

REASONABLE EXPECTATIONS

In other articles, I have criticized both the current orthodox and liberal approaches to Judaism. It is time for me to start describing the Judaism I would like to see.

Here are some aspects of Judaism that I particularly like:

- *an understanding of human nature and thus no expectations of angelic (i.e. humanly impossible) behavior*
- *a rational approach to life, at the individual, family, community, national levels*
- *an action versus belief orientation*
- *a present versus future orientation*
- *a do-it-yourself versus letting-someone-do-it-for-us orientation*
- *a do-it-in-this-life versus waiting-for-the-next orientation*

Judaism is about as rational an approach to human happiness as I have ever seen.

It doesn't ask us to live for making G-d happy. It suggests that we be happy but in a constructive way. It doesn't ask us to believe many things. It doesn't ask us to spend our days in religious service. It doesn't ask for our constant praise.

Judaism could not be simpler or more reasonable. G-d gave us some rules that would not only civilize us but lead to happy lives. He suggests that we try these laws and that their benefits will be great. He also says that if we go in other directions, we'll suffer. We will suffer not at His hand but as an eventual result of our dubious endeavors.

He says that the benefits of following the suggested laws will even be clear to the surrounding societies and that they would be welcome to adopt this wisdom. The big idea is that with the Jews' demonstration of the laws' benefits, human fulfillment could spread around the globe. What an amazingly simple but strong idea? Get one group on the right track and eventually all of humanity is transformed.

Getting back to reasonable expectations, Judaism doesn't expect humans to act like angels and doesn't want them beaten down with guilt because of their imperfections.

We don't assume guilt from our parents or ancestors. We don't fault current humanity for the failings of Adam and Eve. We don't need to carry guilt into the future either. Judaism shows us how to atone for our shortcomings.

In the Five Books of Moses there are a reasonable number of laws. I cannot say the same for the Oral Law. The laws don't require that much from us. They certainly don't make Judaism a full-time job except for the ethical consciousness.

The Written Law does not ask for impossible things, actions that go completely against human nature. For example, they don't expect us to turn the other cheek to an aggressor and they don't expect us to love our enemies. Those things make no sense, being counter to survival or practically impossible anyway for human beings. Judaism puts a high value on individual and group survival and I like that. Some people call impossible demands a kind of a higher law. I fervently disagree; there is no higher law than the Written Law.

G-d did not change His mind about what it takes for humanity to succeed. His commandments are the ultimate mixture of rational and human considerations.

Unfortunately even these reasonable expectations have proven too much for us. Some think that they are too reasonable and want to add many additional laws. Others want to reinvent Utopia and feel they are perfectly capable of doing that.

The Judaism I see described in the Five Books of Moses is the foundation for an idyllic society, where ethical behavior is the first directive, the ever-present, ever-conscious goal of every individual, family, city, and the state. The second directive is the respect for human nature, animals, and the entire natural world; this search for natural harmony would be widespread. Third, people go about making themselves happy in any way of their choosing that does not go against the first two directives.

BE ETHICAL TOWARD HUMANS, BE RESPECTFUL OF NATURE, BE HAPPY!

These are the reasonable expectations of Judaism. If we can live these, G-d will also be very pleased with His creation.

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