

No Favorites

Ruth teaches how devoted one may be to G-d. King Solomon's Song of Songs taught us just how far we are to go in our love of G-d. Convert and Jew – grandmother and grandson – together: one people.

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Weekly Parsha

Bemidbar

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“Take a census of the entire congregation of Bnai Yisrael. Do it by their families, by the households of their fathers, according to the names of each male, taken individually.” (BeMidbar 1:2)

Moshe is commanded by the Almighty to take a census of Bnai Yisrael. The Torah uses an interesting

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Torah & Reason

RABBI REUVEN MANN

From time to time, it is necessary to review fundamental principles of Jewish belief. On Shavuot, we celebrate the Revelation at Sinai and the Jewish people's acceptance of Torah. We are thus sworn to study Torah and keep the mitzvot (commandments). Observance of the laws is essential to fulfilling our mission as Jews. All would agree that in any constructive endeavor understanding the reason of the activities we are engaged in is vital to achieving their full benefit. It is therefore necessary to ask, what is the nature and purpose of mitzvot. This is no simple or unnecessary question. We live in a time when mystical religious trends have become popular. They have had an impact on Jewish religious thinkers especially the ones whose popular writings influence the masses. The “mystics” tend to downplay the logic and intellectuality of mitzvot. They do not view the commandments as embodiments of wisdom, which must be studied and internalized. Rather they are seen as “mysterious” phenomena containing “cosmic” significance and “supernatural” power, which

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The Queen of Sheba offering King Solomon gifts - awed by G-d's wisdom

LOVE & FEAR OF G-D

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

A friend of mine asked me if I could direct him to any article on the Love and Fear of G-d. I then realized I hadn't thoroughly investigated this essential area. I thank him.

When initially pondering these two command to Love and Fear G-d, we are overcome with a preponderance of questions: What are the precise

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Torah & Reason

RABBI REUVEN MANN

the reason of mortal man dare not analyze or explain. I believe it essential to obtain clarity about this basic issue for our orientation toward mitzvot determines how much we benefit from their performance. Thus it is important to shed light on an ancient question: Are the mitzvot rational?

We read in the book of Psalms: "The Torah of HaShem is perfect restoring the soul". Every mitzvah is designed solely for our benefit and leads us to our true perfection. Whoever maintains that a mitzvah has "no reason" (even Chukim) denies the Torah, which states "For it is not a vain thing from you", to which the Rabbis (Chazal) add "and if it is vain (i.e. you find it empty) it is "from you" meaning the defect lies in your lack of understanding. All of the great Torah sages such as Rambam, Ramban, Avraham Even Ezra, and Saadia Gaon to name just a few, openly affirm this principle in their works. Nachmanides, in his commentary on the Torah (Devarim 22:6) explains that all of the mitzvot are intended for the purpose of refining and perfecting man's nature. Rambam in the Guide for the Perplexed (Part III Chapter 26) says: "All of us, the common people as well as the scholars, believe that there is a reason for every precept, although there are commandments the reason of which is unknown to us, and in which the ways of G-d's Wisdom are incomprehensible". Avraham Even Ezra in his commentary to Shemot 20:1 says "and the second kind are hidden mitzvot it is not explained why they are commanded, and heaven

forbid to say that any of those mitzvot are contrary to human reason; rather we are obliged to keep everything which HaShem commanded whether the secret is revealed or not"). The Lord our G-d is True- hence everything, which comes from G-d, is true. In most cases, with diligent study, we can discover the purpose and benefit of mitzvot; and when we do so we must incorporate the underlying value into our personality, for this is how we improve our soul and get closer to HaShem. However, all mitzvot are perfectly rational even if our intelligence is too deficient to discover the hidden wisdom of any specific one. Hence, it is rational to keep a mitzvah that on its surface makes absolutely no sense to you. For since you know that it comes from G-d, you know it is both rational and beneficial even though you cannot demonstrate how. This is similar to one who follows the advice of a great physician even though he does not understand how the medicine works. We say that such a person is acting rationally and one who (ignorant of medicine) refuses to take the advice of a great doctor because it makes no sense to him is a fool. Such is the case with Torah. We know that it is true because we know that it comes from G-d who revealed Himself on Sinai to the entire nation in a manner which would leave no doubt to those present and to all future generations that the Torah and it's authentic exposition by Moses and all subsequent Masters of The Oral Law is from G-d. Moses commanded the people to remember the events they witnessed at Sinai as the foundation of all Torah

commandments. He never called on them to have faith that the Torah is from G-d but only to "take heed" of what they saw with their own eyes. What could be clearer than Devarim 4:35 "You have been shown to KNOW that HaShem, He is the G-d, there is none beside Him". The Rambam, in the Mishneh Torah Yesodei HaTorah Ch 8, explains that the purpose of Sinai was to remove any possible doubt as to the Divine origin of Torah. Therefore, we do not have faith but know that the Torah comes from G-d and is therefore perfect and rational in every respect. As such, we keep all the mitzvot and do not subject them to the scrutiny of our deficient intellects to determine whether they make sense or not. That would be sheer arrogance and stupidity. Rather we devote all our energies to uncovering the wisdom of Torah with a sense of humility and with the guidance of our authentic sages and teachers. As the genuine scientist knows that everything in nature has a cause and explanation so too the genuine Ben-Torah (Torah scholar) knows that everything in Torah has a perfect explanation and he studies diligently and endlessly and prays to G-d: "Open thou my eyes that I may understand the wonders of your Torah". (Psalms 119:18) As we approach the holiday of the Revelation may we merit to incorporate it's lessons and return to HaShem and His Torah and expound it's wisdom in a manner which will cause all who hear it to proclaim; "what a wise and discerning nation is this great People".

Chag Sameach to all. □

(Love & Fear of G-d continued from page 1)

“In accordance with one’s knowledge will be the love – if much (knowledge), then much (love), and if little (knowledge) then little (love).”

requirements of the commands to Love G-d, and to Fear G-d? How does one accomplish these goals? Are they requirements to simply emote ourselves towards G-d? Would such an act be meaningful? Can one accomplish Loving or Fearing G-d in thought alone, or do we require action? Is one more important than the other? Can anyone fulfill these commands, that is, can one achieve Love of G-d and Fear of G-d prior to obtaining wisdom?

Love of G-d

Maimonides does not agree with this last opinion, as he writes in his Laws of Repentance, 10:6:

“In accordance with one’s knowledge will be the love – if much (knowledge), then much (love), and if little (knowledge) then little (love).”

Based on this last quote, I would ask: if love of G-d is impossible without knowledge, how is the law to study Torah distinct from this law to Love G-d? I will explain: it seems that once one obtains wisdom, he will naturally love G-d, as the source of that profound wisdom. If such a love is a natural result, he already loves G-d, without the command to Love G-d. What more, then, can the command to Love G-d impose on us? Asked in the reverse fashion: if love of G-d cannot exist without knowledge, then it is impossible to have a free-standing command to Love G-d, independent from the law to study Torah. Again, the laws of Torah study and Loving G-d appear inseparable. How then can we describe fulfilling the law to Love G-d, independent from Torah study? If there are two separate laws, there must be two separate means of fulfilling each, but it does not appear to be so!

In Maimonides’ second chapter in his Laws of the Fundamentals of the Torah, he writes:

2:1: “This honorable and awesome G-d, it is a command to love Him and to fear Him, as it states, “And you shall love Hashem your G-d. And it states, “Hashem your G-d you shall fear.” (Deut. 6:5, and 6:13 respectively)

2:2: “And what is the path to His love and His fear? At the time that man comprehends His actions and His creations that are wondrous and great, and he sees from them His wisdom that has no measure or end, immediately he loves and praises and glorifies and desires a great desire to know the great G-d. As David wrote, “My soul thirsts for G-d, the living G-d.” And when one considers these matters alone, he immediately recoils backwards, and trembles, and knows that he is a small low, dark creation, standing with slim, little knowledge, before (He with) perfect knowledge, as David said, “When I see Your heavens, the works of Your fingers, what is man that You should be mindful of him?” And in accord with these matters, I will explain great categories from the works of the Master of the world, so that there may be an

opening to understand, to love G-d. As the wise men stated in the matter of love, “that because of this, you will recognize Who spoke and the world came into existence.”

For what reason does Maimonides group these two commands together? Why are these two commands not treated separate from each other? What is Maimonides’ proof from David’s words?

It is interesting that the two verses commanding Love and Fear of G-d, are close by one another, just eight verses apart. Love of G-d is derived by Maimonides from a verse that we recite twice everyday, the second verse of the Shema prayer:

- 1. “Hear Israel, G-d is Our G-d, G-d is One.*
- 2. And you shall love Hashem your G-d, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.*
- 3. And these words shall be, that I command you today, on your heart.”*

The Rabbis taught that the second verse’s command of Loving G-d, is only fulfilled by following the instruction of the third verse: “placing the Torah’s words on our hearts” is indispensable for our fulfillment of Loving G-d. Devoted study is the sole course to arrive at Love of G-d. One cannot love an object, if he is unaware of that object. Similarly, our relationship to G-d is purely based on our knowledge of G-d. We cannot love Him if we are ignorant of Him. For this reason, Maimonides states that our love of G-d is in direct proportion to our knowledge of Him - “knowledge of Him”, refers only to His creations, and His actions. Maimonides made this clear: “At the time that man comprehends His actions and His creations...”

From G-d’s response to Moses that “man cannot see me while alive” we learn that it is impossible to possess direct knowledge of G-d’s essence. Not even the greatest mind, Moses, could comprehend G-d’s nature. All of our thoughts are connected to some sense perception, and all sense perception, by definition, is physical. G-d is not physical, thus, we will always be unable to understand His essence. The only knowledge we may attain in relation to G-d, is knowledge of His actions, and His creations: all of G-d’s ‘actions’ in relationship to man, display His absolute knowledge - omniscience. All of G-d’s ‘creations’ display His absolute power - omnipotence. These two aspects, G-d’s omniscience and omnipotence, are the exact two aspects on which we focus our High Holiday prayers. Under these two categories, all else we know in relation to G-d may be subsumed. As a Rabbi once wrote in his article on Rosh Hashanna prayers, we focus on knowledge of G-d during Rosh Hashanna, not ourselves. In his article, Rabbi Ruben Gober explained well, that Rosh Hashanna, New Year, is a “chance to reflect on the true ideas behind the physical universe and give our souls real existence. It is only in this way that we may warrant a favorable verdict.” These true ideas are of G-d’s omniscience and omnipotence – they are the base categories of truth of G-d. Therefore our study of these categories will bring us to a love of G-d.

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“When I see Your heavens, the works of Your fingers, what is man that You should be mindful of him?”

Creator vs Lawgiver

We now understand that man’s love of G-d depends on his knowledge of G-d. And in direct proportion to one’s knowledge, is his love of G-d. The Minchas Chinuch states that Love of G-d is achieved when one “considers and understands, both, G-d’s laws, and His works, as much as he is able, until he arrives at an utmost state of joy in that knowledge.” Some texts have it as, “until one rejoices in G-d’s providence.” (You may discern the difference.) However, in his formulation of Love and Fear of G-d, Maimonides omits any mention of Torah laws. Amazing! He does not require one to study Torah to arrive at Love and Fear of G-d:

Laws of the Fundamentals of the Torah, 2:2:

“And what is the path to His love and His fear? At the time that man comprehends His actions and His creations that are wondrous and great, and he sees from them His wisdom that has no measure or end, immediately he loves and praises and glorifies and desires a great desire to know the great G-d. As David wrote, “My soul thirsts for G-d, the living G-d.” And when one considers these matters alone, he immediately recoils backwards, and trembles, and knows that he is a small low, dark creation, standing with slim, little knowledge, before (He with) perfect knowledge, as David said, “When I see Your heavens, the works of Your fingers, what is man that You should be mindful of him?”

It would appear from Maimonides’ omission, that he understands Love and Fear of G-d, to be Love and Fear of the “Creator”. Loving or fearing G-d based on Torah knowledge is not identical to loving and fearing G-d as “Creator”. Maimonides’ theory is that true Love of G-d demands we love G-d in His role as Creator. Why must this be? I believe Maimonides to be teaching that “Creator” is the most accurate understanding of G-d available to man. G-d as “Giver of Torah” does not encompass all, as does G-d, the “Creator”. I find this to be a profound concept. Maimonides is consistent. Look at his quote in support of his theory:

“When I see Your heavens, the works of Your fingers, what is man that You should be mindful of him?”

Maimonides quotes David, in as much as David is pondering the cosmos, the works of G-d’s “fingers”. Meaning, David’s love of G-d is a love for the One Who created the heavens. To appreciate the precision and genius of Maimonides, look at his closing words:

“And in accord with these matters, I will explain great categories from the works of the Master of the world, so that there may be an opening to understand, to love G-d. As the wise men stated in the matter of love, “that because of this, you will recognize Who spoke and the world came into existence.”

What stands out is, “I will explain great categories from the works of the Master of the world “ and also, “That because of this, you will recognize Who spoke and the world came into existence.” Two more times, Maimonides underlines his own goal: to enlighten us, to the recognition of the “world’s Creator”. To Maimonides, Love of G-d must be “Love of the Creator.”

The Minchas Chinuch cites the Sifre:

“Since (the Shema) says “you shall love (G-d)”, I do not know how to Love G-d, therefore we are taught (by the following words) “and these words that I command you today shall be on your heart”, and due to this, you will recognize He Who spoke and the world came into being.”

The Sifre combines the two, as it says that due to Torah study (placing them on our hearts implies study, not fulfilling commands) one will love G-d, but he too says a love for the “One Who spoke and the world came into being”. Both Maimonides and the Sifre agree. Our recognition, or Love of G-d, is of G-d as “Creator”. They only differ in terms of the path: Maimonides says studying the cosmos is how to fulfill the command to Love G-d, while the Sifre states it is Torah study. Maimonides view also favors the state of affairs pre-Torah. How could Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob love G-d, without Torah, unless Torah is not essential? According to Maimonides, these great individuals were not bereft of the means to love G-d: they had the cosmos.

Fear of G-d

What is Maimonides’ view on the law to Fear G-d? Let us review his words:

“And what is the path to His love and His fear? At the time that man comprehends His actions and His creations that are wondrous and great, and he sees from them His wisdom that has no measure or end, immediately he loves and praises and glorifies and desires a great desire to know the great G-d. As David wrote, “My soul thirsts for G-d, the living G-d.” And when one considers these matters alone, he immediately recoils backwards, and trembles, and knows that he is a small low, dark creation, standing with slim, little knowledge, before (He with) perfect knowledge.”

“And when one considers these matters alone, he immediately recoils backwards, and trembles, and knows that he is a small low, dark creation, standing with slim, little knowledge, before (He with) perfect knowledge.” This is Maimonides’ formulation for the fulfillment of Fearing G-d. I say, “this is his formulation”, as I see no other place in this section where Maimonides follows up his introductory statement that it is a command to Fear G-d. This is the only further description. I am hesitant here, and for good reason: had Maimonides not discussed Fear of G-d in any other area, I would rest assured; this is how he

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"...the only object and aim of "all the words of this law" is to [make man] fear "the glorious and fearful name."

formulates the fulfillment of Fearing G-d. However, Maimonides does in fact discuss Fear of G-d in a few other areas. Before examining those, let us understand this present formulation.

Fear of G-d is much like Love of G-d: they are both results of man's recognition of creation, "he immediately recoils backwards, and trembles". This is a result of recognizing G-d's creation. But Maimonides adds something more: "...and knows that he is a small low, dark creation, standing with slim, little knowledge, before (He with) perfect knowledge." What does this add? Maimonides teaches that man does not fulfill Fear of G-d, unless he has a great sense of humility. The recognition, which results in a fear alone, is not the goal in the Fear of G-d. No. Man must then go one more step, and reflect on himself. Fear of G-d must, by definition, be accompanied by our diminished self-image. This makes sense. How may one possess true recognition for another's greatness, while retaining his ego? If one is to possess a true Fear of G-d, he must have a greatly reduced sense of self. Our great teachers verbalized this, and in proportion to their perfection, did they perceive themselves: David referred to himself as a worm, small, but still an animate being. Abraham said of himself that he was dust, lower than a worm as dust is inanimate. Thus, Abraham was greater than David in this respect. But Moses, the chief of all prophets, who spoke to G-d "face to face", referred to himself as "nothing". Moses, who possessed the greatest intellect, saw the greatest contrast, and was called by G-d, "more humble than all man." Maimonides, again, is so precise. He records David's words, "When I see Your heavens, the works of Your fingers, what is man that You should be mindful of him?" Maimonides teaches us another beautiful lesson. (I cannot help but to remark that the more we see the brilliance of one as Maimonides, in even this single law, the more we laugh at those other forms of Judaism claiming to have the "true" Judaism. Where are their Maimonides, Rambans, Sfornos, and Rashis? And I refer to both extremes; the over and under religious. And those so disgracefully haughty who say, "I don't agree with Maimonides on such and such a point". I feel two may argue when the playing field is equal. No one today is in Maimonides' league.)

Now, let us look at another source. In his Laws of Repentance, chapter 10, Maimonides contrasts one who follows the Torah out of love, to one who performs out of fear. He ridicules one whose performance is from fear. The problem is, we are commanded in fearing G-d! We must then ask: what type of fear is Maimonides ridiculing? He cannot be ridiculing the Torah's commanded Fear of G-d. Additionally, why is Maimonides discussing Fear of G-d in his section of "Repentance"? Also, is Maimonides of the opinion that Fear of G-d is temporary, that is, until we arrive at the higher level of Love of G-d? Let us be mindful of these questions as we look at one more source.

Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed, Book III, Chapter LII

"We do not sit, move, and occupy ourselves when we are alone and at home, in the same manner as we do in the presence of a great king; we speak and open

our mouth as we please when we are with the people of our own household and with our relatives, but not so when we are in a royal assembly. If we therefore desire to attain human perfection, and to be truly men of G-d, we must awake from our sleep, and bear in mind that the great king that is over us, and is always joined to us, is greater than any earthly king, greater than David and Solomon. The king that cleaves to us and embraces us is the Intellect that influences us, and forms the link between us and G-d. We perceive G-d by means of that light that He sends down unto us, wherefore the Psalmist says, "In Thy light shall we see light" (Ps. xxxvi. g): so G-d looks down upon us through that same light, and is always with us beholding and watching us on account of this light." Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him ?" (Jer. xxiii. 24). Note this particularly.

When the perfect bear this in mind, they will be filled with fear of G-d, humility, and piety, with true, not apparent, reverence and respect of G-d, in such a manner that their conduct, even when alone with their wives or in the bath, will be as modest as they are in public intercourse with other people. Thus it is related of our renowned Sages that even in their sexual intercourse with their wives they behaved with great modesty. They also said, "Who is modes? He whose conduct in the dark night is the same as in the day." You know also how much they warned us not to walk proudly, since "the fullness of the whole earth is His glory" (Isa. vi.3). They thought that by these rules the above-mentioned idea will be firmly established in the hearts of men, viz., that we are always before G-d, and it is in the presence of His glory that we go to and fro. The great men among our Sages would not uncover their heads because they believed that G-d's glory was round them and over them; for the same reason they spoke little. In our Commentary on the Sayings of the Fathers (chap. i. 17) we have fully explained how we have to restrict our speech. Comp. "For G-d is in heaven and thou upon earth, therefore let thy words be few" (Eccles. v. i).

What I have here pointed out to you is the object of all our religious acts. For by [carrying out] all the details of the prescribed practices, and repeating them continually, some few pious men may attain human perfection. They will be filled with respect and reverence towards G-d; and bearing in mind who is with them, they will perform their duty. G-d declares in plain words that it is the object of all religious acts to produce in man fear of G-d and obedience to His word-the state of mind which we have demonstrated in this chapter for those who desire to know the truth, as being our duty to seek. Comp. "If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, the Lord thy G-d" (Deut. xxviii. 58). Consider how clearly it is stated here that the only object and aim of "all the words of this law" is to [make man] fear "the glorious and fearful name." That this end is attained by certain acts we learn

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likewise from the phrase employed in this verse: "If thou wilt not observe to do . . . that thou mayest fear?" For this phrase clearly shows that fear of G-d is inculcated [into our hearts] when we act in accordance with the positive and the negative precepts. But the truths which the Law teaches us—the knowledge of G-d's Existence and Unity create in us love of G-d, as we have shown repeatedly. You know how frequently the Law exhorts us to love G-d. Comp. "And thou shalt love the Lord thy G-d with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." (Deut. vi. 5). The two objects, love and fear of G-d, are acquired by two different means. The love is the result of the truths taught in the Law, including the true knowledge of the Existence of G-d; whilst fear of G-d is produced by the practices prescribed in the Law. Note this explanation."

Three Types of Fear

We end up with three statements by Maimonides, all on the Fear of G-d, and all indicating something quite different:

1) In his Laws of the Fundamentals of the Torah, Maimonides describes Fear of G-d as resulting from recognizing G-d's creation - we are struck with an immediate awe of this Creator.

2) In his laws of Repentance, Maimonides ridicules one who worships G-d from fear, and not love.

3) And in his Guide, Maimonides praises Fear of G-d as produced by the commandments. (According to Ibn Ezra, fear of G-d mentioned in Deuteronomy 6:13 is, "One shall not commit one of the negative commands." Ramban says on this verse, "one shall not sin." Minchas Chinuch holds a similar view.)

What is Maimonides view on Fear of G-d? We must be clear.

1) In his Laws of the Fundamentals of the Torah, Maimonides describes the "command" to Fear G-d. This is a result of one's recognition of G-d's creation. This is the "mitzvah", a positive command, and a desirous state. However, there is more than one manifestation of "fear of G-d" - not all are preferable.

2) For example, the fear ridiculed in Laws of Repentance is not discussing the "command" to Fear G-d. Here, Maimonides describes man's "worship" of G-d. Such worship must be an attachment to the positive, and not an "avoidance of the negative". If one serves G-d out of fear, or for any other motive, like honor, or to inherit the next world, man is ridiculed for not following the Torah out of an intelligent recognition that it is a good - unto itself. This second form of "fearing G-d" is not acceptable.

3) The final form is described in the Guide for the Perplexed. Here, Maimonides again described a good type of fear. But this is not the "command" mentioned in the Fundamentals of the Torah. This latter fear is a product of our adherence to G-d's words in general. As Maimonides stated, "...fear of G-d is produced by the practices prescribed in the Law." He also wrote, "G-d declares in

plain words that it is the object of all religious acts to produce in man fear of G-d and obedience to His word." This latter fear is a result of man's adherence to the Torah. Besides the first form of fear, where we recognize G-d's creation and stand in awe, there is the need for the person to be subjugated to G-d's word. This is only achieved by our having been commanded in Torah in general.

The Torah is a two-pronged system in this respect: we must realize the Creator, and arrive at a Love of G-d, through understanding greater and greater ideas. But, as Maimonides observed, "some few pious men may attain human perfection". Man is deviant, and only the few reach the optimum. Man requires much training to arrive at such a perfected state, thus, the Torah commands. The commands subjugate us into a service to G-d, by which we may be tempered towards a restraint of the emotions, to enable more freedom for our developing intellects, uninhibited by emotional surges.

The reason Maimonides' ridicule of the second form of fear is placed in Laws of Repentance makes sense: one must repent from this poor way of life. G-d is not to be served from fear, but from recognition of His truth, and that Torah is a pleasant, perfect system. Additionally, the "command" to Fear G-d is taken from the section of Torah warning against other gods. This fits in perfectly with Maimonides' definition: the "command" to Fear G-d should be based on recognizing His role as Creator, ipso facto, all other gods are impostors. Thus, laws against following alien gods follows in that section of the Torah.

We must return to our first, glaring question: How is the law to Love G-d distinct from the law of Torah Study? According to Maimonides, it is clear, as he does not require Torah study for the fulfillment of Loving G-d. This we said is achieved through studying creation. But according to the Minchas Chinuch, the answer is as follows: although Torah study results in Love of G-d, and Love of G-d is impossible without Torah study, they are not one and the same: Torah study is an 'action'. It affords us great appreciation for the wisdom G-d possesses, certainly, when we see that it is endless. And Maimonides points this out "...and he sees from them His wisdom that has no measure or end...". So the command on our 'action' is to study Torah, not to Love G-d. However, "Loving G-d" is not an action, but a 'result', a 'state' in the person. We are to study Torah, and this is one, distinct command. But the command to Love G-d is not a command we fulfill through action, but through a 'state that results from our study'. That is, we are to study, until we reach a state that we are enamored with G-d's wisdom, and we have a longing for the "Source of all wisdom", i.e., G-d. As Maimonides stated, "immediately he loves and praises and glorifies and desires a great desire to know the great G-d". Maimonides made it clear at the outset, that he was describing a "path" to loving and fearing G-d. Meaning, it is not accomplished in one action. A path means that arriving at Love and Fear of G-d is at the end of a journey - it takes time. As Maimonides said, "And what is the path to His love and His fear?"

Love and Fear of G-d are essential requirements – throughout our lives – as seekers of truth. ■

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practices
prescribed
in the Law."*

Bemidbar

RABBI BERNARD FOX

term for taking a census. The term is se'uh et rosh. Literally translated, the phrase means "lift the head". Midrash Rabbah explains that this term has a number of meanings in the Torah. It can mean elevation to a higher position. For example, Yosef used this term when foretelling the release from prison and reappointment of Paroh's wine butler.[1] The term can also mean execution of punishment. Yosef used the phrase to tell Paroh's baker that he would be executed.[2]

The Midrash explains that this phrase is used here because of the alternative meanings. If the nation follows the Torah, this census will result in the nation's elevation to a higher status. However, if the people disregard the Torah, this census will lead the people's demise.[3]

This is a difficult comment to understand. We expect the nation to be rewarded and punished for its actions. However, the Midrash seems to say that because of the census the nation will be judged for its actions. Are we to assume that without the census the nation's actions would not be judged?

There is another related question that must be answered. The Torah forbids the direct counting of the nation. Instead, the Torah requires indirect counting. A token – generally a coin – is collected from each individual. These tokens are then counted. This provides a census. The Chumash explains that this method is used to protect the nation from punishment. The question is obvious. Why should taking a census endanger the nation? Why must tokens be used instead of a direct count?

It is difficult to entirely answer these questions. However, Nachmanides provides an important insight. From his comments the beginnings of an answer can be derived. He begins with an observation. The Torah uses another term for taking a census. This term is tiftkedu.[4] Nachmanides explains that this term is also associated with Divine providence. When Hashem grants Sara a son, this term is used.[5]

Why is this term used for taking a census? Nachmanides explains that there is a direct connection between the compilation of a census and providence. The counting of the nation invites a closer providential relationship. In other words the census taking increases the level of providence over the nation.

Nachmanides further explains that reward and punishment is an expression of Divine providence. Hashem rewards us for observance of the Torah. He punishes us for transgression. It follows that the higher the level of providence the more our actions are scrutinized. With greater providence our observance

will be more fully rewarded. However, we will also be more strictly punished for our transgressions.

Nachmanides now answers our questions. The census invites an increase in the providential relationship. This, in turn means that the Almighty will more closely scrutinize our actions. The tokens or coins used for the census represent our recognition of our own weaknesses and failings. Through providing a coin to be counted, the individual acknowledges the need for atonement. These coins will be used to provide for communal needs. This donation is an atonement. The individual is stating that close scrutiny of one's personal actions will uncover shortcomings. Therefore, the individual provides an atonement at the time of the census.

Nachmanides also explains the comments of Midrash Rabbah. The census will not directly result in reward or punishment. Our observance of the Torah determines our fate. However, the level of providence is directly affected by the census. This is the message of the Midrash. The census will impact upon the level of Divine providence. This means that the nation's behavior will be judged more strictly. The people will be more richly rewarded and more severely punished. In the words of the Midrash, the census can result in the elevation of the nation to a greater status. It can also bring about the execution of severe punishment.[6]

“Do not take a tally or census of the Leveyim together with the children of Israel.” (BeMidbar 1:49)

Parshat BeMidbar begins with Hashem's command to take a census of Bnai Yisrael. Hashem instructs Moshe to exclude the shevet – tribe – of Leyve from this tally. Rashi offers two explanations for this exclusion. The first is that the shevet was designated to serve in the Mishcan. This appointment bestowed a special status upon the tribe. The exclusion of Shevet Leyve from the census acknowledged the exalted status of the tribe.[7]

Rashi offers a second explanation. Hashem foresaw the incident of the spies. The nation would send spies into the land of Israel. These scouts would return and report that the land could not be conquered. The people would accept this report and refuse to proceed and take possession of the land of Israel. The nation would be punished. The generation would be condemned to wander in the wilderness for forty years. During this period, the generation would die. Their children would conquer the land of Israel.

The decree that the generation should perish would not include the entire nation. Only those included in

the census would be subject to the punishment. Hashem wished to spare the tribe of Leyve. The Almighty instructed Moshe to exclude Shevet Leyve from the tally. This exclusion assured that the shevet would not share in the punishment of the generation.

Why was the tribe of Leyve to be spared? Rashi explains that the Leveyim were not involved in the sin of the Egel HaZahav – the Golden Calf. As a reward for their faithfulness, they would be permitted to enter the land of Israel.[8]

These comments are difficult to understand. Rashi is asserting that the Leveyim were spared from the punishment of the generation because they did not participate in the sin of the Egel. Were the Leveyim involved in the in sin of the spies? This alone should determine their survival or death in the wilderness. If the Leveyim were involved, they deserved to be punished. If they were not parties to the rebellion, they were entitled to be spared! What is the relevance of their refusal to participate in the previous sin of the Egel?

We can answer this question based upon the comments of Gershonides. These comments require an introduction.

The first city in Israel conquered by Yehosua and Bnai Yisrael was Yericho. Yehosua instructed the people to completely destroy the city. No one was to take spoils.

The second city Bnai Yisrael attacked was Aiy. The initial attack was not successful. The attackers were turned back from the city. Thirty-six members of Bnai Yisrael's army were killed.

Yehosua was astonished by this defeat. He turned to Hashem for an explanation. G-d explained that this set-back was a punishment. The prohibition against taking spoils from Yericho had been violated. The defeat at Aiy was a punishment for this transgression.

The commentaries ask an obvious question. The thirty-six soldiers killed at Aiy had not violated the prohibition at Yericho. Why did they deserve to die?

Gershonides explains that these thirty-six victims did not die for the sin of Yericho. It is normal in a battle for both sides to suffer casualties. These thirty-six innocents were casualties of war. Only through Divine intervention can such losses be avoided. The sin at Yericho deprived Bnai Yisrael of this providence. The soldiers at Aiy did not die because they sinned. They perished because Bnai Yisrael did not deserve the miracle necessary to save them.[9]

This provides an explanation of Rashi's comments. The Leveyim were not guilty of the sin of the spies. However, this does not mean that they deserved to be spared from the punishment of their generation. Hashem had decreed that the nation should wander in the wilderness for forty years. This provided adequate time for the generation to naturally die out. In order for the Leveyim to be spared a special act of providence would be required. Hashem decided that Shevet Leyve deserved this Divine intervention. How did they earn this treatment? They

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did not participate in the sin of the Egel. In other words, the generation was punished for the sin of the spies. Shevet Leyve's behavior at the incident of the Egel caused the Almighty to protect the shevet from the decree upon the generation.

"Do not cut off the tribe of the family of Kahat from among the Leveyim." (Bamidbar 4:18)

Each of the families within the Leveyim were assigned a specific duty in the caring and transport of the Mishcan. The most sacred components were carried by the family of Kahat. In our pasuk, Hashem commands Moshe and Ahron to protect the family of Kahat. They must not be endangered. What is the reason for this command? What special danger confronted this family?

The simplest explanation is based upon the process described by the Chumash for the handling of the Mishcan. The most sacred components were prepared for transport. They were wrapped in special coverings before being entrusted to the family of Kahat. This function was performed by Ahron and his sons. This was an act of respect for these sacred objects. After proper preparation, the objects were delivered to the family of Kahat. Failure to properly prepare these components would endanger the members of this family. Handling these sacred objects before their proper preparation would be disrespectful. Moshe and Ahron are instructed to be careful that the components are wrapped with their special coverings, to assure that the members of Kahat are not endangered.[10]

Sforno provides an alternate explanation. Each component must be assigned to a specific individual or group from the family of Kahat. This assures that the process of transporting the components will be conducted with dignity. Moshe and Ahron must assure that the components are not seized by members

of Kahat in a chaotic fashion. There can be no debate and strife over assignments. Any of these behaviors would express a lack of respect for this sacred duty.[11]

There are many reasons for the practice of appointing a fixed Chazan to lead the congregation in prayers. If a congregation does not have a Chazan, the Gabbai appoints individuals to lead the various portions of the service. The idea expressed by Sforno provides an important reason for these practices. Without a system for determining who will lead the congregation, debate easily arises. Debate can lead to argument and chaos. These behaviors degrade the sanctity of the prayers. The practice of appointing a fixed Chazan assures that the prayers will be treated with dignity and respect. Entrusting a Gabbai with the responsibility of choosing individuals to lead the prayers also serves this purpose.

[1] Sefer Beresheit 40:13.

[2] Sefer Beresheit 40:19.

[3] Midrash Rabbah, Sefer BeMidbar 1:9.

[4] Sefer BaMidbar 1:3.

[5] Sefer Beresheit 21:1.

[6] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer BaMidbar 1:1-3.

[7] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 1:49

[8] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 1:49

[9] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer Yehoshua 7:5.

[10] (unavailable)

[11] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 4:20.

Shavuot

RABBI BERNARD FOX



"I am Hashem your G-d which took you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." (Shemot 20:2)

Eliyahu, the prophet, challenged Bnai Yisrael to choose between the worship of Hashem and the worship of the Ba'al - an idol that was popular at the time. He asked the people, "How long will you skip between the two opinions? If you choose Hashem, go after Him. If you choose the Ba'al, go after it." [1]

This is an amazing statement. It is appropriate for Eliyahu to urge the people to follow Hashem. But, Eliyahu continues beyond this point. He tells the people that if they cannot completely devote themselves to Hashem, then they should follow the Ba'al. Would it not be better to leave those undecided in their state of confusion? Why encourage these doubters to totally abandon the Almighty for the Ba'al?

Rav Chaim Soloveitchik Ztl explained that the answer to these questions requires a clear understanding of the fundamental principles of the Torah. Maimonides outlines thirteen basic convictions. These convictions are the basis of Torah Judaism. These thirteen principles are different from the six hundred and thirteen mitzvot. If an individual repeatedly violates a mitzvah, this does not excuse this person from observance whenever possible. For example, a person who eats non-Kosher food in restaurants is not permitted to disregard the laws of Kashrut at home. Each opportunity to observe a mitzvah must be seized. A person should not

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hesitate because of an inability to make a total commitment to observance of this command.

In contrast, belief in the fundamental principles of the Torah must be complete. This stems directly from the definition of the term conviction. Convictions cannot be accompanied by doubt. For example, a person who is in doubt as to the non-corporeal nature of Hashem has not accepted this principle. Similarly, belief that the Messianic era is possible does not represent conviction regarding its reality.

This was the message Eliyahu delivered to Bnai Yisrael. Acceptance of Hashem leaves no option for belief in Ba'al. A person choosing to believe in both lacks conviction in the fundamental principle that only Hashem is G-d. Those in doubt are no different, in this manner, than those following Ba'al whole-heartedly.[2]

"Ribbi Elazar says about the Torah that the major portion of it is written and the minor portion is an oral tradition.. And Ribbi Yochanan says that the major portion of the Torah is an oral tradition and the minor portion is written." (Talmud, Tractate Gitten 60B)

The festival of Shavuot celebrates the revelation of the Torah at Sinai. The Torah received at Sinai is composed of two parts. It includes a written portion and an oral portion. The written portion is recorded in the five volumes of the Chumash. The Oral Torah was also received from Moshe at Sinai. This Oral Torah is an elaboration on the material in the Written Torah. It was not originally recorded. Instead, it was taught as an oral tradition and communicated through the generations by teacher to student. Eventually, a brief synopsis of this body was recorded as the Mishne. Later, a more detailed written account of the Oral Torah was created. This is the Gemarah. Over the centuries, an enormous body of writings has supplemented these early records of the Oral Torah. These works include all of the interpretations and elaboration on the basic material in the Written Torah. It is the product of the insights of Sages throughout the generations.

The text above recounts a dispute between two Sages. Ribbi Elazar asserts that the major portion of the Torah is contained in the Written Torah - in the Chumash. The Oral Torah is the smaller of the two components of the Torah. Ribbi Yochanan disagrees. He contends that the majority of the Torah is contained in the Oral Torah. The Written Torah is the smaller component of the Torah.

This is a perplexing dispute. One merely needs to look at any library of Torah works to understand the problem. The Written Torah is recorded in the five books of the Chumash. This work can be contained in a single volume. The Oral Torah fills endless volumes.

It is true that the published material has grown over the centuries. During the time of Ribbi Elazar and Ribbi Yochanan, the published or written portion of the Oral Torah was quite limited. Nonetheless, the body of material encompassed in this Oral Torah surely was larger than the five books of the Chumash.

There is another problem with this dispute. Both Ribbi Elazar and Ribbi Yochanan were great Torah scholars. They certainly had disagreements. However, they studied the same Torah. They were both fully aware of the scope and detail of the Torah. Yet, the disparity between their positions is immense. How could they present such radically different accounts of the material they studied?

In order to answer these questions, we must ask one more important question. How does one measure the relative "sizes" of the Written and Oral Torah? The Written Torah has a size. It has a material form. We can measure the number of words or letters required to record it. But, how do we even measure the Oral Torah? We can count the number of words required to record it. However, this is not its true measurement. The Oral Torah existed before it was recorded in writing. It is a set of ideas. How does one assign a size to a set of ideas? How big is the theory of relativity? Is it larger or smaller than the Newtonian mechanics? These are absurd questions! Concepts do not have size.

It is apparent from this last question that Ribbi Elazar and Ribbi Yochanan are not disputing the relative material size of the Written Torah and the Oral Torah. This is not the basis for comparison. We have also shown above that, even if we make the questionable assumption that the Oral Torah can be assigned a size based on the words required to transcribe it, the dispute between the Sages remains enigmatic. They would both have to agree that the Oral Torah fills more volumes than the Written Torah. So, what are they disputing?

In order to understand the dispute between these two Sages, we must consider the relationship between the Written Torah and the Oral Torah. We will begin by outlining two fundamentally different possibilities.

The first possibility can be understood through imagining the following scenario. Consider an immense library. Some poor soul has been assigned the enormous task of preparing a single work that summarizes the knowledge contained in this entire library. How might he proceed in accomplishing this task? Let us propose the following. First, he should divide the library into sections. One section would be works on agriculture. Another section might contain all works on business and finance. Once the library has been so divided, these sections will be divided into smaller subsections. The business and finance section would include an accounting section and investment section. Once the sections and subsections are created, the real work can begin. A brief summary should be prepared of each volume in the library. Based on these summaries, a summary will be created of the works in

each subsection. The subsection summaries will then be used to create a summary of each section. Finally, using the section summaries, a summary will be created that encompasses the entire library.

The Torah can be understood through applying a similar scheme. Each Tractate of the Talmud can be viewed as the summary of a large subsection of Torah concepts. The Mishne of the Tractate is a summary of the Tractate. The Written Torah is a brief summary of the summaries contained in the Mishne. In other words, the Written Torah can be viewed as the summary of an immense body of knowledge. This body encompasses all areas of the Torah - the entire Oral Torah.

There is an alternative way to characterize the relationship between the Written and Oral Torah. Again, let us consider an analogy. Shakespeare is probably the most thoroughly studied playwright or author. Let us consider just one of his works - Hamlet. Countless articles and books have been written analyzing and critiquing this work. These books and articles are commentary on Hamlet. They expand upon the issues and insights that the play reveals.

This description can also be used to characterize the relationship between the Written and Oral Torah. The Written Torah can be viewed as the more fundamental component, and the Oral Torah as a commentary and elaboration on the Written Torah. The Oral Torah explores the meaning and significance of each passage and nuance of the Written Torah. It reveals the Written Torah's full meaning.

These two relationships are very different. If the Written Torah is a summary of the entire Torah, it is - by its very definition - smaller than the Oral Torah. The summary is a condensation of the body it describes. However, if the Oral Torah is a commentary on the Written Torah, it is the less fundamental of the two works. Again, this is a result of its very definition. The commentary is an elaboration on the more fundamental work it explains.

We can now understand the dispute between Ribbi Elazar and Ribbi Yochanan. They do not dispute the relative sizes of the Written and Oral Torah. The issue they debate cannot be resolved through taking some measurement. They disagree over the relationship between these two elements. According to Ribbi Elazar, the major portion of the Torah is written. He maintains that the Oral Torah is a commentary and elaboration on the Written Torah. In this relationship, the Written Torah is the fundamental major component. The Oral Torah plays a secondary role. Ribbi Yochanan asserts that the major portion of the Torah is Oral Torah. He understands the Written Torah as a summary of the entire body of knowledge contained in the Oral Torah. In this relationship, the Oral Torah is the major element or partner in the relationship. □

[1] Sefer Melachim I, 18:21.

[2] Rav Y. Hershkowitz, Torat Chaim, p 203.



Ruth and Equality

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

EQUALITY OF CONVERTS

Question: How would you describe the acceptance of converted person? Is the person accepted as equal or are there still some prejudice, besides the fact that by law if you are converted properly you are considered as Jewish.

Mesora: Judaism accepts the convert fully with no discrimination. God didn't discriminate, as our kings (David and Solomon) are descendants from Ruth the Moabite who converted. The prayers we say each day are taken from David.

The Torah is sensitive to our feelings, and therefore protects the converts feeling of "second rate Jew" by commanding our distinct love for the convert. Moses married a Midianite. Joshua married Rachav.

We must follow the Torah's sound principles, not man's corrupt idiosyncrasies.

Editor's Comments

Not only does Judaism accept the convert fully, but we are commanded as it says in Deuteronomy 10:19 "and you shall love the converts." Just as we are commanded to love God (Deuteronomy 11:1) "and you shall love God, your Lord." The Holy One, blessed be He, Himself, loves converts as stated in Deuteronomy 10:18: "and He loves converts." A convert is included in the commandment: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Leviticus 19:18)

In the Book of Ruth, chapter 2:12: Boaz says to

Ruth: "May Hashem reward your actions, and may your payment be full from Hashem, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge."

The Rambam says in Chapter 6 of Hilchot De'ot: "Loving a convert who has come to nestle under the wings of the Shechinah fulfills two positive commandments: one for he is also included among the "neighbors" (whom we are commanded to love-see above) and one because he is a convert and Torah states this." Deuteronomy 10:19) "One's love for the convert should be as unlimited as one's love of God..."

A number of the Rambam's responses are dedicated to strengthening the spirits of the converts. He wrote to a convert Ovadiah that although the Jews trace their lineage to Abraham, the converts' connection to Judaism is dependent on God, Himself and is therefore, more praiseworthy. In another letter to a convert the Rambam praises by saying: "leaving his father and homeland...pursuing God...and reaching such heights..."

BAALEI TESHUVA

A reader asked us to make mention of the need to be considerate to Baalei Tshuva. This goes without saying that a Jew should be treated with respect, and with equality, regardless of when and if they are observant. Showing kindness is not contingent upon one's level of observancy.

I understand that regarding shidduchim, one has preference towards another who shares equal commitment to observancy. But one should not nullify another if they have become religious only after time, although they were not raised that way. We need not look far to see that our forefather Avraham was an idolater prior to developing an understanding of what G-d's will actually is. Avraham himself worshiped idols. Nonetheless, as he perfected himself, G-d selected him to be the forefather of our Jewish nation.

This fact alone should stand clear in our minds; G-d favors one who has selected the proper life, not only those who were raised observant. Ruth the Moabite was selected to bear our kings, as she exemplified humility, and the correct philosophy, although she was not even born a Jew. Marrying a convert actually has benefit, as they came to Judaism out of love, not out of being reared that way.

Many people judge others too quickly, and too superficially. This only demonstrates one's own insecurities. If one follows G-d's Torah, shows kindness to others, and is charitable in nature, these should be the traits we strive to find in others as friends, and as mates.

We must stop fabricating false, manufactured criteria by which to judge people. G-d's word must be what we follow. He designed us and knows what is best for us.

The Talmud says, in the place where Baalei Tshuva stand, even the righteous cannot stand. Recognize their effort expressed to attach themselves to the Torah. They have done so much more than us, and have more merit because of their toil and love.