

## God Manipulation

The second form of monotheistic auto-immune disease, God Manipulation, works slightly differently. The indifference expressed here is quite simple. I have a political stand. God approves of that political stand, because the text states [pick the verse or portion of verse you need] which proves it. God's stand is mine, and since I am enacting God's will, I do not need to examine the implications any further.

There is a cure for this, which we will get to.

In America we often think in binary solutions, since they work best for protest banners and unreasoned debates. A thing is either one way or another, a person is either for or against something. A thing, or a person, is either wrong or right. It is quite Aristotelian, in a way. This kind of thinking leads some people to conclude that either God is always correct (and there is one right way of being with God) or everything that people might think to do on their own is valid.

Reality is a bit more gray and muddled than that.

Communicating the revelatory moment requires that humans use words to describe the wordless. I will have more to say about that in the next segment. At this stage, I will merely state that the imposition of human

wordsmithing implies human interpretation. Since humans can make mistakes, some kind of independent audit is in order.

Part of the job in each generation is to use one's intellect and conscience in combination to uncover the most moral actions, and then to audit one's religion to make sure that it is in synch with the moral findings. This means that an active part of Torah is integrating what people who are not speaking from a religious perspective have to say about ethical and moral behavior.

So, let us continue to problematic texts.

The TaNaKH is not a G-rated text. Not only are there sections dealing with rape and incest, there are sections where both people and God act in ways that should not be emulated. The important people in the TaNaKH all have human flaws. Even God is written as if God was human – getting angry, impatient, and downright violent.

The story of the TaNaKH is not only about us. It is also about God. It's a way to try and show how we can actually have a relationship. You do not need words to have a God moment. In order to have a clue as to what the other side of this intense experience wants, you do need some words.

When I held my son for the first time, I was feeling quite overwhelmed with the intensity of my love for him. At the moment I could not have told

you what I was experiencing – and any words I have used since then are pale in comparison.

Revelation is like that.

The moment is the essence. The words from the prophets have their power because it is presumed they arose from one of their God moments, often brought into play by God. My words, and the words of any other Rabbi, must stand on their own, as none of them arise from a revelatory moment.

Since it is difficult if not impossible to fully explain intense experiences, the people hearing or reading about it are forced to make certain judgment calls as to what the written Revelation means. The members of a faith community, over time, do just that. These judgments are subject to change, when the experiences of the community change enough that the words no longer bring up the same internal reactions.

The text we have will always fall short of our highest aspirations and ideals, for each generation hones the ethics that have been received from before and extends those considerations to more and more people. The context of the text itself, and of the very first listeners, needs to be taken into account before deciding the relative morality of the text in question. God, as it were, is saying to us, “I spoke in ways that people could

understand. Only those things that were the highest moral standards of the day were accurate representations of what I said, and even those I ask each generation to check and recheck to see if they still apply.”

The resolution of textual issues is to always look and see if the action proposed is one that never was supposed to be enacted, is one that fit well in a previous age, or is one that still resonates strongly as an unfulfilled ideal.

To sum up what the book has to say – and I do recommend that you get and read the book, not only to make sure that I am representing it properly, but because my words this season are just a summary, so what follows now is a summary of a summary:

To cure God Intoxication a person should inject a little bit of hubris into their lives. People are important and worthwhile, so never let putting God in front of you continuously blind you to them. To cure God Manipulation a person must always make sure that the moral commands they locate in the text are either in synch with the best that current morality has to offer, or even better than what is currently available. One must also use one’s intelligence when it comes to the text itself.

The bottom line is that only when one remembers that goodness and justice are independent of God, albeit part of the creation God instigated, is

it possible to keep realizing that just because God is said to have said it or reputed to have thought or done it, does not mean that “it” is a worthwhile action.