

The Sum of it All – What Torah is All About

by Ariel Bar Tzadok

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Let's put philosophy aside, ask a simple question, and hopefully discover a simple answer. The Torah and the Bible is full of so many different things. If we wanted to sum it all up and simply proclaim, ***the message of the Torah and Bible is this. What would "this" be?*** If we cannot answer this question, in a simple and direct way, are we then missing the message of what the Torah and Bible is really all about?

We read all the stories, and the laws, and all the other information that, on the surface, appears to be a bunch of superfluous irrelevancies. Granted, the mystics teach that every word and letter of the Torah is sacred, and concealed within them, lie the secrets of the universe. Well, be that as it may, the secrets of the universe are all well and good, but those sublime secrets do not really have much to do with our daily lives. So, sublime and sacred as they may be, they are just as practically irrelevant, even though not as superficial as the others.

I do not live in Heaven, and I am not an angel. What goes on in the other realms might be the focus of intense curiosity, but aside from curiosity, what goes on over there, really has nothing practically to do with me, nor have I anything practical to do with it (all mystical connections aside). As long as I live on Earth, my immediate circumstances define for me my arena of interests and involvements.

So, what's it all about, this Torah of ours? If you want to draw any conclusions about religion, let me remind you, my dear reader, that there is no mention, not even a word for, religion, anywhere, in either the Torah, or the entire Bible. Funny as it may seem, but ***there is no Biblical word for "religion" to be found anywhere in the Bible. Indeed, the concept of religion is a later creation that did not exist in Biblical times.***

Let's put matters into a context. Based upon clear and undisputed Biblical evidence, (the fact that there is no word for religion in the Bible), we must conclude that while all the famous characters of the Bible, like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, David and Solomon were all God-fearing, righteous men, none of them could ever be called religious men. Indeed, none of them would have ever defined themselves as being religious. Religion was an unknown concept in their times.

In Biblical times, people believed in God. They lived in accordance to Torah law. The righteous believed in behaving properly, and doing what was moral and right. This about sums it up. Greater insight into this simplicity can be seen echoed throughout the final of the five books of the Torah, Deuteronomy.

The final book of the Torah, Deuteronomy, is presented as the summary and repetition of all that happened beforehand. The entire book purports to be a collection of the speeches, made by Moses, to the children of Israel, in the last few days of his life. Essentially, Deuteronomy sums it all up. **Deuteronomy is the Torah and the Torah is Deuteronomy.** This is why this book is referred to by the Sages by the Hebrew term, Mishneh Torah, the Repeat or Second Torah.

So, what's it all about? The answer will be found in Deuteronomy. Agreed, the book is a rather big one, consisting of 959 verses in 34 chapters. That's still a lot of reading to get to a simple point. Yet, **Deuteronomy is the final “pep-talk” that Moses gives Israel, to solidify them as an indivisible nation, under God, and under law, equal for all.** The laws as outlined in Deuteronomy include the second rendition of the Ten Commandments, and of course, the famous proclamation, central to all Israel, the Shema.

Listen Israel, YHWH is our God, YHWH is one! (Deut 6:4). Faith and allegiance to YHWH is the foundation of both Torah and Israel. But, in spite of God be called jealous and devouring (Deut 4:24), let us ask a rational question. Does the highest form of extraterrestrial life in existence, really and literally, embrace and express what may be considered some of the basest forms of human behavior? Is the Creator of all really jealous and devouring? Are we to understand these terms literally, as we would with regards to human emotions?

Moses wrote these words about God. What was he trying to tell us? Was Moses trying to frighten us, by telling us that God is gonna get us if we violate His commandments? It might seem strange to the modern mind, but this is exactly what Moses was indeed trying to do. He was trying to put the fear of God into us. Yet, for what purpose? What was all the fire and brimstone all about? Again, all one has to do is to read Deuteronomy as a whole and it should become apparent.

God wants Israel to worship Him exclusively. Yet, read Deuteronomy carefully. **What is the reason for God wanting such exclusive worship? It has nothing to do with jealousy,** even though Moses calls God a jealous God. God is the director of our world, along with humanity as part of it. God has a plan for the development and evolution of our planet, and our race. As such, God has provided for us guidelines and instructions how to build a stable and secure human society. These instructions are the laws of Torah.

By observing the Torah laws regarding our fellow man, our relationship to the earth under our feet, and the ways of Heaven above, we create a harmonic convergence that enables the best of humanity to materialize, and to be expressed in the social, economic and political arenas.

Torah means instruction. Torah teaches us how to best express our highest human aspirations. Torah laws were meant to establish a sane, and just society, for all. Torah

was designed to create one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. Veering away from Torah law, therefore, perverts justice and stability. ***This is why God demanded exclusive worship, because exclusive worship of God also meant exclusive obedience to the social laws that created the sane society.***

The surrounding cultures of the day were still involved in all types of immoral, and unbalanced behaviors. The collapse of these ancient societies came about pretty much due to their own faults and weaknesses. This situation is uncannily similar to today, with the corruption that is undermining our present civilization.

When Torah is observed properly and true, civilization prospers. When the Torah is abandoned for alternate lifestyles, the mere psychological instabilities in those lifestyles eventually infect the entire society, leading to its collapse, along with the resulting chaos and destruction. Therefore, ***God says, to worship Him means to be acting morally, righteously and responsibly in accordance to Torah.*** And, of course, the opposite is also true, rejecting God leads to a rejection of Torah, which leads to a rejection of morality, which leads to the destabilization of society as a whole.

So, Moses clearly had a method to his madness, when he said the God is a jealous God and a devouring fire. These fears kept people on their toes. They were constantly aware that God was watching them, and would punish them, if and when they ever acted badly or poorly to their neighbors.

The fear of God had nothing to do with Heaven, on the contrary, it had/has everything to do with how we live here on Earth. The fear of God is not ever concerned with God, on the contrary, it is concerned with directing us to act more humanly and humanely towards our fellow human beings.

If we want to properly serve God, then we must properly treat one another.

This sums up the entire Torah.

The message of Deuteronomy is just this. Do the right thing! Live right and be right. This is how God is worshiped, and this is what Torah is all about.