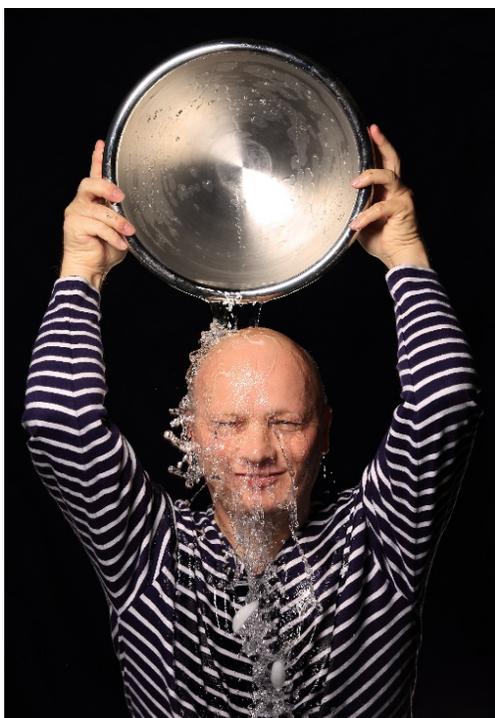


SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

with Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

POURING ICE WATER ON FALSE PROPHETS



While visiting a park, a middle-aged man asked me if I was a rabbi. He assumed that only rabbis cover their heads with a kippah or yarmulke. I answered yes, but explained that although I am a rabbi, many Jews cover their heads in reverence to God.

This reverence is alluded to in the word yarmulke which, according to some scholars, is a compound word derived from the Aramaic expression “*yarei malka*” [ירא מלכא] which means “awe of the king.”

As our conversation continued, I discover that my new acquaintance was a Christian missionary. He asked me many questions, which I answered. Then, he challenged me to explain the miracles attributed to Jesus in the New Testament.

I politely responded that the numerous contradictions in the New Testament call into question the validity of

its claims. Furthermore, although Jews believe in miracles, we do not rely on them as proof that someone is a prophet or the messiah.

A proof needs to be irrefutable. This is not the case with miracles, since they can be dismissed as sleight of hand, magic, or natural phenomena. The Torah also warns that a false prophet can give a “*sign or a wonder*” to test our faith in God (Deuteronomy 13:1-3).¹

“Even I can perform miracles,” I told the missionary. His face dropped when I said I once walked on water.

It was January 1990, while visiting the former Soviet Union to teach Torah to Jews thirsting for knowledge, that I took a side trip to see the Baltic sea which was frozen over. As I cautiously ventured onto the ice, I marveled at how I was able to “walk on water.”

Although walking on ice isn’t a miracle, the incident reminded me of something mentioned in this week’s Torah portion of Korach (Numbers 16:1–18:32).

Korach challenged the authority of Moses and incited a rebellion against him. How was it possible for Korach to diminish the awe and enthusiasm the Jews had for our greatest Jewish leader?

An answer is found in the Hebrew spelling of Korach's name. The letters [קרַח] also spell the word "kerach" which means ice. To challenge Moses' leadership, Korach had to "cool down" the Jewish people by drawing attention to what he considered an unfair hierarchy. In the end, Korach's rebellion failed, and it became clear that every individual plays a unique and valuable role in the community.

Millennium later, on a cold winter day, the holy Baal Shem Tov, the founder of the Chassidic movement, traveled into the forest with his students. They came to a frozen lake and watched as two Russian peasants carved a cross into the ice to go fishing. Having learned from the Baal Shem Tov to always look for a lesson in whatever they saw or experienced, the Baal Shem Tov's students wondered what they should learn from witnessing a cross carved into the ice.

He explained to them that the Torah is compared to water, which flows from a high place to a low place and gives life. However, if the Torah inside us is cold and indifferent, it can turn to ice, and then, even false theologies can be carved into it.

This happened in Korach's time, in the time of the Baal Shem Tov, and is still happening today.

The solution is to warm up our Torah by practicing it with enthusiasm and imbuing it with spirituality which heightens our sensitivity to God.

May this Shabbos provide us with many opportunities to tap into the spiritual wellsprings of Judaism and experience the warmth and life it provides.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

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¹ The prophet Ezekiel 37:24-28 provides one of the clearest lists of irrefutable proofs required to determine with certainty the messiah's identity. Maimonides reiterates this list in his same work [Mishneh Torah] which states that we do not believe in Moses because of the miracles he did.