

Jesus beyond the Talmud

By Nicos Kaloyirou

A Jew's pattern of moral behaviour involves absolute adherence to the literal directives of Torah (the Five books of Moses) especially the 613 *mitzvot* or commandments as classified by Maimonides in the 12th century.

Jewish Law also recognizes that the source and expression for all the commandments is the love and fear of the Lord who has created the material Universe and has fixed its spiritual Laws for the good of mankind.

God is the measure of all things (*Isaiah 40:12-13*). Like the wonders of the Exodus from Egypt and the miracle of Jesus' resurrection, the material universe is the product of a miracle: God spoke it into existence by his Word (*Psalm 33.6*). As both the natural and the miraculous have therefore their beginning in *Elohim*, this must be reflected in the behaviour of every Jew who desires to keep the commandments.

Whilst the natural pattern of the ordinary citizen of God's Kingdom adheres strictly to the literal Torah, the citizen who practises the miraculous pattern goes beyond the *measure* (Letter) of Torah, beyond the bounds of human potential as his entire being and totality of conduct is spiritually energized (from *The Letter* sent by Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, 6th Day of Tishrei).

The Talmud which primarily deals with the interpretation of Jewish Law (*halakha*) uses the Bible to derive an ethical code of conduct that governs various business transactions. For example, employers must pay employees their wages on time. Withholding wages due to workers, or even paying late, is a violation of Biblical Law (*Deuteronomy 24:14*). The Talmud (*Bava Metzia 111b*) extends this law to all kinds of payments

owed including various types of rental fees.

From the Biblical prohibition against stealing in *Leviticus 19:11-13* the Talmud prohibits various kinds of deceptions and falsehoods in the sale of merchandise. For example, sellers must inform buyers of any hidden defects in the merchandise and contracts made under false pretences, by hiding a product defect, would be null and void (Talmud, *Bava Kama 46a*, *Bava Bathra 92a*). This prohibition was later incorporated into English and Australian Law.

The principle of monetary compensation in the Talmud is 'measure for measure'. However, many times the principle is applied beyond measure. For example, to the prohibition found in *Leviticus 19:11* 'You shall not steal' the '*Gemara* answers that it is necessary for God to write that the prohibition applies in all circumstances where money is obtained by illegitimate means even if the thief does so only in order to aggravate the victim'. In this situation the offender is required to pay the double payment as a gift to the person from whom he stole (*Bava Metzia 61b*).

In *Deuteronomy 3:23* Moses teaches, 'And you shall do that which is right and good in the eyes of God'. Both Rashi and Maimonides understand this verse to denote a level of behaviour that is above the letter of the Law. The Rabbinical commentaries give this example: when a person finds a lost object that legally he is allowed to keep, but he knows the identity of the original owner, even though he is technically permitted to keep the object, he should nonetheless give it back.

The *Gemara* (*Bava Metsia, 30b*) tells us that the Temple was destroyed because people were exacting with each other and treated them according to the strict letter of the Law. That is,

they did not show a desire to fulfil the truth underlying the Torah (its spiritual essence) which is an expression of the Divine nature. Rabbi Nachman (*Likutey Moharan I:282*) teaches that finding a good point in someone is one aspect of not treating that person in accordance with the strict judgment of the Law because mercy triumphs over judgment (see James 2:13). If you practise this, the other person will no longer be as wicked as you thought (he translates *Psalms 37:10* 'In another little bit the wicked person will no longer be; think about his place and he will not be there').

In the human sphere, this principle is interpreted by the Mishnah (*Sotah 1:7*) as 'the measure that a man measures, so is he measured'. In other words, a man's thoughts and behaviour determine his recompense. This reminds us of Christ's teaching in Matthew 7:2 'For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged: and with what measure you mete out, it shall be measured to you again.'

God's economy incorporates the Law into a new measure. God practises a Law beyond measure. God did not only love his friends, he also loved his enemies. He did not practise an 'eye for an eye'. The Son of God travelled 'the second mile' into the far country in order to meet us. Jesus allowed the soldiers to steal his cloak and gamble for it.

God practised a law beyond obligation. Jesus who received the Spirit without limit, took the obligation of the Law upon himself. By becoming the debtor, he destroyed its bondage and fulfilled both the Law and the Prophets (Mark 9.4) to an infinite degree. God promised that there will be even greater miracles than those performed during the Exodus from Egypt. For this reason, Jesus commanded his disciples to show God's miracle

of loving-kindness (*hesed*) to others because they are made in God's image: 'love your neighbour as yourself' (the Book of the Law, Leviticus 19.18).

The whole concept of *hesed* (mercy and grace), this divine pattern of redemption, the full measure of God's unmerited presence which was revealed to Moses during the Exodus from Egypt (Exodus 34.6-7), is embodied by Messiah who is clothed in the garments of each letter of Torah and whose disproportionate self-abandonment and sacrifice of himself, operates beyond the Law's literal patterns.

The Son of God, the heir to God's throne, identifies himself with the depths of our creaturely nothingness, adopts us as sons and makes us co-heirs in God's Kingdom with himself. He willed the same Spirit that was expelled from Adam to be expelled from his body that he might taste death for us; that we may know him through those things which he endured and experience the flowing in and breathing out of the Spirit's freedom; our fellowship is with the Father and the Son according to that immeasurable life and power that was present when God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, the greatest event in history.

If I am willing to repent of my evil doings and confess Jesus as Messiah, God is willing to save me and is able to cleanse me from all unrighteous thoughts desires and actions (I John 1.9) and will grant to me as a gift the righteousness of Christ.

This is the seed from which spring forth virtue, true self unveiled and forever contemplating with every sense the King's infinite beauty.

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