



RABBI YITZCHAK BREITOWITZ

INTERNATIONAL LEGAL AUTHORITY, SENIOR LECTURER, MODERN-DAY SAGE

Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz lectures on medical, business, and family ethics. He has written and published on the interface between Jewish law and contemporary society, with an expertise in medical, family, business, and legal ethics. His articles discuss topics such as stem cell research, cloning, organ donation, and land for peace. He received his BA from Johns Hopkins University and his JD, magna cum laude, at Harvard Law School in 1979. In 1979 he also obtained rabbinic ordination from Ner Israel Rabbinical College

Rabbi Breitowitz has published widely on Jewish law and ethics. Among his articles are those on the right to die, physician-assisted suicide, brain death, the status of frozen embryos, the desecration of ancient burial sites through archaeological excavations, business ethics, peace in the house, and spousal abuse. His major work, *Between Religious and Secular Law: The Plight of the Agunah* (Greenwood Press, 1993) is a comprehensive and far-reaching study of one of the most complex issues of Jewish family law. As Educational Consultant to the Atlantic Seaboard Region of National Council of Synagogue Youth (NCSY), he compiled several sourcebooks on a variety of topics.

He lives and works in Jerusalem, where he makes the rounds on the lecture circuit.

Faith Versus Reason Versus Knowledge

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Maimonides often uses the word “knowledge” when he describes faith, and many people grapple with this. I think that most people approach their religion with a combination of both reason and faith.

It is important that your religion makes sense, that you can justify and explain it on rational grounds. But unfortunately, even those rational grounds will not get you to the 100% level of proof. As a result, there will be a leap of faith. It’s a leap that is inseparable from logic, however. It is a leap of faith that is based on countless logical premises, even if those premises are not established to a 100% degree of certainty.

I do want to point out though, and maybe this is more of a mystical idea, that there is a certain momentum that occurs as a result of that leap. If you are willing to take that first step and embrace living with integrity through your closeness to God, your heart will give you certain intuitions of truth that go beyond the brain. This is very important.

There are many things that we just know are right even if we can’t prove them conclusively. Maybe this sounds anti- philosophical or anti-intellectual, but proofs are only one of the tools by which human beings ascertain truth. Proof and the scientific method are indeed important but they are not all there is.

There’s also something called the “*Truth of the Heart*,” a truth that goes beyond logic. I think what happens is that you might start developing a relationship with God and becoming religious because probabilistically it makes sense, even though it is not 100% certain. Then, during the course of your life, God might bring you to 100% certainty. I am not saying God “will,” but God “might,” because that is the Truth of the Heart, which can transcend the Truth of the Mind. Nevertheless, if the system is logical to begin with and the leap of faith is not deciding to “jump off the roof and trust that things will be ok,” which would be an absurd decision to make, then the logic can be enough to convince you that this is a rational path to follow.

Somebody asked me, “If your religion can only be proved to 90%, why do you follow it?” I answered, “So instead of following what I believe is the 90% probability, I should follow what I believe is the 10% probability?” That doesn’t make a lot of sense. I mean if you have a strong probability, then logically that is how you should run your life, because it is certainly better to follow a strong probability than a weak one.

So what logic accomplishes is the creation of a very strong probability, a probability that justifies a leap of faith, which in turn will lead to intuitions and the opening up of the heart. That’s how it works.