

Parshat Emor
Keeping Torah Far From Tefilla
Melton Gesher at Shearith Israel, May 7, 2012
JSI at Akiba Academy, May 8, 2012

- A) Sefer Vayikra chapter 22, verse 26 – 28
- 1) It is quite plausible to interpret these commandments from a moral perspective, as teaching mercy and compassion. Indeed many commentators have understood in such a fashion.
 - 2) A number of other commandments relating to animals and to the foods we eat could be, and have been, understood in a similar way.
 - a) Shmot chapter 23, verse 19b
 - b) Devarim chapter 22, verses 6 - 7
 - c) Devarim chapter 25, verse 4
 - 3) Indeed the whole matter of the original prohibition against meat eating in general is a matter of compassion and brotherhood with the animal kingdom.
- B) Mei haShiloach by Rav Mordechai Leiner, volume I, Parshat Emor, dibur hamatchil “Shor vSe”, page 125
- 1) A word about Targum Yonatan and the Zohar
 - a) These two sources that are quoted teach not only about a moral message in the verse, but also inject in a theological message.
 - 2) A word about the state of tefilla at the time of the Gemara
 - a) Note that the hazan mentioned in the Gemara makes a theological statement
 - b) The Mei haShiloach is pointing out a clear contradiction between the Targum and the Zohar on the one hand and the position of Rava in the Gemara on the other hand.
 - c) In truth, the Gemara itself acknowledges two different positions: the one mentioned by the Mei haShiloach that it is forbidden to engage in explaining the mitzvot by way of rational reasons, and a second position that does not see any problem in such explanations.
 - d) But the Mei haShiloach is not interested in such things; he wishes to use this contradiction as a foundation to teach a much deeper message.
 - 3) The deep explanation is that we must distinguish between Torah study and Tefilla
 - a) Torah study is about understanding how Jews should behave, and statements about God in its framework should be understood as being valuable only for what they teach us about human behavior, and no more.
 - b) Tefilla is about God, and here human beings must be open to a deeper experience that may go beyond rationality.
- C) Rabbi Abraham Isaac haKohen Kook, Orot, The Pangs of Cleansing, Classics of Western Spiritual, edited by Ben Zion Bokser, pages 261 – 263, 264 – 265, 268 - 269

Mei haShiloach

Perhaps the instructions of the author not to bring Torah insights about God into one's tefilla are based on the following: Torah is a book of 'atzot' for human living. It is about living human life; about God's instructions concerning how to make the most of this life. It is a practical handbook about our lives and behavior and it is not meant to be a book of theology. It is about man and not about God.

The Torah says a lot about God and implies even more about God. But perhaps we are not to take any of that literally, for it is only written as support or background for the practical instructions for human life. The Torah gives a particular image of God, but it is only in order to strengthen the commandments and encourage us to do them. It is not for its own sake; it is all a means towards the mitzvot and has no independent truth value. For theology, we have to free ourselves of what the Torah seems to say and expand our consciousness on the basis of intuition and experience and mystical texts.

To be bound by the Torah as far as theology goes is a kind of idolatry that profoundly misunderstands what the Torah's and what it means to say. It means to reveal His law, but does not mean to reveal anything about Himself. It is Torah mSinai but not revelation!

No man can see Me and live! The Torah's theology should be understood as only being negative but not positive. It does not tell you anything about God but only tells you that it does not tell you.

This is really the Rambam. It is also the Ralbag in the sense that Torah is תועליות but as far as theoretical, philosophical, scientific truth, the Torah can and should always be interpreted to be in accord with what we know from those branches of inquiry whose expertise is in those fields.

Remember the Guide to the Perplexed that hints that the Torah says that God brings the earlier and later rains and it depends on your behavior good or bad, not because such is really the truth, but rather because it wants you to leave behind idol worship and worship the one true God, and so it has to say that God does those things that people used to think that the idols do.

This emphasis only on deed is reflected in Rashi on the first verse of the Torah.

God is transcendent and Torah is our bridge to Him. Because of this, we sometimes mistake the means for the end, and we end up worshipping Torah when we should be worshipping only God.