

1160 E. 12 Street
Brooklyn, N. Y. 11230
BH April 16, 1966

Dear Norman,

I just read your article, "God is Alive," in Jewish Life, March-April 1966. I found it so provocative that I've been compelled to write to you about it.

Frankly, I am troubled by the easy moral of the last section -- the ethical consequence of your theological argument. I am troubled by the certainty of "As we will be to Him, so will he be to us" (my italics).

Hester Ponim is a punishment that God gives (p. 18), but the hidden-ness is so hidden that we do not know it is hidden (p. 19). Therefore, nothing on earth--no incident of national or individual occurrence--is testimony of His being "hidden," or of His turning His face to us. It is conceivable, then, that existential pain, suffering, and death is as much a noticing of us as happy events are. The Torah implication that deviation from Torah Law causes "hidden-ness" and conformity will cause the land to bring forth fruit (the Shema) seems not to be historically or individually inevitable (to our finite vision). Vide Job and Koheleth, Poland, Russia, and Germany. Reward and punishment is not an issue.

If that is so, why should one heed your call to do Mitzvot and to worship God? Because, your article seems to imply, communion with the living God is its own reward. This, however, places on God a limitation: He has chosen to wait for our acts before He will make His own move. He omnipotently delimits His own omnipotence by permitting Himself communion only with the good and prayerful. But can one be so certain about the converse: if one is good and prayerful, He will commune? Is this a din? Dare He not choose to hide Himself for His own inscrutable purpose? And all that is left in such a dreadful instance is the guilt that one ~~has not performed~~ has not performed the requisite acts of ethics or has not prayed hard enough. This was the rebutted position of Job's comforters.

Further, do you guarantee that His purposes do not include "aliveness" for the wicked (Hitler's visions may have led to Israel resurgent) or for the private life of the insane?

We are, I fear, dealing with something that is none of our business. The statement that "God is Alive" in itself is chutzpah. Our actions in conformity with Torah assume the living God and make Torah and ourselves alive. If I do not know if He is hidden, then I cannot concern myself with ways to uncover his hidden-ness. For my own faith and sanity, I ~~cannot~~ assume He "is there" to begin and end with. I must join Koheleth in concluding that the end of trying to understand is fear and faith, precisely what we began with.

If this be an anti-intellectual attitude, be patient with me, for the intellect brought me to this conclusion: To do God's will through Torah is my problem; what happens afterwards --pain, joy, communion-- is His problem.

Thanks for an hour away from the problem of where to put classes where no classrooms exist. Regards and happiness!

Yours,

Wan Vogel

Pardon my unpracticed typing fingers.