

Parashat Re'eh

Was Jesus a Kind Spiritual Healer or a False Prophet?

The Rise of Messianic Judaism

In Medieval Spain, many Jews hid their Jewishness in order to survive. They concealed their Siddur and Chumash (Pentateuch) behind secular books in their library. Today, we have a converse kind of crypto Jew. Behind their ArtScroll and Feldheim books, they hide the New Testament. Outwardly, they act as devout Orthodox Jews. They keep Shabbat, Kosher, modesty etc., and are the nicest and the kindest people, always happy to lend a helping hand. Some are actual Jews. Others seek to convert to Judaism, or pretend that they are Jewish. Perhaps, they have convinced themselves that some ancestor's Jewish name imbues them with Jewish blood. While they behave Jewishly on the outside, they secretly worship Jesus on the inside. Yes, you have guessed it. I am referring to Messianic Judaism – a movement of people who identify as Jews and embrace Jewish culture and religious tradition, while at the same time maintain a belief in the divinity of Jesus, the Trinity, and the authority of the New Testament. According to the estimates as of March 2016, there are 262 Messianic organizations operating in Israel (Kehila News Directory). The estimated number of Messianics (alleged Jews proclaiming belief in Jesus) amount to almost 20,000 in Israel, while globally the reports range as high as 300,000 Messianic Jewish believers (*Charisma Magazine*, October, 2013).

It is no wonder that Israel's Ministry of the Interior denies visas for many conversion candidates, out of concern to screen out Messianics. Likewise, trip organizers for Birthright have begun screening candidates interested in free trips to Israel to prevent Messianic Jews from participating. The number of Messianics is rising in Israel and the world. The fervent worship with heartfelt singing and easy access to 'the lord' attract many Jews and non-Jews alike. Without the heavy burden of the Oral Torah, with its strict halachic requirements, this movement entices the intuitive, spiritually seeking type. For some, being a Messianic is a stepping-stone towards full-fledged conversion or return to Halachic Judaism. While I do not harbor any negative feelings on a personal level towards anyone who believes in Jesus – on the contrary, several such women are very close to my heart – I would like to clarify what the Torah has to say about Jesus, based on this week's parasha.

Worshipping Separate Existence

First of all, it is interesting that the name Jesus (ישו/Yeshe in Hebrew) is related to the word ישות/yeshut – existence or separate existence. The Torah teaches that there is no separate existence from G-d; we are all part of His Oneness. Chassidut emphasizes how we must work on freeing ourselves from the ego that claims ישות/yeshut and separate existence from Hashem. We are called upon to transform our ישות/yeshut to אין/eyn – nothingness, for עוד מלכודת/od milvado – there is nothing besides Him (*Devarim* 4:35). This is the constant challenge of a Jew – to overcome the pride of our ego and realize that nothing exists but Hashem. We are all part of Him, and no human being ever, has a claim to being more a son-of-G-d than anyone else. Messianic Judaism provides its worshippers with a feeling of concrete closeness to 'the lord,' saturating them with more instant gratification than the abstract worship of the incorporeal Hashem. The

attraction of worshipping a human being is that it offers a physical anchor to hold onto, allowing people to feel spiritual without giving up independent existence. In spite of the spiritual devotion of the Messianics, unconsciously, their service actually serves the spiritual part of the ego, giving the sweet feeling of being concretely connected to the divine. Yet, in reality, this feeling of 'connectedness' stems from an illusion of being able to commune with the lord while still holding on to the separate existence of the ego.

The Test of Dream-Diviners & False Prophets

This week's *parasha* describes the false prophet and the dream-diviner. A false prophet is someone who claims that Hashem spoke to him, and appointed him to forward his 'divine message' to others. In our time, the world is replete with enticing 'Spiritual Intuitives,' Transcendentalists, Occultists, Wiccans and Witchcraft. This varied spirituality menu is meant to test whether, despite all the attractive alternatives, we keep holding on to the Torah, worshipping nothing but G-d.

ספר דברים פרק יג

(א) אֵת כָּל הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מִצְוֶה אֶתְכֶם אֹתוֹ תִשְׁמְרוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת לֹא תִסֹּף עָלָיו וְלֹא תִגְרַע מִמֶּנּוּ: יְקוּם בְּקִרְבְּךָ נְבִיא אוֹ חֹלֵם חִלּוֹם וְנָתַן אֵלָיךְ אוֹת אוֹ מוֹפֵת: (ג) וְבָא הָאוֹת וְהַמוֹפֵת אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֵלָיךְ לֵאמֹר נִלְכָה אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים אַחֲרִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִדְעַתֶּם וְנִעְבְּדֵם: (ד) לֹא תִשְׁמַע אֶל דְּבַר הַנְּבִיא הַהוּא אוֹ אֶל חֹלֵם הַחִלּוֹם הַהוּא כִּי מִנְסָה הַשֵּׁם אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֶתְכֶם לְדַעַת הַיִּשְׁכֶּם אֹהֲבִים אֶת הַשֵּׁם אֱלֹהֵיכֶם בְּכֹל לְבַבְכֶם וּבְכֹל נַפְשְׁכֶם: (ה) אַחֲרֵי הַשֵּׁם אֱלֹהֵיכֶם תֵּלְכוּ וְאֹתוֹ תִירָאוּ וְאֶת מִצְוֹתָיו תִּשְׁמְרוּ וּבְקִלּוֹ תִשְׁמְעוּ וְאֹתוֹ תַעֲבֹדוּ: (ו) וְהַנְּבִיא הַהוּא אוֹ חֹלֵם הַחִלּוֹם הַהוּא יוֹמֵת כִּי דִבֶּר סָרָה עַל הַשֵּׁם אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הַמוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְהַפְדֶּךָ מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים לְהַדְיָחָךְ מִן הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר צִוָּךְ הַשֵּׁם אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְלַכֵּת בָּהּ וּבַעֲרַת הָרַע מִקִּרְבְּךָ:

“Be careful to observe only that which I enjoin upon you. Neither add to it, nor detract from it. If there rises among you a prophet or a dream-diviner and he gives you a sign or a portent, saying, let us follow and worship another god, whom you have not experienced, even if the sign or the portent that he named to you comes true, do not heed the words of that prophet or that dream-diviner. For Hashem your G-d is testing you to see whether you really love Hashem your G-d with all your heart and soul. Follow none but Hashem your G-d and revere none but Him; observe His commandments alone, and heed only His orders. Worship none but Him, and hold fast to Him. As for that prophet or dream-diviner, he shall be put to death; for he urged disloyalty to Hashem your G-d, Who freed you from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to make you stray from the path that Hashem your G-d commanded you to follow. Thus, you must remove evil from your midst” (*Devarim* 13:1-6).

False Prophet Features

We must believe in the primacy of the prophecy of Moses our teacher; no other prophet –past or future – can ever reach his level (Rambam, *The Thirteen Principles of Faith*, Principle Seven). Therefore, nothing may be added or detracted from the Divine Torah that Moshe received through His supreme prophecy. Anyone who claims that Hashem told him to abolish one of the mitzvot of the Torah or to add a new mitzvah to the Torah is bound to be a false prophet (*Devarim* 13:1). According to the uncensored version of the Talmud, Jesus was a false prophet who instigated Israel away from doing the Mitzvot. It is, furthermore, undeniable that the New Testament goes against the injunction not to add to the Torah.

תלמוד בבלי, סנהדרין מג ע"א

והתניא בערב הפסח תלאוהו לישוע הנצרי וכרוז יוצא לפניו ארבעים יום ישוע הנצרי יוצא להיסקל על שכישיף והסית והדיח את ישראל כל מי שיודע לו זכות יבוא וילמד. לא מצאו לו זכות ותלאוהו בערב הפסח: אמ' עולא ותסברה ישוע הנצרי בר הפוכי ליה זכות הָוָה, מסית הוא...

They hanged Jesus the Nazarene on the eve of Pesach. The proclamation went forth before him for forty days heralding: "Jesus the Nazarene is going to be stoned because he practiced sorcery, instigated and seduced Israel to Idolatry. Whoever knows anything in his defense may come and state it." Since they did not find anything in his defense, they hanged him on the eve of Pesach. Ula said, "Do you suppose that Jesus the Nazarene is worthy to be given the opportunity to have his cause pleaded? Behold he was a מְסִית/mesit – an instigator, concerning whom the Merciful [G-d] says, 'Show him no compassion and do not cover up for him'" (*Devarim 13:9*)... (*Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 43a, uncensored edition*).

The Torah's Safeguarding of Physical and Spiritual Life

These fierce words of the Talmud are not so politically correct in a time when the Western World is largely against capital punishment. I, too, feel appalled by the notion that a human being would have the authority to execute another. We grew up being tolerant and accepting of everyone. The result is a world filled with terrorism and confusion. No human being may take the law into his own hand and take someone else's life. Only Hashem, in His Torah, has the power to command the death penalty in specific, very limited cases. The rabbis have always been extremely cautious to implement capital punishment: "A Sanhedrin that puts a man to death once in seven years is called a murderous one. Rabbi Eliezer ben Azariah says 'Or even once in 70 years.' Rabbi Tarfon and Rabbi Akiva said, 'If we had been in the Sanhedrin no death sentence would ever have been passed;'" (*Mishnah Makkot 1:10*). The Torah sanctions human life by all means, and murdering a human being is one of the only three cardinal sins for which the Torah requires one to give up his life. A person, who takes the physical or spiritual life of another, forfeits his own right to exist. This is precisely due to how much the Torah values and safeguards human life on all levels.

Rabbinic Reliance

The teaching of the Talmud regarding Jesus is a hard pill to swallow, since he is generally portrayed as the embodiment of love and kindness, and as a spiritual healer who uplifted the poor and weak. Even many of those who do not believe Jesus is the son of G-d or the Messiah, still feel he was a good person, based on artwork, pictures, books and articles. . Truthfully, no one really knows what kind of person Jesus actually was, as he lived more than 2000 years ago. We will have to choose between relying on the testimony of the Christians or of the Rabbis. As a Torah Jew, whom do you choose to believe?