



by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

KI TAVO

What Do Jews Believe?

Everybody knows Jews have commandments. But do they have dogmas? Do Jews have beliefs which they must profess on pain of exclusion?

Some say no, and there is a "great dogma of dogmalessness".

Great minds - Rambam in particular - have tried to formulate Jewish beliefs, but no formulation has ever achieved dogmatic status, binding every Jew to its contents.

Not that Judaism lacks great principles, characteristic teachings and fundamental axioms, to which Jews throughout history have on the whole subscribed.

But what makes Judaism different is that none of these principles has been frozen into final form. Thus whilst the existence of God is axiomatic in Judaism, some perceive Him in rarefied philosophical terms whilst to others He is the Sweet Father in whose presence one feels pure ecstasy.

Joseph Albo says three principles are axiomatic: M'TZI'AT HASHEM, the existence of God; TORAH MIN HASHAMAYIM, Divine revelation; and S'CHAR VA-ONESH, reward and punishment.

All are hinted at in this week's sidra.

It commands the people when they cross the Jordan to set up large stones and inscribe on them the words of the Torah (D'varim 27:2).

The Talmud says there were three such commands; "There were three sets of stones - one that Moshe set up in the land of Moav, one that Yehoshua set up when they crossed the Jordan, and one later set up at Gilgal" (Sotah 35b).

The first, says the Maharsha, alludes to Revelation, the second to the Existence of God and the third to Reward and Punishment.

So this must be the preferred rabbinic listing of the principles of Judaism.

more...

A Really Good Gift

Bringing the first fruits to the kohen was an exciting moment. What a feeling of achievement!

The suffering of the slavery was over. The people were free and independent.

They had struggled through the wilderness, and now they had arrived.

They had entered the Promised Land, they had planted and sown, and the land had proved fertile and yielded a good crop.

No wonder the Torah commanded, "You shall rejoice in all the good which HaShem your God has given you!"

There is a discussion about this verse in various rabbinic commentaries. What, they ask, is the nature of "the good" that God has given?

Since our ancestors lived in societies that were ruled by kings, many of their parables had to do with kings and royal deeds and doings.

So they make the comment, "When the king gives you a present, does the actual value of the gift really matter?"

"Isn't the exciting thing the fact that whatever the gift may be, it has come from the king?"

In this case the great thing is not merely the Land, but the fact that it was the gift of God.

Modern implication?

Israel is great, with all its problems and perplexities... but never let us forget Who gave it to us and to Whom we are responsible for cherishing and looking after it. -OZ

Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH