

Google God

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

It's a sign of our times that the New York Times can devote a serious op-ed to the fact that God is in decline because He, She, or It was googled less than few years ago.

According to the author, pornography searches are up 83%, heroin is up 32%, and churches are down 15%. The top Google search that includes God is a video game called "God of War".

There are 4.7 million "hits" for Jesus, but 49 million for Kim Kardashian. By that standard she is more popular than John Lennon, who in turn claimed that Beatles were more popular than Jesus Christ. And indeed they were if you think that kind of popularity should be taken seriously. Even so Allah does pretty well amongst Muslims, just as HaShem is no slouch when it comes to Jews. Does Krishna count? Of course! And if you include such Google questions as "Why did God...make the world, make me, make me so ugly, so stupid, etc.", God gets a lot more searches. But what does that actually tell us? Does anyone believe that God is a popularity contestant or a product? Since when did God care how many people voted for him? Only Satan in the Christian tradition worries about pride. It all reminds me of the famous witticism "The God that is small enough for my mind is not big enough for me." If God needed popularity, He couldn't be God. People who sell themselves, particularly outwardly religious ones are just that, they are salesmen.

The writer goes on to say that:

"I looked at the war in Ukraine, the civil war in Syria, the tsunami in Japan and 2014 Israel-Gaza conflict. In every instance in the affected country, searches for news increased by between 90 and 280%. The top religious searches be they Bible, Quran, God, Allah, or prayer tended to drop."

Yes, of course people want news of a crisis, especially if they are affected, more than sitting down to a theological discussion. The piece reminded me of all those silly articles in which God is described as a kindly old man sitting on a cloud in the sky (or very angry, hurling down thunderbolts at evil doers). Having set up a caricature as the target, the article then proceeds to make fun of the idea. Well, yes. If you compare God to Superman it would be laughable. But which thinking believer sees Him that way? Do people assume that all religious grownups still cling to kindergarten ideas of what God is?

□

Bad is always more fun than good. That is why in Milton's great poem, "Paradise Lost", Satan sounds so much more interesting than boring old God. And Milton was a believer. Crime always hogs the headlines. Taking a drug is

an easier way to escape your problems than working hard to overcome them.

That's why the papers are full of all the bad things Israel does but rarely does anyone ever mention the good, even if there's just as much of that too. Newspapers will always publish "Man Pushes Old Lady Off a Bus." They will never bother to publish "Girl Helps Old Lady Onto a Bus." Scandal sells. Paris Hilton became a celebrity because of a sex video, not because she helped refugees. And Kim Kardashian became a celebrity because she behaved like a hooker, not a nun. "50 Shades of Gray" did not sell millions with a message of love, fidelity, and devotion. And consider this blog. I have named several people I despise and haven't named anyone I admire!!!!

It is obvious that most human beings are pretty selfish, self-indulgent, egocentric animals who want to have fun and pleasure and work as little as possible. Which is why the few who are prepared to work hard usually do so much better if they are given half a chance. It's why trust fund kids rarely succeed in comparison to the poorer, hardworking first generation who slog to build the fortune in the first place.

For most human beings life is sex, drugs, and rock-and-roll. That is what sells. Of course billions prefer pop music to classical, a rock concert to a religious service. It's easier, so much more fun. It's true some successful churches entertain. But even so, the vast majority of the lumpenproletariat prefer playing computer games to reading a book. Of course people who lust after money will say that money talks, because that's the only language they speak.

Your average Joe or Josephine is a yahoo who is satisfied with the lowest common denominator, the easiest and simplest of everything. He will vote for Donald Trump to become president of the United States. He will hate foreigners, minorities, and probably women too. But this merely tells us what we already know—that most people in this world love pornography more than the self-discipline of a religious tradition. Indeed the amount of sexual abuse within religions suggest that even many religious people treat sex as their true god, that is to say the thing that matters and occupies them most in this world. Many religious people get just as corrupted by money as anyone else. Well, good luck to them, if that's what they want, I say. But that does not make pornography or masturbation a good partner in life.

It's like all popularity polls of politicians, teenagers, actors, singers, "personalities". It is based on who can make the biggest noise, splash, or fool of themselves. A huckster is after all only a huckster. And the public, bless them, laps it up because they have no greater values, no higher standards to apply. How many people prefer reading comics to studying the Talmud or a book on nuclear physics or history? What sells more? A cheap, sexy, potboiler (bodice-ripper as we used to say 50 years ago) or a serious work of literature?

Of course we live in a dumb world. All Google searches prove is how true that is. Google Jews and anti Semitic sites come top of the list. So why does a supposedly serious newspaper publish such a silly article, unless it too feels the need to attract more dumb readers? Unless it was hard up for news

and needed to fill the space. (Which is probably why hardly a day goes by without it also publishing pages of anti-Israeli reportage). Funny how the two often go together.

So you wonder what this blog has to do with this weekend? Well, after the seriousness of the High Holy Days, it's nearly Sucot, the time of Simcha (Joy)...and fun.