

# THE QUESTION

*by Rabbi Pinchas Winston*

Here's the question: Are you Godly, or are you God? Well, of course you can't actually BE God, but do you ACT as if you are? Before you answer no, know that this is the question you are going to be asked on Rosh Hashanah, not by your spouse, not by your Rav, and not by your neighbor. The Heavenly Bais Din will be asking this question, and they will answer it by how you lived your life the previous year, and based upon your attitude during the Ten Days of Repentance.

What does it mean to be Godly? The Torah answers THAT question through the 613 Mitzvos. What does it mean to PLAY God? That is going to be the basis of the discussion that follows.

Dovid HaMelech wrote:

When I see Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and stars that You have established, what is man that You should remember him, and the son of man that You should be mindful of him? (Tehillim 8:4-5)

What did Dovid HaMelech mean by this? Let's answer this question with an analogy.

One day, a father took his young son to see his place of business. The son had never been there before, and he was excited to see where his father worked and earned his livelihood. As they drove through the front gate, the son was in awe of how large a place it was. "You own all this?" he asked his father in wonderment, to which his father simply answered, "All of it."

As they walked into the front lobby of the building, the son was amazed at how many people went in all directions, each one seeming to have a purpose, each one saying "Good morning" to their boss. "All these people work for you?" he asked his father in bewilderment. His father answered him, "All of them."

He then took his son on a tour of the entire operation. As they moved from one department to another, the son became overwhelmed by what his father had built up, and runs. He could not fathom how his father could own all of it, and oversee so many workers. Workers had managers, and the managers had managers, and they all answered to the father. "All of these people answer to you?" he asked his father in disbelief. "Each one of them," he told his son.

The entire tour took two hours. When they finished, they went to the father's office, and it too impressed the son. "All of this is yours?" he asked his father, scanning the entire room. "The entire office," his father told him.

The son sat down in a chair, overwhelmed.

"What's the matter?" the father asked his son. "Do you feel okay?"

"Yeah, sure, fine," the son answered, unconvincingly. "It's just that I had no idea how BIG an operation you had here. I've heard you talk to Imma about it, and on the phone to others. But, I NEVER imagined that it was ALL this! I could NEVER do the same thing."

The father smiled. "Oh, but you will . . . one day," he told his son, "because everything you see I did for YOU! I started this business from scratch and built it to what it is today for you, at the right time. One day, this will be YOUR business, and you will run it."

All the son could do was sink into his chair and take a big gulp. He had never felt so small, so insignificant, compared to what he was being given.

The analogy is clear. The world belongs to God, but He built it all for man. He certainly didn't build it for Himself. He runs it, but He wants us to. He takes responsibility for it, but He'd rather we did. It's only once we do that we realize what an awesome place this world is, and we become appropriately humbled by it.

Awe requires two parts. It first requires a person to realize how great something is, and then it needs the person to realize how small they are next to it. This is necessary because with awe comes respect, and respect is the basis for any solid relationship. Love helps, but without respect, the bond is flimsy at best.

This is especially true when it comes a person's relationship with God. Humans crave and need the respect of others in order to feel secure in their relationships. They need to give it to others if they want to get back good in return.

God doesn't. Insecurity is not relevant to God. If anything WE need to respect Him to be able to connect to Him on the level we ultimately want to. This week's parsha says that Torah is not in Heaven. One of the explanations of this in the Talmud is, that Torah does not flow to haughty people. Compared to water, it must flow from a high source to a lower receptacle.

I used to wonder what this meant in practice. I have seen many Torah scholars with quite the attitude. They clearly know a lot, but they clearly have arrogance as well. They would probably say the same thing about me, but I'm the one writing this article, and it is THEIR arrogance I see, not my own.

My mistake was in thinking that "having Torah" just meant knowing a lot of it. I was impressed by the way a person could recall important Torah details from memory, while I struggled just to remember some general principles. It revealed some of the depth of their knowledge, and the lack of depth of mine.

But I also noticed that when it came to other aspects of Torah, like the more spiritual elements such

as prayer, or not attracting too much attention to yourself, they fell short, far short. Very often, their personality spilled out into public in a way that could easily have been considered, from a more spiritual point of view, distasteful.

The Talmud says that the Torah of Doeg and Achitophel was superficial (Sanhedrin 106b). Doeg, in addition to being the head of the Sanhedrin in his time, also commanded the special police of Shaul HaMelech. Achitophel, the leading Torah scholar and counselor of his time, was actually the grandfather of Dovid's wife, Bas Sheva.

Each was a Torah genius in his own right. Each probably commanded the respect of teachers and students alike. Each could impress others with their erudition, and yet, each lacked the most important part of Torah, the "inside" part. They KNEW Torah, but they didn't HAVE Torah. They lacked the humility for that, and though people overlooked this, God did not. He never does.

There is a reason why the Ten Days of Repentance are called "Days of Awe." We sin because of a lack of it. We disgrace our relationship with God, because we lose our sense of awe of Creation, and our place within it. We treat this incredible world like it is no big deal, and our responsibility to it, similarly.

And, while we're on the topic, it should be pointed out that all this natural disaster is invoking a similar response: AWE. All of our genius and technical prowess is no match for Nature's wrath, which seems worldwide at this time. Whether it is a hurricane, monsoon, forest fire, or incredible heat, it all qualifies as natural catastrophes, and all people can do is cope and hope to survive.

It is humbling, to say the least, even for people not directly affected by it. It inspires a sense of awe within the hearts of men, and pushes us back down a few notches where we belong. Great, we're supposed to be. Arrogant about it, never. When we are, we play God.

One of the ways that God provided for man to maintain a sense of awe for higher authority, was the mitzvah to honor one's parents and teachers. It is such an important mitzvah that we even have a special viduy on Yom Kippur for falling short in these areas.

Another important means for maintaining awe in preparation for having awe of God is leadership. We have flesh-and-blood kings to help us better relate to our Divine King. Though today there are few kings, we do have many world leaders. Their office still requires the kind of awe and respect that of a king, even if they are far less than royal. It is the office that counts, not the one in it.

I don't pretend to know the mind of God. As the prophet said on behalf of God, "Your thoughts are not My thoughts." I am certainly not trying to explain why death and damage has to come to some and not to others. That would be the kind of arrogance I am criticizing above. I am just looking at what is happening and wondering out loud about the awe that is resulting, especially so late in history. Rosh Hashanah has arrived. Time to become Godly, and to stop acting like God.

Thanks for reading, ANOTHER year. And, it should be year of salvation, and not one of destruction, a

year of redemption, and not one of exile, national or personal.