

Prayer and the Problem of Evil: Rewriting or Reinterpreting

Noam Zion and Steve Israel

REINTERPRETING TRADITIONAL IMAGES OF GOD: CHANGING WORDS, CHANGING MEANING (*TB Yoma 69b*)

THE CHALLENGE:

How can we pray using images of God that contradict our experience of a world without Divine power to grant reward and punishment?

So far we have examined two different approaches to living in a world without this worldly rewards and punishment. One approach developed a new rationale for the concept of a reward for a mitzvah. The second developed a revolutionary concept of *bracha* as a tool for raising consciousness of God. We now move to a third approach based on a re-examination of the relationship between meaning and language in prayer.

In TB Yoma 69b the Rabbis face the gap between the **expectations** created by traditional texts like the Shmoneh Esrei and the **reality** lived in history in our relationship with God. As portrayed by the Torah, God acts in history to bring reward and punishment and that is perpetuated in the prayer language of the Amidah. Its formulation is attributed to Anshei Knesset HaGedola who lived in the difficult centuries in the early Second Temple period not long after the destruction of the First Temple. Here they faced the gap between the traditional Noachide image of an all powerful and just God and the Second Temple reality. They ask themselves: how can we educate people to continue to say the same prayers with sincerity? Can we continue to speak of God in traditional terms even though our experience of God's presence in our world, falls short of our hopes and needs?

DRAMATIS PERSONAE:

The discussion is about the Men of the Great Assembly, a leadership institution that is believed to have existed in the first part of the Second Temple period. Before them the spiritual leadership was in the hands of prophets like Jeremiah who lived through the destruction of the First Temple (586 BCE) and Daniel (traditionally identified with the end of the Babylonian period, though his book is edited much later).

The main speaker in this piece is R. Joshua ben Levi, a 3rd century Palestinian Amora from Lod who was one of the most prominent teachers of Midrash Aggadah in his generation. A generation or so later, R. Elazar, a fervent Zionist who was born in Babylon, a student of the two great Rabbinic leaders, Rav and Shmu'el, came to Eretz Yisrael to study under R. Yochanan, whom we met earlier. At Yochanan's death, Elazar succeeded him as the principal of the Yeshiva at Tiberias.

GEMARA: THE LANGUAGE OF PRAYER.

R. JOSHUA BEN LEVI SAID:

WHY WERE THEY CALLED MEN OF THE GREAT ASSEMBLY?

BECAUSE THEY RESTORED THE CROWN [of God's glory] TO ITS ANCIENT STATUS. [For originally] MOSHE HAD COME AND SAID: "THE GREAT GOD, THE MIGHTY, AND THE AWESOME".

The subject of the Men of the Great Assembly comes up in a discussion, and a predictable question is asked. What caused this assembly to be described as great? There were other great institutions of leadership such as the Sanhedrin. So what was special about this particular group? The answer is given that they restored God's reputation to its former glory because over the years, God's power and greatness had been eroded. This power was represented by the phrase attributed to Moshe, "האל הגדול הגבור והנורא – *the great God, the mighty and the awesome*" [Devarim 10:17] which he, Moshe, used as he tried to explain the characteristics of God to the Israelites. The next part of the text explains the nature of the erosion that had taken place in God's "reputation" and image.

CRITIQUING THE PROPHETS

THEN JEREMIAH CAME AND SAID:

ALIENS ARE DEFILING GOD'S TEMPLE. WHERE ARE, THEN, GOD'S AWESOME DEEDS?

HENCE HE DID NOT MENTION THE [attribute] 'AWESOME.'

[Then a while later] DANIEL CAME AND SAID:

ALIENS ARE ENSLAVING HIS CHILDREN. WHERE ARE GOD'S MIGHTY DEEDS?

HENCE HE DID NOT MENTION THE [attribute] 'MIGHTY'.

We now hear that the two figures who played a central part in demeaning God's status were Jeremiah and Daniel. Jeremiah who lived at the end of the First Temple period and for whom the climactic event of his life was the destruction of that Temple, expressed the phrase in question at the time of the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem. In Jeremiah 32:18-24 we hear the following cry.

Oh great and mighty God [האל הגדול הגבור] whose name is Lord of Hosts, wondrous in purpose and mighty in deed, whose eyes observe all the ways of people so as to repay every person according to their ways and with the proper fruit of their deeds! You displayed signs and marvels in the land of Egypt with lasting effect and won renown in Israel and among humanity to this very day. You freed your People Israel from the land of Egypt with signs and marvels, with a strong hand and an outstretched arm and with great terror. You gave them the land that You had sworn to their father to give them - a land flowing with milk and honey, and they came and took possession of it. But they did not listen to you, nor follow your teaching. They did nothing of what you commanded them to do. Therefore you have caused all this misfortune to befall them. Here are the siege-works raised against the city to storm it, and the city, because of sword and famine and pestilence, is at the mercy of those who attack it. What you threatened has come to pass.

We see here that Jeremiah calls God – האל הגדול והנורא the great and mighty God but omits the word awesome as if to imply that God's name has not scared away the Babylonian army and prevented them from besieging Jerusalem. He recalls the wonders of the past in Egypt and says that then – in Egypt – God acted not only with strength and with power but - במורא גדול - with "great terror", inspiring all with fear and with the greatest of respect. That is in contrast to the situation that Jeremiah himself observes, where God does not inspire that fear and respect. It is certainly true that in Jeremiah's view this is because of the misdeeds of the Israelites and not because of any inherent weakness in God – it appears to come from God's decision to allow this situation to develop as a punishment for the sins and misdeeds of the Israelites. Nevertheless, the Rabbis are correct to note that indeed, Jeremiah has left out one of the words in the Mosaic formula which, presumably he is (half) quoting.

We hear a similar thing about Daniel, whose story occurs a little later, when the Persians have taken over the Babylonian exile. Daniel, in Persia, laments the fate of the Jewish People. In Daniel 9:4-10 we hear the following in Daniel's prayer to God.

Oh Lord, great and awesome God [האל הגדול והנורא] Who stays faithful to the covenant with those who love God and keep God's commandments. We have sinned, we have gone astray, we have acted wickedly, we have been rebellious and have deviated from Your commandments and Your

rules. We have not obeyed Your servants the prophets who spoke in Your name to our kings, our officers, our fathers and all the people of the land. With You, Lord, is the right, and the shame is on us to this very day, on the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, all Israel, near and far, in all the lands where You have banished them for the trespasses they have committed against You.

Daniel here uses the phrase, – האל הגדול והנורא – the great and awesome God but omits the word mighty - גבור . Once again, similarly to the case of Jeremiah, Daniel does not suggest that God lacks the capacity to be mighty. He puts the blame on the Jews themselves who have not followed the word of God and implies that God has punished the Jews for their misdeeds. Nevertheless, it is true that he omits the word ‘mighty’ when he prays to God, once again presumably quoting the familiar Mosaic formula. Thus we have two cases in which two great and important Jews, loyal to the Mosaic tradition and to their understanding of God’s demands, can be seen to have implicitly criticised God out of their own experience. Both of them have witnessed in their own lives, situations in which the biblical God appears not to have used the full capacity of divine power as they understand it, in order that the Jews should internalise the price of their non-obedience of God.

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SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR STUDY

1. What is the text saying about Jeremiah and Daniel? It is making a criticism about them but what is the precise nature of the criticism?
2. Read the following two pieces taken from the Books of Jeremiah and Daniel. It was on the basis of these pieces that R. Joshua ben Levi was making his criticism. Taking into account the circumstances in which the pieces take place (Jeremiah is watching the Babylonians besieging Jerusalem and beginning to break through the walls, at the end of the First Temple period, Daniel is in exile a few generations later) you must decide whether the criticism is justified.

***Oh great and mighty God** [האל הגדול הגבור] whose name is Lord of Hosts, wondrous in purpose and mighty in deed, whose eyes observe all the ways of people so as to repay every person according to their ways and with the proper fruit of their deeds! You displayed signs and marvels in the land of Egypt with lasting effect and won renown in Israel and among humanity to this very day. You freed your People Israel from the land of Egypt with signs and marvels, with a strong hand and an outstretched arm and with great terror. You gave them the land that You had sworn to their father to give them - a land flowing with milk and honey, and they came and took possession of it. But they did not listen to you, nor follow your teaching. They did nothing of what you commanded them to do. Therefore you have caused all this misfortune to befall them. Here are the siege-works raised against the city to storm it, and the city, because of sword and famine and pestilence, is at the mercy of those who attack it. What you threatened has come to pass.*

Jeremiah 32: 18-24

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Daniel 9: 4-10

Write a letter to R. Joshua ben Levi in which you either defend Jeremiah and Daniel or condemn them in accordance with the Rabbi's opinion.

RESTORING GOD'S GLORY

**BUT THEY [the Men of the Great Assembly] CAME AND SAID:
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GOD RESTRAINS THE DIVINE WILL, AND EXTENDS LONG-SUFFERING [patience]
TO THE WICKED.**

**AND THESE ARE [indeed the great displays of] GOD'S "AWESOMENESS" [Norah]: FOR
BUT FOR THE AWE [in which the nations hold] GOD, HOW COULD ONE [solitary and
small] NATION SURVIVE AMONG THE (many hostile) NATIONS!**

Now the Rabbis of the Talmud refer back to the Men of the Great Assembly and discuss their reactions to this whole apparent diminution in the divine status. According to the Talmudic discussion, the Men of the Great Assembly took a very different line. Rather than removing words from the traditional formula, they reinterpreted the words so that the phrase could fit their own situation. Also living at a time when the Jews were not in a glorious situation, they chose to interpret the words mighty and awesome in a way which would enable them to use the traditional formula, but in a different way. For them, God's power is manifested in the Divine ability to exercise self-restraint in accordance with the Rabbinic dictum from Pirkei Avot – איזהו גיבור, הכובש את יצרו . And God's awesomeness is manifest in the fact that the Jews have been enabled to exist among the nations of the world despite all their trials and tribulations. Thus, even in a period of apparent weakness, there is no need to doubt the capacity of God. God remains God, with full power and ability. The divine will is still manifest in the world but it expresses itself in a different way because of circumstances.

What the Men of the Great Synagogue have done is to save the words that describe God in the traditional prayer, while changing the meaning of the words to describe their contemporary reality. Where is the evidence for this, according to the Rabbis?

In the text of the Amidah, attributed by them to these self-same Men of the Great Synagogue, we encounter the following formula for the first bracha.

ברוך אתה ה' אלוהינו ואלוהי אבותינו, אלוהי אברהם אלוהי יצחק ואלוהי יעקב, האל הגדול הגיבור והנורא אל עליון,
גומל חסדים טובים וקונה הכל, וזוכר חסדי אבות ומביא גואל לבני בניהם למען שמו באהבה.

*Blessed are You, O Lord our God and God of our ancestors, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, **the great, mighty and awesome God, the Supreme God**, Who bestows loving kindness, creator of all, and Who remembers the pious deeds of our ancestors and brings redemption to their descendants in God's name with love.*

Here the formula is intact. For the Rabbis who praise the Men of the Synagogue, the great contribution of the latter group was to adapt content while maintaining form. In a world which draws strength from the power of tradition, it can truly be seen as a great achievement to allow authentic tradition to continue to answer the needs of a changing population facing a new situation. The times have changed, the reality has changed, the needs have changed, but the text remains the same and still manages to meet the needs of the new situation.

This is a kind of intellectual sleight of hand which will ultimately enable the tradition to continue for thousands of years in many different circumstances. It enables people to take their traditions and texts with them into a series of changing realities. As long as the meaning can be adapted, the tradition can be saved. This is what Judaism managed to do for generations, that paganism, for example, never succeeded in doing. When the idea of many competing gods began to seem unconvincing to many in the ancient world, they failed to be able to interpret their existing pantheons of gods in a way that made sense to the peoples of the time. Those people sought other explanations and changed their paradigm for understanding the world to monotheism, a completely different system of thought. Judaism in the pre-modern world managed to ward

off that danger by adapting the meaning of its tradition and enabling the tradition to “swallow” different understandings and perceptions.

When Judaism failed to be able to do that, at the beginning of the modern age, we get the first major breaks and splits in the Jewish world which were not healed within the tradition, but by a break which left the texts behind. Modern thinkers and theologians changed both the form **and** the content and brought on a major rift in the Jewish world which continues till today. But the Rabbis here praise the Men of the Great Assembly for keeping the text while changing the meaning. They believed in the need to keep the texts and changed the tendency of Jeremiah and Daniel, who changed the texts to reflect their reality.

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and small] NATION SURVIVE AMONG THE [many hostile] NATIONS!**

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR STUDY

1. What have the Men of the Great Assembly done according to R. Joshua ben Levi?
2. Why does R. Joshua believe that this justifies the epithet “great”? What is the contribution of the Men of the Great Assembly, to Judaism?
3. Write your own appraisal of the achievement of the Men of the Great Assembly? To what extent do you think that they have achieved something important? Why? Why not?
4. Have you any idea where the phrase attributed to them actually occurs? Hint: it appears in a prayer that is said regularly, every day? What is that suggesting about the Rabbis’ opinion of the origins of the prayer?

THE VALUE OF HONESTY IN PRAYER

BUT HOW COULD THE RABBIS [i.e. Jeremiah and Daniel] ABOLISH SOMETHING ESTABLISHED BY MOSHE?

R. ELAZAR SAID: SINCE THEY KNEW THAT THE BLESSED HOLY ONE INSISTS ON TRUTH, THEY WOULD NOT SPEAK UNTRUTHS [in their prayers] TO GOD [i.e. they would not attribute qualities to God that they themselves did not experience].

The question is now asked which criticises implicitly the way that Jeremiah and Daniel acted. How could they abolish a form of prayer established by Moshe himself? The question, we should understand, is much more far-reaching than it appears to be on the surface. The question could be rephrased: How could they have endangered tradition? Did they not realise the fact that they were leading to a devaluation of God's reputation, among non-Jews and Jews alike? Did they not understand that they were standing at the edge of a slippery slope where their changes could have started a process which could have led to the end of Judaism? Do they think they have greater wisdom and authority than Moshe? Do they think they know God's attributes better than Moshe to whom they were revealed on Mount Sinai?

A fascinating answer is given by R. Elazar. God, he says, **demands truth. God is not interested in hearing false praise.** It is far more important for God to hear real prayer which reflects the genuine feelings and perceptions of those who are praying. False prayer means nothing. Truth is not a matter of an objective description of God or reality but a subjective interpretation of one's own experience, our own true testimony to God's relationship to us and our generation.

If God values truth, it is because lip-service, meaningless mouthing of well-known prayer formulae, is a very dangerous situation for any religious structure. People have to be committed to their prayers. They have to feel that their contact with God is real and authentic. Above all, a true religious life needs an honesty which can only come when people speak their real and true thoughts. If there is a need to change the formula of texts and prayers in order to save a religious consciousness which is in danger of dying because those texts have lost their authentic meaning, then keep the consciousness and change the prayer. If the prayer is real and reflects genuine feelings, the religion can last. When the picture of God changes but the formulae stay the same, that is precisely the same slippery slope mentioned previously. It too will lead to the death of Judaism, but for the opposite reasons.

Thus what we have here is no less than a major philosophical discussion about the way to carry a tradition forward so that the tradition remains fresh and vital and meaningful. There are those who say: "keep the texts but change the meaning to reflect the new reality" and there are those who say the opposite, namely: "change the texts to reflect the new meaning".

In many ways this looks like a prototype of the fierce argument that broke out again at the beginning of the Haskalah - the modern Jewish enlightenment. Modern enlightened thinkers attacked the defenders of traditional Judaism accusing them of killing Judaism through their defense of all sorts of outmoded traditions and beliefs that had degenerated in parts of the Jewish world into superstitions that had little or nothing to do with the spiritual truths of Judaism. In turn the traditionalists attacked the would-be-changers of Judaism and accused them of bringing in innovation that would undermine and finally lead to the death of Judaism. It is the argument that has broken out countless times between defenders of a traditional system and between those who wish to change the system and claim to be doing it for the good of the system itself. Can any change be permitted? Is there a line, over which, to change is to throw out the "baby" with the "bath-water"? What is the best way to preserve tradition?

The discussion in the Gemara appears at first glance to be an early case of precisely this argument. But in fact this discussion is far subtler and much more complex. It is between two groups who want **to save the personal testimony to God's reality for a new generation with different experiences.** Both accept the need for change: the question is what should be changed. Is it better to change the meaning of the words or

to change the words themselves? The Gemara gives us two different answers. It does not decide between them. Perhaps it cannot. Perhaps it realises that both answers are in their own way correct.

The two answers look very different. In fact they have a great deal in common. Both of them realise that a religious system needs to reflect the honest experience of its members. Religion must be based on honesty. There are different possible ways open to effecting this aim. It is possible to change one's understanding or it is possible to change one's texts. Both are ways of authentic religious response. Both have their pitfalls and their dangers, because both can open the way to misunderstandings. Both are capable of undermining a system and leading to disintegration instead of growth. Demanding to retain the text and change the meaning is a difficult and subtle path that is perhaps not open to Every-man and Every-woman. It can lead to blind conservatism and to a rigid defence of what might well be indefensible. The other path, the path of changing text, can lead to an attitude that the text is expendable, marginal and ultimately unimportant. Both paths can lead to growth and flowering, but they can also lead to attrition and death.

The challenge of faith in Judaism is not only to express what we believe today but to continue to find a place for ourselves in a rich tradition reflecting on the problem of evil and nature of our personal faith in Divine goodness and power. The gap between the Biblical experience of the God of Noah and of the Exodus and the Rabbinic experience of God after the exile and destruction makes this problem an ancient one not a peculiarly modern one. The variety of positions honored within the traditional conversation offer almost all our students a view about which they can feel both sincerely honest to their experience and authentically Jewish. In fact it is only when honest enough to face the gap between our typical God language of omnipotence and goodness and our generational and personal experience that the interesting and potentially creative search for meaning takes place.

Jeremiah and Daniel represent a truth about God's limited power rooted in their generational experience. It gives them not only the right to censor Moshe's standard formulae of praise but the duty to do so out of respect for God's own trademark – truth and integrity.

Yet Anshei Knesset Hagedola also represent a possible compromise. Both God's actions or lack thereof and the words of the tradition may be reinterpreted. Masculine strength *Gevurah* maybe seen in self-restraint. (*mi hu hagibor hakoveish et yitzro*) as our notions of a praiseworthy hero change. Learning the tradition is not only a matter of finding someone we already agree with but also stretching ourselves to perceive the world and the tradition in new ways.

By speaking the words of tradition may we may come to perceive it and the world in new ways (*acharei hamaasim nimshachim halevavot*). The problem of evil does not require a knockout logical argument or an overwhelming miracle, but an invitation to reframe our tradition and the perception of our reality without ever denying our honest experience.

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SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR STUDY

1. What is the argument that is reflected under the surface of this piece of the discussion?
2. Divide into pairs or small groups. Half the groups think, together with the Rabbi Joshua ben Levi that Daniel and Jeremiah have taken totally the wrong approach to their Judaism. The other groups accept the opinion of R. Elazar justifying their actions. Each group has to prepare a response to the claims of the opposing opinion.
3. Following this, two "opposing" groups should get together and argue out the question, suggesting the best way for a religious cultural system like Judaism to go forward on this issue.
4. Finally, have an open discussion followed by a vote on the question: Who's way is better for Judaism – Joshua ben Levi or R. Elazar – or neither?

ADDITIONAL OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: Bialik's "In the City of Slaughter"

This activity is based on a reading of a challenging and complex text. It is recommended for advanced students who have the maturity to understand the implications of the text and to be able to deal with them.

One of our first activities in the Rabbinic section was based on the poem "On the Slaughter" written by Chaim Nachman Bialik in 1903, in the wake of the Kishinev pogrom. That was one of two poems that he wrote at that time in reaction to the terrible things that he had witnessed. The other was a longer epic poem called

בעיר ההריגה "In the City of Slaughter." The following piece is taken from the poem.

*Descend then, to the cellars of the town,
There where the virginal daughters of thy folk were fouled,
Where seven heathen flung a woman down,
The daughter in the presence of her mother,
The mother in the presence of her daughter,
Before slaughter, during slaughter, and after slaughter!
Touch with thy hand the cushion stained; touch
The pillow crimson with blood:
This is the place the wild ones of the wood, the beasts of
The field
With bloody axes in their paws compelled thy daughters yield:
Beasted and swined!*

Having read this part of the poem, we reach a scene where the reactions of the surviving men among the Jews is described. The pogrom has passed. Many of the women have been raped: some have been murdered. The poem describes the men going to the synagogue.

Each student should write two continuations of the poem describing the scene inside the synagogue as R. Joshua ben Levi would like to see it or as R. Elazar would like to see it, each according to his own belief system as expressed in the piece that we have just read.

Some of the class should share the pieces that they have written.

Now read together the following piece of the poem as Bialik wrote it. It is worth mentioning that it becomes clear in this part of the poem that the speaker is God and the character addressed is a Prophet of God, a Jeremiah or an Ezekiel.

*Turn, then, your gaze from the dead, and I will lead
You from the graveyard to your living brothers,
And you will come, with those of your own breed,
Into the synagogue, and on a day of fasting,
To hear the cry of their agony,
Their weeping everlasting.
Your skin will grow cold, the hair on your skin stand up,
And you will be by fear and trembling tossed;*

*Are they not real, their bruises?
Why is their prayer false?
Why, in the day of their trials
Approach Me with pious ruses,
Afflict Me with denials?
Regard them now, in these their woes:*

*Ululating, lachrymose,
 Crying from their throes,
 We have sinned! And Sinned have we!
 Self-flagellative with confession's whips.
 Their hearts, however, do not believe their lips.
 Is it, then, possible for shattered limbs to sin?
 Wherefore their cries imploring, their supplicating din?
 Speak to them, bid them rage!
 Let them against Me raise the outraged hand,
 Let them demand!
 Demand the retribution for the shamed
 Of all the centuries and every age!
 Let fists be flung like stone
 Against the heavens and the heavenly Throne!*

Bialik is clearly very critical of the reactions of the men in the synagogue. Why? What is he actually saying? By putting his poem into the mouth of a prophet of God, how does this affect the meaning or message of the poem? Whose point of view is he closer to, that of R. Joshua ben Levi or R. Elazar? Why do you think Bialik is so angry?

SUGGESTED FINAL ACTIVITY: Berl Katznelson

The following piece is taken from a speech made by the great Zionist activist and educator, Berl Katznelson in the mid-1930's.

Man is endowed with two faculties: memory and forgetfulness. We cannot live without both. If we were only to remember things and never to forget them, then we would be crushed under the burden of memory. We would become slaves to our memories and to our ancestors...And were we ruled entirely by forgetfulness, what place would there be for culture, science, and spiritual life?

A renewing and creative generation does not throw the cultural heritage of ages into the dustbin. It examines and scrutinizes, accepts and rejects. At times, it may keep and add to an accepted tradition. At times, it descends into ruined grottos to excavate and remove the dust from that which had lain in forgetfulness, in order to resuscitate old traditions which have the power to stimulate the spirit of the generation of renewal. If a people possesses something old and profound, which can educate people and train them for their future tasks, is it truly revolutionary to despise it and become estranged from it?

The speech was made to an audience of youth leaders and Katznelson was trying to persuade his audience to change their minds about something. Both he and his audience were very Jewish and very secular.

Let one person make the speech without introduction, in the intonation of a real fiery speech. Then the speaker should be introduced and the circumstances of the speech (in pre-State Palestine, to a secular audience of young idealistic youth leaders) be explained.

Now the speech should be made again. Following the speech, the students, in small groups, need to try and understand what Katznelson is trying to persuade his audience. What do they think must be the point of view of the audience before the speech?

After this they should try and continue the speech with some examples or extra points.

Now discuss whether there is any connection between the ideas in the speech and any of the ideas put forward in the Gemara.

SUMMING UP: SOME ISSUES IN THE PROBLEM OF EVIL IN RABBINIC THOUGHT

We have looked at three educational paths to build and maintain a religious consciousness in a world seemingly lacking in Divine reward and punishment. We have seen a revaluing of the idea of mitzvah, so that the reward for virtue is virtue itself, rather than the fulfillment of a desire for some kind of an extrinsic prize. We have seen an increased awareness of the great contributions of God to our world through the development of a systematic bracha consciousness. Last, we have seen a struggle with issues of truth and meaning in the language of prayer, with an implicit warning not to expect miraculous answers from the outside. Rather we should increase our appreciation for what God has done and continues to do in the world. All three are Rabbinic replies and all three of them go along with the idea of Rambam, quoted earlier, namely that the right path to God is through love and not fear. Let us recall Maimonides' words:

The person who worships through love rather than fear, follows the Torah and its wisdom not in order to gain anything. Not because of fear of punishment and not because of hope of reward but for its own sake – because it is the truth and virtue is its own reward.

To a large extent, this sums up the ideas that we have seen in this section. There is the way of explanation or the way of response. There is worship through love and worship through fear and hope for material consequences of our mitzvot. Each person must decide for him or herself, which is the right way forward.

REVIEW ACTIVITY

Each student should go through their notes for all the different Rabbinic texts that have been examined. They should write down as many different Rabbinic positions as they can find in one big list.

Let them choose the two positions that speak to them most convincingly, and the two positions that appeal to them least.

The students are asked to examine the local newspapers and to find a report of a car crash in which lives were tragically lost.

They are asked to write two editorial articles about road accidents in general and **this** accident in particular for different Jewish newspapers, each of which has reported the accident in its news coverage. One of the editorials should reflect one or both of the positions that appeal to the student and the other should reflect one or both of the positions that do not appeal to them at all. They must in addition, think of the type of Jewish person whom they would expect to write each editorial and the kind of Jewish newspaper which would print each article on its editorial page.