



"Would it be that My people listen to me, if Israel would go in My ways, I would subdue their enemies in a instant, and turn My hand against their foes."

King David, Psalm 81

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Rabbi's Blessings

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

We find that in the Bible, Rashi states (Gen, 30:2) when Rachel desired children and had none, she asked Jacob her husband that he should have prayed for her. Jacob's response was, "God has withheld children from you, not from me". Possibly implying that her prayer was the important one.

A rabbi mentioned that the person's prayer is the essential one, and not what someone else prays for you.

The reason for this is that prayer, when performed correctly, has an elevating reaction on the one praying. The ideas one ponders when praying actually raise his knowledge and awareness of these concepts to a higher level. When one adheres to these values, he is more under God's Providence, and will experience a different, more perfected existence than before, now benefiting from God's involvement in his life to a higher degree, as Maimonides points out in the Moreh Nevuchim.

It is the raising of one's perfection that causes this good. God is not the One who changes in this scenario. As the Rambam stated, it is like something distant from a fire. As it approaches the flame, it is affected differently, although the fire never changes.

Such is our relationship with God. The more distant, the more in darkness we are. The closer we come, the more God's system of providence effects us. However, God never changed. What is perfect - God - can be no more perfect, and therefore, He cannot change. Therefore, we cannot change God. Even through our prayer. As God said Himself, (Malachi, 3:6) "I am God, I do not change....". This concept also explains the mishneh in Pirkei Avos, (Ethic of the fathers) where 10 miracles are said to have been created at sunset on Friday of the Six Days of Creation. All other miracles

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Ditheism

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: Thank you for a quick response. If you don't mind I'd like to ask you a few more questions. One other person with whom I discussed this topic, told me that the information about Christians not having share in olam haba is totally incorrect since Christianity is considered permissible for Gentiles (but not for Jews). He used the term schituf when referring to Christianity and claimed non-Jews are not commanded against schituf.

What do you think about this opinion Rabbi?

Mesora: "Shituf" means partner, or in this context, ditheism - more than one god. Judaism follows reality,

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Questions & Answers

E-mail us: questions@mesora.org

Reader: Dear Mesora, I opened your weekly letter with great anticipation, expecting to read some words of insight and encouragement. Instead, you have trivialized the situation in Israel. It's not that I don't agree with what you wrote. However, people are expecting to understand why this is happening NOW.

Based on your "analysis", Hashem should never have "allowed" the state to be created and "reward" the seculars with the thought that what they were doing is right. Certainly the hundreds of Yeshivot, growing every day, should never have proliferated, under the secular Zionist regime. If you have nothing to new to say, I think you should leave the answers to others. Hag Sameach.

Mesora: You do not agree with the text of the Shema which forecasts the ousting of Jews from Israel when they commit idolatry? Doesn't the Prophet many times admonish the people to keep the Torah when bad tidings hit our nation?

No new words need to be spoken. The old, authentic Torah warnings are what we must apply to our current situation. We don't need a new answer, God gave the answer to us time and time again through the Prophets. We need to realize through rational conviction the Torah is true and apply its complete teachings which need no new points. God knew He taught us a complete and decisive message when we veered from the Torah in the past. He need not repeat Himself.

To earn God's perfect Providence, keep His perfect Torah.

Editor's Comments: This reader should understand clearly, that when the government does not follow halachic rulings - the land will be filled with problems. Why is that so difficult to understand? These rulings include who Israel allows to settle in the land, how those people live and what Israel is obligated to do when those people oppose the law. However, since the government allows Arabs to corrupt its land, it must deal with and suffer through those consequences brought on by those hateful people (The PLO) and also suffer the consequences of NOT establishing a government founded on Torah law. This is absolutely clear.

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Ditheism

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

(continued from page 1)

which dictates that as we trace the steps of creation backwards, we must eventuate at a cause which preceded all other causes, and was in fact the "First Cause", i.e., God Himself. Parenthetically, speculation in matters prior to the first acts of creation are prohibited by the Mishna in Chagiga, 11b. Similarly, scientists teach that the laws we use to understand the world cannot be applied to studying anything prior to the Big Bang. Since these laws (physical causes and effects) at that time were not yet established, we are inherently crippled from pondering this subject. This truth that the scientists arrived at through reasoning, complies with the Mishna we received on Sinai.

By definition, there can be only one "First Cause". Christian ditheism, (i.e., the father, son and holy ghost) is a theory which goes against reason. The Torah does not say anywhere that Christianity is acceptable for Gentiles. Conversely, the Torah prohibits Jew and Gentile alike in the area of knowing God. It is an open verse seen by anyone with clear vision, (Exod. 20:20) "Do not make with me gods of silver, and gods of gold do not make to yourselves". We just read this last week. The person you have been talking with is not following reason, and not following the Torah's own words. God Himself says do not follow ditheism, and this is part of the Noachide laws which all Gentiles must follow. Again God says, "Hear O Israel, God is your God, God is One". Gentiles must accept God, and all that the Torah says about Him. He is One.

There are a few essential problems with this person's statement. First of all, he accepts a ditheism for Christians. This means that God is not independent - He has needs. In truth, God has no needs, as reason dictates, and as Ramban points out on the verse quoted above, "God needs no other". By claiming a ditheism, a few gods in need of each other, he denies the concept of an all knowing and all powerful God which Judaism firmly teaches. See our Rosh Hashana prayers. The entire foundation of these prayers is that God is omniscient and omnipotent.

His second mistake is he believes there is more than one reality, as he says, Christianity is fine for Christians. Would he say "gravity works for Blacks, but not for whites?" Certainly the absurdity of the latter applies to the former. Just as there can be only one scientific reality, there can be only one theological reality.

His third mistake is his belief that the fabrication of Christianity at a point in history affects what a follower of this religion must now believe as truth. My response; Objective reality and God's

existence are independent of foolish peoples' fabrication of man-gods throughout history. Just as there was truth before Christianity, this objectively true system can in no way be corrupted by the fantasies of Jesus' disciples. Claiming Christianity is acceptable for Christians means to say that after Christianity was developed, all reality in the universe conformed to Christianity's new tenets. This is absurdity taken to new heights.

Sources addressing the status of ditheism now follow:

Exodus, 23:13: "The names of other gods do not mention, let them not be heard (via your doings)". The simple meaning of this verse is that no other gods are to be mentioned by us, nor heard from others by any action of our own. Other gods includes distortion of God in any form. Once a person construes God as more than one, he has thereby completely distorted the true concept of God. He is as far from the truth as one who thinks God is physical.

Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Dayah, 147, see the T"Z), "It is completely prohibited to strengthen the beliefs of idolaters". Reason dictates that God desires all mankind to recognize Him. The "Alaynu" prayer with which we conclude our services states clearly, "V'chol b'nei basar yik-ri-uh shimecha", "all flesh will call your name". This means that God desires all mankind to recognize His truth. ditheism is false, and therefore against this verse.

This area in the Shulchan Aruch say that one is allowed to say to a gentile during the years of shmita, "Elokim should bless you with good this year." The Gra states that this term "Elokim" cannot reference the false gods of this gentile. If so, one would be strengthening the beliefs of idolaters which is prohibited. In fact, the Gra held that when you say this, you must be referring to God Himself, thereby wishing a real blessing for the gentile. Even though we cannot work the field, we can wish the gentile success, as he is not prohibited by laws of shmita.

The Pilpula Charifta on Talmud Sanhedrin, Chapter 7 - quoting Maimonides - states, "ditheism is real idolatry". He further states via a fortiori argument - addressing the accepted law that celebrating multiple deities carries prohibition, "How can their holidays be prohibited, but their beliefs be permitted?" He thereby reasons that celebration of ditheism cannot be worse than the belief itself. Accordingly, the Pilpula Charifta deems ditheism a prohibited belief, otherwise the holidays would not be of prohibited status. And not just for Jews.

Talmud Sanhedrin, 63b, Tosafos "Assur L'Adam". Here, Tosafos poses an argument: "We do not find it prohibited to cause idolaters to commit ditheism". If Tosafos held that ditheism is permitted,

they (Tosafos were comprised of many sages) should have said so. But they didn't. Why? Because this Tosafos is not addressing the definition of "ditheism". It is addressing the act of a Jew causing ("grammah") a gentile to swear by idolatrous deities. Tosafos says, this far we do not go. That is, to prohibit a Jew from doing and act which might cause a gentile to swear an oath to his god, we do not prohibit actions that far on Jews. Again, this specific Tosafos is not addressing whether ditheism is prohibited, because in reality, it is. Common sense tells us that gentiles too must have the correct notion of the true God. Otherwise, their entire existence is a waste, as would be equally so if a Jew had the wrong concept of God.

In summary, ditheism dilutes the pure, accurate truth that God is one. If one believes God to be more than one, even if he says I believe in the God of the Torah and another god, his concept of God is 100% wrong.

Any prayer to such a god would be idolatry.

Reader's Response

Reader: I read your article on Christianity. It seems like the most important point is that the Torah does not demand merely that one not be involved in idolatry (which perhaps this concept of shitfuss is not technically idolatry??)

Mesora: That I would have to research further, to determine the definition of "idolatry". There are many permutations of the offense, such as palm readers, necromancers, etc. So what constitutes idolatry must include all the violations, not merely acceptance of dualism, but even perhaps those who read horoscopes. I'm not paskining, but rather suggesting that the umbrella definition of idolatry must include all violations mentioned in the Talmud.

Reader: That the gentile must also have the correct notion of Hashem, who is One. Without the correct notion of Hashem, there is nothing. If I act correctly in every area of my life, but deep down I believe that my computer is responsible for the existence of the universe, I am delusional. All of my actions are meaningless, because they are in this framework (that's assuming my actions can even be correct in this framework, which I doubt).

Mesora: I believe this question was asked to either the Rav or Rav Moshe zt"l: If one keeps all 613 commands, but believes God is a man, what is his fate. The answer was "Tragically, he has no Olam Haba". So yes, exactly as you put it.

Reader: It is true that in other areas, the Torah does not technically penalize someone who makes a philosophical mistake, (you can fulfill the commandment of tzizis even if you believe that if you wear them they protect you physically from harm, like a shield).

Mesora: I don't think this is true. Even according to the view that mitzvos don't require intent in their performance, in my understanding, this would not be considered a valid act of following a command. See the Shulchan Aruch on this very point. The Gilyon M'harsha, Yoreh Daah, 289, page 113 on the bottom, "if one affixes the mezuzah for the reason of fulfilling the command, one may consider that as reward for doing so he will be watched by G-d. But, if one affixes the mezuzah solely for protective reasons, it in fact has no guidance, and the mezuzah will be as knives in his eyes". This statement "knives in your eyes" would appear to me that one has not fulfilled this command of mezuzah. Similarly, all other such erroneous notions should void any attempt at fulfilling any other command. However, Rashi in Devarim states that if one does a mitzvah with no clue as to its purpose, it is worthless. Although a rabbi taught, "this doesn't mean you are free from the mitzvah". Based on this, your conclusion is correct, i.e., one still must act out the mitzvah, meaning, it still an acceptable performance. But Rashi would hold it is useless. This must be looked in to further.

Reader: But in terms of the purpose of the entire Torah being to help humanity come close to reality, i.e. the world as it really is (as opposed to how we imagine it), a mistake in the area of the nature of God's existence undermines everything.

Mesora: Yes, and the reason is that the command of acknowledging correct notions (as far as we can have them) of God is a command which can only be carried out with wisdom. Since specific wisdom is the very element we are required to have for this command's fulfillment, lack of wisdom (in the form here of ditheism) is inherently antithetical to any possible fulfillment.

Reader: In order to be a Noachide, one must not merely refrain from idolatry, one must accept that the world was created by a being who is One. However, I have heard a few times that Christianity is not idolatry. Do you know of any sources that actually state that, and can you analyze them?

Mesora: I have only heard that it is in fact idolatry.

Editor's Note:

The person quoted herein created a convenient double standard saying Christianity is ok by negating the concept of tzelem elokim. If each person is created in the image of God, then God's system of belief is set up specifically and appropriately for all beings, as that is God's will for mankind. In the case of gentiles, God created the system of Noachide laws which were created for the Gentile so that the correct and absolute understanding of the Creator remains intact - so that no misconception(s) whatsoever will occur in acquiring and maintaining this understanding of God and His laws. Any other explanation that alters this one is false.

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Bris Mila: Circumcision

RABBI REUVEN MANN

The question regarding circumcision is why this performance is the 'bris' - the treaty - made by God between Him and man.

Abraham was the one who God selected as the forefather of the new nation. There was nothing peculiar about Abraham over the rest of mankind, other than his attachment to a life based in reality, in discovering God, and his enjoyment and preoccupation in the study of reality.

Circumcision was the mark selected by God to render Abraham, and all man, perfected. What is this perfection of circumcision? I believe it is very basic: As the organ commanded in circumcision is one which affords man the ultimate in physical enjoyment, and as God desires that man immerse himself in the world of the metaphysical, i.e., knowledge, God therefore commanded circumcision to weaken man's attachment to the physical.

Maimonides says that man is created physically perfect. When man is circumcised, he enjoys that pleasure less, as does his partner. His reduction in physical enjoyment sets the stage for man's diminution in lusts, freeing up his energies to reattach to the real good in life - that being wisdom. Circumcision designates man for the true life.

Circumcision is an essential 'state', not only an action. We see this from the sons of Jacob. When in Sh'chem, the brothers referred to those uncircumcised people as "cherpah", disgraceful. That is, anyone who cleaves to the life of the physical desires by going uncircumcised is disgraceful in light of God's desire for mankind.

During the first Passover in Egypt, the Jews were commanded to perform circumcision. This perfection was required prior to the Exodus in order that the Jews in Egypt be saved by God. Without adherence to a life where Torah study and knowledge is supreme, and the physical is recognized only as a secondary means to Torah acquisition, man absorbs himself in physical lusts and desires, completely contrary to the philosophy outlined by the Torah. The Jews in Egypt would not merit salvation into a life of wisdom if they remained submerged in the Egyptian life of physical desires. Circumcision therefore was a requirement, timed precisely at the time of salvation, prior to receiving the gift of the Torah. □

Trust in GOD

RIVKA OLENICK

It is difficult, if not impossible to have perspective. God is all-powerful, all wise, just and beneficent. It is difficult to see God's justice - when we believe that we see only injustice in the world. What we see is man's power and clever manipulation, and man's evil destruction while innocent people in Israel are suffering and many have died. We suffer with them, they are our brethren, our family. And the rest of the world does not come to our aid but condemns us and undermines who we are as a people... Where is the justice that is supposed to be meted, each according to his evil deed. How do we deal with the world's denial of God's chosen people and the denial that the land of Israel was designated for us? At the same time, how do we maintain trust in God, while life all around us appears to defy justice and we do not see God's protection?

Trust in the Lord: When a person devotes his/her life to the service of God, a person has real security. This is the only security there is and this security is based on trust. A person realizes if they live according to God's plan as a Jew, then he/she has no need to find security in anything else. This is the purpose of our existence, as the Jewish nation and individually. Knowing that this is the purpose of our existence should give a person tremendous security. Because this is the only reason we were created. It is only God who provides us with our intelligence, talents and abilities. It is He who allows us to enjoy our good fortune and everything that we acquire and achieve in this world - even when it seems we have no protection in the world. The Jew has a specific mission in life, which completely revolves around serving the Creator and being an example of righteousness and goodness to others. By definition, our mission provides us with all the security we need. We must try to stay steadfast in our faith and belief that God knows everything. After all, He created us, we are HIS nation, his children and our covenant with God is eternal.

Do good: By doing good, we direct our energies in fulfilling the commandments as often and as much as we can. This is service, and this is doing good. This is what gives us true

fulfillment in our lives and this is what God wants of us. Don't be fooled by what the rest of society calls "good," which is finding ways to seek never-ending pleasure and fantasy. This has nothing to do with how the Torah defines the "good." The only good that matters is the good that God wants you to do. When deciding on an activity, a person only has to ask: "Will this find favor in God's eyes?" As said by King David, "Seek and find your greatest sense of comfort with God. Desire and take delight only in those pleasures of which you need not be ashamed in God's presence. In fact, these pleasures should give you joy because you know that you may enjoy them in his presence since they have come to you through His bounty and they find favor in His eyes. Even amidst joys and pleasures, you remain with your God." Therefore, directing our energies to serve God is good, while directing our energies to serve only ourselves is not good. Do not be concerned with whether others appreciate your aspirations to serve God, or not. Or even whether they encourage you to or not.

Rest on earth: This means we should seek and secure for ourselves, a quiet, undisturbed place to live. And live side by side as neighbors, each as individuals within a peaceful and harmonious existence. While everything around you may be constantly changing and uncertain, make a stable dwelling for yourself. But do not be so absorbed by your "place" that you forget your purpose in life - which is to do the will of God.

Nourish faith: We are all vulnerable and easy prey to the instability of life. Yet each day we should think about the greatness of God, and the true purpose of our lives as God planned for us. Try to live each day as if it were our last, and serve the Creator with all our heart, soul and all our might, as it says in the Shema, that is our purpose. Because maybe we won't live past today.

God has provided us with the "how" to fulfill our purpose. By making a greater effort to be involved in prayer with greater concentration, Torah study, the commandments, especially tzedaka and trying harder to improve our character flaws - which is all part of "how" we nourish faith. This is what gives us strength and courage to be involved in God's will. And this is what helps us to cultivate in our mind love and fear of God.

We must try every day to be really involved in the "how." And teach our children and inspire others to be involved in the "how" so they can nourish their faith.

If we continue to direct our lives towards the derech Hashem, the way of God, God will assist us. □

Excerpts from THE ETHICAL WRITINGS of MAIMONIDES

The Rambam says: "Here is a very good thing to reflect upon. By reflecting on it, bad thoughts, worries and grief are diminished. Sometimes they can even be completely destroyed, if a person holds this reflection foremost in ones' mind. Namely, whenever a person thinks about something that distresses him/her, and worry, grief, or sadness crop up in him/her, it can be due to only one of two things: either one is thinking about a matter that has already taken place, like someone who thinks about something that happened to him/her, such as the loss of money, or about the death of someone dear to him, or else he/she is thinking about matters he/she expects and whose advent he/she dreads. Like someone who thinks and talks about the advent of any disaster he/she expects.

Now intellectual reflection teaches that thinking about what has taken place and what has happened is of no benefit at all, and that sadness and grief about matters that have passed and gone are due to faulty understanding. There is no difference between a person's being grieved because of the loss of ones' money or similar things and one being grieved because he/she is a person and not an angel, or a planet, or similar thinking about impossible things.

On the basis of this reflection, acts of thinking leading to depression about something that is expected to come to pass in the future ought to be abandoned. That is because everything that a man expects is within the realm of possibility: it may take place or it may not take place. Therefore, just as one becomes distressed and grieves about what one expects to occur, so too one ought to delight ones' soul with anticipation and hope that perhaps the opposite of what one expects will take place. After all, the expected matter and its opposite are both possible." □

Rabbi's Blessings

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

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were also created then, but in their proper day, as Maimonides states. (Ethics, 5:6) All this means that God made the world with all miracles built in to the fabric of their respective substances. God need not wait until the miracle is needed in order to render it. He has foreknowledge, and was able to implant all miracles into the creation - during creation.

This also teaches us clearly that God is the One Who performs ALL miracles, and man performs none. People today believe that rabbis perform miracles. From Pirkei Avos we see that the Torah holds that God alone causes ALL the miracles, as all miracles were built into creation.

It is also crucial to note here that a person cannot effect changes in the world outside of his ability as a mere mortal, a weak individual. Even Moses prayed to God on numerous occasions to make changes. He alone had no power to do so.

The concept of a rabbi having any power whatsoever is against Judaism, and against accounts of Moses, who was the greatest man to have ever lived, or will ever live. If Moses prayed to God for change, it follows that we must do the same, and we cannot effect changes in nature ourselves. Saadia Gaon says openly in his sefer, "Opinions and Beliefs" that man, not even the prophets, had any powers at all. Had they been given power, or protection from death, mankind would project false notions of their being superior to other mortal men, and this is not so. Saadia Gaon gives numerous arguments against the idea that man has any power whatsoever. God is the Sole wielder of power. This has never been given to man,... even Moses.

The Gemora (Moade Katan 9a) states that that both Rav Shimon ben Yochai and Rav had sent their son's to receive blessings from their respective students. Why didn't Rav Shimon ben Yochai and Rav give the blessings themselves? They were definitely greater than their students. Yet, they both desired that the students give the blessings. It is interesting to note that Rav Shimon ben Yochai only sent his son to his students after he saw that they were "anashim tzura", "wise men". The gemara also inserts that Rav Shimon ben Yochai's desire to have these students give blessings was only after they came back to take leave of him an additional time. As the story goes, "Rav Shimon ben Yochai was visited by these two



students. They said their goodbyes, and left that night. The next morning they returned to say goodbye again, at which, Rav Shimon ben Yochai asked why they did so. They responded, 'Rebbe, you taught us that if a student takes leave of his teacher, but sleeps over in that town, he must once again take leave the next day'. To this, Rav Shimon ben Yochai said to his son, these men are wise men, go to them that they may bless you."

What is so significant about this mechanical activity of returning to take leave a second time, that Rav Shimon ben Yochai thought of these men as wise? Aren't there more difficult commandments which would convey greater intelligence more readily than merely traveling back to say goodbye to a teacher? It is a very simple activity with no real intelligence required.

I believe the gemara says that this command was followed by these two students for good reason, and very germane to this story.

Rav Shimon ben Yochai could have very well blessed his son. But blessing doesn't mean one performs miracles or controls nature in any way. Man does not have this ability. Moses didn't perform miracles without God's intervention, and anyone on a lower level certainly cannot perform miracles.

When these two men returned to Rav Shimon, as a friend pointed out, Rav Shimon was testing the students by saying, "why have you returned?" Rav Shimon ben Yochai didn't forget the halacha. He was merely testing to see if their return was one of a personal

nature, meaning, they were so attached to him they didn't want to leave, or perhaps their return was merely out of respect to objective law. When they answered Rav Shimon that they returned as the law prescribes, Rav Shimon saw in them an intellectual objectivity, and not a lower, emotional dependence. It was this objectivity which he felt was necessary for one to see his son's true nature, and bless him accordingly. Rav Shimon may have felt that he was biased towards his son, and this is why I believe both Rav Shimon ben Yochai and Rav had their students bless their sons, and they themselves did not. They both saw the need for objectivity.

We now see how the gemara very cleverly slipped into this story the fact that these two students returned for this specific halacha. It is this halacha of returning to remind oneself of the town's real import, which displayed their relationship to their own rebbe as an objective, intelligent one, not a personal and emotional one. This performance may be simple in action, but it is very indicative of one's level of relationship with mankind. Interesting also is that both Rav Shimon and Rav did not instruct their sons to request a blessing on a specific matter, as is done today when people ask a rabbi to bless them with children or monetary success. Rav Shimon and Rav both let the wise students decide what is best for their sons. No preconceived notions. Respect for wisdom alone was their motivation.

But how should we understand the idea of a "blessing"?

A Rabbi once expounded on this topic. He mentioned that when Jacob blessed his sons, he merely pointed to each son's nature and underlined it. Without bracha, one may have to decide whether to take a business position or not. He has no knowledge how it will play out later in life. He can be very successful, or a real failure. However, with prophecy as Jacob had, he was able to remove doubt from his son's lives, and share with them Divine Knowledge to assure their success.

But we today, as well as Rav Shimon and Rav, do not have Divine intervention on this level. So what does bracha mean in this sense, and as well, what does the gemara mean when it teaches that when sick, one should have a chocham pray for them? It means that a wise person looks objectively at a person, studies their character, and points out their wrong doings so they understand how to operate better, and remove themselves from sin. The reason why one gains illness is due to a misguided life. To teach them that they are wrong, God delivers an illness apropos of the mistake, "mida kneged mida" or "measure for measure". However, it is of utmost importance to realize from the Torah's teachings, in no case does a person have the ability to change nature or perform miracles alone. This, the gemara and Chumash do not state.

These wise students of Rav Shimon ben Yochai asked Rav Shimon's son upon his arrival, "What do you request here?" He responded, "My father sent me to you to receive a blessing". When these students heard this, they quickly surmised that this son of Rav Shimon was clearly still taking direction from his father. Perhaps, this is why their blessing had to do exclusively with their wishes that Rav Shimon's son be fortunate to have himself, his wife (to be) and his children all have longevity. By making this wish to the son, perhaps, this young man will abandon his current paternal dependency and feel secure through this wish that he can start a life of his own. This I believe to be the purpose of this specific blessing.

We are not referring to Talmudic stories where someone "performed" a miracle. Such cases should be understood as metaphors, as Avraham ben HaRambam states in his intro to "Ain Yaakov". When Scripture records miracles of Moses and the like, here God rendered the act, as is attested to by Moses' prayer for God to cease a plague. As Rav Saadia Gaon stated clearly and numerous times, "man has no power over the elements". □

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Parshas Tazria/Metzora: The Punishment of Leprosy

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The Torah teaches of the punishment of leprosy, or tzaraas, which visits a person on account of his speaking "Lashon Hara", derogatory remarks concerning another. Leprosy visits the person in stages. At first, leprosy attaches itself to the person's home. If the person heeds the warning and repents, it is gone. If not, it excels towards the person's garments. Again, if one repents, it is gone. If not, it finally attaches to the person's body.

What is the purpose of this progression, and why these objects? Additionally, the Torah states that for one to be atoned, one must bring two birds, one is slaughtered, and its blood is caught in a bowl. The live bird is dipped therein along with a branch of hyssop and myrtle, and the live, bloodied bird is now set free over an open field.

On the surface, this seems barbaric, or at the least, unintelligible. However, as we know God is the Designer of the Torah, and "all its ways are pleasant", there must be a rational explanation for these required practices, and for the objects used in attempting to correct the person who spoke badly.

In order to understand how "mida k'neged mida" (measure for measure) works in this case, we must first understand the crime.

Speaking derogatorily against another has at its source, the desire for self affirmation of one's greatness. An insecure person will usually be found degrading others, and in this manner, he is in his mind, higher in his self estimation by comparison to the ridiculed party. A secure individual however, will not concern himself with others, as this doesn't effect his self estimation. Being secure, another's level has no effect on his status. What then is the remedy for this egomaniac type of personality? To diminish his image of his self proclaimed, imagined grandeur with a realistic dose of self recognition that

he is undesirable by others.

Part of the need to elevate oneself is the desire to be loved by others. When this cannot be, as a leper is banished outside the camp of the Israelites, he is faced with the fact that he is not the great image he conjured, and he must eat his words of scorn.

God however tries to avoid the worst by hinting to the person that he has done wrong. God doesn't send leprosy to the body first. He initially uses other vehicles with which the person identifies, viz., his home, and his clothing. God commences with the home, as this is further removed from the person, but specific enough to him so as to awaken him that there's something distasteful in him that he should delve into. If the person is obstinate, God sends the leprosy to a closer object, his garments. This is more closely tied to one's identity, and is more effective. But if not heeded to, God finally has the punishment of leprosy delivered to his body, which is undeniably him. We see from here God's mercy, and intelligence in using that with which one will identifies.

Parenthetically, these three objects, namely the house, clothes and body, are exactly where Mezuzah, Tzitzis, and Tefilin abide. These are also tied to the idea of identification, but from a different angle.

Since God desires that one place their trust in Him, and not in their own strength, God created these three commands to redirect where one places their trust. Mezuzah reminds one not to invest too much reliance in his home, as God should be recognized as the True Protector. The home is correctly viewed as a haven from the elements. But God desires that we act above the norm, meaning, that we have trust in His shelter. So we place a reminder on the doorway, which is the best place for us to be reminded of God, as a doorway receives most of the activity of a home.

We are urged not to place too much importance on our dress, and therefore are commanded to wear tzitzis, fringes. Clothing again is an area where people derive identity, as people wear different styles to express themselves.

Lastly, but most closely tied to our self identity is our bodies. One is most effected when something happens to his body, even if no pain is suffered. This is due to our false definition of what "man" is. Society tells us man equals his body. The Torah tells us that man equals intellect and love of God. Hence, we are commanded to wear tefilin. A reminder placed on our bodies that we should not invest too much worth here either.

These three, the home, clothes, and body are the three main areas where one identifies, and thus, the three areas where God therefore saw it fit to place reminders that God alone should be Who we depend on.

Returning to the parsha, what is the idea behind the two birds? I believe that besides correcting the person's flaw of overestimation, he must also realize the damage done to the other. Rashi states that specifically birds are brought, as they chirp, to make clear that the crime had to do with his "chirping" like a bird. The one bird (resembling the sinner) is dipped in the blood of the other bird (resembling the one humiliated by the speech) and let free over a field. This is to demonstrate that just as this bloodied bird is irretrievable, so is his evil, "bloody speech" irretrievable. As you cannot catch the same bird twice, so also he cannot catch his words which were let loose on the world. The damage is done, the "bird is loose". This will hopefully give recognition to the person who spoke destructively and make clear his crime.

The birds acting as atonement teaches that knowing one's sin is the first step to forgiveness. □

HOW YOU CAN HELP ISRAEL

Following is a list of ways you can help Israel. Please do what you can, and get others involved:

1) RALLY IN WASHINGTON, MONDAY, APRIL 15: Locate organizations offering bus service to this essential event - and make it there. Bring along sandwiches and drinks, as the ride is about 4-5 hours each way. Bring cell phones, comfortable clothes (see weather and dress accordingly) walking shoes, and especially plenty of large signs demanding Arafat be labeled a terrorist, or equate Arafat with bin-Laden. His recent "denunciation of terrorist activity" cannot deny his true colors as founder of Fatah suicide bombers.

TEXT SUGGESTIONS FOR SIGNS:

"Arafat: Israel's Bin-Laden"

"Arafat=Bin-Laden"

"SHARON, Stop Arafat's bombers"

"You can't talk peace with a terrorist"

"ARA-FAT-LIES"

"Finish the Job Israel"

"Words mean nothing without action"

PRINT SIGNS FROM THE MESORA

WEBSITE:

WWW.MESORA.ORG/RALLY.HTML

2) MAKE A DONATION FOR AMBULANCE PURCHASES: Go to this secure page on Mesora to make a donation: □

https://www.mesora.org/_private/libi.html

Mesora readers who have already contributed, thank you.

3) PURCHASE BUSINESS GOODS AND SERVICES FROM USAISRAEL.ORG:

USAIsrael.org was set up to help Israel's suffering economy. By redirecting your business spending, and replacing current vendors with Israel's, you can infuse her economy with a much needed boost. Please join the many who have already become members free, and help out Israel. If you have a business in Israel, you may create a free profile with links to your website and email so foreign business can contact you and do business with you. Help out few Israeli businesses below:

