

Correction



Last week I wrote the following: "I don't see how attending a class was permitted for this Gentile, although the teacher need not stop if the Gentile attends after it starts." A reader referred me to Rav Moshe Feinstein's Igeros Moshe: "...if the teacher's intention is to only teach the Jews in the audience and a Gentile is there too (even on a permanent basis) it is permitted. Another permission is the fact that the Gentile is learning Torah in order to convert." As always, I ask that any error be brought to my attention so others are not misled. I thank this reader for his correction. -Moshe Ben-Chaim

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Weekly Parsha

Shoftim

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"The hand of the witness shall be against his first to put him to death, and only afterwards the hand of the other people. And you should destroy the evil from your midst." (Devarim 17:7)

The Torah is not only a code of

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Judging Truth

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The Jewish Press "Letters to the Editor" published an exchange over the past month, and with good cause: the issues debated addressed the tenets of Judaism. Rabbi Abraham Stone was criticized by other Rabbis for two positions he reiterated again in the Jewish Press August 18, 2004 issue, "The Meaning of Menachem Av". I wish to comment on his two positions:

Rabbi Stone writes:

"...there are various Talmudic and other sources which speak of Hashem's painful feelings for Am Yisrael in exile, such as Shechina B'golusa - the Shechina is in exile."

Rabbi Stone deviates gravely from the Rabbis' words, projecting his own feelings by suggesting, "Hashem has painful feelings." Even Genesis 6:6 which contains the words "console" and "pain" in connection with G-d, Unkelos translates as "G-d's word", and not G-d Himself, to obviate anthropomorphism.

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Unlike Rabbi Stone's words, the Rabbi quoted did not write "G-d has painful feelings", rather, "G-d's shechina (manifest relationship) is in exile with them (the Jews)." Rabbi Stone carelessly misquotes the Rabbis' precious words that deserve preservation. What the Rabbis' meant is not that G-d experiences pain, which is blasphemy. What this means is that although we are exiled, G-d does not sever His relationship with us. This is the meaning, as opposed to Rabbi Stone's misquotation, and impossible suggestion that G-d "experiences pain."

To do justice to the Talmud, I will quote it accurately:

"Rabbi Shimone Ben Yochai said, 'come and see how beloved are the Jews before G-d, that wherever they were exiled, the Shechina was with them.' (Megilla 29a)"

This is not a statement of pain, but of love. It teaches that even in exile, G-d's honor is identified with the Jew. His "shechina" (manifest relationship) "exiled with us" cannot be understood literally, as G-d has no 'place'. Also, G-d does not experience "pain". G-d is not governed by His creations, i.e., emotions. This quote does not say what Rabbi Stone suggests.

We may also add that along with the love G-d expresses (Deut. 7:8, and 10:15), there is another idea: G-d's shechina being "exiled with us" means this: His name is always associated with the Jewish nation. This makes sense, as Judaism is the only religion, which He forged, and Israel is His one, chosen nation. Other nations witnessing our exile will understand that it must be "by G-d's hand" that we are exiled for our sins. (Deut. 28:64, and 32:30) Our exile is in fact a testament to the fulfillment of G-d's curses - a sanctification of G-d's name. "G-d curses finding fulfillment" may be another understanding of His shechina being with us in our exile.

Although this is a case of misquotation, Rabbi Stone also exhibits misunderstanding. None other than Rambam's son Avraham refutes literal interpretations of Medrash, "metaphors". (Intro to Ain Yaakove) Maimonides wrote in his "Guide", (Letter of the Author to his Pupil, R. Joseph Ibn Akinin), "Thus the parables in themselves are of no great value, but through them the words of the holy Law are rendered intelligible. These likewise are the words of our Sages; consider well their statement, that the deeper sense of the words of the holy Law are pearls, and the literal acceptance of a figure is of no value in itself." King Solomon's work Proverbs is the preeminent example that the Rabbis and our Prophets spoke in riddles. They expected a level of intelligence from the Jewish nation, that proverbs taken literally would prove

absolutely incomprehensible, and Israel would never accept their overt form. The Rabbis intended that we unravel their purposefully cryptic, overt text; searching for the hidden, true intent. But not only is Proverbs metaphorical, King Solomon writes, "To understand proverb and poetic expression, the words of the wise and their moot sayings" (Proverbs, 1:6) With this verse, King Solomon teaches that not only is his book Proverbs metaphorical, but the Rabbis too spoke in metaphor. In order to train us to understand the Rabbis' metaphors, King Solomon wrote Proverbs.

Contradiction and Blasphemy

Rabbi Stone writes:

"...Hashem has no human form or human emotions, and He needs nothing from His created beings. Certainly this is true."

Rabbi Stone contradicts himself with his following statement:

"Hashem created the world in a way that, through Torah and mitzvos, we enhance Hashem's pleasure."

This is the exact contradiction Rabbi Stone made two weeks ago. Rabbi Stone wrote:

"Certainly, we cannot attribute any physical features and human emotions to Hashem...He needs nothing from us."

Rabbi Stone then wrote:

"For Hashem created the world in a way that our service is for the need of Hashem."

Rabbi Stone's sustained contradiction is inexplicable. In virtually the same breath, and on two occasions, he says one idea, and then suddenly contradicts himself. I don't mind if someone disregards their words, unless he teaches false ideas about Judaism and G-d, which Rabbi Stone does. Suggesting G-d has needs, that He experiences pain or pleasure, are all blasphemous notions. Rabbi Stone understands the Rabbis literally, and improperly.

Maimonides vs Tanya

Rabbi Stone also suggests the notion that G-d has parts. In last week's article, Maimonides' 13 Principles were properly cited:

"And (G-d is) not like one man that may be divided into many individual parts... and also, '...the Chachamim (wise men) denied G-d as being composite or subject to division', and, 'the prophet said (Isaiah, 40:25), 'To what shall your equate Me that I should be similar, says G-d?' (ibid; Principle III)"

Isaiah teaches quite clearly that there is nothing that compares to G-d, including parts, division, or any physical attribute. Again this week, Rabbi Stone disagrees, and reiterates this false view of G-d:

"I also noted that all Jewish souls are 'a part of Hashem from Above', which is stated in Tanya."

Rabbi Stone made it quite clear; he has selected Tanya over Maimonides. Tanya subscribes to the notion that G-d has "parts", while Maimonides clearly denies this.

This brings us to a fundamental in rational thought: when there are two contradictory views, either both are false, or one is false...however both cannot be true. And when there are only two possibilities, one must be true: G-d does, or does not have parts.

As it is impossible that Maimonides and Tanya are both correct on this point, how do we determine which position is true? Neither lays claim to prophecy, as the Talmud teaches that prophecy ended, and both works are outside the pale of Written Torah - "Torah Sheb'Ksav". Additionally, we do not deify man, falsely suggesting that Maimonides or the Rebbe are infallible. For we read, "For man is not righteous in the land who does good and does not sin." (Ecclesiastes, 7:20) Even the greatest man Moses made errors. Therefore, we are forced to compare each position with the Torah's words. In this fashion, whichever one complies with either, the Torah, Prophets or Writings, is truly a Torah idea. And whichever one deviates, is not a Torah idea.

As mentioned in the quote above, G-d said through Isaiah, "To what shall your equate Me that I should be similar, says G-d?" G-d said through Moses, "Hear Israel G-d is your G-d, G-d is One." G-d says through these two great prophets that He is unlike anything, and that He is One.

Let us follow step-by-step reasoning: Our world is physical. G-d is not. We know this, as G-d created the physical. Therefore, G-d is outside the physical realm. What are some features of the physical world? Physical attributes include "composition", the fact that things have parts. And G-d said that He is not similar to anything, according to Isaiah's words. We conclude: G-d has no "parts", there is no part of Himself in man. (G-d also clearly states that He is One, and not two or more.)

On the other side, Rabbi Stone quotes Tanya:

"...all Jewish souls are 'a part of Hashem from Above,' which is stated in Tanya (ch. 2)."

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Now, if what Rabbi Stone quotes is from Job, this presents no problem for Maimonides' theory. Some misunderstand a few words in the book of Job to ascribe "parts" to G-d: "a portion of G-d from above", or in Hebrew, "Chalek Elokim Mimaal". Some people sustain a blasphemous belief, thinking this to mean, "there is a part of G-d in each of us." However, these people do an injustice to Job, to Ramban's explanation, and to the Jews who they mislead from Judaism's most fundamental tenet.

The source of their error is found in Job, 31:1,2:

*"A treaty have I made with my eye; for what shall I gaze at a virgin?
And what portion shall I have with G-d above, and an inheritance of
G-d on high?"*

Here, Job declares he is upright, never gazing lustfully. Job explains that in doing so, one forfeits his "portion with G-d". This is reasonable, and in

accordance with G-d's system of Reward and Punishment. But people misinterpret the word "portion", not as the end of the verse clarifies as "inheritance", but wrongly, ascribing "parts" to G-d. This verse in Job simply means that Job admits he will forfeit his "portion" (inheritance) with G-d. Through sin, Job says he will lose this world and the next. Job is not describing G-d, that He has parts. Job is describing his inheritance.

Torah, Prophets, and reasoning vindicate Maimonides. Conversely, Rabbi Stone's quote from Tanya is either a poor interpretation, a misprint, or an error by the author. Nor is Rabbi Stone's position rational.

Regardless of their source, quotes are meaningless if unsupported by Torah, while also violating reason. Certainly, we do not subscribe to notions, which are blasphemous, such as G-d being similar to anything physical. ■

Creator and the Created III

In the current edition of the Jewish Press, Rabbi Abraham Stone responded to my recent critique of the beliefs about Hashem and Torah that he had articulated. Once again, Rabbi Stone affirmed his conviction that Hashem cannot be described in material or human terms, a conviction that is the cornerstone of the unique body of religious thought that was revealed at Sinai.

Rabbi Stone proceeded to express his agreement with another fundamental principle of Judaism - that Hashem has no needs and therefore gains nothing from our observance of mitzvot. After this statement, however, I was disappointed to observe that Rabbi Stone backtracked and reiterated his earlier claim that our performance of mitzvot somehow confers benefit to the Creator and "fulfills His needs" or "increases His pleasure". Strangely, he seems unphased by the clear contradiction in his words, even after it has been pointed out several times in submissions to the Jewish Press.

Rabbi Stone cites a selection of midrashim that make reference to Hashem "wanting" things from human beings, and infers that our observance of Torah must satisfy some Divine "need". He also quotes the Shelah, whom he represents as agreeing with this perspective. How can Rabbi Stone feel comfortable sidestepping the entire corpus of philosophical literature handed down to us from the Gedolei Harishonim - literature which clearly and unequivocally militates against the ideas he has articulated - and rely upon an Acharon whose words themselves are subject to interpretation? We cannot draw inferences from Midrashim and rabbinic parables without the guidance of the greatest of our baalei Hamesorah!!

I think that much of the confusion in this debate may be resolved by the introduction of an important distinction on which I believe we can all agree. In fact, I suspect that the

misunderstandings that have transpired are due to the vagueness of our terms. When we speak of "Hashem needing" or "Hashem wanting" this can have two possible meanings. The first, which is clearly untenable and is unanimously rejected by our Gedolim, is that Hashem somehow derives satisfaction or benefit from our good behavior. This idea imputes imperfection and humanness to the Creator, something which is certainly unacceptable. On the other hand, we can understand these statements as references to the Will or Divine Plan that Hashem has for humanity. Obviously, Hashem created us for a purpose and in that sense we might say - by way of analogy - that He "wants us" to achieve the objective that He has set for us. For instance, Hashem "wants" the prayers of the righteous because, through involvement in prayer, tsadikim elevate themselves to ever-higher levels of inner perfection and move closer to the goal of spiritual development that Hashem has mapped out for them. Hashem gains nothing for Himself from their piety - as we recite each year in the Neilah prayer "If man is righteous, what does he give You?".

We do not suggest that Hashem derives personal benefit or enjoyment from our observance of mitzvot - Heaven forbid - but we do maintain that Hashem's infinite wisdom has formulated a design for humanity that He intends for us to implement. This Divine mission is articulated for us in the Torah in its full beauty and grandeur, and Hashem has charged us with its completion. It is in this sense, and in this sense alone, that we might say that Hashem "wants" us to observe His commandments.

Thank You,

Rabbi Joshua Maroof - Riverdale, NY

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

Democracy

DOUG TAYLOR & RABBI MORTON MOSKOWITZ

"How was your weekend?" asked the King of Rational Thought, as he got into my car.

It was an innocent enough question for a Monday evening. Downright predictable in fact, as I drove toward the lecture we had agreed to attend. My reply, on the other hand, was near ballistic.

"It was awful," I spat out angrily. "One of the worst weekends I can ever remember."

I bitterly explained that my employer had held a so-called "team-building" retreat Friday and Saturday. The idea was to get all the employees together and figure out better ways to market our services. It sounded like a great idea.

But it turned into a nightmare. Rather than focusing on positive things that could be done by working together, people started complaining. One group thought another group got too many privileges. A third group thought others didn't work hard enough. People who had landed few, if any, new clients griped about the salary levels of the people who did. For my part, I had busted my tail for the entire year, working more hours than anyone. Yet all I got was criticism because the company had, years ago, provided me with a cellular phone. On and on it went. Rather than setting boundaries and limits, the moderator - an outsider - let it go from bad to worse. The meeting finally ended in a huge verbal fight between departments, with no resolution.

"The decline to democracy," said the King of Rational Thought quietly after I stopped venting.

"What?" I asked, surprised.

"I mean, it sounds like your company has taken that most treacherous of turns; the decline into democracy."

"I don't follow you," I said, slowing for a stoplight. "You make it sound like

democracy is a bad thing."

"Tell you what," he said.

"Can I ask you a question?"

"Sure."

"Suppose a nuclear power plant has a problem; a serious problem that could lead to a melt-down. But they've had some warning. They have one hour to make a decision about what action to take. Which do you think would be the best approach? To gather the entire power plant staff, from engineers to security guards to janitors, and vote on a plan of action, with each person getting an equal vote? Or do you think it would be better to turn the problem over to the senior nuclear engineers and let them decide what to do?"

I rounded a corner and entered the freeway. "Well, that's pretty simple," I replied. "You'd let the senior engineers decide."

"Why?"

"Because they're the ones who really understand how the power plant-"

I stopped in mid-sentence as I saw the implication of what he was saying.

"Operates," he finished. "They're also the ones in the best position to fix it. So, what's the difference between a company like yours and a nuclear power plant? Is the mail room clerk really as qualified as the president to decide what direction the company should go? Does a rookie employee fresh out of school really have the experience, wisdom, and knowledge to tell a senior staff member how things should be done?"



"You see," he continued, "it's in vogue these days to think that everyone's opinion should carry equal weight, regardless of its merit. But that assumes that one person is just as wise and knowledgeable as another, which clearly is not true. Just as you wouldn't entrust the nuclear power plant problem to a vote of the staff, so should you not do the same with a business or, for that matter, a country. Running businesses and countries is not about doing what's popular. It's about making wise and intelligent decisions. Of course, the success of such a system, in government or in business, depends on having people at the helm who meet those qualifications."

Traffic began to slow.

"What do you think?" I asked, gesturing to the sea of tail lights ahead. "Should we get off at the next exit and take surface streets?"

The King of Rational Thought smiled.

"Want to vote on it?" he asked. ■

(Shoftim continued from page 1)

ritual law. It also includes an elaborate system of civil ordinances. The various laws are interpreted, applied, and enforced by a system of courts and officers. Our parasha discusses the appointment of judges in the land of Israel. The parasha describes some of the guidelines followed by the courts. For example, the courts cannot execute a person based on the testimony of a single witness. The Torah requires a minimum of two witnesses in such cases.

Our parasha also briefly describes one of the four basic forms of execution. This is Sekilah – stoning. Our parasha does not describe all aspects of this execution. Our Sages provide the essential details. The person to be stoned is pushed from a height. If the convicted person dies from the fall, the execution is completed. If the condemned survives, then a large stone is pushed from the height upon the person. If this, too, is survived, the person is stoned until dead.[1]

Our pasuk explains that that the witnesses must participate in the execution. Our Sages explain the details of this requirement. One of the witnesses pushes the condemned from the height. The second witness is responsible for pushing the large stone from the height upon the convicted person.[2]

It is interesting that Maimonides does not count this requirement as a mitzvah. In other words, there is no separate mitzvah that requires witnesses to participate in the execution of the condemned. Instead, Maimonides indicates that this requirement is part of the mitzvah of performing executions. The courts are charged with the responsibility of carrying out executions. The Torah specifies the means of execution in detail. Each form of execution is embodied in a specific mitzvah that enjoins and authorizes the courts. Within this mitzvah is the requirement that the witnesses participate in the execution.[3]

Why must witnesses assume a leadership role in the execution of the condemned? Maimonides discusses this issue in his Commentary on the Mishne. He explains that the witnesses have first-hand knowledge of the crime. The court bases its judgment solely upon the testimony of these witnesses. The judges have no direct knowledge of the crime. They have second-hand knowledge on the basis of the testimony. Therefore, the witnesses' knowledge of the crime is always superior to the knowledge of the judges. It is reasonable that those parties that are the primary source of all knowledge of the crime perform the execution. These are the witnesses.[4]

Gershonides offers an alternative explanation. He explains that witnesses must



be aware of the impact of their testimony. This awareness encourages the witnesses to carefully consider the evidence they will provide. This is especially true in the case of a sin punishable by death. We do not want the witnesses to view their testimony lightly. A life is at stake. How can the Torah help assure that the witnesses fully appreciate the significance of their testimony? The witnesses are made responsible for the execution. The witnesses must be sure of their testimony to the extent that they are prepared to personally execute the person that will be condemned.[5]

There is a significant difference between these interpretations. As explained above, Maimonides interprets the requirement for the witnesses to participate in the execution as a detail within the mitzvah for the courts to carry out executions. His suggestion regarding the rationale for the requirement is consistent with this interpretation. The most appropriate person should perform the execution. Who is most appropriate? The witnesses – they have first-hand knowledge of the crime.

Gershonides seems to disagree with Maimonides' basic assumption. He does not regard this requirement as an aspect of the mitzvah to perform executions. In other words, the participation of the witnesses is not required in order to render the execution more fitting or appropriate. Instead, Gershonides regards this requirement as an element of the laws of testimony. The testimony in a case that could result in the death penalty must meet the highest standard of credibility. The Torah creates a test of this credibility. The witness must offer the testimony with the knowledge that, if it is accepted, he will personally carry out the execution.

“According to the Torah they shall teach you and the judgment they shall tell you, you shall act. You shall not deviate from the thing that they tell you to the right or left.” (Devarim 17:11)

The Torah creates a system of courts for the land of Israel. These courts extend to all the cities and decide all issues of law. The highest court of the land is the Great Sanhedrin. This court is composed of seventy-one judges. These judges are the greatest Sages of the nation. The court resides in the Bait HaMikdash.

What is the role of this highest court? Our passage deals with this issue. The pasuk explains that the Great Sanhedrin interprets the Torah. This court decides the meaning of the passages of the Torah and halacha derived from these passages. The Great Sanhedrin has additional responsibilities. It enacts decrees. It establishes customs.[6]

In short, the Great Sanhedrin combines two related roles. It interprets the Torah and legislates new laws and customs. The court is primarily involved in the development of law. The court does not resolve legal disputes between parties, or judge a person accused of violating the Torah. Only if such a case involves some novel legal issue, might it be brought before the Great Sanhedrin.

In our parasha, there is an exception to this description of the Great Sanhedrin's role. In order to understand this exception, we must return to last week's parasha.

Last week's parasha – Parshat Re'eh – describes the law of the Ir HaNidachat. An Ir HaNidachat is a city in the land of Israel whose inhabitants have adopted idolatry. If a city is judged to be an Ir HaNidachat, its residents are executed and it is entirely destroyed.

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Our parasha teaches that only the Great Sanhedrin can judge a city suspected as an Ir HaNidachat. This restriction is not explicitly stated. It is implied. Our parasha describes the execution of Sekilah – stoning. In this description, the Torah explains that the court that resides at the gate of the city performs the stoning. This statement authorizes the court of the city to execute an individual sinner. However, the pasuk implies that the authority of a city court is limited. This court executes individuals. This court may not judge or execute the punishment of an entire city. This responsibility resides with the Great Sanhedrin alone. Only the highest court can judge and punish an Ir HaNidachat.[7]

Although our parasha provides a source for the Great Sanhedrin's role in judging an Ir HaNidachat, it provides no reason for this law. As a result the role ascribed to the Great Sanhedrin is enigmatic. Primarily, the court deals with defining and enacting the law. However, there is an odd exception. In the case of an Ir HaNidachat, the court actually involves itself in judging a specific case. How can the court's involvement with the Ir HaNidachat be reconciled with the court's predominant role as a body that defines and enacts laws?

In order to answer this question, we must better understand the role of the Great Sanhedrin. It seems that this court is essentially responsible for areas that relate to the entire nation. It decides issues of national significance. The Great Sanhedrin interprets the Torah and creates laws and establishes customs. All of these functions are consistent with the court's mandate to provide national leadership. The entire nation is responsible to observe the Torah and the laws and customs established by this court. These activities are of national significance.

In contrast, individual disputes are not of national significance. If Reuven accuses Shimon of stealing from him, the Great Sanhedrin does not judge the case. The nation – as a whole – will not be affected by the outcome of the case. Therefore, the Great Sanhedrin does not judge individual legal disputes.

However, it is conceivable that a specific case can be relevant to the entire nation. Should such a case arise, it is fitting that the Great Sanhedrin judges it. The Ir HaNidachat is such a case. This case is relevant to the entire nation. In the instance of an Ir HaNidachat, a city is judged. If the inhabitants are found guilty, the entire city will be destroyed. The city is an element of the land of Israel. In other words, a piece of the land of Israel will be lost. The land belongs to the entire nation. Therefore, this loss is relevant to the entire nation. Only the Great Sanhedrin – that represents the entire nation – can judge this case.



“Hashem your G-d will appoint for you a prophet, like me, from among you. You should obey him.” (Devarim 18:15)

This pasuk introduces the Torah's discussion of prophets. The Torah explains that the Almighty will appoint prophets after Moshe. These prophets will provide leadership and guidance. We are commanded to obey these prophets.

This passage has a second meaning. This message is explained by Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik Zt'l. Rav Soloveitchik was brought the manuscript of a sefer – a book – to review. The author sought Rav Soloveitchik's feedback on his work. Rav Soloveitchik reviewed the manuscript. After this review, he told the author that one specific statement should be removed from the text.

The manuscript contained a comment attributed to Rav Soloveitchik's father – Rav Chaim Zt'l. Rav Chaim was quoted as praising the scholarship of Rav Diskin. In the quote, Rav Chaim states that Rav Diskin's scholarship was superlative. The Torah's injunction, “You should obey him” could be applied to Rav Diskin.

Rav Soloveitchik asserted that this statement simply was not true. This command cannot be applied to Rav Diskin or any scholar. This injunction is derived from our passage. We are commanded to obey the prophet. Rav Soloveitchik explained that the passage has two meanings. First, we must obey the prophet. Second, this level of obedience is not given to any other person. Only the prophet has the right to demand complete obedience. The passage cannot be applied to Rav Diskin. This is not because of any inadequacy in Rav Diskin. This is because the passage stipulates that only a proven prophet can demand this obedience. Rav Diskin was a great scholar. However, we no longer have true prophets.[8]

Rav Soloveitchik's comments require some interpretation. We are required to be obedient towards Torah scholars. These scholars, through their courts, have the right to interpret the law. Our scholars may institute new laws. We are commanded to obey their decisions. How does this obedience differ from the obedience reserved for the prophet?

Perhaps, Rav Soloveitchik was alluding to a basic difference. The prophet's words are regarded as infallible. Infallibility is reserved exclusively for the prophet. The Torah scholar is not regarded as infallible. We do not obey the scholar's decisions because we assume that he has an unerring knowledge of the truth. He is fallible. We obey our scholars because the Torah commanded us to be absolutely obedient to their decisions.

We can now more fully understand Rav Soloveitchik's objection. Rav Diskin was a great scholar. His opinions deserve careful consideration. His outstanding wisdom and knowledge must be respected. In many instances, his legal decision deserves absolute obedience. However, we cannot attribute infallibility to him. This is level of regard is exclusively reserved for the prophet. ■

[1] Mesechet Sanhedrin 45a.

[2] Mesechet Sanhedrin 45a.

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Sanhedrin, 15:1.

[4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Commentary on the Mishne, Mesechet Sanhedrin 7:3.

[5] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on the Torah, p 223b.

[6] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Mamrim 1:1.

[7] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Avodat Kochavim 4:3.

[8] Rav Y. Hershkowitz, Torat Chaim, pp. 169-171.

MAGICIANS VS PROPHETS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: What exactly is the difference between Moses and any of the other prophets?

Mesora: See Maimonides 13 Principles, Principle VII. Moses (Moshe) differed in four manners:

1) All other prophets G-d spoke to them through intermediaries. By Moshe it was without one, as it says, "face to face I spoke to him".

2) Regarding all other prophets, prophecy came to them at night while they were asleep in a dream as it says "in a dream of the night" and other such references; or in the day but only after a deep sleep-like state came over them, and all their senses were shut off except their thoughts. Not so by Moshe. Moshe would receive a prophecy any time when he would stand between the two figures on the ark as G-d attests to it, "and I will make it known to you there" and "not so my servant Moshe. Face to face I speak to him."

3) When a prophet would receive prophecy he would not be able to stand the intense effect and he would shake and not be able to stand. As it relates regarding Daniel in his encounter with the angel Gabriel. Regarding Moshe, he did not suffer from this. As it says, "Face to face do I speak to him as a person speaks to his friend". And even though this is the greatest connection to G-d, still he did not suffer.

4) All other prophets could not receive prophecy at their will – but only when G-d desired. Some would go days or months without prophecy. Even if they wanted or needed something, sometimes it would be days or months or years, or even never, that they would be told. Some would have people play music to put them in a good mood such as Elisha. But Moshe peace be upon him received prophecy whenever he wanted as it says, "Stand here and listen to what G-d will tell you what to do" and "G-d said to Moshe tell Aaron your brother that he can not come to the holy of holies at any time [he wants]". Our rabbis said, "Aaron was prohibited to come whenever he wanted, but not Moshe."

Reader: You write that Israel did not believe Moses because of the miracles he displayed.

Mesora: "Israel did not believe Moses because of the miracles", is a quote from Maimonides.

Reader: In fact, you disparage the concept of a warlock in general. On the other hand, one of the tests a prophet has to pass in order to be accepted is the prediction of the future - exactly the type of miracle being performed in many of the stories, some having been corroborated, that people have written to you about. Yet when people write you about that, you respond with Maimonides' criticism of astrology.

Mesora: Let me first say that today's astrology is not divine, it is man's invention, as opposed to prophecy which is G-d's Divine, informative gift. If I am clear, what you are asking is how a warlock is of no validation, yet a true prophet who predicts future events is accepted, and even warranted. It is a good question.

I would make this distinction; a warlock and one who accurately predicts the future are doing two qualitatively different acts. The prophet who forecasts events - all of which come true in fine detail - demonstrates a perfection in the realm of knowledge, and only attainable by G-d's Will. This validates him, as operating in line with the Creator. Additionally, he is not spoken of in the Torah as one who derails another from following the Torah, as opposed to one who performs tricks in order to cause others to defect from Judaism. Here alone we see why G-d tells us not to follow the "baal mofes", the warlock. He is speaking against the Torah. Here, G-d teaches that when a warlock and Torah come into conflict, the Torah is always to be followed. Torah is the absolute truth. (Saadia Gaon dismisses all the signs of Pharaoh's magicians as merely slight of hand.)

To reiterate, only a true prophet can forecast the future with 100% accuracy. This is because one who is not a prophet, has no means by

which to forecast. A human being has but five senses, and no others. Therefore, he has the future closed off to him. He is as a blind man is to vision. For this very reason, that knowledge of the future is unavailable without prophecy, does the Torah validate one as a prophet when his forecast comes true with 100% accuracy, to the finest detail. Only in such a case do we know that he must have been informed via prophecy.

Why then isn't a forecast of 50% accurate enough? He has in fact forecasted something properly! The answer why we require 100% accuracy is simple: a person may make guesses, and reality may coincidentally parallel one's guess. This can and does happen. This is how warlocks attracted people. If they say enough generalities about the future, a few are bound to be somewhat similar to events that eventually happen. Followers of warlocks and fortunetellers are emotionally driven, and latch on to any small statements the warlock makes, if it smacks of similarity to reality. But these followers don't realize that there is such a thing as coincidence. They view coincidental phenomena as actual forecasts, which have come true. The Torah tells us how we verify a true prophet; ALL predictions must come to be. If even one detail is not realized, he is a false prophet, and is killed. (Deut. 18:20)

One might ask, "what if an accurate predictor of events tells us to follow idolatry? Do we then follow him, as he predicted future events accurately, is he now completely validated by his forecast?" The answer is that one who forecasts accurately, will never oppose the Torah. Why? It is because his forecast demonstrates that he is receiving knowledge from G-d, and G-d will never give a true forecast that one opposes Torah. This is the case, as G-d instructs us that one who forecasts with 100% accuracy must be accepted by Torah standards. "Torah standards", not idolatrous standards. ■

Following G-d Perfectly

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The Torah says in Deuteronomy 18:9, "When you come into the land which Hashem your G-d gives you, do not learn to do as the abominations of those (other) nations." The Torah lists idolatrous prohibitions; passing children in between pillars of fire (Molech), inquiring counsel from your staff (Kosame), fortune telling, witchcraft, consulting the dead and other practices. We understand that all these idolatrous practices are not based on truth and knowledge, and thus, are completely false. But this section concludes with a statement not found at the end of other sections of commandments, (18:13) "Perfect (tamim) shall you be with Hashem your G-d." Why isn't this statement applied to other areas, i.e., kosher, laws of robbery, court systems, or any other section? Why is the statement of "Perfect shall you be..." mentioned here? What does "perfect" mean?

We must say that only in the area of the idolatrous practices is one in violation of "perfect shall you be with Hashem your G-d". If one were to eat non kosher foods, he would not violate this command to be perfect. To what specific objective does "perfect" with G-d refer? Framing the question this way, we are forced to understand these "abominations".

Each of the aforementioned idolatrous practices is an attempt - in some way - to procure information. In each case, there is an inquiry, or an attempt to secure oneself. A few examples will help to illustrate this point. Molech was a practice where a parent would pass his son or daughter through two flames - not burning the infant, according to at least one view. What was this objective? Let us consider: Fire is the one element, which opposes all biological existence. In all elements, an organism may survive, except in fire. Passing the child through unharmed, the father imagines that just as the child is shielded from flames, so he is shielded from all other mishaps during his life. It makes sense that the parent/child relationship forms the prohibition, as the parental instinct is

focused primarily on survival of their infant. This parent has a distorted notion that such action is fortuitous and actually "protects" the remainder of his child's existence. Kosame and Nichush were two practices, which foretold the success or failure of future events or actions. So too was the practice of consulting the dead. The goal is to obtain knowledge of the 'other side', or of future events. One would usually attempt to consult a dead friend or relative. As there was nothing to be learned about someone with whom you were already intimate with, the interest in consulting the dead must serve some other need; knowledge of the future, or more specific, the inquirer's future. Obsession with the dead is an expression of one's own immortality fantasy.

What common thread runs through all these practices? The answer is "knowledge". In each of these violations, the inquirer seeks security through some imagined source of knowledge, via a warlock, an enchanter, or the dead. He assumes there is a source of knowledge out there - besides G-d. This is precisely where one removes his self from following G-d perfectly, or rather, "exclusively". To assume sources of knowledge other than G-d, is to not follow G-d "perfectly". It is a dilution of G-d's unique and exclusive position. Therefore, the command to "be perfect with G-d", means, in other words, "do not assume other causes for the universe's existence and operation".

The followers of these practices assume that aside from G-d, there are other means by which the universe operates. They assume supernatural powers other than the perceived laws of cause and effect. This of course is baseless. Their insecurities propel them to seek forecasts for their actions, so they need not think for themselves. Relying on another's advice removes their need to make decisions. This is the opposite of G-d's plan that man engage the gift of intelligence. Similar to these idolatrous practitioners are present

day Jews who check a mezuzah when household members fall sick, or those who don red bendels, place keys in challas, use prayer books as protection, and those who ascribe powers to Rebbes, Mekubals and Kabbalists. I recently heard of a "Meir bal Hanase" practice where foolish individuals believe that by giving charity, you can locate a lost object. How ridiculous and damaging are such notions! What is "created", cannot oppose the "Creator". It is clear. Just as G-d set boundaries for the sea, "You set a boundary, they cannot overstep..." (Psalms, 104:9) so too, all creation follows the laws governing its matter and behavior. Just as parchment and ink mezuzas burn, so too they are static, and have no will, and cannot "do" anything.

All practices assuming forces aside from G-d are idolatrous. It makes no difference if we see "religious" Jews practicing such foolishness, or if we read about them under a Hebrew title, or authored by a Rabbi. What is the objective truth? That which G-d created and wrote in our Torah. He created and controls the universe; therefore, He alone determines reality. Not people, and not objects. The same mezuzah consumed by flames, people foolishly think possesses protective abilities. If mezuzas cannot protect themselves, how can they protect anything else?

G-d created everything. There is no other source. G-d's knowledge alone defines the operation of the entire universe. Therefore, there cannot be anything which can alter our reality, other than G-d, the Sole Creator.

"Perfect shall you be with G-d" means we must not deviate from following Him alone. G-d, to the exclusion of anything else, is the only Cause. This makes sense: how can That which has ultimate power, coexist with anything else laying claim to His power? G-d's ultimate Kingship and power negates anything else from having any power whatsoever. This is so clear; it boggles the mind that there are such idolatrous practices within our fold.

Having shown that the term

"perfect" (tamim) refers to man's requirement not to assume knowledge or powers outside of G-d, we have a question: In Genesis 17:1, regarding circumcision, G-d instructed Abraham to "walk before Me and be perfect". G-d again uses the term "perfect". How does this fit in with our theory? I believe it is 'perfect'! The Ibn Ezra says the following commentary on this command to Abraham to "be perfect", "You should not ask why (to) perform circumcision." On the surface, Ibn Ezra defies all he stands for, i.e. a life of understanding. How then can he verbalize such a statement? I don't believe Ibn Ezra is saying we should not use our minds. Rather, he is teaching us that Abraham should not make his performance of divine decrees dependent on his own intelligence. Ibn Ezra teaches that man can fall prey to an erroneous notion that "only when I know the reasons will I perform, but not before". To this, Ibn Ezra teaches, "do not inquire why the circumcision" - "do not let your inquiry determine your acts". "Be perfect with G-d and don't render your intelligence superior to His" - this is what Ibn Ezra is teaching, and why the term "perfect" is also used here. In this case too, man can go so far as to think of himself as a source of knowledge outside of G-d...making his subjective knowledge supreme to the knowledge contained in G-d's divine commands. G-d says to Abraham, "be perfect" - follow me even when your mind does not grasp with complete understanding.

We see Abraham does follow this concept, as he did not second-guess G-d when he was commanded to kill his son Isaac. A Rabbi once asked why Abraham inquired of G-d's decision to destroy Sodom, but not regarding Isaac's slaughter. The Rabbi suggested that Abraham realized he could learn about G-d's justice by asking. But regarding perfection via commands, Abraham felt he could not necessarily understand how a command would perfect him, although it did. He therefore did not ask about the killing Isaac - a divine command - but he did inquire about G-d's justice for Sodom. ■

Metaphor

Reader: I have a question for someone with knowledge of Hebrew. It deals with chapter 8 of Shir HaShirim. The enigmatic portion about Shlomo having a vineyard, that the keepers have to pay him 1000 pieces of silver, then the Shulamite saying her vineyard is her own, that 1,000 will go to Shlomo and 200 to the keepers.

My question: Could the Hebrew be rendered to express the following line of thought...The shulamite would be saying "My vineyard belongs to him. Therefore 1,000 must be paid to him, but the keepers only have 200." Is this a possible reading?

Thanks and shalom.

Mesora: As is the case with all Torah study, the Rabbis' words must be reviewed to gain insight.

This is a metaphor.

This metaphor is this: G-d has a vineyard (The Jewish people) which was handed over to cruel guardians (The Jews were exiled to oppressive nations) who extorted 1000 pieces of silver (these nations levied heavy taxes on the Jews)

In 8:12 the nations response is that they vindicate G-d's ownership of the Jews, and also confess their sin, by saying "the 1000 pieces of silver is yours", meaning, "we will pay you back for what we did to the Jews. Study this section with this understanding. □

for lunch. When we got there, it wasn't about lunch at all. These people were extremely rude to us. In front of our two teenage daughters, the man of the house read these scriptures to my husband:

For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not G-d. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him G-d speed. (2 John 1:7-10)

My husband then said, "are you telling me to leave your home?" Yes, was the answer. We were invited for lunch and my husband was going to remove a virus from their PC since he is a tech. Instead, he was attacked. There was much more said.

My question is, are we obligated to forgive them for this if they ask for forgiveness?

Mesora: If a person is genuine in his request for forgiveness, then we should give them the benefit of the doubt. But if in the same breath someone commits such an attack, and then asks forgiveness, I suspect he is simply guilt-ridden, and not sincere. Wait some time to forgive. If he doesn't request forgiveness on a later date, you need not forgive him, as he is clearly cleaving to his sin. Jewish Law entitles the victim to a few opportunities, and need not forgive on the first request. □

Common Ground

Reader: Dear Rabbi, I am a rising sophomore at the College of Notre Dame of Maryland in downtown Baltimore. Although I admit it feels odd, as I am Catholic, I am seeking

knowledge on the Jewish faith. I am writing about a passage from the Tanakh that has importance for both Christians and Jews so that both communities might find common ground. I understand how every aspect of one's religion is very important to him/her. However, is there one passage, idea, or ideal that you can say the Jewish religion holds even a little higher than the rest or relate to more than others? Your help is most appreciated. Thank you.

Mesora: You write "I am writing about a passage from the Tanakh..." but you don't mention the passage...Please inform me of the passage.

Regarding what Judaism holds "higher" than other issues, it is our position that religion must not deviate from what our senses and rationale tell us, but religion too, must follow proof. For this reason, we deny all other religions, as they are ALL based on the words of one man, claiming beliefs, bereft of masses proving their positions.

Conversely, Judaism is based solely on Revelation at Sinai, which ironically, the major religions accept as fact. This is because it is impossible to fabricate a story of such magnitude (2.5 million attendees). The stories we have today in every Bible MUST have happened. Otherwise, it would not have successfully been accepted as truth, and transmitted throughout all the generations until today. This story proves G-d's existence, and His selection of Judaism as His exclusive religion, for all Mankind. (Gentiles must keep 7 of the 613 laws, which Jews observe.) □

Fallen Angels

Reader: I cannot find the subject of the Nephilim of Genesis Chapter 6 on your search option. I have been studying about Judaism for a few years now. I would like it if you

could verify for me that the "intercourse" between the wicked angels and daughters of men was not sexual but a type of spiritual adultery and/or possession.

A friend and I are studying this presently. My friend says that the words in this chapter are easily mistranslated and at first one would think that angels and human women begat children.

In the New Testament it says: "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels of G-d in heaven." Matt. 22:30

Please direct me to the answer to this on your site if it has already been addressed. Shalom, Carol

Mesora: The Nephilim as well as the "children of Elokim" refers to men, not "fallen angels" or any misinterpretation like that. See the authentic Bible commentators such as Rashi. The Jews are those to whom G-d entrusted His Torah, and they must be the exclusive authority sought out to determine the meaning of the passages in the Bible. □

Common Ground II

Reader: What is a scripture that has great importance to Christians and Jews? How does this particular passage shed light on what Christians and Jews have in common and on what distinguishes them from each other?

I am trying to understand. Any help will do. Thank you so much.

Mesora: G-d told Moses, "You cannot know me while you are alive." Judaism holds steadfast to this, while Christianity supposes a trinity, Immaculate Conception, and that Jesus is G-d incarnate. We cannot know G-d, so all of Christianity's suppositions are baseless, and violate G-d's Biblical words. The difference between Judaism and Christianity is that Judaism follows reason and G-d's words, while Christianity apparently ignores them. □

Forgiving

Reader: I have a question about forgiveness being extended to Gentiles. My husband was born and raised Jewish and after his mid 20s he left Judaism. In 1999 he became a Christian. In May of this year he returned to Judaism and of course, many of our friends are not friends any longer.

This Friday afternoon we were asked to join some Christian friends

Letters

Satan

Reader: Good day. What is the Jewish belief about Satan? As a Gentile I have been taught that Satan is an evil fallen angel who is responsible for all evil on earth and who will be defeated by G-d at the end of "time".

Mesora: Satan in Hebrew means, "to turn aside". Satan is man's instincts, which turn him aside from G-d's Biblical commands. Nothing more. Judaism denies any idea of an evil, animated being. The only beings, which exist, are G-d, man, and G-d's angels, which we do not claim any knowledge of. But we do not believe in your concept. □

Common Ground III

Reader: I am writing a paper about reaching common ground between Jews and Christians. In Genesis chapter 12:1-3, G-d called Abraham out of Haran. It was in this passage that G-d made his first promises to Abraham about his descendants. As a Christian I see the passage to mean G-d blessing Abraham's descendants and through him all nations would be blessed. The blessing that all nations receive is through the birth of the messiah via Abraham's lineage. And by Christ dying for our sins on the cross we are blessed because through acceptance we become part takers of those blessings and heirs of Abraham. I'd like to know where we have common grounds and differences in the interpretation. Any suggestions on how we might all look and interpret that passage that will help us better understand each other and get along will be greatly appreciated. Thank you.

Mesora: Nowhere in these verses is messiah discussed, nor dying for other peoples' sins. Study the verses based on their content alone, and based on the Rabbis' commentaries. Do not lose the opportunity to learn G-d's true words, by projecting alien issues. Additionally, Judaism really has no common ground with Christianity, as our tenets have nothing at all to do with a man-G-d system, and any other Christian belief. □

Gentiles Learning Torah II

Reader: Dear Mesora,

I read your publication weekly and thoroughly enjoy it. In addition I often quote the Jewish Times in classes I teach.

Although I am not a judge, I take issue with your response concerning a reader's question about a Gentile attending Torah classes on Shabbat. You said a Gentile could not learn Torah, outside of his 7 Noachide commands. In Maimonides' ruling in his Law of Kings (Chap. 10 Law 9) he uses the verb "asak" (to "labor" in) not the word "lamad", which means to learn. The gentile must not, according to Maimonides, "labor in" teaching the Noachide commandments. This appears to mean that the gentile may not teach Torah professionally. However, to "learn" Torah, it is my understanding that it is not at all prohibited.

Mesora: See the Maharsha on Talmud Chagiga 13a. There, he says a Gentile who "learns" Torah other than his 7 is punishable with death. He uses "ha-lomade" (learns) not "asak" (indulges). The Maharsha clearly defines the prohibition as a Gentile learning Torah, outside of his 7 Noachide Laws.

Reader: You then correctly explain the severity for this prohibition - as Maimonides also implies - that this prohibition on Gentiles studying Torah is for the goal of not "blurring the line" of who is a Torah authority. Maimonides goes on to explain, and you seem to concur, that the prohibition applies to a Gentile who seeks to establish any additional commandment in addition to the 7 Noachides.

This clearly suggests that the prohibition for the gentile is not to teach - nor propagate - Torah to others, or establish oneself as an



authority on Torah.

This is not a prohibition for the gentile to learn Torah for himself.

As such, this prohibition would not seem to apply to a Gentile who attends classes about Judaism. In the next Law in halacha (law) 10:10 Maimonides goes on to state that for a gentile who wants to fulfill any "mitzva" (in addition to the Noachide Mitzvot) in order to receive reward - he is not prevented from properly doing so.

Mesora: Rabbi Reuven Mann suggested that Maimonides' halacha 10:9 addresses a prohibition for learning "for the sake of learning", whereas halacha 10:10 addresses learning "for the sake of performing". In the latter case, no prohibition exists. Rabbi Mann suggested that the prohibition is for a Gentile, is to study Torah as an end in itself, i.e., for the mitzvah of "limud Torah". But to study so as to know how to perform mitzvos, no prohibition exists. These are Rabbi Mann's words. Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l states in his letters (Yoreh Daya II, Siman 7) that this law 10:10 refers only to non-recurring mitzvos. But should a Gentile wish to continue performing a certain mitzva in addition to his 7 Laws, he is not allowed. This makes sense, as this

(continued on next page)



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The only poor question is the one not asked.



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would appear as a creation of a new religion: he is practicing something other than 7 Noachide Laws.

I reviewed many, and some lengthy letters of Rav Moshe Feinstein, and did not find where he permits a Gentile to learn other than his 7 Noachide Laws, or for a Jew to teach Torah to a Gentile outside of the 7. (One exception is outlined below.)

Reader: Maimonides also states that the gentile may go on to accept all the Mitzvot and convert to Judaism. How would this be possible if he were prohibited from learning Torah?

Mesora: The Rabbis address this point, teaching that for exclusive purposes of conversion, the prohibition on a Gentile to study is not applicable.

I hope the Rabbis explanations are not misconstrued. Torah is a completely righteous system. The prohibition on Gentiles to study is not a prohibition on them, as much as it is an appointment of the Rabbis. Through such a prohibition, the Rabbis and the Jewish nation remain the exclusive teachers of Judaism, and so should it be: they are the ones who received the proper facts and methods of interpretations. And should a Gentile enjoy the Torah so much, he may convert, enjoying the study of Torah as one of the Jewish people. In reality, there is no limitation placed on any person who desires to study. □

Noachide Resources

Reader: I would like to thank your publication for providing rational and logical arguments to many viewpoints that unfortunately have denigrated into emotional issues. I as a Noachide have learned so much in the past few months. Quite literally it has changed my life. I was once a Christian, but that has changed. Truth is something that can be discovered through rational thought, as I have discovered through your many articles. I hope that there continues to be more features that focus on the Seven Universal Laws. There is scant little out there in the intellectual world. I think it would be absolutely incredible if there were a weekly article, or perhaps a collection of articles to be collected later on. Once again, my heartfelt thanks to all those involved in your website and publication.

Sincerely, Kent W. Kromrey

Mesora: Thank you for your words Kent. -Moshe Ben-Chaim

Death or Repentance?

Reader: Thank you so much for all your hard work. It is because of Hashem and your dedication and the hard work of so many Torah Jews like yourself, that I now count myself as "Orthodox" and on the path of Truth. I have started going every morning to an Orthodox shul in Dallas and praying Shacharit services and have made friends with a rabbi and some other men there. I have received nothing but love, patience, and kindness from these people. They were even gentle today in correcting me when I answered an "amen" while still wrapping my tefillin. They have a spare "borrower" set of Tefillin for anyone in need, and I am using this until I can save enough money to buy a good set of my own.

Here is my question. When we pray that Hashem "destroy evil and humble the wanton sinners", we are actually praying for idolatry and ignorance to be ended by education and love towards individuals, correct? I understood that we do not pray for the death of the Palestinians but that they convert to B'nai Noach or become Jews, correct?

Mesora: When in war, we do not pray the enemies convert, but we kill them, as demonstrated by Moses, Joshua, King David...the list is endless. There is a distinction between those who are out to kill us, and those who don't threaten us, but have ill ideas and religions. For the latter, we educate them, and hope they see the light, and this is the meaning of this verse you quote as discussed in Talmud Brachos. But for the terrorists, we hope they perish. G-d commands Israel to annihilate the Amalekite nation for this reason. Some people deserve death. We carry out G-d's death penalty on our own if warranted. □

The Other Cheek

Reader: In Catholic Christianity the concept of forgiveness is embedded into us at a young age and overseen through the formal ritual of sacramental

confession. We are taught that forgiveness of others by ourselves in extremely important in order to be "Christian".

My question: Does the Torah or any formal teaching of Judaism address this issue as an ideal for daily living? In other words, does the Hebrew tradition put such importance on "turning the other cheek", and "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those..." as mine does?

I have a paper to write about the story "Sunflower" by Simon Wiesenthal and his doubts about giving a dying SS soldier forgiveness. I am trying to determine if there is any religious reason Wiesenthal would have felt compelled to forgive this man. This is for an ethics class. Thank you

Mesora: All human values, such as forgiveness, are modeled after G-d's truths, not by our subjective feelings. Many people, following their subjective "feelings" were the causes of great tragedies. Abel killed his brother based on feelings; Hitler followed his feelings, as did many others.

But the question is, "How does G-d demand we feel and act?" This is one reason why G-d gave us His Torah, His Bible, that we may learn true values.

Judaism sees a proof for the Five Books of Moses, but not for the New Testament. (You made read the article "Torah from Sinai" on our site for this proof.) Therefore, we follow G-d's system of justice contained exclusively in the Five Books, following and understanding all of His values, not our own. He knows what is best for us. We do not follow Christianity's doctrines, as there is no proof for that religion, and it is in direct violation of G-d's words in His Torah. That religion is false. G-d says the Torah will never be added to or deleted from, and that it is a Torah for all generations, for all peoples. All other religions are false, by definition.

In His Torah, forgiveness is definitely a good value. However, as is the case with all Jewish philosophy, reason and intelligence form the core of each and every

one of our values. Using our minds, we arrive at an appreciation and a conviction in G-d's system, and in His underlying reasoning. Thus, we don't forgive a crook if he does not return the object. We don't forgive someone who wrongs us if he stands firm in his evil against us, with no remorse. This is foolish. Forgiveness means we recognize the person has repented from his ways with 100% sincerity; he is no longer the same person who ascribed to corruption. Therefore, we no longer have any claim against him. We fully recognize and accept his remorse, and his new values. It is only this type of complete repentance that G-d forgives man. (See Maimonides' Laws of Repentance; Law 2:2) Therefore, this is the only model of a true forgiveness. But if someone has not repented, for what reason shall we accept and forgive the person? He is violating G-d's words! We cannot accept this, we do not "turn the other cheek", as this is a dangerous, Christian ethic. It invites harm to one's self, and ignores G-d's model of forgiveness. Forgiving one who still sins is not someone who G-d forgives, and therefore, someone we cannot forgive, as we follow G-d.

Studying G-d's Torah, one learns that repentance is a prerequisite for forgiveness. The Torah also teaches, "If one comes to kill you, arise early and kill him first." This means that we do not offer the other cheek to be smitten, but we take just precaution, and even kill our adversary first, when necessary to preserve our lives.

Whether Wiesenthal forgave or not, should not be what is studied, if you desire to know what G-d desires in His Torah. I did not read Wiesenthal's book, so I cannot answer your last question. I will say however, that there are crimes so great; that G-d commands the courts to kill the offender. Hence, repentance is sometimes available only through death, and sometimes, not at all.

If in some cases G-d does not forgive, we would be religiously corrupt, violating G-d's word by ascribing to this Christian ethic of "turning the other cheek". □