

SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

with Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

The Missionary Told Me I Was Blind

Shortly after moving to California, I was contacted by Herb, an elderly Jewish man who had been befriended by a missionary. Herb invited the missionary to his home to speak with his friends and family, and he wanted me to present the Jewish response.

The dialogue lasted several hours, and I was able to refute the missionary's proof-texts to the satisfaction of the audience. However, the missionary became frustrated and said, "*Rabbi, you are blind*". He explained that I have a veil over my eyes that prevents me from understanding the bible, and the only way to remove the veil is by accepting Jesus.

Everyone saw the irony of his statement when I responded, "*If I have to accept him before I can understand the proofs, why bother showing them to me?*"

The libel that Jews are spiritually blind is based on the New Testament's distortion of a well-known story in the Jewish bible, which I will soon explain. This anti-Semitic trope was so prominent in Christianity; some medieval churches depicted Judaism with a statue of a blindfolded woman known as Synagoga.

Far from being blind, the Torah testifies that the Jewish people experienced spiritual revelations of Godliness.

In this week's Torah portion Vayakhel-Pekudei (Exodus 35:1- 40:38), Moses communicates to the Jewish people God's requirements for building the Tabernacle. The Torah reading concludes with a remarkable statement. We are told that "*the cloud of the Eternal was above the Tabernacle by day, and at night there would be a fire visible to [in the eyes of לְעֵינַי] all the House of Israel*" (Exodus 40:38).

This verse indicates that the Jews did see a manifestation of God's greatness. Furthermore, when God gave the Torah to the Jewish people at Mt. Sinai we are told, "*The appearance of the Glory of the Eternal before [in the eyes of לְעֵינַי] the Children of Israel was like an all-consuming fire on the top of the mountain*" (Exodus 24:17).

With such clear biblical statements, how could Christians mistakenly say we are blind? Their mistake is due to a mistranslation and distortion of another biblical statement.

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The Torah relates that when Moses descended from Mount Sinai, “*the skin of his face was beaming [karan - קרן]*¹ *with light from speaking with God*” (Exodus 34:29). The Jews were awestruck by this radiance and out of their trepidation and his humility Moses wore a veil. Yet, when Moses spoke to the Jews, he would temporarily remove the veil, as it says, “*when Moses finished [vayechal - ויכל]* *speaking with them, he put a veil over his face*” (Exodus 34:33).

Shockingly, the King James Bible mistranslates Exodus 34:33 to say, “*till Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face.*” By using the word “till” the translator altered the text to give the impression that Moses spoke to the Jews while wearing his veil.²

This mistranslation reflects the Apostle Paul’s corruption of the original story. Paul said, “*Moses would put a veil over his face to prevent the Jews from seeing God’s glory. But the people’s minds were hardened, and to this day whenever the old covenant is being read, the same veil covers their minds so they cannot understand the truth. And this veil can be removed only by believing in Christ.*” (2 Corinthians 3:13-14).

Paul’s distorted version of events branded the Jews as blind and resulted in disdain and unspeakable persecution of the Jewish people.

Contrary to Paul’s false claim, the Torah testifies that the Jews received an unobstructed communication from Moses. After Moses started to wear a veil the Jews completed the Tabernacle and it was done, “*in accordance with all that the God had commanded Moses, so did the children of Israel do all the work*” (Exodus 39:42).

It is undeniably within our grasp to understand and follow the Torah, as it says, “*it is very near to you; in your mouth and in your heart, so you may do it*” (Deuteronomy 30:14).

For example, this week’s Torah portion also introduces the observance of Shabbos (Exodus 35:2). What could be more meaningful, in these challenging times, than a weekly opportunity for self-introspection, spiritual bonding with God, and a reprieve from the stress and pressures of mundane concerns.

The Jewish prophets appreciated the spiritual gift of perceiving God’s presence, and they looked forward to the day when “*the glory of the God will be revealed, and all people will see it together*” (Isaiah 40:5).

Shabbat Shalom,

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¹ Incidentally, the Hebrew word [קרן – karan] was mistranslated into Latin as “horns” which mistakenly caused Michelangelo to create a sculpture of Moses with two horns on his head. Anti-Semites also used this mistranslation to stereotype Jews as having horns which fits into their narrative that the Jews are “*children of the devil*” (1 John 3:10).

² The Hebrew verb [vayechal - ויכל] undeniably means “when he finished,” as is well know from the verse, “*the heaven and earth were finished*” (Genesis 2:1).