

Hello All,

I've been lurking for sometime because I am incredibly busy this year, and with family difficulties and my own disability am having a tough time finding the time for everything. Please rest assured that I do read, and get lots of good ideas from you all!

I know that I'm very tardy in answering this thread, but I wanted to think it through and pray about my response to be sure of what I wanted to convey. You see, as a Jew, it is hard (nigh onto impossible) for me to just let go of a thread like this one. So, here are my thoughts:

1) The main portrait of G-d that we Jews see in the Hebrew Scriptures is the same as the main portrait of G-d that Christians see in the Christian Testament; a G-d of love, grace and compassion. As Chet pointed out, when Jesus spoke about the true teachings of the Law, and when he answered questions about what is most important, he quoted Deuteronomy and Leviticus when he answered. The Deuteronomy quote is near to most Jews consider to be the only doctrinal statement in Judaism, Deut. 6:4 Hear, O Israel! The LORD your G-d is One! Jesus' answer is the follow-up, called "The V'ahavta" (You Shall Love). For us, the stories presented in Torah, Prophets and Writings is love for Abraham, his descendants, Jacob-Israel, his descendants, the nations\* they became, and the king (David) anointed to rule over them. \*Including the Arabs who descend from Ishmael.

2) However, these stories were not written by or for us with our 20th/21st century sensibilities. They were written by those who lived in the Iron Age, at the beginning of civilization. Theirs was a world of struggle and starvation, feast or famine, where the life or death of anyone seemed to be determined by the caprice of a vicious fate. So, the whole neighborhood was rife with multiple gods. If a traveler from Ai came to Ur, he'd better make gifts and sacrifices to the god of Ur if he wanted to live and conduct his business. Then, when he got home, he'd better make gifts and sacrifices to the god of Ai as apology for having sacrificed and given gifts to the god of Ur. In addition to the gods, there were minor spirits everywhere and they were also likely to deal out catastrophe for no reason at all. It was into this milieu that the Hebrew G-d, the One, came. The lesson that our ancestors had to teach and be taught over and over was that G-d was/is/shall be our protector, our provider, our parent, our monarch, and our lover. We were safe with G-d. We were loved. We were special, and we always would be. It was/is a tough lesson. Our ancestors looked for confirmation of it in ways that we abhor; they wanted their enemies destroyed (Oh! Wait, don't we want that for ISIL?), they wanted their borders to be secure from any and all who might come to them (Oops! We want that, too.), they wanted to be the most prosperous nation (Yikes! This is getting messy.), the most beloved people (Oh boy.), and the strongest empire (Substitute "international alliances" here.). So, maybe we haven't come as far as we'd like to think. Except that we now have paid professional soldiers/sailors/marines, so the average person doesn't have to be so bloody minded any more.

3) When confronted by these images of genocide, destruction, humiliation, greed, jealousy, lust, and dishonesty year after year in our studies, most Jews recast them into psychological terms. What is it that is "native" to my personality that I must wipe out completely? What am I greedy for/about? How do I

humiliate myself and/or others? Who is the object of my jealousy? What is the subject of my jealousy? The war of conquest of the Promised Land (of Canaan) then becomes my own private war of conquest of the negative/hurtful traits within me. The exodus from Egypt (in Hebrew "twice narrow place") becomes an examination of how I am enslaved, and to what/whom, so that I may also make exodus and find myself redeemed by G-d. Each year at Pentecost, we renew our Covenant with G-d, once again enslaving ourselves only to G-d; not to time or money or education or celebrity or . . .

4) Some of the violence in the Hebrew Scriptures is in prophecy. Which means it may still be yet to come. So, we work to bring more of G-d's light into the world, to prepare ourselves and the world for Messiah (for you all, the Second Coming). Not out of fear of the violence to come, but because we were chosen long ago to do this work for the world. That means suffering and pain to come, but we know that G-d will be with us through it all. So, this we acknowledge and move on.

5) Those 10 commandments were actually the executive summary of the 613. If, by some miracle, I could treat you and G-d and myself in just the ways set down there, I would be treating you as G-d does; seeing you as G-d does. And so, in response to the overwhelming love of G-d for me, I struggle to live out the commandments. I don't think that I have to observe the commandments in order to win my salvation. Moses said in Exodus, "See, G-d is become my strength and my salvation." So, I am already saved. When you love someone, you want to make them happy. G-d laid out for us just what making G-d happy looks like, so we do it. But, Jesus was everlastingly right when he said that if only we would love G-d with all our hearts, souls, minds and strengths, and love our neighbors as ourselves, we will have fulfilled all that G-d says in the Law and the Prophets.

Well, I don't know whether this would help with any nightmares or not. Remember, G-d's story with us isn't finished yet. The chapters that came before were bloody and violent and awful in many ways; they were also the only way our forebears knew to communicate to one another just how much G-d loved and valued us. Let's find new and better ways to do that in the chapters ahead. If we do, then maybe humanity's nightmares will cease.

G-d bless, and thanks for reading!

Mentor Tona