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Woodlands Community Temple • White Plains, NY
PS/Yitro • NFTY National Convention
February 13, 2009 • 20 Sh'vat 5769

LOOKING FOR GOD

Yesterday was Charles Darwin's 200th birthday. His discoveries concerning the evolution of the species are about as important as things get in the world of biology. Charles Darwin is a giant on the subject of how the world works. I mention this here, at our Shabbat service, because contrary to popular opinion, it is not at all certain that Darwin denied the existence of God. The God of the Bible, yes. But something present in our universe that was somehow responsible for sparking the very beginnings of existence? Darwin was not at all prepared to speak against *that*.

But some of us *are*. Today, because we've learned much about the Big Bang, evolution, gravity, sunrise/sunset, many have concluded that God doesn't exist. Science tells us all we wish to know.

But Judaism has a lot of different voices when it comes to thinking about God. And you may be surprised to learn that some of our most prominent Jewish thinkers were very comfortable in a scientific world. For them, the Big Bang was an act of God; evolution, by the *hand* of God.

In the Talmud, some of our rabbis said (Pesachim 94b): "*By day the sun passes beneath the firmament, and at night above it.*" In other words, they believed that, at night, the sun would go into hiding behind a thick black covering. But listen to this – the Talmud continues: *The sages of the nations* (meaning Greek scientists like Pythagoras and Archimedes) *they teach, "By day beneath the firmament, and at night beneath the ground."* The Greeks were teaching that the earth turns on its axis and at sunset, the sun appears to duck beneath the horizon. *Rebbe said* (and this is the part I want you to hear), "*Their opinion seems more correct than ours.*"

Do you know what *that* means? The rabbis of the Talmud didn't think that all knowledge of the world came from the Torah. They understood that if mathematicians and physicists ever figure out something that contradicts the Torah ... the rabbis gave preference to the scientists!

So the next time you, or someone you know, says, "I don't believe in God ... I believe in the Big Bang," you might take a moment to ask yourself, "Hmm, is it possible that the Big Bang is part of God's world?"

Some of the most devout practitioners of Judaism have welcomed science and did not see it as a threat to their way of life. Biology and chemistry and anthropology and physics didn't prove there *isn't* a God; it deepened their appreciation for what God had done.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, who lived at the time of Charles Darwin, wrote: "If this notion (evolution) were ever to gain complete acceptance by the scientific world [...] Judaism [...] would call upon its adherents to give even greater reverence than ever before to the one, sole

God Who, in His boundless creative wisdom and eternal omnipotence, needed to bring into existence no more than one single, amorphous nucleus, and one single law of “adaptation and heredity” (Darwinian evolution) in order to bring forth, from what seemed chaos but was in fact a very definite order, the infinite variety of species we know today.”

So no matter what explanations scientists give us about how life works, our gratefulness to Whomever or Whatever created all of this only deepens. “God” is even greater for not having just said *poof* and everything came into being, but for letting it simmer for some fifteen billion years on its way to being as amazing as our world is today.

Do you know the joke about a scientist coming up to God and saying, “We don’t need You anymore. We’ve solved the mystery of DNA. We’ve figured out how to create life. We can now do what, in the beginning, You did.”

God, truly delighted by this turn of events, replied, “Tell Me more!”

“We’ve figured out,” said the scientist, “how to take dirt, form it into a likeness of You, breathe life into it and, voila, a human being!”

“I would *love* to see a demonstration of that,” said God.

So the scientist bent down and scooped up a handful of earth from which to mold the shape of a person. “No, no, no,” interrupted God. “Get your *own* dirt!”

No matter how smart we get, no matter how many atoms and molecules and quarks we can understand, the universe will always remain an awesome Creation. And awesome too is that you and I ... we get to be part of it!

So we may not be as fearful of our Creator as our ancestors were. But we can be as *grateful* as they were. Rabbi Nosson Slifkin, an Orthodox rabbi who lectures extensively on Judaism and nature, teaches: *Unlike those known as “creationists,” Jews accept that science works. But unlike many scientists, we look deeper. For while it is praiseworthy to look for laws in nature, we should never disregard the Lawmaker.*

Shabbat comes each week, NFTY, to remind us that you and I are precious to our Creator. Let’s try and make sure that, as we continue to learn from great individuals like Charles Darwin, our Creator remains precious to us.