

Rosh Hashanah Sermon (Day 2): Two Truths

Story: Atheist Professor vs. Marine

- There's a story I heard when I was in college about Dr. Stone
- A physics professor at the University of Michigan (It's probably an Urban Legend but it's a good story)
- Dr. Stone was an ardent atheist and one day he told his class, 'I can prove to you that God doesn't exist.'

Dr. Stone calls out God

- Dr. Stone said:
- 'God - if you're real --
- Then come down right now and knock me off this platform.
- I'll give you 15 minutes!'

10 Minutes

- 10 minutes went by.
- The professor kept taunting God
- Saying: 'God, here I am / I'm still waiting.'

Last Few Minutes

- It got down to the last couple of minutes and a Marine just released from active duty and newly registered in the class,
- Walked up to the professor / hit him full force in the face and sent him flying off his platform.

Dr. Stone questioned the marine

- Dr. Stone struggled to get up and obviously shaken -- yelled at the marine, 'What's the matter with you? Why'd you hit me in the face?'
- The Marine replied:
- 'Sir, God was busy protecting our troops in Iraq sir, so he sent me instead.'

Tension is real

- The story is kinda funny.
But the tension btw the atheist physics professor and the God-fearing Marine
- The tension between the teachings of science and the teachings of religion are very real.

Poll: Who created the world?

- A recent Gallup poll found that 38% of Americans believe in creationism

that we were created on the 6th day as the bible teaches.

- 57% of Americans believe in the theory of evolution
<https://news.gallup.com/poll/210956/belief-creationist-view-humans-new-low.aspx>

Today is RH -- 5779

- Today we celebrate the holiday of RH / the birthday of the world the year 5779.
- Still we wonder -- is the world less than 6,000 years old as the Torah teaches?
- Or billions of years old as Science teaches?

Science as the enemy (Galileo)

- In the past / organized religion saw science as a direct challenge to its authority.
- Example -- in 1633 Galileo charged with heresy and ordered to stand trial
- After writing a book -- proposing a heliocentric solar system
- earth + other planets / revolve around the sun.

Galileo a Threat

- The church viewed Galileo's ideas
- As a threat to the teachings in the bible
- Which place the earth at the center of the universe
- As it says in the Book of Psalms / (chapter 104:5)
- "The earth and its foundations can never be moved"

What did the Church do?

- What did the church do?
- A) Galileo -- house arrest
- B) Banned his book
- C) Made him recant his theory
- The Church believed: There could only be the truth of religion. but we aren't extremists in this congregation (at least I hope not)
- We have doctors / psychologists / and physicists.
- We aren't the medieval catholic church / ready to toss aside the truths of science.

Big Question

- The question on RH as we celebrate the New Year 5779
- Is how can you be -- (modern + rationale) (and a faithful Jew?)
- How can you believe in both sci and Torah?

My Contention

- My contention / is that it's possible: (of course, I'm a Conservative Rabbi)
- To be a modern Jew / and a religious Jew
- A Jew who believes:
- In both science and the Jewish tradition.

Two Possibilities

- There are 2 Theories that I'll present today that deal with this issue:
- 1) The Synthesis Theory
- 2) The Two Truths Theory

Synthesis Theory: Aisha Torah

- First, let's examine the Synthesis Theory
- Which, I don't find to be intellectually honest / (It doesn't speak to me)
- Still -- I wanted to share it with you today.
- B/c it's used by a lot of prominent religious thinkers

Synthesis Theory

- The Synthesis Theory believes:
- That there really isn't a conflict / between the Bible and Science,
- It only appears so to the naked eye.

Dr. Schroeder

- One of the biggest proponents of the Synthesis Theory is Dr. Gerald Schroeder (who I studied with at Aish HaTorah)
- Dr. Schroeder's an orthodox Jew and an MIT physicist. and in his book 'Genesis and the Big Bang'
- He uses his background in physics / in particular -- Einstein's 'Theory of Relativity'
- To demonstrate that the 6-day creation story is compatible with the scientific notion – the world is billions of years old.

Bible and Light

- B/c the Torah teaches us that the first thing God created was light
- On the 1st day of creation God said: '*Vayehi Or*' – 'Let there be light'.

- The Torah also tells us that the sun and the moon didn't exist until the 4th day of creation and you need those celestial objects to determine time
- A day is determined by the sun / (sunrise and sunset)
- Therefore, if for those first 3 days there was no sun / how do you determine time?

No Absolute Time

- Well Dr. Schroeder explains:
- Einstein's theory of relativity = no absolute time.
- In different frames of reference,
- The time interval between two events may be quite different.

No Sun and Moon

- So, imagine there's no sun (1st 3 days)
- Dr. Schroeder claims:
- That a day from God's frame of reference
- May appear to be 5 billion years from another frame of reference / a human frame of reference.
- Therefore / The Torah's 6-day creation story can be synthesized with science's claim that the world is 5 billion years

Science Complicated

- The science may be complicated / but according to Dr. Schroeder // (this is the important part)
- There doesn't have to be a discrepancy btw science and Torah / on the creation account.
- You can actually use science to prove the Torah is true.

Appreciate his Effort

- Now, I don't agree with what Dr. Schroeder is doing
- Trying to synthesize -- Science and Torah
- Still, I appreciate that as a religious Jew
- He's not ready to toss aside -- the teachings of science

Talmud, Rabbis not at odds with Science

- If you look at Jewish history
- It's interesting / that unlike the Catholic Church,
- Judaism has never viewed science as an adversary.

Examples

- 1) Maimonides - Doctor
- 2) Einstein - Letter
- 3) Talmud - Debate

Debate in Talmud

- There's a Rabbinic Debate in Pesachim
- To determine -- how many days it takes the moon to revolve around the earth.
- (which you need to know to determine Rosh Chodesh – the new month)

Who do we follow?

- The Rabbi's argue:
- Who do we trust to figure out the answer?
- Some say we follow Jewish scholars / but the sages determine we should follow the pagan scientists
- B/c in scientific matters -- they're smarter than us.

Two Truths Model

- I call the Rabbi's model -- "The Two Truths Model"
- That Science and Judaism both teach us about the world,
- What's different? --The nature of their insights.

Parable: R' Schulweis

- R' Schulweis has a parable which beautifully illustrates "The Two Truths Model"
- The parable involves an ophthalmologist
- Who performs an operation on a blind man / giving him sight
- Both decide to write books about the experience.

Ophthalmologist's book

- In his book-- The ophthalmologist describes:
- The diagnosis / the operation / the instruments employed to manipulate the optical nerves.
- The language is -- analytical and precise.

Blind Man's Book

- Whereas, the other book is written by the blind man
- Who's just been given sight after the surgery.

- His book is filled with -- gratitude and excitement.
- He describes the first time he saw his newborn child,
- The first time he witnessed the rising of the sun.

Contradictory?

- Are these 2 books contradictory?
- NO!
- Both books refer to the same event.
- They just have different intentions

Differences

- The ophthalmologist is concerned with:
the factual elements of the surgery.
- While the blind man is concerned with:
what the surgery meant to him // What it meant to gain sight.

79 years old

- Similarly -- Science tells me that the avg person lives to be 79 years old
=Fact
- Torah -- teaches me how to live a meaningful life during those 79 years
=Meaning
- (Torah = How we should conduct ourselves – to be our best selves)

Big Idea

- As a modern Jew
- When I want to know / how the world was created
I'll read an astronomy book.
But when I want to know / 'Why the world was created'
or -- 'What the purpose of life is' / I look to the Torah.
- I have Faith in God / I'll talk about it on YK
– However, we don't have to take every biblical story literally!
- And we can still believe in the truths of the Jewish tradition
- (extrapolate a little here and then explain more on YK)

Newton

- In this way / I'm no different than the famous scientist Isaac Newton
- It's fascinating to me that Newton

- One of the greatest scientists in the history of mankind was devoutly religious.

Science not the enemy

- He didn't see science as the enemy of religion.
- Rather / Newton is reported to have said:
- 'Gravity explains the motions of the planets, but it can't explain who set the planets in motion.'

How did Newton come to this conclusion?

- So how did Newton / this great scientific mind,
- Believe in both -- God and the Laws of Physics?
- The answer is that Newton understood / "The Two Truths Model"
- That Religion and Science can both be true,
- B/c they both teach us different ideas about what it means to be alive.

Problem with Science

- The weakness of Science is that it has no moral compass
- Whereas Judaism is all about being our best selves.

Pack of Wolves

- Last month -- I saw a perfect example of the harsh reality of science / on the Discovery Chanel
- As they were showing a documentary on a pack of wolves.
- The scientists were saying -- that if one wolf breaks its leg
- The rest of the pack will abandon the wolf that's been injured.
- That's sci // sci tells us what is,
- That a pack of wolves will abandon an injured wolf b/c their hungry and they need to move on.

Judaism is Different

- Judaism isn't morally neutral / (it tells us the way the world should be)
- It says: Don't be hungry like the wolf -- you're better than Duran Duran.
- If you see your brothers in Israel in need after a rocket attack
- Or in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria / (Hurricane Florence will be hitting the east coast)
- Don't discard them like an animal -- help them.

9/11

- Today, is the 17th anniversary of 9/11
- The terrorist attack that changed our country forever.
and look / it goes against your base instincts
- To run into a building that's on fire -- that's about to collapse
- (I don't care how much training you've done)

Remember all 3,000

- Today / we of course remember all 3,000 victims who died on that fateful day
- We also remember the bravery of those first responders (the fireman and policeman)
- Who ran into those towers that were on the verge of collapse to save as many lives as they could.
- That's true heroism.

Jewish ideal

- Those acts of bravery performed 17 years ago
- Speak to the Jewish ideal / that unlike the wolf
- We must never ignore the call of those in need
- For it says in the Mishnah:
- *'Kol yisrael aravin zeh bazeh'* all of us are responsible for one another.
- (Examples = Lighthouse Shelter donations / and the Winter Relief Program)

Dr. Schroeder

- At the end of the day
- There are those like Dr. Schroeder
- Who think Science and Torah can be synthesized.
But in my mind:
They both teach us different insights about our reality.

Torah is a higher Truth

- For me Science is a truth but Torah is a higher truth.
- For I know that Newton's 3rd law of physics says:
- "To every action there is an equal and opposite reaction"
- That's a truth! But I'm not going to base my spiritual existence
- On how to raise my kids / on how to live a moral life on Newton's laws of physics. (although Sam would like that)

Judaism Teaches

- Judaism teaches: that for every action there is meaning,
- In every reaction / there is a purpose / there is God.
- Judaism teaches me / to love my neighbor / to honor my parents / to live as a mensch.

Conclusion

- So, as we celebrate RH / and the New Year of 5779
- We modern Jews can believe in both Science and Judaism
- B/c both speak to our fragile existence
and both in their own way / give great meaning to our lives.