

the grasses to be green...

Rabbi Levy shows us that revelation is progressive – that we “can hear the words from Sinai” and apply their principles as we live our lives in the pursuit of holiness. His poem reminds us that there are consequences to our actions and urges us to consider how they impact the world around us.

This resonates deeply with my Process approach to understanding God. If God is that Life-Force, the Source of All Being, then loving God with all our heart and soul demands that we act and live in ways that honor All Creation. Our actions may not literally cause rain to fall or crops to grow, but they can and do impact the natural world around us and our fellow human beings, for better and for worse.

In the voice of Moses, the Torah beautifully frames the ethical demand at the heart of this theological approach:

“And now, O Israel, what does the Eternal your God demand of you? Only this: to revere the Eternal your God, to walk only in divine paths, to love and to serve the Eternal your God with all your heart and soul, keeping the Eternal’s commandments and laws, which I enjoin upon you today for your good.” ({ HYPERLINK "https://www.sefaria.org/Deuteronomy.10.12-13" }

Our lives, our existence, our connectedness to All Being ask only that we revere all life. We do not have to believe that God directly punishes in order for us to take responsibility for our actions as we walk through life, doing so in ways that demonstrate love, service, and protection of all creation.

***Rabbi Max Chaiken** serves as the associate rabbi at { HYPERLINK "https://www.kol-ami.org/" } in West Hollywood, CA. There he directs weekly worship music, and facilitates { HYPERLINK "https://www.kol-ami.org/openyad" }, a community of young adults in their 20s and 30s. He was ordained at { HYPERLINK "http://www.huc.edu/" } in Los Angeles in 2018, where he wrote his rabbinic thesis on economics, ethics, and Jewish law; he also holds a BA in economics and public policy from Brown University. Rabbi Chaiken lives with his husband, Rabbi Danny Shapiro, and their dog, Oogie.*

with the postulates of reason.” As Reform thinkers abandoned a literal reading of Torah, they removed this passage from our liturgy. To this day, while many Jews still recite this passage during prayer, it is not included in { [HYPERLINK "https://www.ccarnet.org/publications/mishkan-tfilah-for-shabbat/"](https://www.ccarnet.org/publications/mishkan-tfilah-for-shabbat/) }, the Reform *siddur* (prayer book).

For me, this was the right theological choice. I don’t think that God controls the weather in response to our behavior; God doesn’t turn off the “rain switch” when we’ve been naughty or give us crops when we’re nice, like some agricultural version of Santa Claus.

Instead, I see God as a Process; a Force that is present in each and every moment, both within us and beyond. I think of the Holy Blessing One like our breath, constantly sustaining and changing us whether we pay attention or not, both a part of us and apart from us, connecting us to the magnificence of all creation.

However, while process theology typically does not understand God as manipulating history directly, our four-letter name for God – which Jews typically pronounce “Adonai” – can reflect truths about God’s oneness and spur theological contemplation, even for those who are agnostic.

My teacher, { [HYPERLINK "http://huc.edu/directory/richard-n-levy-zl"](http://huc.edu/directory/richard-n-levy-zl) }, wrote a poem that was adapted and included in *Mishkan T'filah* to help us reimagine the passage from { [HYPERLINK "https://www.sefaria.org/Deuteronomy.11.13-17?lang=bi&aliyot=0"](https://www.sefaria.org/Deuteronomy.11.13-17?lang=bi&aliyot=0) } as more than a simple conception of Divine reward and punishment:

If we can hear the words from Sinai

then love will flow from us

and we shall serve all that is holy

with all our intellect and all our passion

and all our life.

If we can serve all that is holy,

we shall be doing all that human can

to help the rains to flow,

“Revelation is Progressive”: Our Responsibility to Live in Pursuit of Holiness

EIKEV, DEUTERONOMY 7:12–11:25

D'VAR TORAH BY:

RABBI MAX CHAIKEN

In this week’s portion, { [HYPERLINK "https://reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/eikev"](https://reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/eikev) }, Moses’s great sermon continues with powerful rhetorical impact by reinforcing the theology on Divine reward and punishment.

If, then, you obey the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day, loving the Eternal your God and serving [God] with all your heart and soul, I will grant the rain for your land in season, the early and the late. You shall gather in your new grain and wine and oil – I will also provide grass in the fields for your cattle – and thus you shall eat your fill. Take care not to be lured away to serve other gods and bow to them. For the Eternal’s anger will flare up against you, shutting up the skies so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its produce; and you will soon perish from the good land that the Eternal is assigning you. ({ [HYPERLINK "https://www.sefaria.org/Deuteronomy.11.13-17?lang=bi&aliyot=0"](https://www.sefaria.org/Deuteronomy.11.13-17?lang=bi&aliyot=0) })

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Despite the fact that language similar to this can be found in traditional Jewish liturgy as part of the { [HYPERLINK "https://reformjudaism.org/practice/prayers-blessings/worship-services-vahavta-read"](https://reformjudaism.org/practice/prayers-blessings/worship-services-vahavta-read) } ({ [HYPERLINK "https://www.sefaria.org/Deuteronomy.6.5-9"](https://www.sefaria.org/Deuteronomy.6.5-9) }), this direct connection between human action and Divine *reaction* troubled the ideological forbears of Reform Judaism. In the { [HYPERLINK "https://www.ccarnet.org/rabbinic-voice/platforms/article-declaration-principles/"](https://www.ccarnet.org/rabbinic-voice/platforms/article-declaration-principles/) }, they asserted that Judaism is “a progressive religion, ever striving to be in accord