

On Life and Meaning

MARK PERES

Episode 65 – Yossi Groner – The Inner Torah

The Kingdom Of God

And now a personal word,

I may have a Jewish spark within me. I might make a fine convert to Judaism as I may already have the heart of a convert. There is nothing I love more than the study of history, law, ethics, and theology. That has been my path. My father was Jewish. My mother is Catholic. I was taught by Marianist brothers and priests in high school. I was a history major and philosophy of religion minor in college. I studied law. And I now I teach ethics and moral philosophy. Questions and answers about life and meaning swirl in me.

I'm curious about the internal logic of ideas. What do followers believe? What is commandment? What is commentary? How do ideas play out and give way to new paradigms?

I'm interested in the Jewish view of the coming of the Messiah and the messianic age. I would like to learn more about how Orthodox Jews await his arrival with full faith every day, about how Conservative Jews accept the messianic era as literal truth and as metaphor, about how Reform Jews reject a redeemer yet work for an age of redemption.

Rabbi Groner said that moments can become movements, and consensus can form quickly about a Jewish-prophesied Messiah in our midst. He said events will tell us that the messianic age is upon us. What do Jews believe about Jesus? That he was not the Messiah. Jews believe the coming of the Messiah is associated with events that have not yet occurred, including the rebuilding of the Temple and a messianic age of peace, and any claims about the divinity of Jesus is incompatible with the Jewish view of the absolute oneness and unity of God. Judaism teaches that it is heresy for any person to claim to be God or part of God or the son of God. The Talmud states explicitly, "If a man claims to be God, he is a liar."

Nonetheless, the elders of Israel considered Jesus. They were aware of reports of his miracles. They heard claims that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. They heard him preach that the kingdom of God was at hand. Before long, Jesus was brought before the Sanhedrin, the supreme Jewish legislative and judicial court. The Sanhedrin was composed of high priests, elders, and scribes. One of the responsibilities of the

Sanhedrin was identification and confirmation of the Messiah. They spent much of their time identifying and denouncing false prophets.

Annas and Caiaphas, high priests of the Sanhedrin who were suspicious and wary of Jesus, their minds likely already made up, interrogated Jesus asking him if he was the son of God. In one version, Jesus gave no definitive answer. If he said yes, then his answer would be blasphemous. If he said no, then his answer would be perjury (if in fact he believed himself to be the Messiah). Jesus responded, “You say that I am.” In another version, Jesus answered definitively that he was the son of God and would soon be seated at the right hand of power coming on the clouds of heaven. The Sanhedrin condemned him, delivering him to Pontius Pilate, Roman prefect of Judea, and the rest we know. Most Jews today don’t give Jesus much thought, other than being well aware of centuries of Christian persecution in his name.

What do Christians believe about Jesus? That he was the Messiah. Christians believe scriptural requirements concerning Jesus were met. The historical Jesus was a Jew from Galilee who debated fellow Jews about how to follow God, engaged in healings, taught in parables, and gathered followers. He was executed. His followers believe events revealed him as the Messiah, and his moment became a movement. Christians believe that his crucifixion atones for the sins of humanity, that he was resurrected and ascended to heaven, and that one day he will judge the living and the dead. Christians worship Jesus as the incarnation of God and the second of three divine persons of the Trinity. That’s a big theological divide between Christians and Jews.

I like listening to Rabbi Groner. I have so many questions for him. I like listening to Catholic priests and Protestant ministers too. I have even more questions for them. I listen to their answers. And then I arrive at my own.

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