

KNOWLEDGE: LIFE-GIVING OR DEATH-BRINGING? DIVINE AND HUMAN KNOWING IN GENESIS 2–3

This paper explores the concept of knowing (yada 'i) and knowledge (da 'at) in Genesis 2–3. The story of the garden of Eden is complex and multidimensional, its meanings often ambiguous and elusive. Here, knowledge is one of the richest and most sublime notions that stands at the center of the whole story, highlights its deepest meanings and connects all its characters. Both divine and human actors have their multiple relationships with knowledge, whether they possess it, desire or acquire it. Yet the facets of the idea of knowing are different for different parties involved. Linguistic and stylistic peculiarities of the text mark the connections between the characters and their association with knowledge. The recognition of the textual relationship between the tree of knowledge of good and bad and the tree of life leads to the question about the relationship between knowledge and death. The web of connections between these dissimilar yet cognate concepts establishes meanings of knowledge for God and for human beings. A difficult mix of God's unclear intentions within the narrative becomes the cosmic wisdom, while confusion and shame of the human couple turns into the knowledge of the condition of being human, which includes gender differentiation and childbearing as the source of both mortality and immortality.

Keywords: Adam and Eve, Bible and culture, divine knowledge, garden of Eden, gender, Genesis 2–3, God, Hebrew Bible, human knowledge, immortality, mortality, tree of knowledge of good and bad, tree of life, man, serpent, woman, Yahweh Elohim.

The creation accounts in Genesis 2–11 have a feature that differs them from other biblical and broader ancient Near-Eastern cosmogonies: they are human-oriented. The narrative here focuses primarily on human agents, their characters, relationships and actions, while retaining the scale of cosmic universality of the events narrated. Human choices bring about changes in their status, lives, and the world around them. This world depends on them and their choices – although God ultimately holds control over everything in creation.

In these stories, the difference in how God and the human beings maintain their respective spheres of responsibility lies in their awareness. While God seems

to know what he is doing and why, people have to learn their part, and they learn it by trials and errors, confusions, achievements and more confusions. Initially, they know neither how their world works nor the consequences of their deeds. Thus, the issue of knowledge becomes a key to understanding both the parts God and people play in the narratives, and the nature of the divine and human agents there. It is significant that the question of knowledge comes to the fore in the first story of the series, in Genesis 2–3.

What does God know? Will people ever learn it? Will they have access to the divine knowledge? What is the content of the divine knowledge and its human counterpart? Possession of knowledge, desires for knowledge, acquisition of knowledge become the demarcation line between the realm of God and the human world, and paradoxically, a common ground for all the parties involved.

I. *Dramatis Personae* of the Knowledge Drama

The story of the garden in Gn 2–3 is one of the best known and yet most intriguing and even puzzling stories in Western culture. It influenced the Christian doctrine of original sin which formed the whole realm of Christian anthropology. The figures of Adam and Eve have become recognizable symbols of gender relationship and of human weakness and fall. Everybody remembers Eve whom God created from Adam's rib and who seduced her husband with an apple and thereby brought about their downfall. In Western culture, these images are so conspicuous that even the laryngeal prominence is usually called Adam's apple, cervical rib is commonly referred to as Adam's rib. In a similar way, the serpent from this story has become a model picture of the devil tempting people to sin.

However, if we look at it more carefully, the text of Genesis 2–3 defies our stereotypes. In the biblical story, there is neither apple nor rib, and what is more, there is neither Adam nor Eve. The message of this story is not quite about temptation, or fall and punishment, as in our popular understanding, but rather about the process of growth and maturing of people and their relationship between themselves and with their world. The narrative marks this process with the notion of knowledge, to which all the characters relate in different ways. There are four characters in the story who have their own agenda and motivations, and between whom the drama, centered on the possession and acquisition of knowledge, unfolds.¹

¹ In the following analysis of the characters and their interconnections within the narrative of Gn 2–3, I use my study of the subject done in 2017 for the new translation of Genesis 2–3 into Belarusian with an introduction and commentaries. See, Ірына Дубянецкая. *Эдэнскі сад: стварэнне чалавека. Кніга Роду 2:46-25 // Дзеяслоў 2* (87) (Мінск 2017) 210–218; *ibid.* *Эдэнскі сад: веда добра і зла. Кніга Роду 3 // Дзеяслоў 4* (89) (Мінск 2017) 184–191.

The main character of Genesis 2–3 is God whose name here is Yahweh Elohim.² He creates the world and the human being in it and watches closely how his creature finds his own ways there, what choices he makes. When the human being finds some balance, God overturns his life, makes him to redefine himself and his world in order to find a new balance. God's motivations are never obvious; they are full of hidden meanings, and this creates a tension within the narrative.

Human being, אָדָם (*ha-adam*) in Hebrew, possesses here neither gender identity nor personal name which is clear from the use of the article *ha*.³ He is made from the ground, or soil, אֲדָמָה (*ha-adamah*) which also means the earth, and his life is linked to it forever. In the course of the narrative, as Karalina Matskevich notes, *ha-adam* 'evolves from an ungendered human being to a male character, juxtaposed to woman'.⁴

Then, there comes woman, אִשָּׁה (*ha-iššah*), and her very appearance changes the whole situation, all established relationships and priorities. After the woman has been taken from the first human being, he remains who he was, that is, *ha-adam* connected to *ha-adamah*. Yet she is also a human being, and to define his new situation, the first *ha-adam* is now called also אִישׁ (*ha-iš*), as a mark of his relationship to *ha-iššah*. Therefore, from the gender perspective, woman comes first and man comes second. This might explain why the woman in the story is qualified to take the momentous decision for both of them. Being the first gendered human being, she makes a choice that affects their relationship as a couple: 'the eyes of both were opened, and knew that they were naked ('*arumim*); and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons' (Gn 3:7). Her choice changes the whole life of the human beings, forces them to leave the comfort

² In the preceding story (Gn 1:1–2:4a) God is consistently called Elohim; in the following story (Gn 4:1–16) the name of the divine actor is exclusively Yahweh; the following stories of the Primeval History of Genesis 1–11 use either of the two names. Elohim is employed more often by P, Yahweh by non-P. The divine name in the garden myth in Gn 2–3 is a combination of the two, Yahweh Elohim. Apart from here, this doubling occurs only in Exodus 9:30. Observing that this usage forms 'an unusual combination, almost peculiar to Genesis 2–3', George Knight suggests that the final redactor 'devised this means of linking the two creation stories together, to make it clear that they both describe the activity of the one and only God.' See, G. A. F. Knight. *Theology in Pictures: A Commentary on Genesis Chapters One to Eleven*. Edinburgh 1981, pp. 23–24. See also, M. Witte. *Die Biblische Urgeschichte: Redaktions- und theologiegeschichtliche Beobachtungen zu Genesis 1,1–11,26*. Berlin – New York 1998, pp. 57–61; E. Van Wolde. *Words Become Worlds: Semantic Studies of Genesis 1–11*. Leiden – New York – Köln 1991, pp. 48–49. The double name, Yahweh Elohim, appears some 20 times in the whole story of Genesis 2–3 (Gn 2:4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22; 3:1a, 8bis, 9, 13, 14, 21, 22, 23). Elohim appears four times, only in the speech of the serpent (Gn 3:1b, 3, 5bis), and not a single time Yahweh.

³ Scholars mostly agree that the word *ha-adam* here is a generic term for human being. For an overview of the discussion see, Karalina Matskevich. *Construction of Gender and Identity in Genesis. The Subject and the Other*. London 2019, p. 9, especially n. 17.

⁴ Matskevich. *Construction of Gender*, p. 9.

of the Garden, to start their new life and to create the world of their own – for good or for bad.

While the man's mission is to work on and for the earth, the woman's task is to give life. In Genesis 3:20 her husband names her חַוְוָה (*ḥawwah*), which is explained that she 'will be the mother of all the *living*' – חַיָּה (*ḥay*). In the Septuagint this name here is rendered semantically – Ζωή (*Zoe*), – 'life'. Outside of this episode in Gn 3:20, this name is mentioned only once in the Hebrew Bible, and this happens in the beginning of the story that immediately follows the story of the Garden, thereby providing a link between the two. In Gn 4:1, we read that *ha-adam* 'knew' his wife, *ḥawwah*. This time, the Septuagint translates *ḥawwah* in a different way, more or less phonetically: Εὐα (*Eua*). Precisely this second rendering has become the reason behind our common myth of Eve.⁵

The fourth character in the story in Genesis 2–3 is the serpent who completes the square of interrelations within the story. Everyone is connected to everyone, and the links are multidimensional. There are several types of binary relationships in the narrative, accentuated linguistically, and among them two binary sets of connections: external and internal, vertical and horizontal. The linguistic link within the external–internal relationships is the same-looking (although not necessarily of the same etymology) name of both parties with respective gender-markers (*adam–adamah*; *iš–iššah*); the vertical–horizontal relationships are marked with a keyword, applied to either part of a binary opposition – and only to them. We may have a closer look at these four lines of relationships between the four characters.

1. The **external** connection establishes an inseparable tie between human being, *ha-adam*, and the world, *ha-adamah*, which he is called to care about (*abad*, literally to serve, Gn 2:5, 15; 3:23; then again in 4:2, 12, where Cain carries on the earth-serving mission of *ha-adam*). *Ha-adamah* is more than just the soil, the substance, out of which the man is formed, and more than the ground that feeds him and on whose fertility he depends (in 3:18, God warns the man, that it will not give him good food). Rather, it is his, human, world, the one and the only, his life and his death, the rhyme and reason of this existence. *Ha-adamah* and *ha-adam* are inseparable and interdependent. We read in Gn 2:5 that nothing grew from the earth, for there was no *ha-adam* to work upon (*abad*) *ha-adamah*. Then, in Gn 3:17–19, God speaks about the new status quo for both *adam* and *adamah*, saying that *ha-adamah* is cursed because of *ha-adam* and that he will eat from it until he returns to it. Even outside the garden the purpose of his life remains the same: God sends *ha-adam* 'to till *ha-adamah* out of which he has been taken' (Gn 3:23).

⁵ See, Anne Lapidus Lerner. *Eternally Eve: Images of Eve in the Hebrew Bible, Midrash and Modern Jewish Poetry*. Waltham 2007.

2. The **internal** connection constitutes the relationship between *ha-adam* and his sexuality, or the inner other. The pair of words, *ha-iš* ('man') and *ha-iššah* ('woman'), creates this connection. The same as with *adam–adamah*, the pair *iš–iššah* looks like a masculine–feminine pair, although they are of different roots. God makes the woman, *ha-iššah*, out of a *šela* – 'side', taken from *ha-adam* (Gn 2:21).⁶ In the Hebrew Bible *šela* means side and often is used as an architectural term denoting one of the two sides of an altar, or the tabernacle, or a building – all visualized as having two sides, right and left. Here, in Gn 2:21–22 this architectural metaphor is strengthened by the verb *בנה* (*binah*) – 'to build', used for God's action of making the woman ('Yahweh Elohim built the side which he had taken from *ha-adam*, into the woman', Gn 2:22). In this cosmologic picture, *ha-adam* is a no-gender human being, who has two sides with a potentiality of maleness and femaleness. This means that the two genders were inbuilt in the human being but not differentiated until needed. When the need emerges, God divides these sides, and out of one *ha-adam* there comes a heterosexual couple with different cosmological functions and tasks. In itself, each half of the former unity appears whole: God has 'closed up this place with flesh' (Gn 2:21), so that no traces of the division remain. Yet, *ha-adam* feels that unity when he recognizes the woman, *ha-iššah*, as his own extension and reflection, the body, to which his own body will be ever drawn, so that the two can become one again (Gn 2:23–24). On the other hand, the woman, *ha-iššah*, is herself an independent subject, and they confront each other, as two separate beings, each with their own personality, will and motivations. Their encounter changes *ha-adam*, for he becomes a man, *ha-iš*, even though only in his relationship to *ha-iššah*, the woman. They belong together, and throughout the narrative he will be called *אישה* (*išah*) – her man, or her husband, while she becomes *אשתו* (*išto*) – his woman, or his wife.

3. A curious relationship develops **horizontally**, that is, not hierarchically, between the human couple and the serpent. They are all the creatures of God, and therefore are on a more or less the same level of being. Their close link is linguistically accentuated by the word *ערום* – '*arum* / '*arom* applied to both the couple and the serpent. This word first appears in two juxtaposed phrases, the last sentence of Gn 2 and the first of Gn 3, which constitute a close semantic unity. 'They were both *ערומים* ('*arumim*), the human and his woman (*ha-adam we-išto*), and they were not ashamed' (Gn 2:25) – and immediately after that: 'Now the serpent was the most *ערום* ('*arum*) among all the animals of the field, whom Yahweh Elohim has made.' (Gn 3:1). The word '*arumim* is the plural of '*arom*, 'naked', and also

⁶ Here comes our famous 'rib'. The word *עלץ* (*šela*) occurs some 41 time in the Hebrew Bible, and never has it meant 'rib'. The strong tradition of rendering *šela* as rib comes from the Vulgate, where it is translated as *costae* – 'rib'. The choice of the Septuagint was more adequate: *πλευρά* (*pleura*) – 'side'.

of 'arum, 'crafty/sensible/intelligent'. Such play of the plural and the singular of the word, which might be the same or might be not, suggests some subtle symmetry, or similarity, between the human couple and the serpent. Later, the word for the nakedness will be used in a slightly different form: 'erumim in the plural (Gn 3:7) and 'erom in the singular (Gn 3:10–11). This parallelism between the couple and the serpent establishes a subtle affinity between them, which creates a shadow story behind the main story and elucidates why the serpent was suitable to incite the woman to make her life-turning decision. Later in the narrative, there is one more alliteration with the 'arum–'arom pair: in Gn 3:21 God clothes people in skin – עור ('or). Although 'or here may mean just a human skin, it has some serpentine connotation. Both parties, the humans and the serpent, have a smooth skin; both are naked; both are intelligent.

4. Lastly, there is a **vertical**, or hierarchical, relationship, which develops between the human couple and their creator, Yahweh Elohim. In the case of the human-divine relationship, the link-word is ידע (*yada'*), 'to know', and its derivative, דעת (*da'at*), 'knowledge'. The true knowledge belongs to God, and the story tells of his knowledge of good and bad.⁷ 'Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and bad', says Yahweh Elohim (Gn 3:22). The divine knowledge becomes the object of temptation in the conversation between the serpent and the woman (Gn 3:5), and the object of desire in the woman's decision to take the fruit from the forbidden tree (Gn 3:6). The acquiring of knowledge marks the process of human growth. What does knowledge bring to them, life or death?

II. The Tree of Knowledge

1. The Connection between the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge

The notion of knowledge in Genesis 2–3 is closely associated with one of the major images of the story, namely, the image of the tree. Genesis 2:8 reports that Yahweh Elohim plants a 'garden in the east, in Eden' (ויטע יהוה אלהים גן־בעדן מקדם), and then he puts there *ha-adam* whom he has just formed (וישם שם את־האדם אשר יצר). The focus of the story lies in what God has planted in this garden (Gn 2:9):

⁷ Traditionally, the name of the tree, עץ הדעת טוב ורע (*'es hadda'at tow wara'*) is rendered into English as 'the tree of knowledge of good and evil' – thus in the most of the translations and hence in the scholarly literature. I have found only two modern English Bibles, both rather periphrastic, that render *tow wara* differently, namely, Contemporary English Version: 'right and wrong', and Good News Translation: 'good and bad'. Modern scholarship, however, begins to gravitate to the latter, in order to avoid the strong moral connotation of 'good and evil'. In my view, the term 'good and bad' allows to look at the tree from a cosmologic perspective which denotes a totality of knowledge applied to the binary world.

<p>ויצמח יהוה אלהים מן-האדמה כל-עץ נחמד למראה וטוב למאכל ועץ החיים בתוך הגן ועץ הדעת טוב ורע</p>	<p>And Yahweh Elohim made to grow out of the ground every tree, pleasant for sight at and good for food, and the tree of life in the middle of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and bad.</p>
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The text here is ambiguous about how many trees there were ‘in the middle of the garden.’ Except for the very instant of ‘planting,’ the two tree-names are never mentioned together. What is then the connection between the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and bad, or indeed between life and knowledge? While the tree of life is a well-known image in the ancient world, the tree of knowledge of good and bad appears only in this biblical story. Is the tree of life the same tree as the tree of knowledge, or are they two different trees?

The tree of life grows ‘in the middle of the garden’; the tree of knowledge of good and bad is also there. The rhythmical organisation of the Hebrew text in Gn 2:9b suggests a parallelism between the two lines, which puts the emphasis on the notion of a tree. Parallelism is a literary device typical for the ancient Semitic poetry, where the same phenomenon is described twice, but with slightly different words (often synonymous) that accentuate its different aspects or characteristics. The poetry of these two lines is perfect; every vowel in the second line repeats the respective vowel in the first; every breath is of the same length and depth:

ועץ החיים בתוך הגן	
ועץ הדעת טוב ורע	
<i>w^e‘eš hahayyim</i>	<i>betok hagan</i>
<i>w^e‘eš hadda‘at</i>	<i>tow wara‘</i>
and the tree of life	in the middle of the garden,
and the tree of knowledge	of good and bad.

Such a clear parallelism suggests that the tree is one and the same. Yet, after this first picture of the tree(s) is drawn, each tree-name is mentioned separately in the narrative.

In Gn 2:16–17, only the tree of the knowledge of good and bad becomes an object of prohibition:

<p>ויצר יהוה אלהים עלי-האדם לאמר מכל עץ-הגן אכל תאכל ומעץ הדעת טוב ורע לא תאכל ממנו</p>	<p>And Yahweh 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 bad, you shall not eat of it; ‘for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’</p>
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Then, this prohibition comes to the fore in the dialogue between the woman and the serpent in Gn 3:2–3. This time, the woman speaks of one single ‘tree in the middle of the garden’:

ותאמר האשה אל־הנחש	The woman said to the serpent,
מפרי עץ־הגן נאכל	'We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden;
ומפרי העץ אשר בתוך־הגן	but of the fruit of the tree
	that is in the middle of the garden,
אמר אלהים לא תאכלו ממנו	Elohim said, "You shall not eat from it,
ולא תגעו בו פן־תמתון	"nor shall you touch it, or you shall die".

Which tree does she mean? In the light of God's prohibition in Gn 2:17, the woman could only mean the tree of knowledge of good and bad, while from the perspective of its location 'in the middle,' this must refer to the tree of life in Gn 2:9. Or is it the third tree? The uncertainty grows and suggests that the matter is not straightforward, but there might be some deeper layer to the story, some game played unseen within it.

The ambiguity becomes even greater when the tree of life comes to light at the end of the story. In Gn 3:22, God does not want the man to eat the fruit of the tree of life:

ויאמר יהוה אלהים	And Yahweh Elohim said,
הן האדם היה כאחד ממנו	'Behold, the man is become as one of us,
לדעת טוב ורע	'knowing good and bad.
ועתה פן־ישלח ידו	'And now, lest he put forth his hand,
ולקח גם מעץ החיים	'and take also of the tree of life,
ואכל וחי מלעל	'and eat, and live for ever –'

On the one hand, the word גם (*gam*), 'also,' indicates that the tree of life is not the one, from which people have already eaten. On the other hand, this is inconsistent with Gn 2:16–17, where God allows the man to eat 'from any tree in the garden' except from the tree of knowledge of good and bad. The tree of life was not then an object of prohibition, which means that the man could have freely eaten from it. What has changed that God now starts to care about the tree of life? Keeping in mind the poetic parallelism at the beginning of the story, the reader must perceive that both prohibitions imply one and the same tree, which has two names. These names may refer to the different 'sides' of the tree, its different capacities or even opposite functions: to give either eternal life (Gn 3:22) or the knowledge of good and bad (Gn 3:5, 22). At the start of the narrative, God does not advise humans against eating from the tree's 'life' part, only from the 'knowledge' part. As the narrative unfolds, people choose to eat the fruit that gives knowledge and thereby close to themselves the possibility to eat the fruit of eternal life – which was open to them earlier. Thus, the text might indicate that there is one single tree in focus, and it has two (or even three, if to count 'the tree in the middle of the garden' in Gn 3:2–3) names.

Then, the question arises: why does the 'knowledge of good and bad' stand on the other side of 'life'? The natural opposition to life would be death. To explore

this intriguing opposition of life and knowledge we may start with exploring the subjects of knowing in the Genesis narrative.

2. *Divine Knowledge and Human Knowledge*

The meaning and usage of the verb יָדַע (*yada'*), 'to know', and the noun דַּעַת (*da'at*), 'knowledge', are ambiguous, polyvalent and sometimes even disturbing in the narrative of Genesis 2–3 and also in 4:1, where the strife for knowledge resolves in an unexpected way and the story completes itself. The subjects of knowledge are either God or the two human beings. The serpent speaks about knowledge (Gn 3:5) but neither possesses nor acquires it.

What is the difference – if any – between God's knowledge and the knowledge of people? The text speaks of the divine knowing three times and three times of the human knowing. Here is a synopsis of the use of the term in relation to the subjects of knowledge:

God

- 1) plants the tree of *knowledge* of good and bad (עֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וְרָע), Gn 2:9, 17;
- 2) knows: 'Elohim *knows* (יָדַע) that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened', Gn 3:5;
- 3) possesses the knowledge of good and bad: 'The man has become like one of us, *knowing* (לִדְעַת) good and bad', Gn 3:22.

Human beings

- 1) *knew* (יָדְעוּ) that they were naked ('*arumim*'), Gn 3:7;
- 2) acquire the knowledge of good and bad: *knowing* (לִדְעַת), Gn 3:22;
- 3) apply their knowledge: 'And the man *knew* (יָדַע) Eve his wife', Gn 4:1.

When the idea of knowledge is introduced for the first time in the name of the tree, it is the idea of the total knowledge: עֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וְרָע, 'the tree of knowledge of good and bad' (Gn 2:9, 17).⁸ This name of the tree suggests, as George Knight puts it, 'the total range of knowledge that is possible to man, knowledge from A to Z, as we might say, on the analogy of an electric battery, from the positive to the negative pole.' Good and bad stand at the opposite sides of existence, or rather, of a potential experience of existence, and hence, include everything that lies in-between the two binary oppositions. Ellen J. Van Wolde defines the knowledge of good and bad as having a discriminative power and 'based on experience which comprises everything, both persons and objects, and this is represented by the two halves of the merism: good and bad'.⁹ This is the knowledge that God possesses and the human beings desire.

⁸ Knight. *Theology in Pictures*, p. 26.

⁹ Van Wolde. *A Semiotic Analysis of Genesis 2–3: A Semiotic Theory and Method of Analysis Applied to the Story of the Garden of Eden*. Assen 1989, p. 36.

The second mention of knowledge comes in the serpent-woman dialogue where the serpent manipulates the idea of knowing: 'Elohim *knows* (יָדָע) that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened' (Gn 3:5). Does the serpent know the content and the extent of God's knowledge, speaking of what God does know and what he does not?

In Gn 3:6, the woman decides to eat from the tree, and her motivation is the acquisition of a new cognitive experience: 'And the woman saw that the tree is good for food, and it is pleasant for the eyes and desirable for understanding'. Her decision is not spontaneous. She contemplates the tree and sees in it what has been implied by God for all the trees in the garden from the beginning, that is, being enjoyable for the seeing and eating (Gn 2:6). However, she also sees something that makes this tree different from all the rest: it is 'desirable for understanding'. The word used here, השכיל (*haskil*), means intellect, understanding, and wisdom. This new perception of the tree proves decisive for the woman; her desire to understand wins over her fears, and she chooses understanding over obedience. Significantly, none of the words for knowledge and knowing, *yada* 'or *da* 'at, are mentioned in this episode.

Nevertheless, the act of seeing is vital for the acquisition of knowledge. On one level of meaning, human sight as such provides a possibility to discern, to, perceive and hence to know. For the woman, seeing becomes knowing: in her triad of the trees' attractive qualities – 'good for food', 'pleasant for the eyes' and 'desirable for understanding' – the first and the last cannot be concluded from a mere sense of seeing, but require a cognitive process. The result of that process is her 'knowing' that she wants what she sees. Mieke Bal notes that the Hebrew word רָאָה (*rah*, 'to see'), has an implication of truth, that is, it denotes 'what really is, behind false appearances or incomplete information.'¹⁰ On another level of meaning, 'seeing' plays upon the 'opening of the eyes', which the serpent predicts in Gn 3:5 ('your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and bad') and which subsequently happens in Gn 3:7 ('the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked'). Walter Moberly demonstrates that the opening of the eyes in the Hebrew Bible has a positive meaning with a connotation of a God-giving knowledge or realization.¹¹

Here, 'knowledge' does come from seeing, but it also becomes integrated by 'eating'. The text makes seeing–eating–knowing an inseparable unity, as it comes three times in the course of three verses. In two instances, this triple usage is nearly identical: in the serpent's speech ('you eat' – 'your eyes will be opened' – 'knowing good and bad', Gn 3:5), and as the result of the woman's choice ('she ate', 'he ate' –

¹⁰ Mieke Bal. *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories*. Bloomington 1987, p. 122.

¹¹ R. W. L. Moberly. Did the Serpent Get It Right? // *Journal of Theological Studies* 39/1 (1988) 7–9.

their eyes opened’ – ‘they knew’, Gn 3:6b–7). In one instance, in Gn 3:6, the order and the wording are different, although all three elements are present: the woman realizes that the tree is good for food–eyes–understanding.¹²

The third mention of knowledge appears in Gn 3:7. Having eaten from the tree, the man and woman subsequently *knew* (ידעו) that they were naked (‘*arumim*).¹³ The text does not tell of what they expected, what they wanted to know, yet it is clear that it was not what they received. The notion of nakedness implies not only some link between people and the serpent, but also some deficiency as a new characteristic of the human nature: they are uncomfortable with each other’s nakedness and choose to cover themselves to hide it.

At the end of the garden story, the word ידע (*yada*‘) occurs in God’s speech, bearing once more the connotation of totality: ‘The man has become like one of us, *knowing* (לדעת) good and bad’ (Gn 3:22).

People are capable of knowing, and this links them to God – they can become ‘like one of us’, as Yahweh Elohim says. The unspecified divine ‘us’ possess knowledge, and now humans have acquired it. Thus, knowledge becomes both divine and human attribute.

However, knowledge does not mean the same for God and for the two human beings in the story. Matskevich distinguishes between the knowledge of good and bad as the cosmic knowledge of totality, of the world order on the one hand, and the knowledge of nakedness on the other. The former is a ‘capacity to make distinctions, to differentiate between the opposite phenomena that form empirical reality’¹⁴, while the latter means experience of gender and the otherness.

3. *The Connection between Knowledge and Death*

In all instances where the idea of ‘knowing’ appears in the garden story, it has a subtle yet undeniable link with the notion of death.

This link comes to the fore in the words of God, the woman, and the serpent, when they one after another elaborate on the possibilities of the tree of knowledge of good and bad.

First, Yahweh Elohim warns the man in Gn 2:17:

כי ביום אכלך ממנו מות תמות ‘the day you eat from it, you shall die’.

Second, the woman tells the serpent, quoting God that to eat from or even touch the forbidden tree ‘in the middle of the garden’ will result in death (Gn 3:3):

אמר אלהים לא תאכלו ממנו ולא תגעו בו פן־תמתו
Elohim said, ‘You shall not eat from it,
nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’

¹² See, Matskevich. *Construction of Gender*, p. 33.

¹³ Cf. M. Fishbane. *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts*. New York 1979, p. 24.

¹⁴ Matskevich. *Construction of Gender*, p. 36.

Finally, the serpent, denying God's words, indirectly links the tree with death again: 'you shall not die' (לא מות תמתון) (Gn 3:4). Gn 3:4–5 reads:

לא מות תמתון	'You shall not die.
כי ידע אלהים	'For Elohim knows,
כי ביום אכלכם ממנו	that in the day you eat from it
ונפקחו עיניכם	'Your eyes will be opened,
והיתם כאלהים	And you will be like Elohim (gods),
ידעי טוב ורע	knowing good and bad.'

Thus, there is a clear connection between the tree of knowledge and death, and therefore, between the concepts of death and 'knowledge of good and bad'.

The tree planted in the middle of the garden is the tree of life and death. The tree in the mythological universe often signifies the *axis mundi*, which unites the three vertical and the four horizontal dimensions of the world (i.e., the totality of space and time) and in itself can be seen as a metaphor for the world in its entirety. Here, in the story of the garden, it holds the possibility of life and the possibility of death, depending on the choice of the one who approaches it. Life and death constitute the fundamental binary opposition within the human world.

4. The Meaning of Knowledge for Human Beings. Mortality as Childbearing

The man and the woman eat from the tree of knowledge of good and bad, and they do not die. On the contrary, they start to think about life: the man names his wife חוה (*hawwah*). In his explanation of the name, it sounds rather like a title: 'the mother of all living' (Gn 3:20). Why then did God warn the couple about their sure death if they eat from the tree? Was he lying as the serpent might suggest (Gn 3:4–5), or was he mistaken?¹⁵ Then there is the question of the meaning of 'life' implied in *hawwah*'s naming and that used in the name of the tree of 'life'. Immediately after the woman receives her life-giving title, God declares that the man should not eat from the tree of life, so that he might not acquire eternal life (Gn 3:22).

The subtle life-knowledge-death game, which has been quietly unfolding in the story, now comes to the fore. Since people have lost their access to immortality but have remained alive, they must have become *mortal* – they and all other living beings, by virtue of their common destiny on *ha-adamah*.

The text does not answer what would happen if the human couple tried a life-fruit from the tree 'in the middle of the garden'. Perhaps, they could have acquired immortality, as God suggests in Gn 3:22. However, they opted for the death-fruit. Their option for knowledge turns for them into a new condition of being human.

¹⁵ See, J. Barr. Is God a Liar? (Genesis 2–3) and Related Matters // *Journal of Theological Studies* 57 (2006) 1–22.

In Gn 3:7, the man and the woman see their nakedness and thus discover their own sexuality. In his speech in Gn 3:16–19, God describes their new status in terms of desire and domination, the pain of childbearing, work for food and return to dust, i.e. the death of the body. Yet, the man reacts to this by naming his wife the mother of all living. Thus, the real outcome of the human choice *to know* good and bad is their possibility to die and to give life. Both their life and death finds their expression in childbearing, which means continuation of life and at the same time necessitates the change of generations and therefore death.

God's predictions in Gn 3:16–19 find their fulfilment in the story of Cain in Gn 4:1–16. The notion of 'knowing' connects the two narratives: Genesis 4 starts with the statement, 'And the man *knew* (יָדַע) Ḥawwah his wife' (וַהֲאָדָם יָדַע אֶת חַוָּה אִשְׁתּוֹ, Gn 4:1). Thus, the man and the woman, who ate from the tree of the *knowledge* of good and bad (2:9, 17) and who subsequently *knew* (Gn 3:7) that they were naked,¹⁶ now integrate their recently acquired knowledge into their life (Gn 4:1). This narrative link is achieved through the polysemy of the verb יָדַע (*yada'*), which in the Hebrew Bible includes the notion of sexual experience.¹⁷ This new knowledge of each other connects the new life of the man and the woman to their previous experience in the Garden.

The fruit of the couple's shared 'knowledge' is their begetting of children.¹⁸ The whole issue of 'good and bad' comes forth in the story about a violent death, the murder committed by the first son of the people who opted for 'knowledge'. The following stories of the primal history in Genesis 4–6 accumulate more and more death until the entire pre-flood generation of humans die. People surely have become mortal. On the other hand, the birth of children becomes the fulfilment of the words said by *ha-adam* about the woman in 3:20, 'she will become the mother of all living'.¹⁹ The potentiality of bringing forth children, indicated in Genesis 3, becomes reality in Genesis 4.²⁰

Their eating from the tree of life and death provides people with the possibility to know each other and their own sexual nature – which is good and bad, depending on their choices; to have children and finally, made them mortal. The 'knowledge'

¹⁶ See, Fishbane. *Text and Texture*, p. 24.

¹⁷ The word *yada'* used in this sense presupposes a total personal involvement, which is associated with 'knowledge'. Cf. Gn 4:1, 17, 25; 19:8; 24:16; 38:26; Nb 31:27, 18, 35; S 1:19; Ju 11:39; 19:25; 21:11, 12; 1K 1:4 (See, F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs. *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford 1906, p. 394).

¹⁸ Joseph Blenkinsopp suggests that the Garden story finds its completion only when the first couple gives birth to their children outside Eden, and when it becomes clear what kind of children they have produced. See, J. Blenkinsopp. *From Adam to Abraham: Introduction to Sacred History*. London 1967, p. 44.

¹⁹ See, R. Davidson. *Genesis 1–11*. Cambridge 1973, p. 51.

²⁰ Cf. Van Wolde. *Words Become Worlds*, p. 50.

they acquired is indeed death-bringing, for because of it, they have been barred from immortality and received mortality. Yet, it is also life-giving, for it has brought them the whole new prospect to become humanity with its never-ending process of a generational change.

On both linguistic and narrative level, the notion of knowledge in Genesis 2–3 links together not only all the characters, but also all the major ideas and images of the text, such as life and death, divine and human spheres of competence, aspiration, shame, togetherness, search for meaning, truth and lie. The tree of knowledge of good and bad and the tree of life merge into one complex image associated with each of these concepts. The recognition of the oneness of the tree points to the textual idea about the difference between the divine and human nature and the divine and human modes of existence. The cosmic knowledge of good and bad that God possesses comes together with the tree of life, which gives immortality. This ‘package’ is not explicitly out of the reach of the human beings at the beginning of the story. Yet they choose another kind of knowledge, which comes together with the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and bad. This is the knowledge of the human condition, which includes gender differentiation and childbearing as the source of both mortality and immortality.

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ЗНАННЯ: ЖИТТЄДАЙНЕ ЧИ СМЕРТОНОСНЕ?

БОЖЕ І ЛЮДСЬКЕ ПІЗНАННЯ У КНИЗІ БУТТЯ 2-3

У статті досліджено поняття пізнання (yada') і знання (da'at) у Бут 2-3. Історія про сад – комплексна й багатовимірна, її сенси часто неоднозначні та невловимі. Пізнання є одним із найтонших і найбагатших понять, навколо якого зосереджена ціла історія, і підкреслює її найглибші сенси та поєднує всіх її дійових осіб. І Бог, і людські персонажі цієї історії мають свої множинні стосунки зі знанням, чи то володіючи ним, чи прагнучи його, чи набуваючи. Однак ідея пізнання проявляється в тексті по-різному для різних задіяних сторін. Мовні та стилістичні особливості тексту вказують на глибинні зв'язки між персонажами та їхній стосунок до знання. Визнання текстуального зв'язку між деревом пізнання добра і зла й деревом життя приводить до питання про зв'язок між пізнанням і смертю. Багатовимірні зв'язки між цими різними і водночас спорідненими поняттями визначають значення і зміст, які знання має для Бога і для людини. Складне поєднання неясних намірів Бога в наративі стає космічною мудрістю, тимчасом як сум'яття і сором людської пари виявляються знанням про те, що означає бути людиною, включно зі статевою диференціацією та дітородженням як джерелом і смертності, і безсмертя.

Ключові слова: Адам і Єва, Біблія і культура, божественне знання, Едемський сад, рід, Бут 2-3, Бог, єврейська Біблія, людське знання, безсмертя, смертність, дерево пізнання добра і зла, дерево життя, чоловік, змії, жінка, Ягве Елогім.