

Sermon delivered by Aaron Shaw, 16 Aug 2014 at Congregation B'nai Chayim

Biblical Faith and Obedience – Maybe Hockey Actually IS Life!

Most major religions contain the concepts of faith and obedience in one form or another. There is some creed or dogma one assents to, and then the person modifies his or her behavior in order to live out that worldview. But **biblical** faith and obedience are unique, in essence, in how they work together, and in how they are lived out. We must carefully define our terms to see what biblical faith and obedience are and are not; and when the two are brought together in just the right way, the amount of power released will make “Fat Man” and “Little Boy”, the atomic bombs dropped in 1945, look like toy store firecrackers.

The **biblical** in biblical faith and obedience is key. The Muslim simply submits to Allah’s will, even though that person knows that Allah might be leading him or her astray¹. Likewise, one of the pioneers of Mormonism preached a sermon in 1857 where he reportedly said: “if you are told by your leader to do a thing, do it. None of your business whether it is right or wrong”². The G-D of the bible is entirely different, as we see in Isaiah 1:18: “Come now, let us reason together”. Absolutely, G-D is cares what we do and don’t do, but HE is more concerned about **why** we do or don’t do things. The believer’s life mission is to break down any and ALL head and heart barriers which hinder G-D’s will from being done. Yeshua (Jesus) said “My **food**...is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work”³. The L-RD’s will is what Yeshua lived for, what HE derived pleasure and fulfilment from it, and this should be true of us. In the same way that a nuclear bomb without its Uranium or Plutonium is a useless hunk of metal, faith and obedience not empowered by the resurrection⁴ are equally useless. Rav Sha’ul (the apostle Paul) wrote about having the desire to do what is good, but just not having the ability within himself to live it out⁵. Apart from Yeshua, we can do nothing⁶. Faith and obedience lived from the inside out is the only kind which will please G-D⁷.

To live out biblical faith and obedience, we have to unpack our personal and cultural baggage. We need to be historians of ourselves, and also to understand the times in which we live⁸. Not only is a biblical worldview widely considered outdated, naïve and uninformed, but it is more and more seen as **actually evil and dangerous**. Rosie O’Donnell was recently on television, and she received thunderous applause when she stated that radical Christianity is just as dangerous as radical Islam⁹. The renowned scientist Isaac Asimov wrote about “The Dangerous Myth of Creationism”; to him, creationists are trying to place

¹ “Allah sends astray [thereby] whom He wills and guides whom He wills”; Qur'an, Sura 14, verse 4 (<http://quran.com/14>)

² Heber C. Kimball, <http://jod.mrm.org/6/28>

³ John (Yochanan) 4:34, NIV

⁴ Philippians 3:10

⁵ Romans 7:18

⁶ John (Yochanan) 15:5

⁷ Hebrews 11:6

⁸ 1 Chronicles 12:32

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ZWG5zqWeG8>

medieval shackles on the human mind and push science back into the dark ages¹⁰. The late atheist Christopher Hitchins recently wrote a book entitled: “God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything”. He argued that to accept the substitutionary atonement of Yeshua for our sins is actually an **immoral** thing to do, because it is relinquishing personal responsibility for one’s own behaviour. Nothing could be further from the truth. Leaning our whole weight on Messiah’s death and resurrection is the only way to experience life and life to the full¹¹. It is only after we have received the cure, that we realize how sick we’ve been.

O’Donnell, Asimov and Hitchins (representatives from entertainment, science and philosophy) confuse the disease with the cure. I don’t remember where I heard it, but it has been said that if you want to understand what drives a culture, look at how it entertains itself. And regarding science, few people know that the first scientists were devout Christians who saw G-D as having created an ordered universe, and that it was possible to discover this order¹². Science could not have even started had it not been for religion. This modern confusion of disease and cure is the natural outgrowth of a culture that for centuries has compartmentalized realms of understanding. Everything that “jives” with science and reason and that can be empirically proven is put in one box; and everything else is put in another box and labelled: “Guilty Until Proven Innocent”. The biblical believer is called to unify these separate realms, within him or herself, within the home, and within the community. We need to be fluent not only in “churchanese” and “synagogese”, but we must (and it’s a big **must**) learn how to translate biblical concepts into the language of everyday living. Terms like sin, evil, defilement, abomination, atonement, salvation, grace and many other terms stem from precise Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek words, but we often gloss over these meanings and we may perceive some of these terms as synonyms for each other, when they absolutely are not.

Our English word obedience actually grew out of the Hebrew עבד (av-ad), meaning **to serve** (can you hear the similarity? **o-bed-i-ence** / **a-vad**)? עבד also carries the meanings **to cultivate**; **to process**; even **to adapt**¹³. In Numbers 8, the service of the tabernacle is referred to as both the **service of the L-RD** (avo-dat ADONAI)¹⁴, and the **service of the children of Israel** (avo-dat b-nei yisra-el)¹⁵. G-D is cultivating us to become cultivators; to do the work HE does. An employer once said to me: “I wouldn’t ask you to do anything I haven’t or wouldn’t do myself”, and I knew this was more than mere words as I observed her living it out. When we learn obedience to G-D, we are learning to do HIS works HIS ways, learning to cultivate ourselves, our families and our communities. Then we can then adapt to anything life throws at us.

Biblical obedience was and is **100% voluntary**. We see in Exodus 36:5 that the work, the **עבודה** (avo-dah), of building the tabernacle, in both its materials and labour, came about on a completely volunteer

¹⁰ Cited in Oakland, Roger; Evolution: Fact or Fiction (video), Oakland Communications, 1992

¹¹ John (Yochanan) 10:10

¹² <http://www.tektonics.org/scim/scienceemony.htm>

¹³ Babylon by Modan, English-Hebrew / Hebrew English Dictionary

¹⁴ Verse 11

¹⁵ Verse 19

basis. After the tabernacle and temples were built, no priest was ever goaded into the sanctuary at the point of a sword or spear, forced to perform his duties.

Another Hebrew phrase is often translated as obey; Genesis 27 verse 8 is an example. The literal Hebrew is “**listen in my voice**” (Shma b’ko-lee). Every religious Jew when he or she reads Torah or hears it chanted or read, is to imagine him or herself at Mt. Sinai¹⁶. When we read the scriptures, from the scroll, book or computer screen, it needs to be more than just the images of the shapes of the letters going passively through our corneas to our retinas and through our optic nerves. And when we listen to G-D’s word, it needs to be more than just sound waves bouncing off our ear drums, producing an electrochemical pattern in our brains; although both of these processes are the starting point. Romans 10:17 tells us that “**faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of G-D**”. We need to develop an unshakeable confidence in both the *Tanach* and the *Brit Chadasha* (Old and New Covenants¹⁷) as fully the word of G-D. Both *Tanach* and *Brit Chadasha* comprise the Bible and there are consistent themes that run all through the scriptures, but the “Bible” is actually a library. 66 books of different genres, written in different places, by roughly 40 different people of varying backgrounds, over a period of some 1500 years. This is important, because it’s easy to hear of read something from one source and dismiss it. But it is undeniable that when you examine these books in the basic order of when they were written, there is a gradual picture that emerges clearer and clearer that points in one direction, yet definitely, the individual books are unique, and are not “rehashments” of each other.

Let’s shed the myth that only the scholars, PhDs, philosophers or those who have been to seminary or Bible College or are the only ones who can really understand the scriptures, and that we can only sit underneath their table, hoping for a few scraps here and there¹⁸. But we also need to avoid the other extreme, where if we can’t “Google” something and have a complete answer in 30 seconds, then we give up trying to find an explanation.

Francis Schaeffer has argued (and I think he is right) that believers in Messiah Yeshua have had little impact because of a tendency to see things in bits and pieces: family breakdown, abortion, immorality, etc. Instead of seeing the big picture that connects all the dots¹⁹. And what connects all the dots is a biblical world view, **demolishing all arguments and all pretensions that set themselves up against the knowledge of God, taking every thought captive, making it obedient to Messiah**²⁰.

In the *Brit Chadasha*, faith is not blind. The Greek word there for faith, πίστις (pee-steess), does **not** come from a root, meaning “squint your eyes real tight, cross your fingers and hope really hard”. It means “persuade, be persuaded”²¹. And in 1 John 1:9 where it says: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness”; the Greek for “confess”,

¹⁶ Deuteronomy 29:14-15

¹⁷ Testaments

¹⁸ Matthew 15:26-27

¹⁹ Francis Schaeffer, cited in Nancy Pearcey, Total Truth (audio book, Disc 8)

²⁰ 2 Corinthians 10:5

²¹ <http://biblehub.com/greek/4102.htm>

όμολογῶμεν (*omolo-go-men*²²), means: *to say the same thing, to agree*²³. How, pray tell, can we say the same thing or agree with something that we never actually understood in the first place?

In Hebrew, a noun is usually either masculine or feminine, but the word for **faith** is unique, occurring in both a feminine form (אֱמִינָה, *emoo-nah*) and a masculine form (אֱמֹן, *e-moon*)²⁴. In B'reshit (Genesis) 15:6, where it says that “Avram believed the L-RD, and it was credited to him as righteousness”; the word for “believed” is אָמַן (heh-eh-**meen**), which comes from the same root. Verbs convey action, and Hebrew verbs carry out their action differently depending if the verb is in active mode²⁵ (like in “John punched”), passive mode²⁶ (“John was punched”), causative mode²⁷ (“John caused punching to happen”) or reflexive (self-action) mode²⁸ (“John punched himself”). There are 3 other modes, but what I wanted to point out is that the *believing* Avraham did comes from the basic root word אָמַן (ee-men), *to train*, or *to coach*²⁹. In Genesis 15:6, the verb form is causative³⁰. So you could translate it: “Avram caused coaching in the L-RD to occur, and this was credited to him as righteousness”. The form of the verb is not the reflexive self-action only form; therefore, not only did Avraham cause himself to be trained (or put himself in the place where he could be coached), but he was also *able to coach others*, as is seen in Genesis 12:5, where he had helped to make souls in Haran. There’s something else in regards to Avram believing G-D; אָמַן (heh-eh-**meen**) is actually misspelled³¹! The *yod* is missing! And what’s a *yod*? Just look at that thing on the end of your arm; a hand! So, there was an invisible hand at work in Avraham’s believing.

You are probably wondering about the title of this sermon: “...Maybe Hockey Actually IS life!” Some of you may have seen a t-shirt or bumper sticker that reads: “Hockey Is Life”. That may in a sense be true. Here’s how:

While it is true that we can never fully live up to The L-RD’s standard 100%, this doesn’t mean we shouldn’t keep short accounts with G-D and aim high. In many Christian circles, the slightest mention of the word “obedience”, and someone sounds the “Legalism!” alarm. G-D’s commands are not burdensome³², and it says in *Torah* that that we are to שָׁמַר (sha-mar - *guard*; *watch, supervise*;

²² I choose to use the Modern Greek pronunciation for reasons I won’t go into here (but for those who may be interested, see <http://www.septuagint-interlinear-greek-bible.com/un-greek.pdf>). Others prefer to say homolo-**go-men**

²³ <http://biblehub.com/greek/3670.htm>

²⁴ <http://www.morfix.co.il/>

²⁵ קָל (kal [“simple”, “easy”])

²⁶ נְפָעֵל (Neef-eel)

²⁷ הַפְּעֵל (Heef-eel)

²⁸ הַתְּפִعֵל (Heet-pa-el)

²⁹ Amen (אָמַן) is also from the same root

³⁰ Hiphil Preterite. Wigram, George V.; *The Englishman's Hebrew Concordance of the Old Testament*, fifth printing, Oct 2003, page 103

³¹ The proper spelling is חָאמֵן (heh-eh-**meen**)

³² 1 John (Jochanan) 5:3

*maintain³³) HIS commands; much like the goaltender in hockey guards the net. Will the goalie stop every last puck shot at him? Does his team expect him to? No. Do talent scouts for the NHL only recruit goaltenders who have never had the round piece of rubber go past them, and does a goalie's career end the instant he is ever scored on? Again, obviously not. Remember in Ephesians 6, where Rav Sha'ul wrote about putting on the full armor of G-D: the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation? If he lived today, he may have written about our feet being fitted with *the skates of readiness that come from the gospel of peace; or the facemask of faith*, so we can keep our spiritual teeth!*

Something else about the game of hockey got me thinking. There are some situations, like when a team is trailing in score near the end of the game, when the coach can decide to pull the goalie and put **another attacker on the ice in his place**, to increase the chances of scoring a goal. The risk though, is that the net is left wide open. This is who Yeshua is! He's that extra attacker ready to go on the ice in our place. Each of us must realize that life is more than just us in front of our own net. We may be afraid to leave our net open; but just look at the caliber of THE ONE ready to come out in your place! Miles above Bobby Orr! Wayne Gretzky couldn't touch HIM in a million years! And the moment we switch off the ice with HIM, victory is certain. The paradox though, is that even though for the believer the game is already won³⁴, believers are still called to play with all their hearts, minds, souls and strength³⁵. We continue to be trained and coached, and coach each other.

Some of you may recall what is now known as the **Miracle on Ice**³⁶; the 1980 Winter Olympics hockey game. The "Goliath" Russia vs. the "David" USA, and the gold medal was on the line. Somehow or other, the US gained the lead, and it was obvious to almost everyone that Russia's only hope was to pull their goalie for the extra attacker, but the Soviet coach adamantly refused to, and it cost them³⁷. Legalism is when we are so focused on guarding our own net, that we lose sight of what team we're on, or even that we are on a team, or confuse what game we are in, and we even forget what the ultimate objective of the game is: to win! Not that life is a game, but our eyes are on the prize: To drink from Lord Stanley's Cup³⁸! It's game 7 of the Stanley Cup final, late in the 3rd period, and we may be headed into overtime. One day that siren, that *shofar*³⁹, will sound, and the "game" will be over.

But even in overtime, there may be a lot of the game left. Two games in the 1930's went to 6 overtimes⁴⁰. I watched a game when I was in high school in 1990; the Boston Bruins versus our Edmonton Oilers. It went to 3 overtimes, as well as the power failed at Northlands Coliseum, delaying the play for what

³³ <http://www.morfix.co.il/>

³⁴ Phillipians 3:12

³⁵ Deuteronomy 6:5

³⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miracle_on_Ice

³⁷ http://www.ask.com/wiki/Extra_attacker

³⁸ Philippians 3:14

³⁹ Ram's horn

⁴⁰ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Overtime_\(ice_hockey\)#Longest_NHL_overtime_games](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Overtime_(ice_hockey)#Longest_NHL_overtime_games)

seemed like forever. By the time Petr Klima finally scored to win it for Edmonton, it was after 1:00 in the morning⁴¹.

How about you? Is your stick still on the ice? (this is still very good advice from Steve Smith!) G-D can still perform the miracle for us, greater than the miracle that happened for US team in 1980. This miracle occurs when we learn to recognize the presence of HIS unseen hand, just as Avraham did. Also when we allow HIM to coach us, and we learn to coach each other in true faith and obedience.

Shabbat shalom, mishpochah!⁴²

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² family