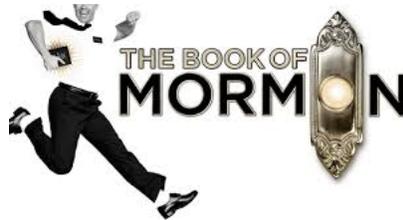


Yizkor

2019

Rabbi Irving Elson

The Book of Mormon: Should we Forgive God??



If I were to ask you what is most important verse in the Bible, what would you say? Shema, perhaps? It is after all the watchword of our faith. How about the Ten commandments? Not really one verse, but they are certainly well within the top 10. Any others? (ask congregation).

Well, for the past almost 16 years, if you were to ask me “What is the most important verse in the Bible, I would say it comes from the Book of Jonah, which we will read during the afternoon service on Yom Kippur. We all know the story, Jonah gets told by God to go to Niniveh, he doesn’t want to, he gets eating by a whale, and yadah, yadah, yadah,

he finally goes to Niniveh and tells the people to repent, and guess what?

They do, and he gets mad that God chooses not to destroy the people.

And here comes the most important verse in the Bible. Jonah is sitting there, pissed off at God because he didn't destroy the city and God says:

"Do you have reason to be angry"??

The most important verse in the bible is this simple question God asks...**do you have reason to be angry??**

I love this verse and consider it such a defining moment for our people's encounter with God, that there is no doubt in my mind that THIS is the most important verse in the Bible. There are really two kinds of people in this world; those who have been angry at God, and those who haven't yet. Everyone who has a relationship with God, at some point in our lives gets angry with God. I know I have, as a matter of fact, I've been pretty angry at God since actually 2003, when, as a combat chaplain with the Marines in Iraq saw the lowest depths of man's cruelty to his fellowman. But I know, or at least I think I know that I'm not the only one; And so, on this most holy day of the year, perhaps its time that we

confronted the Almighty with this anger. Perhaps today, perhaps now it's time to lift our voices and yell:

“What the heck is wrong with you God?? I'm angry at you..how can you let this happen?? “

But before we do that, a short story....

There a tailor in a little town in Eastern Europe who on Yom Kippur eve, when the house was quiet, he would go to the closet and take out a ledger.

“Master of the Universe,” he said, “the time has come for You and me to reckon up our sins for this past year.” He began by listing the sins he had committed. Then he went back to the closet, took out a thicker, heavier notebook and said, “Lord, first I listed my sins, and now I will list Yours.”

When he was finished, he said, “To tell the truth, You owe me more than I owe You, but I'd just as soon not keep strict accounts. We are

commanded to forgive the wrongs that have been done to us. Why don't I just forgive You and You forgive me?"

So much of what we do during Yom Kippur is a recount of our sins — great and small. The tradition teaches: For transgressions between individuals and God, Yom Kippur atones. We ask God for forgiveness.

I'm not sure about you, but more and more I am feeling like the tailor, that I am not the only one who need forgiveness.

I lost Marines in combat, shipmates of mine were killed by an IED and terrible accident at sea; I have lost friends and family to cancer, and I feel outraged at God. I have been sickened by the images from wars, and mudslides, hurricanes and earthquakes, not to mention the suffering we humans bring upon each other in the name of religion, politics or just vengeance.

Haven't we all experiences such grief and anger that you just want to scream "What the hell is wrong with you God"??

Not too long ago, Fran and I went to see the Broadway show, The Book of Mormon, by far one of the funniest and most meaningful shows I have seen in a long time.

Two young Latter Day Saints missionaries are sent to an AIDS ridden, terrorist run village in Africa. When one of the young innocent missionaries asks one of the village leaders how do you deal with such calamities that afflict every man, woman and child, the village leader, a man called Mafasa breaks out in a joyous song:

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In this part of Africa, [he says] we all have a saying.

Whenever something bad happens, we just throw our hands to the sky and say "Hasa Diga Eebowai!"

It's the only way to get through all these troubled times. There's war, poverty, famine... but having a saying makes it all seem better!

And then he sings:

There isn't enough food to eat

[Hasa Diga Eebowai!](#)

People are starving in the street!

The young missionary loves the singing and ask what does that phrase mean? To which Mafala, the town elder explains:

Well, lets see... "Eebowai" means "God". And "Hasa Diga" means...

"F.....You". [So I guess in English it would be "F....You](#) God!!

I apologize if I shocked some of you isn't today THE day when we strip all pretenses? When we shed all covers and masks??

So let's do it....I'll go first...

God, I feel a need in my soul that You and I God need to have it out, right here and right now!!

God, you may not ask for my forgiveness, but yet I feel I **deserve** to be asked, don't you?

How can I stand and tell others to ask for God's forgiveness if you God aren't doing the same?

Ok, I know it's a little dramatic and please don't get me wrong.

Yes, I believe in the great and small miracles that surround us every day.

And I believe God is present everywhere if we only look.

But don't we also want God to do an accounting of HIS deeds? Is it hutzpah to ask God to take responsibility for HIS deeds?

My friends, I, like many of you at one time or another feel we need an accounting from God, and yet, I know that we probably won't get one.

So what do I do? What should we do?

The answer is in the very essence of this day...

If we want to believe there is a God to serve. Then we must also believe that **God needs our forgiveness.**

On this most sacred of days, we not only ask for forgiveness, but we must also forgive the Almighty ourselves.

Rabbi Josh Berkowitz said it best when he wrote in an article a few years ago:

By forgiving God, I make God relevant in my life. By forgiving God, I can allow room for my doubts, my struggles, my confusion. By forgiving God, I maintain my relationship and a connection with God — no matter how tenuous it may be at times.

It is not easy to forgive, [he writes] but I will. If not for God's sake, then for my own."

On this and every Yom Kippur we need to forgive God, because we do not want to write off the relationship between us and God, A relationship the feeds us, sustains us and gives us strength in times of trouble.

On this and every Yom Kippur we need to forgive God, Because there is too much to be lost by simply walking away. On this and every Yom Kippur we need to forgive God, Because we want our children to develop their own relationships and come to their own conclusions.

My friends, we need to forgive God, I need to forgive God because despite the pain, sorrow and suffering, I want my universe to be filled with miracles, not devoid of them.

I want to engage in the eternal conversations with the ancestors and sages. Despite it all, I want to live my life in praise — and awe — in wonder and hope.

Back to Rabbi Berkowitz:

“ Despite my overwhelming desire to walk the other way, I will strive to forgive. Despite it all, I want to surround myself with the people of Jacob, of Israel, with those who struggle with God. That is why I will forgive God.”

And so should we....

My dear friends, this evening as the final shofar blasts and the gates of heaven close, I want to feel I am forgiven by God and that I have forgiven Him.

When we forgive God, God becomes a force in the world, not some dusty ancient relic. When I forgive God, God reigns. And God regains some exalted place in the universe and in my life.

My Dad, a Korean War Marine and such an inspiration to me used to always say: “Leaders Lead”...and so, I will take the lead today..... and forgive God,

Ribono shel Olam

This past year and in years before this one you have done things that at incomprehensible to me,

And I have been angry at you,

But on this, the holiest day of the year,

I humbly say to you, “Lord, our God, Avinu Malkenu, our Father our Kind, I forgive You”

and please God, “selackh lanu” forgive us as well.

Amen.