

How can I carry alone your contentiousness, your burdens, and your quarrels? (1:12)

Rashi derives from the word *masaachem*, your burdens, that the people were *apikorsim*, heretics. They were skeptics who did not believe in their leaders. Thus, they questioned the motives of everything that Moshe *Rabbeinu* did. If he left his home early, they asserted that there was trouble at home. If he left late, they claimed that he was busy seeking ways to take advantage or hurt them. They were bogged down with suspicion. Nothing was good enough for them. They had jaundiced misgivings and perspective about everyone who helped them. This is a *masa*, burden. Apparently, *Rashi* feels that an *apikores*, heretic, is one who is weighed down with questions. When he does not have the answers to the questions that challenge him, he “refers” them to Hashem, Whom he trusts implicitly. A heretic has no “one” to whom to refer his questions, because he decided that he does not believe in G-d, due to some of the tribulations that he sees people confront. It is so much easier to contend that G-d is passive, a spectator who just watches and cannot do anything about it. The heretic believes this absurdity because he wants to. Otherwise, he will have to answer for his actions.

Horav Noach Weinberg, zl, relates the following true story. One day a young adult tourist named Jeff was brought in to meet with *Rav* Weinberg. In his position as *Rosh Yeshivah* of Aish HaTorah and mentor to thousands, this was a constant occurrence. *Rav* Weinberg opened the conversation by asking Jeff what he was doing. Jeff replied, “I am working on my MBA at Harvard, and I am an atheist.” The *Rosh Yeshivah* countered, “Wow! A real atheist! Whoever was able to convince a real-life atheist to come visit a rabbi like me deserves a medal.”

Jeff replied, “He deserves no medal. There is a background to my being here. Let me tell you how I ended up coming here.” Jeff was in Norway visiting his Norwegian fiancée (not Jewish). He decided that he needed to make one trip to *Eretz Yisrael*. If he did not go now, he would probably never go. He took a flight to the Holy Land, and his first stop, of course, was the *Kosel*. He figured that he would see nothing more than some old stones. Yet (like everyone else who goes there), he was amazed and moved. Suddenly, he felt a heavy weight upon himself. He stood there, looked at the *Kosel* and “composed” an atheist’s prayer. (Prayer and atheist are antitheses to one another. To Whom does an atheist pray? He believes in nothing.)

This is the content of the atheist’s Prayer: “G-d, I do not believe in You. As far as I know, You do not exist. However, I do feel something. (At least he had the courage to confess. Others cannot bring themselves to concede the truth.) So, if I am making a mistake, I want You to know that I have no quarrel against You. It is just that I do not know that You exist. If, by chance, You do exist, and I am making a mistake, can You introduce Yourself to me?”

As Jeff finished his “prayer,” an Aish HaTorah student who happened to be at the *Kosel* tapped him on the shoulder and asked if he was interested in learning some Torah. The question slammed

Jeff like a ton of bricks. Here, he had just finished asking G-d for an introduction and immediately someone materialized to invite him to learn at Aish HaTorah. Six weeks later Jeff went home, after having engaged in serious learning. He left with the resolution to continue his journey to delve deeper into what he had heretofore vehemently denied. One year passed, and Jeff returned to *Eretz Yisrael* and shared the rest of the story with Rav Weinberg.

During the previous summer, he had been walking/sightseeing through the cobblestone streets of Meah Shearim. In one of the alleyways, he “chanced” upon a young, observant woman whose charm and *middos tovos*, refined character traits, were obvious. He issued a silent prayer to Hashem to help him meet someone like this woman with whom he could spend the rest of his life.

One *Shabbos* morning, during the following year, Jeff entered a Boston *shul* to *daven*. As he was walking through the door, he “met” the same young woman! He walked over to her and asked, “Did I not meet you this past summer in Meah Shearim?” She replied, “Yes, you are right. I did meet you.”

They are now married and living in New Jersey. Rav Weinberg concludes: “When you are sincere with Hashem, He answers your prayers.” *Karov Hashem l’chol kor’av, l’chol asher Yikra’uhu b’emes*; “Hashem is close to all who call out to Him, to all those who call unto Him in truth.” (*Tehillim* 145:18)