

Denying Sinai

Others exceed our intelligence, possessing conviction in certain truths. If we can't comprehend those truths, it is foolish to argue. Let us first remove our ignorance, and understand their convictions. We may agree.

Ironically, our ignorance teaches us one certainty: we are even more ignorant about He who created the ideas which these wise people understand, and that we do not.

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Defense vs Honesty

Perfection During the Three Weeks

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

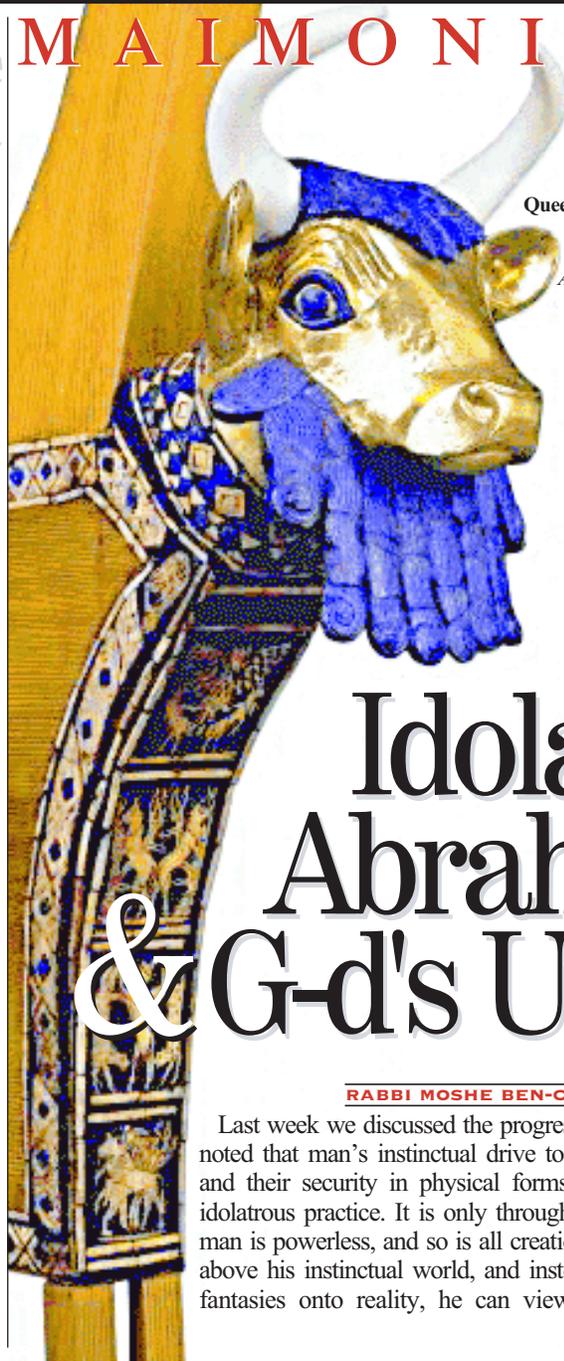
"There was a fortified wall surrounding them. It faithfully shielded its constructors from many attempts to breach inwards. The constructors were secure for a long time. But one day, the wall was breached; the enemy entered, plundered, and destroyed their security. The constructors faced reality. They deserved to be exposed. Their sins brought this on them."

If you think I am describing the Jews and Jerusalem's Wall during the three weeks, you are mistaken. What I describe is every single human being.

When given constructive criticism, people opt to defend their words and actions, instead of listening, reflecting, and objectively determining if they are in fact wrong. The reason is simple: ego. No one wants to hear they are wrong. Man's ego is as a fortified wall, constantly seeking to shield the person from any realization of his errors. But just as with Jerusalem's Wall, once breached, it made the Jews aware of their sins, and why G-d abandoned them. So too, if we let down our own "walls", only then can we learn what we try so hard to ignore; our faults. Without self-reflection, observing how our egos operate and lead us towards harm, we

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M A I M O N I D E S



Queen's Lyre from Ur
2600-2400 BC
500 years before
Abraham was there

Idolatry, Abraham & G-d's Unity

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Last week we discussed the progression of idolatry. We noted that man's instinctual drive to imitate the "parent" and their security in physical forms is the cause of all idolatrous practice. It is only through the acceptance that man is powerless, and so is all creation, that man can rise above his instinctual world, and instead of projecting his fantasies onto reality, he can view reality and adjust

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SEE THESE AND OTHER ARTICLES AT OUR SITE

Maimonides' 13 PRINCIPLES
THE BASIC FOUNDATIONS WHICH ALL JEWS MUST KNOW AS TRUE. WE URGE YOU TO READ THEM:
www.mesora.org/13principles.html

God's Existence: Belief or Proof?
www.mesora.org/belieforproof.html

God's Land Without God?
AN OPEN LETTER TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY:
www.mesora.org/openletter/openletter2.html

Weekly Parsha

Mattos

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"And Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes saying, "This is the matter that Hashem commanded" (BeMidbar 30:2)

This pasuk introduces the most comprehensive discussion in the Torah

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will continue to respond to all matters by defending our delicate self-image.

Maimonides taught that haughtiness and anger are the two traits we are never to vent. In all other areas, we are to seek the emotional mean, which is equidistant from two poles. For example, we should not be miserly, but also, no be a spendthrift. We must not be morbid, but also, not euphoric. Why must we seek a middle ground? A Rabbi once explained that every emotional category has a spectrum, with two poles at either end. By tempering ourselves to remain equidistant from either pole, we diminish the “magnetic pull” of the polar emotions through being as removed from them as possible. This weakening of emotions is not its own ends, but is a means: leaving us in a state where our intellects are as free as possible from emotional draw, enabling us to operate with minimal, emotional pull. In such a case, our intellect is untainted, and knowledge of G-d and Torah can be achieved in the greatest and purest fashion. This is the goal.

We gain immeasurably by abandoning harmful behaviors. But to do so, we must sometimes listen to another person who advises us of emotional errors that we never see. Instead of striving to maintain a false, pristine self-image, listen to the truth from whoever speaks it, and love their rebuke, as King Solomon teaches. (Proverbs, 9:8) Maintaining an impeccable self-image for others to applaud during your short life must not outweigh your perfection, which is eternal.

“Reflection” is an unpopular activity, and never attracts “lines wrapping around the block”. People do not want to face themselves. Distractions of “city life”, culture, recreation, and numerous other excuses serve to keep our mind’s eye directed outward, not on our perfection. But now, during these Three Weeks, when our Temples were destroyed along with other tragedies, it is a time, which demands our reflection. It was only due to our crimes that G-d sent us His punishments. And as we remain with no Temple, we must realize that we have not corrected our errors. The Rabbis state that Messiah could arrive, but does not, due to our sins. Not to minimize the importance of the Messianic era, but even without the Messiah’s arrival, our own purpose of Torah adherence to perfect ourselves is indispensable. Pirkey Avos teaches (4:1), “Who is a strong man? One who conquers his inclinations.” Maimonides also teaches that just as we are to repent from evil actions, we must also repent from poor character traits.

The correct morals and actions are not hidden from us – the Torah is replete with moral instruction, and prophetic rebuke. (I strongly urge your reading of King Solomon’s “Proverbs.”) The problem lies with our failed recognition of the gravity of the situation, that we have flaws, that perfection is our goal and not impressing man. Our willingness to face ourselves is avoided at all costs.

Jeremiah amidst the destruction of Jerusalem



The good news is that we have a great role model who G-d selected and appointed as our first forefather. Abraham also had flaws: he was an idolater. But he did not fear reflection. His goal was to know what truth is. If this truth included realization of errors, he embraced them. He rejoiced in each new stride made towards truth.

“Truth” is something, which is consistent by nature, never changing, and fully complying with how the world operates. As more truths are learned, a greater harmony fills us, a sense of ease overcomes us, and a conviction in a real system presents itself to our minds. We are only then offered glimpse at G-d’s harmonious design of the world, and man’s synchronism with this world. But I refer not only to the physical world - I mean in the worlds of justice, truth, morality, and Torah. G-d created all of these systems, so by definition, they all fit together seamlessly. When we have troubles in life, it is not the external world that is turbulent, but it is our deviation from the calm nature of G-d’s orchestrated systems of nature, justice, Providence, Torah, math, science...and every other law G-d structured. It is far easier to blame everything but ourselves, but it is dishonest.

If we can make the first step of managing our egos instead of the reverse, we have made a large step towards our perfection. Simply following G-d’s commands, His mitzvos, with no appreciation for their perfecting aspects, with no regular self-reflection...we miss the boat. The Torah offers no

refinement to our souls, if we follow the commands like robots. G-d rebuked the people, that their sacrifices meant nothing to Him, if they lead corrupt lives.

Force your self-pride to have no control over your actions. When you see opportunities to show how great and smart you are, keep silent. Get used to passing on honors, don’t take credit for things you have done, for if they are truly good actions, that alone should suffice. Help others in a modest, and even in an anonymous way, as charity laws prescribe. Once you have accustomed your ego to avoid satisfaction, you will find it easier to continue.

You will have also made a great in-road: you have shifted your focus from the internal world of the self, to the external world where you will obtain knowledge and happiness. Your need to satisfy your ego will no longer be strong; it will not obscure new areas of insight, once overshadowed. Your attention will become more engrossed in observing G-d’s wisdom, contained in, and glaringly displayed like fireworks in every aspect of nature and Torah. You will experience enjoyments never before realized, as you are now free from bolstering your fantasy of your greatness. More energy will be freed to invest in appreciation of G-d’s wisdom – the true area of human happiness. Your perfection will now become a reality, as perfection requires the unhampered attendance of your mind towards the appreciation of knowledge and G-d’s justice, and the performance of such justice. But if your ego is the primary goal in

Perfection

your life, you will not adhere to justice when your ego is sacrificed. The foolish person will sacrifice justice and other important concerns, all for the sake of salvaging how he "thinks" others will view him. In truth, the endeavor to bolster our egos takes place only in our minds. It is a fantasy. We only assume it has meaning for someone else. And as all fantasies, we must accept them as unreal. Additionally, living for someone else is such a pity, for you are not living for "you". And if everyone lives for the accolades of others, it ends up that not one person is living his life for himself.

Perfection is not possible simply by learning and performing many of G-d's commands. If our internal values go unchanged, then our external actions are useless. We must focus our energies on truth, and then valuing this truth. The real barometer that we accept an idea as true is our follow-through in action. So we require learning to comprehend truths, but we also require management of our emotional world, so internal obstacles and false notions are removed completely. Only then can our actions be true to absolute Torah truths. Only when we control our emotional world, do we permit our knowledge to fully decide our actions.

Let the Wall which was tragically destroyed during the Three Weeks, enabling many murders, remind us of our own "wall" we have constructed to maintain our self image, which attempts to deny our wrong at all costs. We must destroy our impregnable, invisible barrier - our egos. If we are to enjoy the best life, the one granted to us through Torah ideals, then our focus must not be to protect the self, but to redirect our eyes on the great wisdom afforded by learning. To learn, one must be able to say, "I didn't know that." To learn, one must be humble. And if we were a society of humble people, all striving to attend the next shiur, to focus more on what we utter in our prayers, and to be less demanding, and more patient with our fellow man, imagine how much more we would all come to learn. We learn that Moses was the most humble man ever to exist, and he was the greatest prophet too. Moses' great humility opened doors of knowledge, which in turn afforded him the greatest insight into G-d's wisdom available to man. He saw he was nothing by comparison. However humbled he was, he also had the most enjoyable existence. It is clear: humility is essential if we are to admit our errors, correct our ways, and give knowledge a chance as our primary focus. We must admit we have been wrong.

The Prophet Jeremiah says in Eicha, (3:40) "Let us search out our ways and examine [them], and return to G-d." Our sins and poor character traits remove us from G-d. Introspection, objective examination and repentance are required if we are to improve our state of affairs as individuals, and as the Jewish nation. ■

Books

*Taken from "Getting It Straight"
Practical Ideas for a Life of Clarity*

Youth

DOUG TAYLOR AND RABBI MORTON MOSKOWITZ

"Ah, the innocence of youth," I said wistfully as the elementary school children, bundled to the hilt in winter coats and mufflers, scattered across the playground only seconds after the recess bell granted them temporary escape from classrooms and books. I watched as groups immediately formed; some playing ball, others on the jungle gym, while others just wandered around, talking with friends.

"The what?"

My friend, the King of Rational Thought, interrupted my reverie as we strolled past the school. Having decided that a 30-minute walk would be good for both of us, we were trying by intent to get a fraction of the exercise these children would get by accident.

"The innocence of youth," I said, coming back to the present. "You know. Kids are such innocent creatures. Look at them all, running around, having fun, not a care in the world." I found myself longing for those days.

"Innocent?" he asked. "Innocent of what?"

"Well, they haven't grown up enough to have been messed up by society. They're fresh. Unspoiled. You know. Like a baby right out of the womb."

He smiled. "You sound as if you think a baby is in a better state than an adult."

"A baby is. Well, sort of. I mean, uh, they haven't been-" I was stammering, and he just kept smiling. "Oh, you know!" I finally blurted out, unable to avoid smiling with him.

"Actually," he said, "I don't know. I agree that a baby right out of the womb may be fresh, but it's also helpless and ignorant. It has to learn virtually everything. How to walk, how to talk, how to eat,-"

"Don't forget potty training," I cut in. "I have some experience in such matters."

"That too," he replied. "And most important, a child has to be taught how to think. No baby fresh from the womb knows how to make proper analyses and conclusions or how to foresee consequences. A child has to be taught how to use its intellect."

He looked at me. "Our society, on the other

hand, has it backwards. We look at children and think that they're clean and pure and pristine and that they somehow get worse or spoiled once they grow up. The truth is just the opposite. A baby is utterly helpless. Left to its own devices, it will operate strictly on its emotions and instincts, make dangerous - if not fatal - mistakes, and likely not survive. It needs adults, hopefully mature thinking adults, to carefully guide its development for many years. Longer than virtually any other mammal on the planet. 'The innocence of youth?' A more appropriate statement would be, 'the ignorance of youth!'

We rounded a corner as a chilly blast of air pushed us from behind.

"Ok," I said. "I see your point. But kids have it so good. They're so carefree."

"Hmmm," he said thoughtfully. "Let's talk about that. Do you think children see themselves and their lives as carefree?"

"Well, no," I replied, "probably not. But compared to the responsibilities we face as adults, they've got it pretty good."

"Maybe so," he said, "but that's from your point of view. No offense, but you're fantasizing. You long to be a child with all the knowledge and skills you now possess as an adult, but without the pressures and responsibilities. Compared to you, you think that children live a carefree life. So you're assuming they think that way too. Yes?"

I wasn't thrilled about admitting he was right. Trouble was, he was.

"We don't like to acknowledge it," he concluded, "but ignorance is not bliss. Children are not better off than adults. It's the other way around. Ideally at least, adults should have the skills to deal with the problems of life and the training to make wise and well-thought-out decisions."

At that moment an '89 Camaro, loaded with high school kids, squealed around the corner, doing probably double the speed limit and leaving a long patch of black rubber fused to the asphalt.

The King of Rational Thought smiled again.

"And then," he said, "there are teen-agers..." ■

of the laws governing vows. What is a vow? A vow is a means by which a person creates a personal obligation or restriction. One reason a person makes a vow is to obligate oneself to offer a sacrifice. This person would verbalize a commitment to bring an Olah sacrifice. Once this commitment is verbalized as a vow, the person is obligated to bring the offering. Failure to bring the offering is a violation of a binding Torah obligation.

A person might also make a vow to donate a certain sum to charity. However, vows can also relate to issues that are more mundane. A person eager to control one's diet might make a vow to eat at least one vegetable each day.

A vow can also take the form of a restriction. A person can vow to refrain from eating ice cream for a specific period of time. This person is not permitted to eat ice cream. In fact, for this person, ice cream is no different than the other foods prohibited by the Torah. Just as we are prohibited from eating forbidden fats, this person is subject to an additional restriction. This individual, because of the vow, cannot consume ice cream.

A vow is a serious commitment. The Torah requires strict adherence to vows. Therefore, the Sages discouraged making frivolous vows. This is because the Sages were concerned that a person may violate a vow. The best way to assure that a vow is not violated is not to make the vow in the first instance.

Our parasha focuses on a specific aspect of the laws governing vows. The Torah explains that the vows of certain individuals are subject to reversal. In other words, if one of these individuals makes a vow, this vow can be reversed by another party. Who are these individuals? Who is empowered with the authority to overturn their vows? Under what circumstances can this authority be exercised?

The Torah explains that a father can reverse his unwed daughter's vow. A husband can overturn the vow of his wife. This authority does not extend to all vows. The husband can only overturn vows that affect him. However, if the wife makes a vow that affects no person other than herself, the husband cannot reverse the vow. He does not have authority over such vows.[1]

Our parasha delineates various perimeters of this authority. For example, the father or husband can only overturn a vow by acting on the same day that he becomes aware of the vow. Another restriction on this authority is that a father can only nullify the vow of a daughter that has not completely reached her majority. However, once the daughter is a complete adult, the father's authority lapses.

Our pasuk indicates that Moshe explained these laws to the heads of the tribes – the shevatim. Why did Moshe address the heads of the shevatim and not all the nation? There are various responses to this question. Rashi rejects the very premise of the

question. He explains that Moshe actually announced the material concerning vows to the entire nation. The intent of the pasuk is to indicate that Moshe first taught the material to the princes of the shevatim. After instructing the leaders, he taught the material to the nation. Rashi also contends that this process was not specific to this material. Moshe followed this process in teaching all portions of the Torah. First, he addressed the princes and, afterwards, he again taught the material to the nation.[2] This does leave one question. Why does the Torah, in this instance, mention the preferential treatment afforded the princes? According to Rashi, these leaders were consistently provided with the initial communication of the laws. However, specifically in this instance the Torah reveals this process!

Nachmanides disagrees with Rashi. He maintains that the Torah is describing an unique event. In general, Moshe taught the mitzvot to the entire nation. However, this mitzvah was revealed to the princes. It was not initially revealed to the entire nation. Why is this mitzvah special? Nachmanides offers a number of possibilities. One is that the princes have a unique role in regard to vows. The laws of vows were revealed to the princes as an indication of their special role and responsibility in this regard. What is this singular role and responsibility?

As has been explained, the Torah requires that we adhere to our vows. A person cannot make a vow, then decide that it was ill considered, and disregard it. Perhaps, this person should not have made the vow. Nonetheless, the vow must be respected. However, there is a means of release from a vow. An expert scholar or a court can release a person from a vow. The person must show cause. Halacha delineates the criteria for such a release.

Nachmanides explains that this unique role and responsibility afforded the scholars and courts is not explicitly stated anywhere in the Torah. However, it is alluded to in our pasuk. The princes represented the scholars and judges. In speaking to the princes, Moshe communicated that these princes and the scholars and courts that would exist in the future have responsibility for vows. What is this responsibility? They are empowered to release a person from a vow.[3]

Rashi utilizes this same concept to resolve the difficulty engendered by his explanation of our passage. Rashi explains that Moshe regularly revealed the commandments to the princes prior to the nation. This detail is mentioned in our parasha as an allusion to the unique role of the judges and scholars in regard to vows. They are endowed with the right to release a person from a vow.

In summary, there are two means by which the binding power of a vow can be nullified. A husband or father can reverse the vow. The court can release the person from the vow.

There are many differences between these two processes. However, there is one distinction that the commentaries note is particularly significant. The father or husband does not require the consent of the wife of daughter. He can act unilaterally. In other words, even if the daughter wishes the vow to be binding, the father may reverse it. The same is true of the husband's authority in regard to his wife's vow. The courts do not have this ability. The court cannot act unilaterally. The court does not even initiate the process. Instead, a person wishing release from a vow must petition the court. The court can only act in response to the request of the person seeking release.

This seems to be an odd arrangement. We would expect the opposite. We would expect a court of law to have greater authority than a lay person would. Yet, the opposite is true. A father or husband has greater authority over vows than the most elevated court of the nation! What is the reason for this paradoxical arrangement? More importantly, what does this arrangement reveal about the natures of these processes?

The commentaries suggest an important concept that explains this distinction. What is the legal basis for the authority of the father and husband? Sforno contends that the Torah actually endows the father and husband with authority over the vows of a daughter or wife. As head of the household, the father or husband has the authority to reverse these vows.[4]

What is the legal basis for the license of the courts? Nachmanides addresses this issue. His comments are not completely clear. He seems to maintain that the Torah does not require our unqualified adherence to our vows. However, we are required to treat a vow as a serious commitment. It cannot be regarded lightly. This means that, given sufficient grounds, a vow can be rescinded. If these grounds exist and the vow is rescinded after careful analysis of these grounds, then the vow has not been disregarded. It has not been treated lightly. The role of the court is to conduct this analysis. The court validates the cause presented by the petitioner for nullification of the vow.[5]

This distinction explains the paradox outlined above. Why does the father or husband have greater authority over vows than the courts? The father or husband actually has authority over a daughter or wife's vow. As a result, he can unilaterally overturn these vows. The courts do not have actual authority. They cannot unilaterally release a person from a vow. Instead, the court merely evaluates the credibility of the reasons provided by the petitioner for release from a vow. The person who made the vow presents an argument for release from the vow. The court analyzes this argument and validates its credibility. This process can only take place through the person who made the vow petitioning the court. It is impossible for the court to act without the initiation of the person who made the vow.

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“Command Bnai Yisrael and say to them, “When you come to the land of Canaan, this is the land within the borders of the land of Canaan that shall be your hereditary territory.” (BeMidbar 34:2)

Hashem describes to Moshe the borders of the land of Israel. This land will be divided into portions and distributed among the tribes. Rashi explains that these boundaries are very important in halacha. Various mitzvot only apply in the land of Israel. Therefore, any territory outside of the borders is exempt from these commandments.[6]

It must be noted this description of the boundaries indicates that the eastern border is the Jordan River. This is difficult to explain. The tribes of Reuven, Gad, and half of the tribe of Menashe settled in the territory conquered from Sichon and Og. In general, any land conquered by the nation is considered, in halacha, to be part of the land of Israel.[7] This land was situated on the eastern side of the Jordan. The proper eastern border should be the eastern boundary of this territory!

Rav Moshe Feinstein Ztl explains that there is a basic difference between the land of Israel west of the Jordan and the territory to the east. The land to the west was promised to Avraham and the forefathers. It was destined to be conquered and become the land of Israel. The land of Sichon and Og was not included in this covenant. It was not predetermined that this land should become part of the land of Israel.[8]

This distinction can provide a possible answer to our question. Moshe had awarded the land of Sichon and Og to Reuven, Gad, and half of Menashe. However, he had stipulated a condition. This land would become their portion after they had conquered the territory west of the Jordan. Moshe had required that first the land of the covenant must be captured. Then, this additional land could become part of the land of Israel. The sanctity of the land of Sichon and Og was suspended until the land of the covenant was possessed.

Now, the description of the boundaries can be explained. Hashem specifically described the borders of the land of the covenant. This is the land that must first be sanctified. Once this is accomplished, the land of Sichon and Og can be possessed and sanctified. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Nedarim 12:1. (See Radvaz for other opinions).

[2] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 30:2.

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 30:2.

[4] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sfomo, Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 30:2.

[5] See Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 30:2.

[6] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 34:2.

[7] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Terumot 1:2.

[8] Rav Moshe Feinstein, Derash Moshe, Sefer BeMidbar 32:29.



The Ram in the Thicket from Ur 2600-2400 BC

Is it possible that the inhabitants of Ur Kasdim - Abraham's hometown - knew about the sacrifice of Isaac where the ram was caught in the thicket? Maybe... But this "artifact" claims a date before Abraham lived. Lesson: Don't believe every 'historic' find.

himself accordingly.

As we read further (Maimonides Laws of Star Worship; 1:3) we learn of Abraham's encounter with, and self-extrication from idolatry. Even as a child just weaned, Abraham was a unique personality, already pondering the world around him, "day and night". Such a preoccupation teaches that Abraham found satisfaction in pursuing his curiosity. He wondered, "How can this sphere (planets, stars) constantly spin without anyone controlling it? For it cannot turn itself!" Maimonides states, he had no teacher or one to inform him of anything – he was alone in his research. But it did catch my attention that Abraham asked "who" controlled the sphere, and not "what" controlled it. Evidently, Abraham realized that if this sphere cannot control itself and generate its motion, other planets cannot either. (This is consistent, and Abraham followed consistent reasoning. Reasoning, by definition means that a "rule" exists, and rules are consistent.)

So Abraham realized that spheres couldn't control themselves. How did he know this? Well, he must have argued as follows: a planet, and all we see, cannot "create itself". This is impossible. For if something already exists, then there is nothing to create. And if it does not exist yet, what will do the act of creating? It is clear; something cannot cause its own existence.

Based on this first truth, Abraham recognized that just as the substance of anything requires creation by another entity, so too, its properties require design. For example, sun is created by something else. This "something else" also had to

be the cause for its shape, and its ability to revolve. Thus, Abraham arrived at the idea that the spheres revolve, not by its own abilities, but only due to an external force. Realizing that this must be so not just for the one sphere, but for all the other planets and stars, Abraham knew he had to seek something outside of physical creation as the source of all he saw. He realized that an "object" could not be responsible for creation, as it too would require creation. Abraham concluded that an intelligence must exist that was responsible. This is why he asked, "Who" created everything?

It appears to me that only because Abraham sought a "who", meaning, something that is self-aware and intelligent, (not a static god of stone) this is why he was able to find G-d. For if a person is not looking in the correct area for a lost object, he cannot find it. So too if one seeks to explain creation, but examines physical objects as possible candidates, he will come up empty. Abraham was searching in the right "area", meaning, he was looking for an intelligence, not an object. This, he found G-d.

Maimonides describes Abraham's path as a "righteous line" of reasoning. Meaning, just as a line is a very thin and precise path, and any deviation places you off the line, this is also true with reasoning. One must take great care to be precise in his reasoning, and remain to the singular course of clear and honest questions and answers. For if one veers he will not result in accurate findings.

Abraham's next observation was that G-d is one. There cannot be two gods. How did he arrive at

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this idea? If there were two gods, and we mean all-powerful as our definition of a “god”, then there is a problem: two gods means that neither one created the other. This means that there exists something outside of the power of each one of these gods: “A” did not create “B”, and vice versa. So “A” is powerless over “B”, and vice versa. Therefore, we cannot view either as a god, as neither one has total power.

There is a more profound reason why there cannot be two gods as I read in the commentary on Maimonides. It is a bit difficult, but can be grasped: Maimonides teaches, (Yesodei HaTorah 1:7) “things which are exactly the same (two gods) and are subject to number (because there are 2) can only be distinct from each other (as 2 gods must be) if they are physical.” And a physical god is impossible, for all physical requires its own creation, thus, it is not a god. What does Maimonides mean? Again, he states that two identical gods is impossible. For if we describe anything non-physical and say there exists its twin, we have said nothing. For example, I can say, “There exist an idea of addition, and there also exists the idea of addition.” Did I just describe two things that are distinct in any way, or did I repeat myself? Of course, it is the latter. For if I cannot show any distinction between two ideas, then I am in fact, describing one and the same idea. If I say addition exists, and then I say again, addition exists, I am merely repeating what I already stated. So if I say G-d exists, and then say again, G-d exists, it cannot mean another god. For I have not distinguished one from the other. There can only be “two” of something if there is some distinction. For example, I can say there are two souls. This makes sense, for I can distinguish my soul from yours. Now, if I were to say that one god is distinguished from the other, the distinction would be in terms of capabilities. In such a case, the one with lesser capabilities is not a god, as “lesser” does not meet the definition of “all powerful”, required for a god. We end up with only one G-d.

This principle, that G-d is one, is Maimonides’ second of his Thirteen Principles. It is an essential idea that we must strive to comprehend. Maimonides teaches another idea, that the ideas we have of “one”, are not to be applied to G-d, as our idea of G-d is greatly limited. We cannot know Him, so how can we say he is “one”? What we are to derive from this statement, is that no idea of number known to us may be applied to G-d. We can only possess knowledge of what G-d “is not”, we can never know what He is, as G-d Himself stated, “man cannot know Me while alive.” (Exod. 33:21) So what is meant that we can only know what G-d is not? It means that we can make correct statement with respect to ideas like, “G-d is not unjust”, G-d is not evil”, “G-d is not

human”, and so on. By removing false ideas of G-d, we come closer to truth. Just like learning something positive is knowledge, so too, removing false ideas is also knowledge. Let us return to Abraham.

Ur Kasdim is where he was raised. He, his parents, and all townspeople were idolaters. Once Abraham arrived at a knowledge of his Creator at the age of 40, he began to argue and debate with the inhabitants. Abraham openly discussed his ideas, writing responses to their views. He broke the idols, and published writings on his knowledge of the Creator, and that idolatry was false. He used reason to arrive at his own realizations, and used reason to educate others. He told them that what they followed was not “truth”. It is clear, man can be steeped in idolatry, but can still maintain an appreciation for truth, if exposed to it properly. This is what Maimonides means that Abraham told them “this is not the path of truth that you follow”. How could Abraham talk about truth, unless this faculty to determine truth resides in every man?

With reason alone, Abraham helped so many others arrive at a denial of idolatry, and an acceptance of the truth of a Creator. People saw that reason was perfectly in line with the workings of the world. We are designed to be convinced by reason, and if we adhere to truth over all other considerations, we too can abandon what is false.

We learn a profound lesson: man has the innate capability to discern truth from false. Using reason alone, with no teachers, Abraham arrived at a true concept of how the world operates. So accurate was Abraham that G-d revealed Himself to him, and designated him as a leader of a new nation. The world knows this. This is why Abraham is adopted by other nations as their leader too.

It is amazing how devoted Abraham was to truth. He risked his life. We see that he argues with the people until jailed, and as my friend Jesse informed me, even in jail he argued against idolatry. We must take a lesson: teaching others what is fallacy is not to be squelched, and even demonstration that idols are defenseless - as he showed by breaking them - is mandated as a means of education. What better argument exists than breaking it into pieces, that a stone god is no god! Abraham is the forefather of Judaism, and for good reason: G-d wished that Abraham’s perfection - including his open debates - be a model for others. This is why G-d set up Abraham as a founder of Judaism.

After being exiled, (for no argument could counter Abraham’s truths) Abraham once again began to teach with a “great voice”. This may mean a conviction that affected others, for how great can one’s vocal abilities surpass another? Maimonides teaches that Abraham amassed tens

of thousands of students. Abraham taught each one on his own level. His message was his proofs, and that G-d alone was worthy of service and sacrifice.

Abraham then “planted in their hearts this great principle”, that there is one G-d, and that idolatry is false. If Abraham was able to expose truths through his methods, and he did not silence himself, we must model our behavior after him, as G-d selected him as upright. We too are bound to use reason to teach others, and not be silent. Through reason, other nations will see the flaws of their religions, just as Abraham exposed the flaws of earlier cultures. Man has in it in him to realize truth and withholding truth from anyone is sinful. Abraham’s devotion to truth also demanded his devotion to mankind.

Based on Abraham’s lesson, we must abandon the popular “don’t make waves with other religions” sentiment, which is hurting, not helping Judaism, and violates G-d’s designation of the Jewish nation as a beacon. ■



Survey of eleven fields Third dynasty Ur: 2000-1900 BC
Such accurate record-keeping dispels arguments that the Jew's later account of Sinai was impossible.

Torah & PSYCHOLOGY

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: I have read a number of the articles on your site. I must applaud your work. While I don't think I agree with all of it, many points that are made are truly excellent and seem true. It appears that you are honestly seeking the truth, and I pray that you find it in all of your searches.

My question to you is, why do you use psychology in so many of your explanations? I have not studied psychology to any considerable extent, so I may be ignorant of its supposed scope and predictions, yet it does not seem to me to be a factor in meaningful behavior as such. Allow me to explain myself. As I see it, most people make rational decisions. When they do not, the decisions are either following a habit or falling prey to the instincts. Now, one could call this a natural human thing, or the result of his failure in his use of free will. This summarizes human action. How is this psychology? Why should it affect the statements of the Rabbis or the mitzvot of the Torah? Again, this may be a question asked out of pure ignorance of what is meant by psychology. Still, as I see it, why should one use an explanation from psychology as opposed to the explanation of behavior given by the Rabbis and the simple observations that I summarized above?

Mesora: Your error is your ignorance that Chazal were in fact most adept at psychology.

Man includes intellect as the source of perception and analysis. With it, he identifies concepts, judges their credibility by comparing them with his truths, and then incorporates them into his thinking as new truths, or fallacies. When it comes to acting upon such truths, man then engages another faculty known as freewill. He may then act in accordance with such accepted truths, or be

swayed by his other faculty, which we call the instincts, emotions, or the "yetzer hara". This part of man, the instincts, include a multitude of types; anger, jealousy, pride, hate, love, embarrassment, etc. The area of study of how these emotions work is what psychology addresses.

The Rabbis desired to know and teach the true understanding of man, and what God desired for man's lifestyle, i.e., "the good". Therefore they studied human behavior in their own terms, referred to us as "psychology".

The Torah is a perfect system for man to achieve the happiest and most fulfilling lifestyle. For man to be happy, he must engage his intellect in study as his core and essential activity. But to do so, man must conquer all his emotions so his decisions are not knee jerk reactions to his feelings, but the result of analysis of what is best for him. The Torah and the Rabbis discuss many personalities and prescriptions for our behavior, so as to teach us of man's makeup (psychologically) for us to be aware of our own faculties. Knowledge of our psychological faculties is essential if we are to perfect ourselves.

We read of Joseph cunningly advising Pharaoh, about Avraham's dealings with Avimelech, with Jacob's bribing of Esav, and of Esther's discussions with Achashverosh. Thereby, G-d teaches us what faculties are at work in man, and how a truly wise person will deal with such emotions, internally, and with others.

Psychology is endorsed by G-d's Torah accounts, Torah laws, and in the Rabbis' sayings. These are all essential areas of study to learn about ourselves so our lives are guided not by emotional impulses, but by rational considerations. ■

CHRISTIAN LOVE

CHERYL HOLBROOK

Dear Rabbi Moshe Ben Chaim:

As a B'nai Noachide who has come out of Christianity, I am bothered by some of the responses to your recent series exposing the Flaws of Christianity by our Jewish brothers. I know from experience that Christians, though they claim to love Israel, actually are anti-semitic to the core. They only love Israel because they think that they must in order to usher in their messianic Jesus. Your Jewish readers should be very afraid of the attempts at assimilation that the Messianic Jews and the Christians are attempting as well as the "religious tolerance" being encouraged by some of your readers.

There can be no relationship with evil and Christianity is evil. Don't be fooled by their charitable contributions or their "support of Israel". They believe that they have taken the Jews place as the chosen people of God and in no way really support the Jewish life. Tolerance of their views only damn the Christians to continue in their dark religion.

The loving thing for the Jews to do is to shine the light of truth at the Christians about their false religion and show them who the real G-d is. Not the dead god-man Jesus but the real Creator of the Universe, HaSh-m.

Keep up the great work of exposing the truth about Christianity. This world needs an infusion of truth right about now.

Shalom,
Cheryl Holbrook

A source close to a known author on Maimonides overheard that this prayer was not authored by Maimonides

Maimonides' Prayer for the Physician



Exalted G-d –

Before I begin the holy work of healing the creations of your hands, I place my entreaty before the throne of your glory that you grant strength of spirit and fortitude to faithfully execute my work. Let not the desire for wealth or benefit blind me from seeing truth. Deem me worthy of seeing in the sufferer who seeks my advice a person neither rich nor poor. Friend or foe, good man or bad, of a man in distress, show me only the man.

If doctors wiser than me seek to help me understand, grant me the desire to learn from them, for the knowledge of healing is boundless. But when fools deride me, give me fortitude! Let my love for my profession strengthen my resolve to withstand the derision even of men of high station. Illuminate the way for me, for any lapse in my knowledge can bring illness and death upon your creations. I beseech you, merciful and gracious G-d, strengthen me in body and soul and instill within me a perfect spirit.

אל עליון קודם שאני מתחיל בעבודתי הקדושה לרפא את יצרי כפיך אני מפיל את תחינתי לפני כסא כבודך, שתחנן לי אומץ רוח ומרץ רב לעשות את עבודתי באמונה ושהשאיפה לצבור הון או טוב לא תעורר עיני מראות נכוחה, תוכני להביט על סובל הבא לשאול בעצתי כעל אדם, בלי הבדל בין עשיר ועני, ידיד ושונא, איש טוב ורע. את האדם בצר לו הראיני רק את האדם. אם הרופאים נבונים מני רוצים ללמדני בינה, תן לי הרצון ללמוד מהם, כי תורת הרפואה אין ערוך לה, אבל כאשר כסילים יבזוני, אחלי! אהבתי למקצוע תחזק את רוחי מבלי להתחשב עם זקת המלעינים וכבודם. רק האמת תהיה נר להגלי, כי כל ויתור במקצועי יכול להביא כליון ומחלה ליציר כפיך. אנא ר' רחום וחנן חזקני ואמצני בנופי ובנפשי, ורוח שלם תקע בקרבי:

תפלת הרופא