

## “PASSION OR PRUDENCE?”

The Great French Scientist and mystic, Blaise Pascal, wrote in his *Pensees* about “Pascal’s wager.” Pascal writes that either God exists or not. If God does exist and we believe, we “win.” Whatever rewards accrue to a believer will come to us. If God does not exist, writes Pascal, we have really lost nothing. But if we do not believe and God does exist, we lose. So the rational course is to believe. Therefore we should train ourselves through ritual and community to believe in God.

There are many objections to Pascal’s pragmatism, but the most powerful is that of philosopher Walter Kaufmann. Perhaps, says Kaufmann, God values intellectual integrity over calculated faith. In other words, honest questioning might be dearer to God than calibrated piety.

Rabbi Abraham Halevy bar Hasdai wrote a rhyming Hebrew couplet: “Where is God? In the heart of all who seek.” But the Hebrew word “sho’el” can mean not only seek, but question. Perhaps God is found not in the heart of those who would profit from their faith, but who would question it.

Rather than risking nothing, as Kaufmann writes, “The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob asks men to risk everything.” Seeking, questioning, and risking seem more powerful ways to faith than calculation and reward. Reaching toward God requires passion, not prudence.