

Part III

Skeptic: But why bring G-d into the picture? What's wrong with a secular "Moshiach"? If, as you claim, we can do better, let's do just that. Let us work for world peace, human rights, universal literacy, a cure for cancer, agri-technological solutions for hunger in Africa...

Believer: Do you think that man can do it on his own?

Skeptic: Hardly, with or without G-d's help. You're the one who's been saying that man is essentially good, that if we'll all just wake up one morning with the determination to do better we will have a perfect world on our hands...

Believer: So let us exchange sides in this debate. Allow me to pursue your line of thinking for a while. How many people do you know who can work together for a higher cause? How long does it take for a "united" effort to brake into half a dozen factions? Sometimes it seems that the problem is that there are too many well meaning people around, each with his own "Moshiach" --- his own subjective vision of the ideal and how to get there...

Skeptic: Yet you say that history is a process leading to the perfect existence of Moshiach...

Believer: It is. But who is to define this process and the steps needed to move it along?

Skeptic: And evoking G-d will solve the problem? Hah! If you look at history, religion has been the cause of at least as much evil as good. Think of how many people have been killed and tortured in the name of "G-d" and an assortment of "Moshiach's"!

Believer: That, precisely, is my point. As long as MAN defines "good" and "evil" -- whatever his intentions -- he is inviting conflict with whoever doesn't agree with his definition. If he or his potential audience is of a "religious" bent, he will undoubtedly attribute his idea of morality to G-d and set out on a crusade to destroy the world in order to save it.

Skeptic: So, will the real G-d please stand up!

Believer: That's exactly what G-d does when He sends Moshiach: He shows Himself in a way that leaves no room for doubt. Moshiach, simply stated, is one individual who brings about a unanimous recognition of the true G-d, thereby uniting all of humanity to work for the common good---a good that they all accept to be the true ideal, as defined by the Supreme Architect of Existence Himself.

Skeptic: You're assuming that such an absolute truth exists. I question that very premise.

Believer: If it doesn't, then the whole concept of a purpose to life has no objective meaning -- "Moshiach" becomes five billion different individual fantasies. If one feels that existence is purposeful (and I am convinced that, deep down, every human being feels this way), then there must be a transcendent reality which defines this purpose and implants it in the human soul. In other words, a creator, an author of history, G-d. A G-d who created man in His image, as opposed to gods created by men in their images.

Skeptic: To believe in a purpose is one thing. There is a part to every individual that insists that his existence is meaningful, and that our world will (or at least ought to) amount to something worthwhile. But to believe in a G-d who handed down a particular set of instructions---that is a tremendous leap of faith.

Believer: A purpose cannot arise out of spontaneous bangs and random rearrangement of quarks...

Skeptic: How do you know? Many physicists believe that life, in all its complexity, may have resulted from just such confluence of random events over eons of time...

Believer: Without getting into a semantic argument over the probabilities of such an “accident”, let me say this: assuming it could happen, can you call the result a purpose? Why should I care about such a “purpose”? Why should I strive to uphold some “pattern” that has spontaneously emerged out of meaningless gibberish?

Skeptic: Because these are the laws which ensure our continued survival and well-being. We're all in the same boat. So society as a whole comes up with certain institutions--family, education, charity, law enforcement, courts, international law--to promote the common good.

Believer: But why should I care about this boat? Why not do what I want as long as I can get away with it?

Skeptic: There is no getting away with it. Everything you do affects all of us and, ultimately, yourself.

Believer: By the time that “ultimately” comes about, I'll be long gone. Say that I find that I can lead a luxurious and fulfilling life as a drug czar. Of course, my product destroys the lives of inner city kids and causes old ladies to be mugged in broad daylight. But I'm living in a country estate surrounded by an electric fence and patrolled by my private security force. I have an army of lawyers to keep me out of jail and a charitable foundation to keep me respectable. By the time society collapses, I'd be resting comfortably under my designer tombstone...

Skeptic: What about your children?

Believer: Children? Why in the world should I have children? To keep “society” going another million years? As I said, if we feel that there is meaning to our lives, it is because a purposeful Creator has woven it into the very fabric of our souls.

Skeptic: Still, so what? Why should I care about what's “woven into the very fabric of my soul” by a “purposeful Creator”?

Believer: If you don't care, no “reason” will ever make you care. But you do care. The most frustrating thing about being a skeptic is trying to understand why you care. Well, the reason why you care is because you are inexorably bound to your mission in life. Because your individual role within G-d's overall purpose in creation is what lies at your very essence.

Skeptic: It never fails. Whenever I get into a conversation with a believer it turns out that not only does he know all the answers to everything, he even knows me better than I know myself...