

For two reasons, Bible study which is bereft of the Oral Law cannot possibly result in a true knowledge of G-d's Religion:
 1) The Talmud and the Mishna contain additional facts, and
 2) these two resources are the tools indispensable for training man in the thinking required to unravel G-d's wisdom.



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of Authentic Jewish Beliefs and Practices

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Weekly Parsha

Ekev

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“And Hashem will remove from you all sickness. And all the terrible afflictions experienced by the Egyptians – that you knew – He will not place upon you. And He will direct them against your enemies.” (Devarim 7:15)

(continued on page 5)

Dialogue with a Missionary

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

This actual dialogue picks up after this “Missionary” emailed us a few days ago, having read our latest JewishTimes issues. He critiqued our recent articles where we expose Christianity’s inconsistencies with G-d’s Torah. We will continue to publish this currently, ongoing dialogue as it unfolds, and invite participation from any other readers:

Mesora: I received your emails critiquing our position that Christianity is not G-d’s religion. If I successfully disprove Jesus’ miracles and Christianity, would you abandon both?

Missionary: Of course, if you could, as you say, ‘successfully’ (I assume you mean to my satisfaction) disprove the New Covenant account of Jesus’ miracles and ‘Christianity’, then I would abandon these things. And you have agreed to believe these same things if you find proof to your satisfaction.

Mesora: Yes, I will believe anything that is proven. You appear to have strong arguments. Therefore, I assume you will not mind our publication of our dialogue? Perhaps you wish your friends and colleagues to hear how

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the ORAL LAW

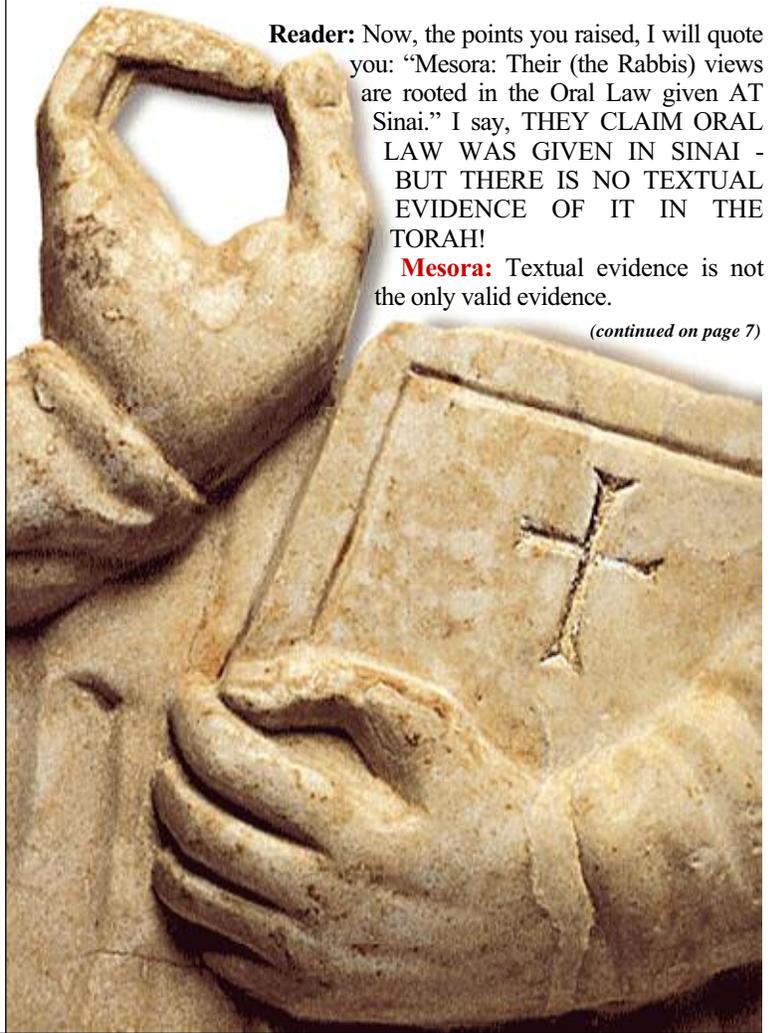
a REFUTATION of CHRISTIANITY

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: Now, the points you raised, I will quote you: “Mesora: Their (the Rabbis) views are rooted in the Oral Law given AT Sinai.” I say, THEY CLAIM ORAL LAW WAS GIVEN IN SINAI - BUT THERE IS NO TEXTUAL EVIDENCE OF IT IN THE TORAH!

Mesora: Textual evidence is not the only valid evidence.

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your words surpass my own reasoning, so I ask you to invite them to monitor our debate. You are not afraid of others hearing your words, are you?

Missionary: I must warn you that many people have come to faith in Jesus thru just such an exercise. May I ask, do you read Yiddish? I have some Yiddish materials that you might enjoy along these lines. I don't read Yiddish, so I have not yet read these documents, but I would be curious to hear what you think of them. I would be happy to send them to whatever address you choose. But, perhaps I am ahead of myself. How would you propose we proceed?

Mesora: Let's start with your presentation of your succinct proofs of the following: 1) Jesus' performance of miracles, 2) that he died for our sins, 3) that he was selected by G-d, 4) that accepting him will save us, 5) and any other doctrine you like. I ask you to comply with my request to be brief, to the point, and use reason in your arguments, not simply quote verses.

Missionary: Of course, it may be a bit silly for me to continue because you are asking me to provide you with the smoking gun, with DNA evidence, photos, etc. I hope you will take the time to understand what I have shared, not because I think it is important for you, but because G-d loves you, and wants your name in the Book of Life, not just for one year, but for all eternity!

1) Jesus' performance of miracles: You have to start at the beginning. The Word (G-d) (later to take on flesh) created the World... Genesis 1:3, Elokim spoke... and there was light, etc. The Word that was part of the Trinity, G-d, G-D, the Father, Jesus the Son, and Holy Spirit, who said at Genesis 1:26, "Let us make man in our image." (See John 1).

The miracles of Jesus were necessary to prove that he was the Messiah. For example in Isaiah 35:5, "Then the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy."

a. blind given sight: Matthew 9:27, 12:22, Mark 10:46, John 9 (there are others)

b. deaf given hearing: Mark 7:31

c. lame healed so they could walk: Matthew 9:2-7, John 5: 1-9.

d. mute given speech: Matthew 9:32, Luke 11:14, Mark 7:31

May I ask you why Jesus caused such a strong reaction among the Pharisees and Saducees? John 7:32 explains that these miracles, signs that Jesus might be the Messiah, led the chief priests and the Pharisees to send guards to arrest him.

In John 10:32, as Jewish people picked up stones to stone him, Jesus asked, "For which of these [miracles] do you stone me?" The reply,

"We are not stoning you for any of these... but for blasphemy, because you a mere man claim to be G-d!" They did not deny the miracles. John 9 is all about trying to understand how a man born blind was given sight. It was a display of the work of G-d!

These New Testament Scriptures were written just a few years after these events. And the environment was not exactly warm and friendly. Neither the Jewish people nor the pagans were particularly excited about what was written. Its not as if they would not have published contradictory evidence if it existed!

I look forward to seeing your contradictory evidence.

Mesora: You make claims that G-d clothed Himself in flesh, that a Trinity exists, and that the New Testament is absolute truth. You make such statements, offering no sense for your words, expecting that I too simply agree, all because you verbalized something? You said you would comply with my design for this dialogue, that you won't simply make statements, but you would offer proofs and rationale. Yet, you do not offer anything you agreed to, and what is demanded by reason. You simply recite passages, in doing so, you deny me the proofs you promised. For I too can recite, yet, mere recitation has no bearing on reality, nor does it offer proof for what G-d wishes from man. At the very outset, you led me to believe that my time would be worthwhile discussing matters, yet I see, I am wasting my time.

Missionary: 2) That Jesus died for our sins: Again, you must start at the beginning. Genesis 3 is the account of Adams disobedience. In 3:22, because the man now knows evil, the LORD said man must not be allowed to take from the tree of life and live forever. Is this just an evil inclination? In Psalm 51, David says he was sinful from the time of conception! Psalm 130: "If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?" From the fall of Adam, we have all inherited this condition that separates us from G-d (Isaiah 59:2). To quote Isaiah, "we all, like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way." Isaiah 53: 6. Sin causes death (Ezekiel 18:4). Not just temporal death, but everlasting condemnation... to those whose name is NOT written in the Book of Life (Daniel 12:1-2). Can we simply try harder? Do more repentance? More prayer? More mitzvot? Can we earn G-d's favor? Isaiah 64:6: "all our righteous acts are like filthy rags."

So where is our hope? In the sacrificial system in the Temple that G-d provided, such as Yom Kippur with the atoning sacrifice, so that the people can be cleansed from all their sins? This was G-d's plan until the New Covenant. It is

interesting that after Jesus died and rose again, the Talmud records that at Yom Kippur, the scapegoat no longer returned with the red cloth turned white... it remained red.

By the way, how are sins atoned for today? Is Leviticus 16 superseded by something other than the New Covenant? If there is some other way to atone for sins, can you explain?

Mesora: Again, you talk of a "New Covenant", and that Jesus "died and arose again". I am amazed that you expect my instantaneous acceptance of a "New Covenant" - that G-d should change His mind, a G-d Who knows all and need not alter His Revealed Religion, based on what must have been events, "unforeseen" by G-d! You also expect my acceptance of such unnatural occurrences, like Jesus being resurrected?! Where are your arguments you promised, your rationale behind your mere claims? You ignore your word to offer proof to me. Instead, you retract from your word to offer solid rationale as I asked, and as you agreed.

Missionary: After the year 70, there could not even be sacrifices in the Temple. That may never be possible again. (You have to admit, there is a bit of a real estate problem)

Why did G-d allow the destruction of the Temple? Because Messiah was to come, and did come, during the Second Temple (see Daniel 9 and Haggai 2). As Jeremiah 31:31 and Isaiah 53 explain, the Zeroah, the Arm of the Lord, was to be our once for all atonement for sin. He was pierced (OK torn as by a lion) for our iniquities...you know this text very well, as well as the Gospel texts. He endured separation from G-D (Mark 15:34) so that he could bear your sins and mine, suffer the punishment we deserve, so that thru faith in him, we can have forgiveness of sins and eternal life. But he didn't enter the man made Temple with the blood of animals; he entered heaven itself with His own precious blood, shed for you and for me. He thought of you as he hung on that cross.

Mesora: Again, you make assertions that Jesus died for other people's sins. Yet, you do not offer a shred of rationale. I am starting to see that in fact, you have no rationale. Your beliefs are just that, "beliefs" bereft of an ounce of reasonable argumentation. You display Christianity as bereft of reason.

Do you think scientists who study G-d's creation base their theories on "belief", or, on tested and proven rationale, precise equations and formulae? Of course it is the latter, you would agree, you know of the great scientific minds, and their writings. You learned of their calculations and how they are based on years of intense study, not mixed with emotional agendas. Yet, in matters of religion, you act as if G-d knows His "left

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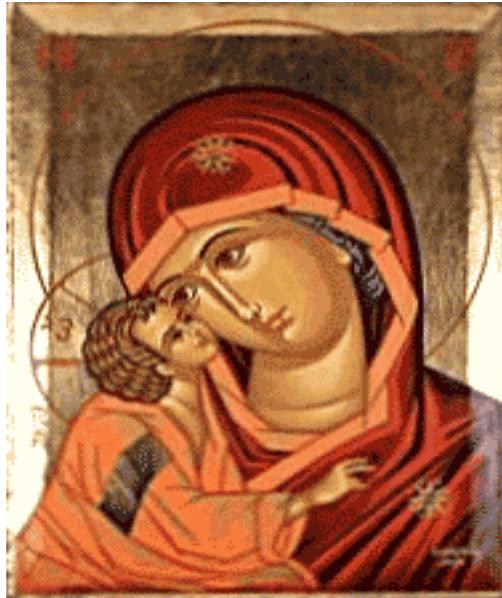
hand”, but not His “right” - that He created the physical world with supreme, evident knowledge and wisdom, but He created religion, being absent minded? Is this your position, that reason applies to only part of G-d’s creation, but religion may be G-d’s creation, but simultaneously lacks the same precision and beauty of knowledge contained in physical sciences?! That is absurd, that G-d can create anything, and that it should not bear His mark of Divine wisdom. Not only does reason and evidence dictate this, that Creation is made precisely to impart the only intelligent beings - man - with an appreciation for this wisdom, but Scripture too attests to this, “The whole universe is filled with your honor.” (Isaiah, 6:3) This means that everything G-d made - religion included - bears witness to His supreme wisdom. However, you have displayed only one thing with your lack of rationale for Christianity, and it is this: that Christianity could not have been a creation of G-d.

Missionary: It is fascinating that when it was finished, the curtain separating the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Temple was torn in two... because as Jeremiah prophesied, G-d will remember our sins no more... once the Holy Spirit dwells in us (as it did on those Jewish believers at Shavuot, Acts 2), we are now the sukkot, the Temples of the Holy Spirit. We have Torah in our minds and hearts!

Mesora: What is fascinating is your complete acceptance of events, without proof. What is disappointing is your failure to comply with your agreement to offer me proof, instead of simply reciting texts, as you explicitly agreed to out the outset.

Missionary: 3) That Jesus was selected by G-d: He WAS G-d. See John 1. One G-d (Echad, not Yachid) in three persons.

Mesora: Not only do you fail to offer any proof for the most unbelievable claim man can make, but you suggest blasphemous ideas that the mind cannot bear to ponder, and that G-d’s prophets openly denounced, “And to who will you equate Me that I should be similar? says G-d.” (Isaiah, 40:25) Yet, you pay no heed to Isaiah when he denies Christian doctrine. Isaiah openly states that G-d cannot be equated to anything or anyone, yet you not only ‘equate’ G-d to man, you MAKE G-d a man! This is outright blasphemy of the worst kind. Do your ears not hear what your mouth utters? You believe what violates Scripture, and you accept that which reason cannot bear - that the Creator became the created, man! It is a contradiction, and violates G-d’s very words. But your position is also in violation of G-d’s word to Moses, “Man cannot know Me while he is alive”. (Exod. 33:20) But you feel you do know G-d, that



He became a man. How is it that you have knowledge of G-d, when He said Himself, “You cannot know me...”?

Missionary: 4) That accepting him will save us, Isaiah 53: “the punishment that brought us peace was upon him...” and 53:11 “by knowledge of him, my righteous servant will justify many.” I am sure you are familiar with John 3:16. See also Romans 3:23 and 6:23. Romans 10 is a great text. To your question, see vv. 9-13. I encourage you to read these for yourself if you really want to know the truth.

Mesora: You read the texts, assuming you have greater knowledge than the Rabbis - who gave you this text! Beware, the Rabbis are the exclusive source for the text and Oral Torah, essential for understanding the truth behind the texts. This area of Isaiah 53, is recording not G-d’s words, but the corrupt view of the other nations. As they see the Jews exiled, the world’s nations suggested an explanation for the sinless Jews being in exile. Exile must have been a punishment not of their own deserving. The nations vindicated the Jews. So why were the Jews exiled? The nations suggested a false explanation, but one that they were pleased with; “the Jews suffered for the other nations’ sins”. Similar to Christianity, but both are false, as Ezekiel 18 teaches, “Each man in his own sin will be killed...” The Torah states this openly many times. Yet, you again, conveniently disregard these passages. Had you been searching for truth, you would have abandoned Christian doctrines already, as they violate G-d’s open words. Isaiah 53 does not record G-d’s words, but the flawed opinions of the world’s nations, as they desperately searched for some rationale behind the Jews’ suffering. They wrongly concluded that the

Jews suffered for their sins. (Christianity’s error is in understanding the term “man” as a single man, when in reality it refers to the entire Jewish nation.)

Missionary: I pray that you will ask G-d to show you whether the New Covenant is true. It is only G-d that can show you. I can’t convince you because it is not an intellectual exercise.

Mesora: These are the first truths you have uttered. Your words are in fact not an intellectual exercise.

Missionary: By definition, your faith is no less based on faith. Can you prove with facts that G-d exists? Facts, other than His Word? If you can, then why are there atheists in the world?

Mesora: I can, but we both agreed that you will commence with offering rationale for your Christian beliefs, and you have not done so yet.

Missionary: Jesus rose again from the dead. His tomb is empty. He is alive! He is different than anyone else who ever walked this earth in human form. He understands your struggles. He has endured far worse. And he loves you so much, he was willing to die for you!

Mesora: Again, words with no support.

Missionary: What is particularly interesting is He, like all of his early followers, and all of the authors of the New Covenant, with the possible exception of Luke, is Jewish! They struggled with whether you could be a Gentile and believe in Jesus. I wonder if part of your resistance comes from a healthy concern about the ugly history of anti-Semitism that infected the church beginning at the end of the first century. Maybe we could agree in this area. I actually believe that there should be additions to the Holocaust museums to show why the German people ‘went along’ with Hitler. It is very convenient to blame him. If it was all his fault, why is anti-Semitism coming back so strong

Anyway, I will be slow in responding for a while as I am on my way in the morning to Florida. On the road, I don’t have good access to my e-mail. But I promise, I will carefully read your reply as I have time! Shalom!

Mesora: You write, “I wonder if part of your resistance comes from a healthy concern about the ugly history of anti-Semitism that infected the church beginning at the end of the first century.” You made a faulty move: you made an “assumption”, and at that, one that plagues your overall credibility. But I think you already have my answer, as I repeated it numerous times: my resistance is to anything bereft of reason.

—Moshe Ben-Chaim ■

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

Coffee

DOUG TAYLOR & RABBI MORTON MOSKOWITZ

"Three million dollars over a cup of coffee??? Are you kidding????!!!" I didn't realize my voice had reached carnival barker volume until I looked up from the newspaper and saw half a dozen irritated faces glaring in my direction. I hadn't meant to shatter the intimate atmosphere of this quiet coffee shop, but the story placed in front of me by my friend, the King of Rational Thought, was more than I could take.

"I can't believe it," I said, lowering my voice. "It's crazy."

The story concerned a fast food restaurant patron who spilled coffee on herself, sued the restaurant claiming the coffee was too hot, and was awarded almost three million dollars by a jury.

"How could someone do that?" I asked, not expecting an answer.

"Philosophy," said my friend, as he sipped his apparently-not-too-hot coffee.

I looked up. "What do you mean, philosophy?"

"Every person has a philosophy of life, whether they're aware of it or not," he replied. "It's the basis on which they make decisions. The person in that story is acting in accordance with her philosophy."

"What's the philosophy?" I asked.

The King of Rational Thought smiled. "Come on now," he said, "this isn't hard. What kind of philosophy of life would lead a person to file a lawsuit like that?"

I put the paper down and sipped my rapidly-becoming-lukewarm coffee. "How about a philosophy of blaming someone else for everything that happens?" I suggested.

"Close," he replied. "What's the basic underlying philosophy behind blaming someone else for everything?"

"I'm not responsible," I said.

"Bingo," he said. "I'm not responsible, so someone else should pay. Now, here's the

really important question. What's wrong with that philosophy?"

"It's irresponsible," I said.

"I know, but that's a value judgment. Tell me why the philosophy won't work, why it's irrational."

I was stumped.

"It's like this," he said. "If I hold that I'm not responsible for myself, but everyone else is, then everyone else should be able to make the same claim, right? They should be able to sue me for everything that happens to them because, after all, they're not responsible. It's unlikely that people who file huge lawsuits such as this one ever consider what would happen if everyone lived by their philosophy. Society would break down almost overnight."

"It's not hard to identify other popular but irrational philosophies that exist in our society," he continued. For example, what's the philosophy behind almost every action-adventure movie you've ever seen?"

How did he know I liked action-adventure movies? "Uh," I fumbled, "good guys always win?"

"How about 'might is right'?" he countered. "Do the so-called good guys win by carefully analyzing their enemy's philosophy and pointing out the logical errors? No, they just beat them to pieces, often killing them, usually in some final dramatic 'I'll show you' fight scene."

"Incidentally," he added, "you can tell when a person's philosophy is based on emotions. Just



question him about it. If he gets angry, you know it's emotion-based. People living in reality have no emotional fears about challenges to their philosophy."

"So how do you develop a correct philosophy of life?" I asked.

"Study reality and base your life decisions on a careful analysis of that reality," he said. "Act in accordance with your intellect, not your emotions and fantasies. If you can, find a righteous person who is living in line with reality, and get him to teach you."

I was, at that moment, doing precisely that. In fact, I was so focused on listening that as we got up to leave, I inadvertently made what some might consider a multi-million dollar move.

I spilled the remains of my coffee in my lap. ▣

(Ekev continued from page 1)

Moshe continues to speak to Bnai Yisrael. In the beginning of our parasha, he addresses the people on behalf of Hashem. Moshe describes the rewards the people will experience if they are scrupulous in their observance of the mitzvot. Bnai Yisrael will be blessed among the nations. The nation will grow – its people will become numerous. The land of Israel will be fertile and blessed with abundance. Moshe even assures the people that their animals will not be barren or sterile.

Moshe then adds our pasuk. Hashem will remove all sicknesses. Bnai Yisrael will not experience any of the afflictions visited upon the Egyptians. Instead, Bnai Yisrael's enemies will suffer these afflictions.

Our passage is difficult to understand. Apparently, Moshe is alluding to the plagues that Hashem brought upon the Egyptians. He is telling Bnai Yisrael that Hashem will not punish them with these plagues. Instead, He will bring these plagues upon their enemies.

There are two problems with this statement. First, Moshe is outlining the reward for observing the commandments. He is saying that one of the rewards is that Bnai Yisrael will not be punished with the terrible plagues brought upon the Egyptians. It is difficult to regard such an assurance as a reward. A righteous nation should expect to be exempt from terrible punishment!

Second, Moshe has already told the nation that their adherence to the Torah will be rewarded with abundance and wealth. It seems obvious that if Hashem will reward the nation, He will not allow terrible afflictions to strike the nation!

The commentaries offer a number of answers to these questions. Sforno suggests that the problem is partially based upon a misunderstanding of the pasuk. The passage refers to the afflictions experienced by the Egyptians. We have assumed that these afflictions are the ten plagues. Sforno suggests that this is a misinterpretation. He explains that these afflictions are epidemic diseases that struck the Egyptians. When did the Egyptians experience these diseases? Sforno explains that this occurred at the Reed Sea. Many Egyptians pursued Bnai Yisrael into the sea and drowned as the waters collapsed upon them. Others died from terrible diseases with which Hashem afflicted them.

Based on this reinterpretation of our pasuk, Sforno answers our questions. Sforno continues to explain that the assurance that Bnai Yisrael will not experience these diseases can only be understood in the context of the entire pasuk – especially the end of the

passage. The last element of the pasuk is the assurance that these diseases will be visited upon Bnai Yisrael's enemies. Moshe is saying that, although your enemies will be struck with these diseases, you will not be affected. In other words, terrible, highly contagious diseases will be brought upon Bnai Yisrael's enemies. Bnai Yisrael will be close by. But the epidemic will not affect Bnai Yisrael. Only the enemy will be destroyed. Bnai Yisrael will be miraculously protected.[1]

Gershonides offers a completely different explanation of our pasuk. He contends that the passage can only be understood in the context of the religious beliefs of the time. The idolatrous cultures of that time had many beliefs that now seem strange to us. We dismiss their ideas as primitive and childish. However, Moshe addressed Bnai Yisrael at a time in which the world was dominated by these ideas. He attempted to introduce a new perspective. He demanded that Bnai Yisrael abandon familiar, prevalent religious doctrines. We must understand his statements in this context.

Gershonides explains that the idolaters struggled with the existence of good and evil. How can a single deity preside over these two opposite forces – good and evil? Some idolaters responded that, in fact, there is no conflict because there are two deities. One deity rules over good, and the other has power over evil. The Torah rejected this response. The Torah introduced the concept of a single omnipotent deity with power and dominion over every element of the universe. This deity only does good. However, we may not always appreciate the goodness of His acts.

What is the connection between this theological debate and Moshe's address? Gershonides explains that these blessings are



more than a reward for observance of the Torah. These blessings are also evidence of the Almighty's omnipotence. Through these blessing, the Almighty would demonstrate His dominion over every aspect of the universe.

We can now understand Gershonides' answer to our questions. Moshe could not merely assure Bnai Yisrael that their obedience to the Torah would be rewarded with blessings of abundance. This might imply that the idolaters were correct - Hashem has the power to bestow good, but He does not have control over evil. Moshe added that Hashem will protect you from all evil. Not only does He control the good; He also has complete control over evil. Moshe further emphasized this point by reminding Bnai Yisrael of the evidence they observed at the time of redemption. Hashem struck the Egyptians with terrible plagues. This demonstrates His dominion over evil.[2]

Gershonides' approach also provides an explanation for another difficulty. Moshe tells Bnai Yisrael that if they observe the commandments, the land will be fertile and its produce abundant. He then adds that none of their animals will be barren or sterile. This last assurance is difficult to understand. This seems to be superfluous and irrelevant. Once the people have wealth and material abundance, their needs are addressed. Why is it important that none of their animals are sterile or barren?

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Gershonides' basic point is that these blessings are not merely a reward for observance of the commandments. Instead, the blessings are a lesson regarding Hashem's omnipotence. They demonstrate His dominion over every aspect of the universe. In the context of this lesson, Moshe is making an important point. Hashem's dominion is not limited to general control over the laws of nature. He does not merely manipulate these laws to produce general effects. His providence extends to every detail of the universe. The Almighty controls even the fertility of a specific beast. He can make a barren animal fertile.

“There idolatrous statues you should burn in fire. Do not desire the silver and the gold that is upon them and take them for yourself. This will be a deadly trap for you. For this is an abomination to Hashem your G-d.” (Devarim 7:25)

Moshe tells Bnai Yisrael that they will conquer the land of Israel. He admonishes the people to destroy and uproot all forms of idolatry from the land. Moshe then cautions the people. He tells them that they will capture gold and silver idols. These are items of value and beauty. They are required to destroy these idols. However, they will be tempted to preserve them. Moshe forewarns the people that preserving these idols is a terrible error. It will lead to their downfall.

Why will preserving these items of value and beauty ensnare Bnai Yisrael? It seems that Moshe fears that preserving these idols will lead to their worship. However, it is not clear how this will occur.

Sforno offers an explanation. Bnai Yisrael was not immune from primitive notions and superstitions. Members of the nation could easily revert to superstitious and primitive practices. Because of this disposition, these members of the nation could be entrapped by idols they would preserve.

How would this entrapment take place? A person preserves one of these idols. Subsequently, this person enjoys unusual success or good fortune in some endeavor. This person wishes to assure the continuation of this good fortune and success. It is natural to seek security and protection against the verities of fate. In response to this need for security, this person decides that the idol has provided the good fortune and success. Next, the person enters into an idolatrous relationship with the stature in order to preserve this good fortune.[3]



“At that time Hashem said to me, “Carve for yourself two stone Tablets like the first. And ascend the mountain, to Me. And make for yourself a wooden Ark.” (Devarim 10:1)

Moshe retells the incident of the Egel HaZahav – the golden calf. He explains that he broke the first Luchot – Tablets. Moshe prayed for Bnai Yisrael and they were forgiven. Hashem tells Moshe to carve a new set of Tablets and construct an Aron – an Ark – for their storage.

Rashi explains that Hashem commanded Moshe to first carve the Luchot. Afterwards, he was to construct the Aron. Moshe reversed this order. He reasoned that the Ark must be ready to receive the Tablets upon their completion. It would be inappropriate to create the Luchot prior to assembling a suitable instrument for their storage. Rashi implies that the Almighty acquiesced to Moshe's decision.[4]

Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik Ztl asks an obvious question. Rashi indicates that Moshe had reasoned properly. It was appropriate to construct the Aron first. However, it cannot be denied that Hashem first commanded Moshe in to carve the Luchot! Why did Hashem not follow the logical order suggested by Moshe?

Rav Soloveitchik offers a simple explanation. An example will help introduce his reasoning. Assume we decide to design and manufacture a product. First, we must decide on the product. Once we have determined our product, we can decide on the best packaging. Logically, the concept of the product precedes the packaging.

This does not dictate the order of manufacture. Once we have completed the design of the product and the packaging, we must begin manufacture. We may decide to manufacture the product and it's packaging simultaneously. We might even decide to manufacture the packaging prior to the product. This will provide available packaging for the product.

Now let us apply this reasoning to our problem. The Aron was designed solely for the containment of the Luchot. The commandment to create an Ark is only meaningful after the concept of the Luchot has emerged. Therefore, Hashem first instructed Moshe in the creation of the Tablets. Afterwards, He instructed Moshe to assemble the Ark.

Moshe correctly understood that the logical relationship between the Luchot and the Aron demanded this order in the commandments. He also concluded that this order did not apply to the actual creation of the objects. In fact, it would be appropriate to construct the Aron prior to the carving of the Luchot.[5] ■

[1] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Devarim 7:15.

[2] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on the Torah, p 414.

[3] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Devarim 7:25.

[4] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Devarim 10:1.

[5] Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik, Chidushai HaGRIZ on T'NaCH and Aggadah, Parshat Ekev.

*Diligent
Talmudic study
of the Oral Law
- the only
method for
arriving at G-d's
wisdom that
permeates both
His Written and
Oral laws.*



*To suggest the
Bible is knowable
without the
Oral Law -
is akin to a
doctor claiming
competence,
knowing only
half of man's
organs*

A unanimous, verbally transmitted position that Moses received the Oral Law proves that the Oral Law was in fact given to Moses at Sinai. If it had not been received, then there would not be a unanimous position by all Torah leaders.

Reader: You wrote, “The Rabbis - and no other group - were granted authority over Torah interpretation, as stated in the Torah.” AGAIN, THIS IS NOT STATED IN THE TORAH. THE CHUMASH MAKES NO REFERENCE TO "RABBIS", OR TO THEIR INTERPRETATION. IT SIMPLY REFERS TO JUDGES AND COHANIM WHO SERVE IN HIS CHOSEN PLACE.

Mesora: It most certainly is, “In accord with the Torah that they teach you, and the statute they tell you, shall you do, do not veer from the word they tell you – right or left.” (Deut. 17:11) However, without the Oral Law, you will not understand “Judges” to refer to the Rabbis. But as I mentioned above, there is no dispute as to the truth of the transmission of the Oral Law, from G-d to Moses, to the Elders, Aaron, his sons, and the entire Jewish nation. The Oral law teaches that this refers to the Rabbis.

Reader: THE MISHNA WAS WRITTEN AROUND THE SAME TIME AS THE NEW TESTAMENT – SO IT WASN’T GIVEN AT SINAI!

Mesora: The date of writing the Mishna does not define its date of inception, which was at Sinai.

Reader: BESIDES, IF YOU DON’T THINK THE TORAH IS COMPLETE, WHY DO YOU ATTEMPT TO QUOTE (OR MISQUOTE) CHAPTER AND VERSE?

Mesora: The fact that there exists an “Oral Law” does not imply anything is lacking of the

Written Law, as you suggest. The Written Law, Torah (Five Books of Moses) together with the Oral Law, function as a complete whole. G-d’s intent is that there be a Written portion, and an Oral portion to Torah. A wise person will ponder the need for such a unique structure, non-existent in all other religions.

A Purpose for the Oral Law

The very existence of an oral portion of Torah, insures - by definition - that in each generation the Torah student be trained by the Torah scholar. For without this personal training, all a student has are the texts, but no methodology of study. This is an essential point to understanding Judaism, its structure, and how it continues to be true to G-d’s knowledge.

To gain insight into G-d’s wisdom, man is hopeless without earnest training in thought, which originated in G-d Himself. This is the Oral Law, the tool for training mankind rational thinking. G-d’s knowledge is not a simple matter. If you respect the greatness of Maimonides, Einstein, Aristotle, Plato, Socrates, and Newton, you must agree with the immense depth found in knowledge, and man’s inability to grasp it all. Man recognizes that the Source of all this wisdom far exceeds man’s ability to comprehend. Man stands in awe of this knowledge, and “That” which created it. These great men certainly did. But not only in “quantity” is G-d’s knowledge superior to man’s knowledge, but in “quality” too. Knowledge is not achieved as our society feels, simply by amassing texts, and enlarging one’s memory. G-d’s knowledge is far too great to be encapsulated in written form, and far superior. Human intelligence requires training to develop analytical skills to unlock new knowledge and insights.

Learning what is Not Written

So how does man tap G-d’s infinite knowledge, once he completes the limited texts available? The answer is “thought”. This activity of “thinking” is virtually unknown to the world, save a few individuals scattered through the generations, like those mentioned. But it does not have to remain this way, and it won’t upon Messiah’s arrival. Until then, with training in the proper method of thinking, man can unlock new vaults of G-d’s knowledge – although not written. The ancient Greek mathematicians demonstrated this. Without texts, they used intelligence alone, inducing and deducing proofs, to actually perceive real knowledge that exists “out there”. Amazing. Such knowledge is so attracting and absorbing, that people like Newton went for days pondering ideas, so focused and lured-in, that others had to force him to eat! His hunger was not stronger than his desire to remain in his studies. This proves how enjoyable thought is, and how exciting is the journey when one anticipates finding new marvels that explain the universe. This is called “Love of G-d”, as we cannot love what we know not (Him), we can only love the knowledge He created, and the Source, whatever He is. But such a level is impossible, simply by reading the Torah alone, with no training in thinking...step in, the Oral Law.

This is the design of G-d’s Torah: a Written portion, and an Oral portion. This Oral Law – Talmud and Mishna – are the indispensable keys for understanding G-d’s absolute knowledge: truths, absolute morality, absolute justice, and His formulations. (For example, we cannot know when it is “just” to kill, if G-d does not tell us His parameters of who is considered an “evil” person worthy of death. These parameters are unknown, without the Oral Law.) To secure that G-d’s knowledge be available to man, G-d formulated the Oral law, which can only be transmitted from teacher to student, originating with the model of “G-d to Moses” - the first “Teacher/student” model. This chain of teacher-to-student training, originating with G-d and flowing down the millennia, guarantees that man is able – even centuries later – to discover G-d’s knowledge.

The chain of Oral Law imparts G-d’s knowledge originating with Moses at Sinai, simultaneously training us in rational thought.

Judaism vs Other Religions

So the Oral Law acts as the only means by which we can arrive at G-d’s true intent of His cryptic, otherwise unknowable Torah. It also acts as a means of securing the teacher/student union, through which, every generation has been chained together, linking all the way back to Moses and G-d. Without the tutelage of a Rabbi, himself trained by his Rabbis, man is bereft of the indispensable knowledge, which G-d imparted to Moses. He has no direct link back. Other religions – by definition – have no knowledge of G-d’s Oral Law.

(continued on next page)

Therefore, their systems are false. But in Judaism alone, with the Oral Law, we thereby gain absolute knowledge of G-d's reality, Sinai knowledge, and the essential training in thought only provided by Talmudic analysis. Judaism remains the only religion of G-d, as opposed to man's fabrication, seen in Bible critics, Christianity, Islam, and every other man-made religion.

Contrast this perfect Judaism with other religions who distort G-d's words, and number two, possess no Oral Law. The absence of the Oral Law is admission by Christianity and others that they possess an incomplete, and hence, corrupt system.

Although lengthy, this elaboration is essential to this topic. I will now return to your questions.

Now, your original question is answered when one accepts the Rabbis' authority as mandated by the Torah, and as expressed by the Talmud. This appears to be your first step, still not understood by you. I suggest you consider why such great minds like Maimonides - who was far wiser than us both - was completely convinced that the Oral Law was a reality, and the Rabbis do in fact have authority directly from G-d. This is not just the opinion of Maimonides, but of all our Sages. Ask yourself what compelled such a position, were it not for proof. In all areas, the Rabbis were brutally honest, admitting ignorance when they were, and speaking with strength on points as solid and provable as the Earth. They did not conspire to perpetrate lies. So with patience, dismount from your position long enough to consider with objectivity, what reasoning was available to convince such great minds.

Reader: You wrote, "Other religions have no proof to their 'prophecies', just the mere word of one man's claim to it. Whereas Judaism has Sinai, attended by 2.5 million people." IF THIS IS A VALID SCIENTIFIC ARGUMENT, AND I DO NOT BELIEVE IT IS, YOU NEED TO SHOW THAT THE 2.5 MILLION PEOPLE RECEIVED THE ORAL LAW ON SINAI, AND ACCURATELY PASSED IT FROM EACH GENERATION TO THE NEXT. DO YOU HAVE INDEPENDENT CONTEMPORARY EVIDENCE TO PROVE THIS? DOES IT APPEAR IN THE TORAH, PROPHETS AND WRITINGS?

Mesora: As we discussed here many times, the account of Sinai would not have been accepted and spread as is evident, had it never occurred. Nothing more is required to prove this history, or any other history.

Your requirement for "independent contemporary evidence" is an internally flawed request: this position claims that a single, historical account - even if held by millions of people - is insufficient evidence for the history it claims. So what IS sufficient for your standards? You suggest additional accounts from independent sources. However, what would these "independent sources" add, other than numbers of



Torah Academy at Lodz, Poland, 1915. Torah education and training commences at youth.

people? You assume other countries possessing the story of Sinai are greater proof than the Jews' possession alone. But what is the new factor you say exists, once other sources claim Sinai's truth? The fact it may be accepted in other lands only shows that the account spread, but nothing else qualitatively. You might retort that "objectivity" is now evident; offering greater proof, as other countries have no personal interest in claiming G-d appeared to the Jews. To this, I respond that the Jews as a country would not unanimously lie, for a common motive cannot be found in millions of people. ("Motive", by its very definition, is a subjective phenomenon.) Certainly, the "real" Jewish history would have surfaced, had there been one. In the absence of any other Jewish history, and the unanimous world acceptance of Sinai, Sinai is proven. (You also have ignored the Christian world's acceptance.)

Regarding mentions in Prophets of Moses' Torah revealed at Sinai, you will find them.

Reader: THE FIRST WRITTEN EVIDENCE FOR ORAL LAW IS ABOUT 1000 YEARS AFTER THIS. IN JOSIAH'S TIME, THE WRITTEN TORAH WAS LOST (THANKS TO MENASSEH) AND IT WAS UNKNOWN IN ISRAEL. HOW, THEN DID THE ORAL LAW SURVIVE? IN EZRA'S TIME, THE PEOPLE IN ISRAEL WERE UNAWARE OF EITHER LAW. PLUS, EZRA READ FROM THE SCRIPTURE, BUT THERE IS NO MENTION OF AN ORAL LAW!

Mesora: Incorrect. The Rabbis unanimously agree that Moses received the Oral Law on Sinai. Perhaps many Jews were ignorant of the Written and Oral Torah, but neither was ever lost. The Prophets constantly rebuke the people to abide by "Toras

Moshe", "Moses' law". Rashi, Ibn Ezra and all other Torah leaders knew that the Oral Law was never lost.

I believe your problem is that you commenced your inquiry from the wrong starting point: instead of starting from a position that there was no Oral Law, (which from your words has no basis) you should question what convinced these great minds otherwise. The fact is that generation after generation, the Torah leaders verbally communicated truths. One of these truths is the event at Sinai, and the body of knowledge passed down from Moses to the Elders, to Joshua, Aaron, his sons, and the Jewish nation. Read the introduction to Pirkei Avos for the history of the Torah's dissemination. Base yourself on facts, not your own supposition.

Reader: You wrote, "G-d promised in the Torah and through prophets to never alter the Torah." BUT THE RABBIS FELT THEY WERE ABOVE THIS, AND ADDED NEW LAWS!

Mesora: You project your own emotional notions onto people who were far superior in character than you or I. Don't assume their motives are like ours, that they felt "above" matters and acted in such a way. Also, your knowledge of Jewish Law is severely lacking. You must study the Talmud on this issue, and you will see how G-d demanded the Rabbis interpret the laws, and construct fences - not new laws - to protect the Torah system. Had you studied, you could not have made such a statement.

Reader: Well, that was certainly a good dialog. I thank you for taking the time to compose this and to sort thru our correspondence. I shall also endeavor to take your challenge and look at things from different angles. □

Understanding Angels and Satan

Reader: Dear Sir, I would like to know about angels, the archangel Michael in particular. I have read about the three angels who visited Avraham and the adversary in Job but really know nothing about them.

Mesora: According to Judaism's chief commentator Maimonides, any time "angel" is mentioned in Scripture, it refers to a vision, and not an Earthly account. Deep and profound ideas are conveyed through such metaphorical accounts of angels in visions. Therefore, visions themselves are not the goal, but rather, the concealed ideas and principles transferred to man from G-d in such prophecies. The account of the three angels who visited Abraham, according to Maimonides, was in fact not an Earthly event, but a vision Abraham had while unconscious, whose illustration via angels contained important ideas.

You must also note that such areas are quite elusive, and were given to such great minds like Abraham and other prophets, as they were intellectually prepared to unravel such mysteries. Unless we earnestly toil in Torah study for many years, such areas will remain inexplicable to us.

The adversary, "Satan", mentioned in Job, according to my understanding, represents the opinion of Job's peers. Perhaps this is why it refers to Satan as walking to and fro in the Earth. Satan is not viewed as a real being, out to do harm. This would be an injustice on G-d's part, to create such a being, while not informing man. Judaism views Satan as 'man's instincts'. Nothing more. He is called Satan, as this word means, "to turn aside" in Hebrew. Satan turns man aside from the proper life intended by G-d for all mankind. Maimonides writes extensively on Job in his "Guide for the Perplexed." □

Describing G-d in Human Terms

Reader: Reading your front-page article last week, it seems that you totally misunderstood the person's comment on people being a "part" of G-D. He wasn't disagreeing with your idea. He was trying to explain that people use the incorrect language "part of G-d" to refer to the concept that all existence is dependent upon G-D. He did not contradict himself at all, if you read his words more closely. He just attempted to account for the misleading phrase that religious people often use.

I am not sure that he is right that this is really what people have in mind when they say the soul is part of G-D. But the person doing the explaining is not subscribing to the view you imputed to him.

Mesora: I agree, I was not addressing the emailer, but rather, the writer he quoted. The use of "parts" instead of "sections" is not a valid distinction in this area. How do you understand the writer who said, "and because of His overriding unity there are no distinctions within Him. The point is that Torah and neshama are part of G-d as opposed to separate from G-d..."

He clearly states that neshama and Torah are "part" of G-d. This is error #1. He bases this on his "overriding unity" theory. With such a theory, he clearly claims positive knowledge of G-d, of which the Sages agreed we are bereft - error #2. Not having positive knowledge of G-d, such a statement is a grave error. He projects "parts" and "unity" as humanly understood, onto an unknowable G-d. The great error is transferring human concepts onto the unknowable G-d, when these concepts are limited to accuracy within the Earthly sphere alone.

He cannot describe the unknown, and he compounds his error by saying that this unknown G-d possesses some similarity to our ideas of "parts" and "unity". □

Homosexuality & Pedophilia

Reader: I have a question about the statement in Sanhedrin, which troubles me, regarding child sex. It says that homosexual relations with a boy below 9 years is not considered homosexuality, and that there is no punishment and this implies no prohibition. Can you explain why this might be the case?

Mesora: The Talmud cites a dispute between Rav and Shmuel: Rav says that for one who engages in homosexual behavior with a child below 9, there is no punishment of the offender, while Shmuel says that once a boy reaches 3 years, homosexual relations are recognized.

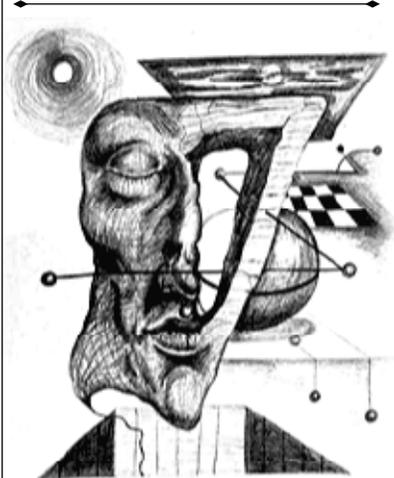
What is their argument?

I believe Rav holds that until 9 years of age, there is no act of homosexuality; as the child cannot initiate a sexual act, he is also not viewed as a partner, so as to contribute to a homosexual relationship. See Rashi who states that although a full adult is not required, i.e., 13 years, some maturity is required to obligate the offender in a homosexual act. The Rabbis deemed a child of 9 as meeting this requirement. But below 9, the boy is no different than an inanimate object, as there lacks any "psychological partner". Hence, there is no Torah prohibition of homosexuality. Shmuel differs, suggesting that homosexuality is not based on psychological maturity, but on the physical ability of intercourse. Shmuel says that since intercourse is derived from normal (female) intercourse, which commences at three when her body is fit, so too, homosexuality exists with a boy once he is three. Normal sexuality is derived from a man-woman union, and transposed onto males to obligate the violator in homosexuality.

Their argument is what determines sexual readiness: maturity (psychologically) according to Rav, or, according to

Shmuel, simple, physical capability.

I would add that although no punishment exists, I would not say there are no violations for pedophiles, for the adult is certainly abusing the child physically and mentally, while also spilling his seed. He also partakes of corrupt emotions similar to recognized homosexual behavior. □



Kabbalists & Mystics

Reader: Dear Rabbi: I just read your section about kabbalists/mystics and agree with much of what you wrote. However, my wife had an experience with a kabbalist who visited our town several years ago that I'd like to mention.

She had just lost custody of her son (from a previous marriage) several months ago, but made no mention of it to the kabbalist. Rather, as soon as she sat down, he looked at her and reported that he was getting mixed signals as to whether she had children or not (i.e., did she have, or did she not have). Coincidence? Verbal trickery? As I reported, she had not so much as opened her mouth before he said this.

Also, I recall a story told about the "Bais Yisrael" (late Gerrer rebbe) who admonished a ba'al teshuva who came to ask for a blessing before returning to the States about his Gentile girlfriend (whom he'd told no one about).

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Letters



They arrive with a conviction that they will receive some positive, earth-shattering and "true" news about themselves. They need little to convince them, as they already are believers.

Moreover, stories are legion down through the ages about chachamim (sefardi, ashkenazi, chassidic) who were privy to information about people that no one had told them about.

How do you account for all these stories? All fabrications? And besides, these are not 'miracles' being claimed; rather "knowledge" that this chacham (sage) seemed to possess, perhaps as a result of his righteousness? Do you acknowledge the existence of 'ruach hakodesh' (as distinct from prophecy) that certain chachamim can possess?

Sincerely,
A grateful reader

Mesora: Rule number one: most of these stories are never first-hand accounts. Don't buy into them so fast. Rule number two: those who go to mystics have an expressed desire to believe them. They distort what actually took place: these mystic-going Jews need very little to latch onto, as they are desperate for quick fixes, and emotionally appealing "solutions" to their problems.

You must know that people go to mystics only when in crisis, not when things are good, thus, the additional motivation to escape an emotionally disturbing situation.

The mystic can say just a single word that the listener wants to hear, and the listener will then completely misconstrue his words or intent, projecting onto these words their own fabricated dream. Thereby, we explain away such accounts as credible. When an emotional need is great, man's mind is weak, and he cannot discern well. In such states, one would benefit a world of difference by seeking counsel from a chacham, a wise man, not the phony mystics and kabbalists who feign super-human knowledge, but have to charge \$4.95 per session.

If man truly knew someone else's thoughts, he would rise to instant fame and success, as such knowledge would be indispensable by governments. This is the story of Joseph who told Pharaoh his interpretations, and then was promoted to Viceroy of Egypt. Can these self-proclaimed mystics and kabbalists match Daniel, who not only told Nevuchadnezzar his interpretation, but his forgotten dream as well? I think not.

Such practice ruins the name of Judaism, all for the sake of money. It is despicable and a Chillul

Hashem, defamation of G-d's name: the Torah becomes valued only as long as it satisfies someone's emotional needs.

Man has but five senses, and none include the ability to mind-read. Additionally, prophecy has long since expired from us, as the Talmud says. And if someone has Ruch HaKodesh, a Divine Spirit, I am certain he won't abuse it in such a fashion as present day kabbalists do. Certainly, G-d would not bestow such a gift on those unfit. □

Politics in the JewishTimes

Reader: I usually print out the Jewish Times for reading over Shabbos and perhaps passing on some good idea at the Shabbos table. Therefore I was surprised and disappointed to find in last week issue, (Vol. III, no. 37) a political column by Ed Koch.

The masthead of your publication reads, "Dedicated to Scriptural and Rabbinic Verification of Authentic Jewish Beliefs and Practices." As much as you or I may like Ed Koch, and his defense of the Jewish community, his writing does not even come close to reflecting scripture, rabbinic literature, authentic Judaism, and halachic practice. I also worry when one side in a political battle starts to claim that G-d is only on their side.

Let's keep the Jewish Times true to its mission, there is enough political stuff out there without your inserting his column into a torah-oriented publication.

Mesora: Thank you for sharing your thoughts on the JewishTimes. At times, we will include political columns if we feel there is worthy content. Part of Torah adherence is welfare of Israel and Jews at large, which requires some attention be paid to the political landscape.

Our focus is Torah, and all that is required for its support. Just as the early Rabbis did, we too cannot ignore world events. □



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