
WEEKLY Z-MAIL

PARSHAS VAYIKRA/ZACHOR 2024

EVOLUTION AND AMALEK

the-o-ry [*thee-uh-ree, theer-ee*] – noun, plural-ries

1. a proposed explanation whose status is still conjectural, in contrast to well-established propositions that are regarded as reporting matters of actual fact: as in The Intelligent Design Theory

2. an established scientific fact: as in The Theory of Evolution.

I know from experience that discussing the problems with the “theory” of evolution in a public forum is a really dumb idea – but I am going to do it anyway. As humorously illustrated in the (partially made up) dictionary definitions above, many people, including some of the most prominent scientists and biologists, have come to believe in the theory of evolution as fact, no matter what the evidence is against it, or the fact that it has never been “proven”.

I refer here, of course, to the untested theory that life originally evolved from dead matter, and to macroevolution, the speculative idea that one species evolved into a completely different species, as opposed to microevolution, in which small genetic changes take place within a species, which has indeed been proven to be true and is therefore no longer just a theory).

Even the Nobel Laureate in Chemistry, Professor Harold C. Urey admitted that evolution remains unproven:

All of us who study the origin of life find that the more we look into it, the more we feel that it is too complex to have evolved anywhere. We believe as an article of faith that life evolved from dead matter on this planet. It is just that its complexity is so great, it is hard for us to imagine that it did”. [Christian Science Monitor, January 4, 1962; p, 4]

And here’s another great quote along the same lines from the well-known Harvard biologist Richard Lewontin in the New York Times Book Review January 9, 1997, in an review titled “Billions and Billions of Demons”:

Our willingness to accept scientific claims that are against common sense is the key to an understanding of the real struggle between science and the supernatural. We take the side of science in spite of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, in spite of its failure to fulfill many of its extravagant promises of health and life, in spite of the tolerance of the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, because we have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism. It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our a priori adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counter-intuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that Materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door.

So you see what I mean when I say that it's not always worth it to discuss the flaws in the theory of evolution (and there are many: the lack of transitional fossils, the Cambrian explosion, irreducible complexity, etc.) these days in polite company. (This is not to suggest that all those who subscribe to evolutionary theory are not open to challenges against it. But the reality is that far too many people have accepted this theory as Gospel, making it difficult for anyone on the G-d/Intelligent Design side to sound rational and "scientific" when they challenge it.)

At the same time, though, I feel that it's necessary to bring up this controversial subject, as it relates to one of the special Torah readings, Parshas Zachor.

Zachor means to remember, and the Torah commands us to "remember what Amalek did to you on your way out of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 25:17). We fulfill this Biblical commandment by reading from the Torah publicly once a year the passage in Deuteronomy which discusses the evil that the nation of Amalek represents, as well as our obligation to wipe out their memory.

Now even if today we can no longer identify exactly who these people are (so put down your guns, people), the mitzvah to remember the evil of Amalek is still quite relevant. You see, Amalek is more than just a nation – it is a negative force in this world that is the polar opposite of what G-d asks us to be. Amalek represents anti-growth, cynicism, and stagnation. And Torah Judaism is all about growth and taking our spirituality and connection to G-d to new levels.

Based on this understanding of what Amalek represents, we can see an amazing connection between Amalek and the theory of evolution. The word Amalek (spelled in Hebrew alef, mem, lamed, kuf) can be seen as a contraction of two words – amal kof, "the toil of a monkey". In other words, Amalek's goal is to stop us from growing spiritually and

leading purposeful lives. And what better way to stop us than to have us believe that all our toil and work in this world is essentially meaningless since we are no more than random accidents of nature, evolved from monkeys!

There is yet another connection between Amalek and evolution. The Torah teaches that a purposeful Creator we call G-d created and designed this world for Man to live in (and the recently popularized “Anthropic Principle” heavily supports this view – see, for example: www.aish.com/ci/sam/48938072.html). And for man to stand on G-d’s earth, denying that He even exists, is the ultimate chutzpah!

But that’s exactly what Amalek wants us to do. As the Torah relates in Parshas Beshalach: “Amalek came and battled Israel in Rephidim” (Exodus 17:8). Rashi quotes a Midrash which explains:

The Torah juxtaposed this passage [that deals with Amalek’s attack against Israel] with the preceding verse, “Is G-d in our midst or not?” to say: “I am always among you, and ready for all of your needs, yet you say, ‘Is G-d in our midst or not?’ I swear by your lives that [as a lesson] the dog [Amalek] will come and bite you. And you will cry out to Me, and know where I am.” This is compared to a man who put his son on his shoulder and went out on a journey. That son saw an object and said, “Father, take that object and give it to me.” [The father] gave it to him. And so, too, a second time [when the son asked for something], and so, too, a third time. They encountered a man. The son said to [the man], “Have you seen Father?” His father said to him, “Do you not know where I am?” He cast him down from upon [his shoulder], and the dog came and bit him [the son].”

Now I am not suggesting that everyone who subscribes to the theory of evolution is a spiritual descendant of the evil nation of Amalek – despite the connections between the two. What I do believe, though, is that many of those (Jewish) people who tell you that they are of the view that we are essentially accidents of nature and randomness, don’t really believe that – and they certainly don’t lead their lives that way. After all, if we humans are just some freak evolutionary accident, then why do we even bother doing “good” and “meaningful” acts all the time when there is no ultimate “good” and there is no ultimate “meaning”? And why do so many of us “professed evolutionists” pursue religious activities like prayer, shul on the High Holidays, philanthropy and acts of kindness etc.? Is all this just made up by us because, for, some inexplicable reason, we feel a need to create meaning or else our lives would be truly meaningless?

No, it simply cannot be. I believe that in our heart of hearts we intuit and believe that this world came into existence, not by chance, but through G-d’s purposeful design, and that

life must have ultimate meaning – just as the Torah claims. And we therefore live our lives based on that reality.

I also believe that many of those who profess a belief that we evolved from monkeys and therefore have no “soul” or G-dly spirit inside us, would have a far more difficult time believing this if they were exposed to (or even just read about) great people who managed to rise above their biologically-driven animal instincts to live elevated lives of purity, sensitivity and holiness. And yes, there have been many such holy tzaddikim (righteous people) throughout the centuries and millennia, all the way down to our own times.

The saintly Reb Boruch Ber Leibowitz, zt”l, Rosh Yeshiva of Kamenitz in the Ukraine, travelled to the United States in the 1920’s to collect desperately needed funds for the yeshiva. During his stay in New York, Mayor Jimmy Walker presented him with the key to the city of New York. At the presentation, Mayor Walker remarked, “Rabbi Leibowitz disproves Darwin’s theory of evolution. A holy person like him could only be created by G-d.” (All for the Boss, by Ruchoma Shain p.66).

This year on this weekend, as we Jews gather together in synagogues across the world to read Parshas Zachor and to remember the danger that Amalek represents for the Jewish people and the rest of humanity, let’s remind ourselves to stop “monkeying around” with theories that we don’t really believe in, and strengthen our commitment to lead elevated lives full of spirituality and meaning.

GOOD SHABBOS! HAPPY PURIM!