the ones that have set the example for our children. Let's face it, the parenting skills of today are sadly non-Scriptural. What we saw in our parents is what we have emulated for the most part. How many do you know who have actually taken the time to read and study Scripture to learn how to parent their children? And if one has not gone to Scripture to learn how to parent his children, then by default he is eating the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

How so? Because if they are the ones who are deciding what is right and wrong for their children, instead of YHWH through His Written Word, then they are eating of this forbidden fruit. Furthermore, they are teaching their children to eat of this forbidden fruit.

So here is a question for us to ponder. How can we raise our children in the way that they should go if we are the ones determining what is right and what is wrong? Honestly, I do not think that we can do this! The only way to train our children in the way that they should go is by letting YHWH decide what is good and what is evil. We simply do not have enough information to properly determine this for anyone or anything!

The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Torah Moshe

As many people are awakening to the reality that the Torah Moshe is still for today and for those who would accept its yoke, the most common thing that happens is that people look at the Torah and begin building lists of dos and don'ts. May I submit to you that this very act is eating the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil? Why?

YHWH gave us His Torah through Moshe who then wrote it down. From this YHWH expects us to live according to His commandments, ordinances, and judgments. Furthermore, He has told us specifically that we are to be careful not to add to these commandments, nor are we to take away from these commandments.

Within many of the commandments of the Torah is latitude. The specifics of how to keep the commandments is not given to us. Let us take the commandment of the tzitzit as one example of how YHWH has commanded us to do something, but has not given us all the specifics on how to actually do it. We are supposed to wear one tzitzit upon each of the four corners of the garment with which we cover ourselves. Besides that, the only other requirement is that it must have a thread of techelet in it. Beyond these requirements, there are none.

A couple of years ago at a Sukkot that was held here at our home there were many people who came. I observed that each family tied its tzitzit differently, which caused me no problems. I have worn my tzitzit tied in many different ways, always with white thread and a thread of techelet. What nearly freaked me out was that some of those who came had tzitzit that were of all the colors of the rainbow. I had never seen nor heard of such a thing. While at that time I personally would not have worn such tzitzit, I knew and recognized that since these tzitzit had the techelet in them, they fulfilled the commandment. Therefore, I could say nothing to them, and did not say anything.

It is when we as His people begin to add what we deem as right and good on how to keep His commandments and then attempt to impose them upon others, we have become guilty of eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

It would seem that in our efforts to come out of Babylon and to keep His Torah to the best of our ability in the Diaspora, we often go a little too far in our zealotry. I do not believe that we actually intend to eat of this forbidden fruit. Nevertheless, we eat this fruit all too often. How can we tell if we are eating of this forbidden fruit?

One way that is a strong indication that this forbidden fruit has been partaken of is how we are treating His people, our brothers and sisters in Mashiah. If there is harshness and judgment on our part towards others because they are not keeping His Torah in exactly the same way that we are keeping it, then we have most likely eaten the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. One's harsh

judgment of others indicates that he believes that the keeping of Torah must be in accordance to his understanding, otherwise others simply are not keeping Torah.

The greatest problem when this happens is that it is nothing short of idolatry! If a person believes that they are keeping Torah perfectly (believe it or not, there are some out there who actually think this) and all others must come in line with their thinking, then they have set themselves up as Elohim. We are not to follow each other; we are all to follow YHWH!

A friend of ours who is a local business owner was in his store one day when some people who keep the Shabbat came into his store. Now this friend of ours is not a keeper of Shabbat, but we have been witnessing to them and so they have a lot of information that we have given to them, including His Name. In the discussion that ensued between our friend and these people the discussion turned to the subject of His Name. When it became known that this friend of ours already knew the name but did not use His Name, these people began condemning our friend. In fact, they began yelling and shouting at them, telling them that they were going to hell because they did not use the name of "Yahweh."

Brothers and Sisters, I hope that none of you reading this has ever been guilty of something so anti-Torah as this! However, any time that we pass judgment upon others and condemn them, and this happens without so much as two or three witnesses, then we have set ourselves up as a judge.

Ya'aqov [James] 4:11-12

11 Speak not one against another, brethren. He that speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the Torah, and judges the Torah; but if you judge the Torah, you are not a doer of the Torah, but a judge.

12 One only is the Torah giver and Judge, even He who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you that judges his neighbor?

YHWH has called each and every one of us to be a doer of the Torah. Furthermore, we are to help one another to be doers of the Torah. But if one is condemning another, how can that help the other person be a doer of the Torah? It cannot! In fact, in most cases when one receives condemnation from another is has a tendency to discourage, rather than encourage one to be a doer of the Torah. Is it not fair to say that we all receive enough discouragement and condemnation from the world and those who have no desire to keep His Torah? So, why should we give discouragement and condemnation to one another?

In essence what the passage above from Ya'aqov is teaching us is that we should be careful to be a doer of the Torah, rather than eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. For when we condemn another we have decided for ourselves what is good and what is evil. You see what Torah provides for is that YHWH raises up judges amongst His people. It is up to the judges to decide if someone is not doing something according to Torah. And this must only happen with the proper amount of witnesses, at least two or three, never only one witness. However, much of the condemnation that I have witnessed in the past has been on the testimony of only one person. You

would think that these people should know better! It is almost as if they do not think that the Torah applies to them in the same way.

And since we do not at this time have a nation in which we have properly sitting judges, we should be extra cautious about lynch parties and attempting to destroy another through slander, gossip, and character assassination with accusations against another without the proper amount of witnesses and of course, due process according to Scripture.

But this presents us with a difficult question. How are we to know what is good and what is evil in regards to keeping Torah at this time? First, we need to understand that He is calling each person to serve in a particular function within the body (nation). As such, that person may be given special knowledge and understanding that the rest of the body may not have or readily understand or accept. We must exercise patience and understanding with one another. Where there is latitude in the Torah, latitude we must give. We must be able to discuss these things without having an agenda, nor being emotionally tied to the subject matter being discussed.

Perhaps the best rule of thumb in this is the following passage.

Matithyah [Matthew] 7:12

"Always treat others as you would like them to treat you; that sums up the teaching of the Torah and the Prophets."

No one likes to be condemned! Therefore, we should not condemn others.

It will take us some time and some very hard work to iron out all the differences between all our understandings of Scripture and how to walk and live a set-apart life. Let each one of us look to ourselves to make sure that we are not eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. If each one of us would do this, then working out our differences will be much more pleasant.

Let us walk in His Spirit so that we can be sure that what we are doing in regards to keeping Torah is in fact of His Spirit and not of our own vain imaginations.

In addition to this, whatever conclusions that we draw from Scripture should not and cannot violate or disagree with the pashat level of understanding; that is, the literal reading of Scripture. We just need to let the Scripture say what it says. If we do that as much as possible, then we will not need to have a lot of exotic interpretations of Scripture whose explanations are so involved that the explanation is difficult to follow. We just need to become as a child and go with the simple reading and understanding of what the Scripture says.

Furthermore, we need to be sure to stay away from proof-texts. We need the whole counsel of Scripture. If one's position is such that it rests upon just a one verse or perhaps just a few verses, and

other verses seem to indicate something different and those verses are ignored, then one's position is not very tenable.

Of course, in all of this process we need to be careful to always use good hermeneutics. First, we need to understand the passage in its historical context of Scripture. Who was writing it; to whom was it written; what was meant by it in that culture; and how would the first readers have understood it; then, rightly applying its principle and meaning to us today in our culture.

There are many people who daily eat the deadly fruit of this tree today because they do not seriously consider the choices they are making on a daily basis.

May YHWH open our eyes and give each one of us understanding in this matter that we may learn to stop eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and do only what is right and good in His eyes; in the name of Yeshua our Mashiach. Amein.

Shabbat Shalom

Zerubbabel ben Emunah

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