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Torah addresses multiple facets of the human personality: we are offered insight into fundamental truths about God, while our idolatrous tendencies are simultaneously countered.

Both are addressed in this issue.

Dedicated to Scriptural and Rabbinic Verification of Authentic Jewish Beliefs and Practices

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Weekly Parsha

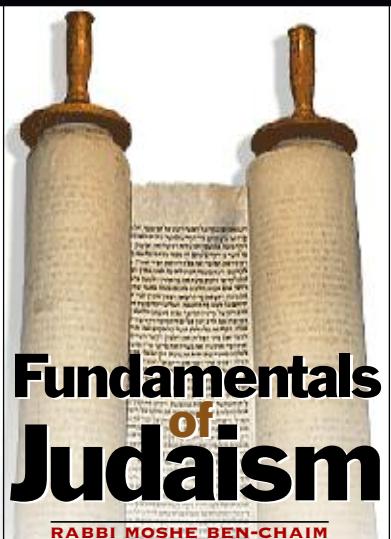
Vayishlach

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"And the sun rose for him as he passed Pnu'el and he was limping on his hip." (Beresheit 32:32)

Is suffering bad? We tend to regard the answer as obvious. Of course, it is bad to suffer! However, it is not clear that this answer is completely correct. The

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Fundamentals of Judaism

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Many times when studying Torah, we notice parallels between our currently studied topic, and another we learned previously. At times, these parallels are not central to the compared areas. However, when studying the laws of the Jewish court system – Bais Din – we come across an idea, which seems quite central to its laws, and to other areas. I will list the areas, which seem to contain this parallel, but will allow you the reader to try and detect this parallel I am hinting to, and think into the underlying concept.

1) Maimonides writes in his Laws of the Chosen House as follows:

Law 2:2: "And the transmission is in the hands of all, the place where David and Solomon built the Altar in the threshing floor of Arnan, it is the (same) place that Abraham built the altar and bound on it Isaac. And it is the (same) place

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the Gravesite of MOSES & its Affect on Idolatry

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by student

The Rabbis dispute whether Moses wrote the last eight Torah verses. What is the issue?

The last eight verses took place after Moses died. Either Moses wrote them through prophecy, or Joshua wrote them. Rabbi Simone says that Moses wrote them. But how may we understand the theory that Moses didn't write these verses? What theory demands this view? Additionally, what is the necessity to record his death in the Torah? The Torah is a book, which teaches truths about God. How does Moses' death conform to such truths? Although the Torah contains accounts of events, these accounts

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(Moses' Death continued from previous page)

Idolatry

do not serve as mere, historical records, but they contain profound teachings, as is the case with all Torah accounts. Maimonides cites the rabbinic ridicule of King Menasseh:

"There is a saying of our Sages (B.T. Sanh. 99b) that 'the wicked king Menasseh frequently held disgraceful meetings for the sole purpose of criticizing such passages of the Law. He held meetings and made blasphemous observations on Scripture, saying, 'Had Moses nothing else to write than, 'And the sister of Lotan was Timna.' (Gen. xxxvi. 22)'"

"Every narrative in the Law serves a certain purpose in connection with religious teaching. It either helps to establish a principle of faith, or to regulate our actions, and to prevent wrong and injustice among men; and I will show this in each case." (Guide for the Perplexed, Book III, Chap. L)

Maimonides establishes the principle that the Torah - every verse - must contain religious teachings. How is this true with regards to the account of Moses' death?

Deuteronomy, 34:6-7 reads as follows:

"And Moses died there, the servant of God, in the land of Moab by the word of God. And they buried him in Gai, in the land of Moab, facing Beth Peor, and man does not know his gravesite to this day."

What is so essential about where Moses was buried, facing Beth Peor? We learn that Peor was the primary, idolatrous god. What is the connection between Moses and Peor? Additionally, what demands that mankind not know Moses' gravesite? And if we are not to know his gravesite, why does the Torah offer so much detail?

There are a few more statements, which are relevant to this analysis. Talmud Sotah 13b says, "Moses didn't die." What does this mean? We know he died, as the Torah records his gravesite.

It is stated, "the Torah commences with God's kindness, and concludes with God's Kindness. It commences with God's kindness as we read, "and He clothed them (Adam and Eve) with animal skins." And it concludes with God's kindness, as we read, "And He buried him (Moses) in Gai." What is this principle, and how is burying Moses in Gai an act of kindness? We also learn that Moses' gravesite was prepared during the Six Days of Creation. Thus must be due to some essential aspect of his gravesite, but what?

There is one more Midrashic (allegorical) statement, which deserves our attention. After Moses died, wicked people sought out his burial site. When they were at the summit of the mountain, they saw his gravesite at the base. When they were at the base below, they saw it at the summit. They decided to break up into two groups: those at the base saw his site at the summit, and those at the summit, saw Moses' gravesite at the base. Then, they realized that what they both saw was a projection. Why were these grave seekers referred to as "wicked"?

Let us begin by examining Moses' unique character.

Moses' Unparalleled Distinction

The Torah says, "And Moses died there, the servant of God...". True knowledge of God converts one into a "servant" of God. Additionally, the ineffable name of God used here indicates that Moses obtained the truest knowledge of God. God's name "Elohim" is not used, as this word refers to how God bestows His providence on mankind. Therefore, we learn that Moses was the "servant of God", the ineffable name of God, teaching that Moses' knowledge was of the highest form, not limited to knowledge of God's providence alone. Through this knowledge, he was converted into God's servant.

**What is so essential
about where Moses
was buried, facing
Beth Peor?**

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(Moses' Death continued from previous page)

Idolatry

*God also concluded
His Torah with
kindness:
He gave us our
metaphysical
(spiritual) needs.
God gave us
an essential teaching
through Moses'
death.*

We learn that Moses was referred to as a "Sachel Nifrad", "a separated intelligence". This means to say that Moses reached the highest level of any human; he operated completely through his intelligence. Moses was in complete control of his instincts. Thus, he, over all others, was the furthest removed from the idolatrous emotions. Idolatry is not a "taboo", but a natural force. Its seeds lie within the core of every human psyche. Idolatry is not created from anywhere else than from man's own emotional and psychological drives. However, Moses, being completely removed from any instinctual component, had no relationship to such drives or emotions. Thereby, Moses reflected the entire Torah. The Rabbis teach, "One who denies idolatry, is as one who follows the entire Torah. One who follows idolatry is as one who denies all of Torah."

Not forming part of his prophetic teachings, Moses did not write about his own death. However, his death was not simply an event, but it served a precise purpose: it forms part of Torah. How so?

Moses' Death: The Lessons

The Rabbis teach that Moses' death atones for the sin of Peor worship. As we stated, Moses' very being, over all others, did not partake at all of the idolatrous emotion. Now, as he was buried facing the primary idolatrous entity Peor, God

teaches us this was done to oppose idolatry. The study of Moses suppresses the drive for idolatry. One cannot entertain Peor, without also recognizing that this very location is Moses' gravesite. This contrast between Peor (idolatry), and Moses, forces one to recognize the fallacy of idolatry. He recognizes Moses, the one who opposed idolatry par excellence. Thus, one being "atoned" for Peor means the sin of Peor is forgiven, as Moses' nature suppresses the idolatrous drive in others. "Atonement" is anything, which functions to remove man from evil. Moses' gravesite faces Peor precisely to remove man from the worst evil: idolatry. For this reason, Moses death was essential to Torah. It was not simply a recorded historical event.

This explains why the Rabbis state, "Moses did not die". Of course Moses is dead, but "not dying" means that his death was not a negative: he didn't simply pass with no benefit to man. Moses death functions to teach this truth, that idolatry is false. He "did not die" means, his teachings have not ceased: his death was not without a teaching of its own.

This event is so essential; the Rabbis stated that Moses' gravesite was created during the Six days of Creation. This means that Moses gravesite was so essential to creation itself, it forms part of Creation. God's physical world cannot exist without an eternal and concrete lesson uprooting the fallacy of idolatry. Moses gravesite achieves this teaching, thereby forming part of the goal of Creation itself.

Why were those seeking Moses gravesite called wicked? The reason is because a grave can also function as a vehicle of idolatry – human worship. This was the very reason Rashi states that Jacob asked not to be buried in Egypt, lest the Egyptians worship his grave. Jacob did not desire that in death, he should detract from mankind's objective to recognize and serve God. Even more does this apply to Moses, and this is why God did not reveal to man Moses' gravesite. Moses' death serves to oppose idolatry. Therefore, inherent in his death, God orchestrated this event that there would be no possibility that Moses become deified, and mutually exclude the very goal of his death: uprooting idolatry. Moses gravesite must remain hidden.

This kindness God showed to mankind: He gave us a vehicle through Moses' death, which counters the fallacy of idolatry. God commenced His Torah with kindness, by supplying Adam and Eve with their psychological needs. Now embarrassed at their nakedness, God placated them psychologically. God also concluded His Torah with kindness: He gave us our metaphysical (spiritual) needs. God gave us an essential teaching through Moses' death. □



In his Laws of the Chosen House, Maimonides stresses the significance of the Temple mount. For what reason did all of these great individuals value this location?

that Noah built (his altar) when he exited the Ark. And it is the (same) Altar that Cain and Ebel sacrificed upon. And on it Adam the First sacrificed a sacrifice when he was created, and from there, was he created. The Rabbis stated, 'Adam, from the place of his atonement was he created.'

2) Bais Din (Jewish courts) cannot rule on capital punishment cases unless they are convened in Lishchas Hagazis. This is where the great Sanhedrin sat in judgment. In Talmud Avodah Zara 8b, Tosfos explains that this location was "next to God's presence" in the Temple area. In other words, capital punishment cases cannot be ruled upon unless the Great Sanhedrin is in session. This also applies to other courts: they too cannot rule on such matters unless the Great Sanhedrin is in session in Lishchas Hagazis. This seems odd, as what difference does it make to other, outlying areas courts, whether Bais Din is in session in the Temple near God's presence? This would seem to be an issue for only the Great Sanhedrin. However, as Tosfos state, "the place is causative". Meaning, this place is indispensable.

3) In Parshas Shoftim (judges) we read as follows (Deut. 17:8-13):

"When a matter will be hidden from you in judgment, [whether in distinguishing] between blood to blood, between judgment to judgment, between plague to plague, words of contention in your gates, and you shall rise and ascend to the place that God your God has chosen. And you shall come to the priests, the Levites and unto the judge who will be in your days, and he will discern and will tell you the matter of the judgment. And you shall do in accord with the word that they from that place which God has chosen, and you shall guard to do as all they instruct you. In accord with the Torah that they instruct you and [in accord with] the judgment they say to you, do. Do not veer from the matter they tell you,

[to turn] right or left. And the man who acts wickedly, not listening to the priest who stands to minister before God, your God, or unto the judge, and you shall kill that man and vanquish the evil from Israel. And all the people shall hear and fear and not act anymore wickedly."

4) God states that He will instruct man from between the two cherubs upon the ark (Exod. 25:22):

"And I will appoint My word to you there, and I will speak to you from above the Kapore (Ark cover) from between the two cherubs that are on the Ark of testimony, all that I command you to the Children of Israel."

5) Moses received his prophecies from between the two cherubs mounted on the ark's cover (Numbers 7:89):

"And when Moses came into the Tent of Meeting to speak with Him, and he heard the voice speaking to him from above the Kapore (Ark cover) that was on the Ark of Testimony, from between the two cherubs, and it spoke to him."

6) The cherubs themselves were structured as looking downwards towards the ark. (Exod. 25:20, Exod. 37:40)

7) Isaiah 2:3:

"...for from Zion comes forth Torah, and God's word from Jerusalem."

8) When praying, we face the direction of the Temple.

9) Prophecy was given only in the land of Israel.

10) Ethic of the Fathers (3:6) states that when people study Torah, God's presence is with them.

Are you starting to see any parallel? Think into these areas for a bit before continuing, and then proceed to read our questions and answers below.

Questions

In his Laws of the Chosen House, Maimonides stresses the significance of the Temple mount. For what reason did all of these great individuals value this location? Why is the Bais Din's proximity to God's shechina – His presence – essential for rendering judgments? Why, in Parshas Shoftim, is the phrase "the place that God has chosen" repeated? What is its significance? Why is it necessary that God deliver His address, and that Moses hears his prophecy from between the cherubs? What is the idea behind the cherubs looking at the Ark? What about the Ark is capturing the cherub's attention? What is the necessity for Jerusalem - the "seat of Torah" - to exist as stated by Isaiah, and that our prayer must be directed there?

Wisdom, Prophecy & Prayer

In Torah study, or any area for that matter, our

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God

method of analysis is crucial to our results. Therefore, it is wise to take small steps, positing only those ideas which we are confident are well supported. We need not answer the 'big question' immediately. Rather, as we proceed in our analysis, we hope each step paves the path to the next. We never know what the outcome will be, but we can be sure that if our gradual observations are solid truths, our final discoveries have a better chance of being true. But if we build on unsupported premises, we may veer completely off track.

What is the first step we may take here? The parallel in all of these cases is one thing: a precise location. Why is "place" so essential in all of these cases, and can we distinguish between these cases?

We note three, distinct institutions: 1) judgment, 2) prophecy and 3) prayer. What these three institutions share can be summed up in one word: wisdom. In all three, man either approaches wisdom, or is approached by it.

When man studies Torah to render a judgment, he is the one who approaches the world of knowledge, or wisdom. This is also true when one prays or sacrifices to God: he approaches the concepts contained in prayer and sacrifice, reviewing his own values as they compare to what is truly correct and good. Making such a comparison, man must weigh his values and realign himself with God's Torah system. However, prophecy is the institution where God approaches man. It is the reverse of study and prayer. But in all three cases, man is "interacting with knowledge". In all three cases, we are directed by God's precisely formulated laws to recognize a "place": be it Jerusalem as the seat of prophecy, prayer and in Bais Din's judgments; the cherubim during prophecy; the Temple Mount in sacrifice; or the Ark which the cherubs focus upon.

The First Fundamental

It appears that the idea permeating all these areas of knowledge is man's need to be cognizant of a "source": God. We learn this first fundamental: ***Nothing in creation is responsible for knowledge - God is the exclusive Source.***

Although highly elevated existences, over and above man, angels too are part of creation, and recognize God as the source of all knowledge and wisdom, displayed by the cherubim facing downwards at the Ark which contains God's knowledge, i.e., the Torah contained therein. In all of our cases, we are directed to a location, which is identified exclusively with God. Be it Jerusalem, the Ark, or the cherubim on the Ark...these all refer to God's selected city, His Torah, or His presence.

But we must ask: why is it essential that man be cognizant that nothing in creation is responsible for knowledge? Meaning, knowledge is not embedded in creation, rather, creation merely "displays" God's knowledge and wisdom.

Man's perfection and fulfillment are achieved when he arrives at a love of God. This appreciation functions in two spheres: 1) to promote man's interest in study and propelling his curiosity, and 2) to result in man's renewed and advanced love for his Creator.

The two commands, which underscore all others, are the Love and Fear of God. Fear of God is the prerequisite for man's initiation into study of the universe. It is only when man possesses the fear and awe of God, that his studies will be driven by this conviction. He knows there is immense and immeasurable knowledge awaiting his discovery. This causes man to greatly anticipate his studies, seeking what he knows must be brilliant and highly pleasurable concepts. This realization does not allow the Torah student to be satisfied with inconsequential findings, but he seeks profound ideas, new categories of thought, and new vaults of wisdom. He knows the Creator of the universe works with majestic ideas, and this is what he seeks. This fear and awe of God promotes our study.

How does Love of God fit in? Love of God is the 'result' of our study. When we arrive at new knowledge, we are fascinated by this knowledge. However, we must not stop there. We must realize and be drawn to the Source of this knowledge. This attachment to the source of all knowledge is what the "Love of God" means. So both fear and love of God, serve to drive our learning, and act as the focus of our love, respectively.

What Obscures this Fear and Love of God? If man were to assume a source exists other than God that is responsible for wisdom, our appreciation that God is the exclusive source, would no longer be. Our life's objective would be lost. Therefore, in all areas where man either approaches or is approached by God's wisdom, we must have something on which to focus. And this focal point must be exclusively identified with God. Therefore, "place" is essential. In our discussed areas, each one makes use of a location tied to God's existence: Jerusalem is His chosen city, His Ark houses His Torah, and the cherubs recognize God.

But it is interesting, even with regards to Jerusalem and the Ark, these have a center, and function not of themselves. These locations or objects have the Torah as their underlying distinction. "For from Zion comes forth Torah, and God's word from Jerusalem." Jerusalem is distinct only because of its seat of Torah. The Ark too is merely a housing for the Tablets and the Torah.

The Second Fundamental

Torah is proof of God's revelation at Sinai. We have the Torah only because God demonstrated His incontrovertible existence to millions, and gave us His Torah at that event. We then arrive at the next fundamental: ***our relationship to God (judgment/prayer) and Him to us (prophecy)***

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*Nothing in creation
is responsible for
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the exclusive Source.*

Our relationship to God (judgment & prayer) and Him to us (prophecy) must never be divorced from the proof of His existence.



God

must never be divorced from the proof of His existence. The absolute truth of His existence must be constantly reiterated in these specific institutions. The Ark's contents – Torah – point to Sinai, from where we received Torah. Revelation at Sinai was the single event proving God's existence.

Unlike other religions, Judaism demands mankind live by proven truths, not accepted beliefs. And the most essential truth is God's very existence: the Sole Cause for all that exists. Being mindful of this primary tenet, we understand that all the answers in life lie with God. We turn to Him alone through His Torah.

Creation vs Creator

We live in a physical, sensual world. We are subject to attachments to beauty, wealth, approval, insecurity and numerous earth-bound drives and emotions. We may become more physically oriented, than spiritual. We easily forget that which is not visible. The Temple - a physical location associated exclusively with God's existence - keeps us mindful of our goal: to strive for truth and recognize there is a Creator.

We learn according to Sforno, the Temple exists only as a response to the sin of the Golden Calf. In that sin, man demonstrated his inability to relate to God abstractly. Therefore, God created the institution of Temple so man may have a location through which he may satisfy his need for physical worship. Temple strives to redirect man to the truth, although conceding to his needs as a sensual being.

Man may erroneously assume knowledge is derived from something other than God. Man may be astounded at creation, to the point, that creation completely obscures the Creator. Many scientists arrive at theories like evolution with no God. The world to them takes on a life of its own, and they are satisfied that it exists and even came into being...without a Creator. But those with intelligence conclude that the very universe we witness, and all of its precise laws, could not have created itself. In our relationship to wisdom, we are constantly reminded to focus on this idea, that God is the only source of wisdom. Wisdom in not "in us" or "in creation." Wisdom is God's alone. We simply perceive it. Rashi on Exodus 25:22 states that when Moses heard his prophecies, a voice first emanated from heaven, and then descended in between the two cherubs. Rashi enunciates this idea. Knowledge is from God "in heaven". This idea is compounded with the realization we too are "created".

What about mankind pre-Sinai? Before Revelation at Sinai, rare individuals like Abraham realized God from His created universe. Nothing more was required. Maimonides actually states that if one wishes to fulfill the command to Love

God, he should study the physical universe. Creation alone affords the intelligent man all that is needed to recognize God as the sole Source of all the wisdom that exists.

One may ask whether the pre-Sinai life afforded those generations the same opportunities we have been gifted through Torah. However, the patriarchs too possessed knowledge of the Torah's fundamentals, although not via a written Torah. Similarly, as Genesis commences with creation, we too possess both directives: to study Torah, and understand creation as the indisputable evidence of the Creator. Both, pre-Sinai and now, knowledge of Torah truths and the physical universe have been available.

The Third Fundamental

We have posited that, 1) Nothing in creation is responsible for "knowledge". God is the source of all knowledge. 2) Regarding institutions wherein man relates to wisdom and God is the 'subject' of that institution (prayer, prophecy and study) it is crucial that we are absolutely convinced by proof of God's existence. This is why these institutions refer back to Sinai: the one event precisely orchestrated to serve as proof of God. For if God is not a reality to our minds, our approach to Him cannot take place. The very act of "relating to God" demands that we possess the accurate idea of God, and that idea is the absolute need for His very existence: all that exists requires a Creator. If we don't view God's existence as essential, our idea of God is false. Therefore, all of our cases listed at the outset contain references to Sinai. But this is not the end of the line.

As I reviewed these ideas, I felt unsatisfied. I am certain of these first two fundamentals, but felt there was more to be discovered. I felt some idea was still concealed. Then this morning, a profound thought occurred to me. In all of our cases, there is yet another more primary idea.

The essence of prayer culminates in the "Atah Kadosh" blessing, which means that God is removed from our minds - we cannot know Him. "Kodesh" or "holy" means "removed", or separated. As a Rabbi once taught, we commence prayer (Shmoneh Essray) describing God's relationship to our forefathers, the patriarchs. We then move to the blessing where we praise God for His future miracle of resurrecting the dead. While in this blessing we still refer to God as relating to man, the personalities of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are not mentioned. So we have moved from the first blessing, which is more identifiable with known individuals, to a less personal relationship with God. We culminate these primary blessings with our third blessing, "You are removed from all we know". There is a clear progression: we are moving away from a familiar view of God, to an admission of complete ignorance. This idea is also

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God

Man is ignorant of God's true nature.

found in the Temple's central focus: the Holy of Holies. It is forbidden to enter this room. This demonstrates that man cannot approach God. It is not that God can be "in" a room, but it displays this idea of our ignorance of God's nature. And again with regards to prophecy, Rashi states that the voice emanated from heaven: an unreachable location. We arrive at the third fundamental: ***man is ignorant of God's true nature.***

Man must be humble enough to admit his ignorance. We must also know that we cannot fathom the extent of God's knowledge: since we do not know what God is, we cannot know other aspects, like His knowledge. God is beyond human comprehension. God told Moses, the greatest prophet, "Man cannot know me while alive."

The Temple Mount's Significance

Returning to our initial idea, "location", can we add to what we have established? We understand that man requires a location to relate to. This is a concession. But is there another idea here? I believe so. Let us ask why "this" location was selected. We learned that all of the patriarchs and kings maintained this location's significance...but when was this location initially "given" its significance? We learned that it was the place where God created Adam. This was the initial event, imbuing this place with its significance. What is the significance of Adam's creation, and Creation in general?

The Torah teaches that God created the universe "yashe m'ayin", "out of nothing". Prior to the physical, by definition, there was nothing physical. Therefore, God's very Creation of the universe was "matter made from nothing." We do not know, nor will we ever know how this was achieved. This is God's knowledge. This very point is our third fundamental in this paper.

Now, in order to demonstrate this ignorance, what does man do? By retaining this location for all future prayers, sacrifices, prophecy and the Temple's site, the patriarchs demonstrated an important idea: we mimic God's selection of this location, thereby admitting that we cannot choose a "better" location. This means to say that we subjugate our knowledge to His. We cannot know better than the Creator. So this act of "copying" His designated place is the Torah's method of admitting our inferiority to God and His knowledge. As King Solomon said, "Do not be excited on your mouth, and (on) your heart do not hurry to bring forth a matter before God, because God is in heaven, and you are on Earth, therefore let your words be few." (Proverbs, 5:1)

This now explains another point. We do not claim, "God is there" at this site. Although we build His Temple there, we know He takes up no space - He is not physical. So it is not said that we

relate to Him in that sense. In what sense do we relate to Him through a location? It is as we are saying: we relate to God with our demonstration of our complete admission of His unfathomable nature. Subjugating all of our decisions to His Torah demonstrates our conviction that His knowledge far surpasses that of man. As a Rabbi once taught, this act of aligning ourselves with this most fundamental truth, makes us a reality before God, and He then relates to us.

Summary

We conclude: 1) Nothing in creation is responsible for knowledge - God is the exclusive Source. 2) Our relationship to God (judgment/prayer) and Him to us (prophecy) must never be divorced from the proof of His existence. 3) Man is ignorant of God's true nature.

Remaining firm in daily Torah study, we will ever more appreciate God's knowledge, how it is perfectly in line with our nature, to strive towards the most enjoyable and rewarding life. With honesty and continued Torah study, with every new idea, we step closer to appreciating the Source of all wisdom, although never scratching the surface.

And as we progress, we must reach out to those unaffiliated with Torah knowledge. The Torah demands that we must learn, do, and teach. We must recognize that all people – Jew and Gentile alike – are God's creations, and as such, deserve our attention and education. We do a great harm when we remain silent, not taking a concern in humanity's primary objective: to study Torah and love God. We are to be a light to our own, and to the other nations. Do not let your fear of rejection prevent you from educating others. For in time, the truth can change a person. And then, you will have given a person the greatest gift: the eternal life of his soul.

To many, the mere idea of a life pursuing wisdom does not register. They are confident in their life's decision over God's instructions. Many people are trapped by the allure of physical pleasures. They are further convinced of their decision's correctness by the pristine fantasies they create. To them, the life of the physical is the only life perceived. However, as we continue to study, we will again see more parallels throughout Torah. These parallels will imbue us with the realization that they are truly the work of a Designer. Man could not have created such a system. We must share our knowledge, and our humility towards God.

Let today be the first day of many, where you start a Torah class, take a friend out to dinner, invite a family to your home, email someone, or simply call another person...enabling those unaffiliated or with incorrect ideas to benefit from your knowledge. □

(Vayishlach continued from page 1)

Weekly Parsha

lives of the Avot – the forefathers – included suffering and anguish. For example, Avraham endured ten trials. These trials were not pleasant experiences. Yet, it is clear that Hashem brought about these trials because He felt they were necessary. So, perhaps there is some positive element in suffering and struggle. Let us consider the issue more closely based upon an enigmatic statement of our Sages regarding this week's parasha.

Yaakov returns to the home of his father. But, first he must encounter Esav. He knows that Esav's anger has not abated. He fears the encounter. The night before his meeting with Esav, Yaakov battles with a man. Our Sages explain that this man was an angel representing Esav.^[1] The angel realizes that he cannot overcome Yaakov and he strikes him on the hip. Yaakov succeeds in subduing his adversary but is injured. As a result of this injury, Yaakov was limping the following morning as he passes Pnu'el.

Our pasuk tells us that in the morning, the sun rose for Yaakov. This is a difficult phrase to understand. The sun rises on a daily basis. It does not rise for a particular individual. What does the pasuk mean in stating that the sun rose for Yaakov? There is a parallel phrase used by the Torah at the beginning of the previous parasha – Parshat VaYetze. The Torah tells us that Yaakov arrived at a place and he spent the night there because the sun had set. Rashi points out that the pasuk is describing a relationship between two events – the setting of the sun, and Yaakov's decision to spend the night at this place. However, in the pasuk, the events are reversed. Rather than stating that the sun had set and, therefore, Yaakov decided to spend the night in this place. The Torah first tells us that Yaakov decided to spend the night, and then it tells us that the sun had set. Why does the Torah reverse the order? Our Sages respond that the sun was not due to set at that moment. But, as Yaakov arrived at this place, the sun set prematurely. This was done in order to cause Yaakov to pass the night at this special place.^[2]

Based on this parallel, our Sages explain that just as the sun set prematurely for Yaakov in Parshat VaYetze, the sun rose early for him in our pasuk in order to comfort him from his injury.^[3] In other words, in each instance, the sun departed from its usual cycle on behalf of Yaakov.

This is an amazing interpretation of the two passages. The most obvious problem with this interpretation is that our Sages are suggesting that two rather remarkable miracles were performed on Yaakov's behalf. Yet, the Torah

only provides a veiled reference to these miracles. We would expect miracles of this magnitude to be treated by the Torah more clearly and thoroughly. Furthermore, the proposition that Hashem interfered with the movement of the sun on Yaakov's behalf contradicts another statement of the Sages. They teach us that Hashem only interfered with the travel of the sun on three occasions. Yaakov's experiences are not included among these three.^[4] This suggests that the Sages' statement that Hashem caused the sun to set early and rise early for Yaakov is not intended to be taken literally. Instead, it is a metaphor. However, this only adds to our difficulties – for now we must try to understand the meaning of the metaphor.

In order to unravel the meaning of the metaphor, let us begin with Parshat VaYislach. Sefer HaChinuch explains that Yaakov's conflict with the angel represents Bnai Yisrael's struggle with the descendants of Esav. In this struggle, the descendants of Esav will not succeed in destroying Bnai Israel. However, they will be able to harm Bnai Yisrael. The harm that Esav's descendants will inflict upon Bnai Yisrael is represented by the injury Yaakov experiences. The rising of the sun represents the coming of Moshiach. The Messianic era will eventually arrive and Yaakov will be healed from the injury caused by Esav's descendants.^[5]

If we accept this interpretation of Yaakov's struggle with the angel and the rising of the sun, we can also understand the meaning of Hashem causing the sun to rise early. The Sages maintained that the redemption of Bnai Yisrael is not to be understood as a natural phenomenon. Throughout history, nations rise to power and then are overshadowed by new, emerging powers. We are not to understand the ascent of Bnai Yisrael as another iteration of this historical pattern. Instead, we are told that Hashem will interfere with the travel of the sun in order for it to shine for Yaakov. The redemption of Bnai Yisrael will be a result of the direct intervention of Hashem.

We can now use this interpretation to understand the meaning of the sun setting early for Yaakov during his journey to Haran. Once we accept that the rising of the sun represents redemption, it seems likely that the setting of the sun and the advent of darkness represent the opposite phenomenon – the experience of exile and suffering. The implication of this interpretation is that sometimes Hashem causes the sun to set on people, or on Bnai Yisrael. In other words, He initiates a period of exile or struggle.

This is difficult to understand. We can easily

accept that Hashem will interfere with the normal course of history in order to redeem His people. But, why would Hashem cause the innocent Yaakov or His people to suffer and struggle? Of course, we know that Hashem may bring about suffering as punishment and chastisement. But, in this incident, Yaakov is brought into darkness. What sin had Yaakov committed? The implication is that even though Yaakov was innocent of wrongdoing, Hashem brought darkness upon him. This is intended to communicate a message. Suffering has other purposes! What are these mysterious purposes?

Before attempting to answer this question, let us consider Yaakov's situation more closely. In Yaakov's case, what was the impact of the early setting of the sun? Because Yaakov entered into darkness, he went to sleep and had a dream. The dream contained an important prophecy. Hashem told Yaakov that the promises that He had made to Avraham and Yitzchak would be fulfilled through him. The message of the incident seems to be that there are some truths that can only emerge in the darkness. Just as light illuminates, so, too, darkness can be revealing. Suffering can uncover deep truths that cannot be recognized when we are happy and content. What are these truths?

Let us consider a related issue. Our Sages did not deny that the wicked can experience happiness. Instead, they explained that both the righteous and the wicked experience happiness in life. However, their experiences with happiness are opposite of one another. The righteous first experience suffering. This suffering later gives way to happiness. The wicked begin life in happiness, but end it in misery.^[6] Why do they have opposite experiences?

Let us begin by understanding the experience of the wicked person. The wicked person believes that one can achieve happiness through indulgence of material and evil desires. At first, this person does experience a modicum of happiness. When frustrated, this person assumes that the solution lies in a more determined devotion to self-indulgence. However, reality can only be held off so long. As time passes, the wicked person begins to recognize that his or her happiness has been fleeting and meaningless. The wicked person's life ends in despondency and emptiness.

The righteous are not born with all of the answers and the innate ability to always follow the truth. Instead, the life of the righteous person begins as a struggle. This person must abandon all of the falsehoods that guide

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others. The righteous person must abandon the hope that happiness can be secured by material and instinctual pursuits. This person must do battle and struggle with the limits and biases of one's own personality and prejudices in search for the truth and in devotion to the Torah. It is a difficult struggle. But, the outcome of this journey is that the righteous person achieves true, meaningful happiness. In short, both the righteous and wicked are on journeys. The wicked person is traveling on the road to despondency. The righteous travels along the difficult path to the happiness that comes from living according to the truth of the Torah.

But, let us consider the tribulations of the righteous more carefully. Why is the path towards Torah devotion and truth so difficult? Of course, one reason is that one must overcome one's preconceptions and instincts. However, there is another reason. Some truths about ourselves, who we are and our real values only emerge under stress. We learn about ourselves when we are tested. And, sometimes the most revealing and important tests are the most challenging. When we lose a loved one, experience illness or other setbacks, we are tested. In our reactions to these challenges, we learn about ourselves. We discover strengths and uncover weaknesses we must address. Without these tests, we would not truly know ourselves. So, these challenges and the suffering that they engender are catalysts for personal growth. Without these catalysts, this growth cannot take place.

This seems to be the meaning of the sun setting early on Yaakov. Only when challenged by darkness could Yaakov come to recognize certain truths. Hashem brought Yaakov into this darkness in order to help Yaakov grow. So, returning to our original question, suffering is not always bad. Sometimes, whether suffering will be positive or negative depends on our reaction. If we treat misfortune as a challenge and use it as a catalyst for personal growth, then we can create light within the darkness. We can grow from our challenges. □

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 32:25.

[2] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 28:11.

[3] Mesechet Chullin 91b, See Rashi.

[4] Mesechet Taanit 20a.

[5] Rav Ahron HaLeyve, Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 3.

[6] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 27:29.

Tehillim Groups

JESSIE FISCHBEIN



I was reading "Duties of the Heart", and what Rabbenu Bachya said seems to disagree with the current practice of getting together to read Tehillim (Psalms), where many people do not know what they are saying.

He is talking about two tefillos (prayers) that he composed, an entreaty and an admonition:

"Whoever undertakes this should adopt the following method. He should recite the Admonition while seated, after first prefacing it with whatever he chooses of the usual psalms or the like. He should then recite the Entreaty, standing and then bowing low, until it's end. He should then kneel and recite whatever supplications he wishes and follow them with the psalm that opens "How blessed are those of upright way" (Tehillim 119) and the entire group of psalms that bear the title "A Song of Ascents" (ibid 120-134). If one chooses to recite other prayers or use any other order, he may do so; I merely suggest to you the most fitting way of going about it."

The main thing, my brother, is to have purity of spirit when you recite these prayers, and that you concentrate on them properly, recite them (and what follows them) slowly, and not let your tongue get ahead of your heart; for a little bit of prayer, with the heart's devotion, is better than a lot recited rapidly with the tongue, when your heart is empty from it."

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

Peace

DOUG TAYLOR & RABBI MORTON MOSKOWITZ

"Look at that! I haven't seen one of those in years."

I was pointing to a "Make Peace, Not War" bumper sticker on a worn-out Volkswagen that looked like it had survived Woodstock... several times. My friend, the King of Rational Thought, and I were on a walk, enjoying one of the last warm, sunny afternoons before the inevitable chill of fall.

"Interesting," he said thoughtfully. "Tell me, what's wrong with that?"

"You mean the car? Well, let's see. The paint's rusted through, the suspension is shot on the right side, the---"

"Not the car," he laughed, "the bumper sticker."

"It's on crooked?"

"All right," he said, "let's try it another way. What does it mean to 'make peace'?"

"That's easy," I replied. "It means being peaceful with everyone. You know. Not starting fights, not making trouble, not hassling anyone, stuff like that."

"You just listed three negatives," he said. "I didn't ask what making peace isn't. I asked what making peace is."

I started to speak, then realized I didn't have a clear answer.

"It's almost an oxymoron," said the King of Rational Thought, sensing my dilemma. "The term 'make peace' implies that peace is a positive thing. But it isn't. It's a negative thing. Peace is the absence of conflicts. The issue is not to make peace. The issue is to remove conflicts. Of course, that means you have to figure out what your conflicts are and how to get rid of them."

We passed the lighthouse and headed north.

"But isn't that just semantics?" I said. "Peace means there aren't any conflicts. That seems pretty obvious."

"Ah, but there's a big difference between the idea of 'making peace' and the idea of removing conflicts," he replied. "'Making peace' is a nice, fluffy emotional term that almost everyone will say they agree with. But it doesn't lead to action that produces peace. Removing conflicts, on the other hand, is a solid, rational activity. You can take active steps to remove conflicts. Besides, need I remind you that I just asked you what making peace meant and you didn't have an answer?"

"Ok, I hear you," I said, not very pleased with myself. "So what's the root cause of conflicts?"

"It's like this," he said. "Whenever there's a conflict, there has to be a flaw. Either you're in conflict with yourself, or you're in conflict with external reality. Think about it. Every conflict you have is that way. The external conflicts occur because you're not living in line with reality. The internal conflicts usually occur for two reasons. Either you're unwilling to accept external reality, or the animal part of you is in conflict with your conscience."

"Incidentally," he said as we turned east, heading back to our cars, "that's why animals don't have conflicts. Their instincts are in line with nature."

"Can we get rid of our conflicts?" I was hoping for a magic answer. I certainly had plenty of conflicts to try it out on.

"Absolutely," he replied, "but it's not a magic answer."

I glanced sharply at him. How did he know---

"To solve external conflicts," he continued, "you need to study reality and accept it. That



doesn't mean you shouldn't try to right wrongs or make the world a better place. But you must do so realistically. To solve internal conflicts, you have to face the fight going on within you, make a realistic assessment of the various sides, and then act accordingly. And you can't skip a step. Making a decision about something before you've completed a rational analysis of the problem may result in some action, but it won't bring you peace."

We reached our cars. I was busy thinking about a few of my own conflicts that could stand some serious analysis. And then a question popped into my mind.

"Do you suppose the owner of that Volkswagen with the bumper sticker is at peace?"

"I don't know," said the King of Rational Thought, as he started his engine, "but you can probably find out by watching him when he returns to his car."

"Why?"

"His left front tire is flat." □

Vayishlach

The Master

of Politics

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by student

Chazal say that from parshat Vayishlach, specifically Yaakov's interactions with Eisav, we can learn how to deal with the other nations of the world, and we can gain an understanding of the concepts underlying anti-Semitism. The gemara emphasizes this point by noting that one of the Tanaaim would carefully study this parsha before visiting Rome and meeting with the Caesar. Vayishlach is a parsha of political insight conveying the narrative of Eisav's hatred for Yaakov, carefully describing how Yaakov precisely calculated how to confront his brother's hatred, avoiding contention and potential destruction by the great army of Eisav.

Yaakov was a true master of politics; this is made clear from his dealings with Lavan. Even from the first encounter with Lavan's household, Yaakov demonstrates his political savvy as Vayeitzei 29:12 reads: "Yaakov told Rachel that he was a relative of her father..." whereupon Rashi comments that the Midrashic interpretation of this verse is that Yaakov's implication was: "If he [Lavan] intends to be deceitful then I, too, am his brother in deception..."

In this light let us examine Yaakov's message to Eisav at the beginning of Vayishlach: "Yaakov sent messengers ahead of him to Eisav, his brother, to the land of Seir, to the field of Edom. He commanded them saying, this is what you should say to my master, Eisav. 'Your servant Yaakov says, with Lavan I lived, and was delayed until now.'" (Vayishlach 32:4-5) Rashi commenting on the words "with Lavan I lived" states that Yaakov was implying to Eisav that he "did not become an officer or anyone of importance but remained solely a transient guest. It is not worthy of you to hate me on account of your father's blessings, Be master over your brother for it has not been fulfilled in me..." Rashi is emphasizing the extent to which Yaakov acted to avoid battle with his brother. Yaakov diminished his own stature, allowing Eisav to feel superior, in order to foster peace.

While there is much to be discussed regarding

this type of political strategy, surely we can see the logic behind this approach, especially when it comes to saving Jewish lives. What is more difficult to understand is the second interpretation of Rashi regarding the words "with Lavan I lived." Rashi writes: "the gematria [numerical value] of garti [lived] is 613; as if to say, I have resided with the wicked Lavan and yet have kept the 613 commandments and have not learnt from his wicked deeds." What does Eisav, the wicked, the rejecter of Torah values, care if Yaakov kept the 613 commandments while he lived with Lavan? Furthermore, it seems this message could only antagonize Eisav.

Chazal say, quoting the Rambam in his Igeret Teyman, that the reason the mountain from which the Torah was given was called Sinai, was because from this same mountain came down sinah [hatred] to the other nations of the world. Meaning to say that the very source of the hatred that the other nations harbor toward the Jews is the Torah itself. What then did Yaakov intend to accomplish by implying to Eisav that he kept the Torah, when this very Torah was the source of Eisav's hatred for Yaakov?

Before answering these questions, a psychological principle of hatred must be understood; a distinction must be made between the cause of an individual's hatred, and the action of expressing that hatred. The gemara (Pesachim 48b) tells us that the hatred of an ignorant Jew toward the Torah scholar is greater than the hatred the idolaters have for the Jewish nation. This is indeed a perplexing gemara and must be understood in its own light. For the purposes of our discussion, however, it is interesting to note that these same ignorant Jews, whose hatred for the Torah scholar, according to Chazal, is greater than the hatred of an Eisav for Yaakov, are very often the greatest Torah supporters. The emotion of hate is powerful and complex and is disguises itself in many ways. One part of an individual's psyche may possess great hatred for the Torah scholar while another part of an individual's nature

causes him to overcome this hatred and be the Torah scholar's greatest ally. Thus we see that the cause of an individual's hatred for another person does not translate into that individual acting upon that hatred. The question remains, however, why the expression of hatred might at times remain dormant, kept at bay in the unconscious of the human psyche, and why in other instances hatred will manifest itself in its full assertion.

There is one further principle underlying the emotion of hatred, namely, the aggressive expression of one's hatred toward another person always seeks out a justification from reality. The Koran, which expresses great hatred toward the Jews on numerous occasions, often points out that the Jews transgressed their commandments and are therefore lowly people. Sura 2:63 writes: "And well you know there were those among you that transgressed the Sabbath, and We said to them, "Be you apes, miserable slinking!" And we made it a punishment exemplary for all the former times and for the latter, and an admonition to such as are God-fearing." The Koran claims that the Jews did not adhere to the tenets of their own law and thus according to their Torah the Jews are despicable people. In this way Mohammed tried to justify the expression of his hatred toward the Jews in the Koran. We can now begin to understand Yaakov's implied message to Eisav. While the source of Eisav's hatred was the Torah itself, this did not mean that Yaakov's adherence to the Torah would antagonize Eisav to destroy Yaakov. As explained, the cause of an individual's hatred does not directly translate into the action of expressing that hatred. Furthermore, by Yaakov's implication to Eisav that he merely lived with Lavan and, rather than learning from his evil ways, that he kept the 613 commandments, Yaakov would not permit Eisav the justification to act upon his anger and destroy Yaakov. Yaakov did not afford Eisav the opportunity to find fault with him and in this way Eisav could in no way assuage his guilt and justify acting upon his hatred toward his brother.

There is an amazing Rashi in support of this idea in Toldos regarding the blessing Yitzchak gave to Eisav. Toldos 27:38-40: "Yitzchak, his [Eisav's] father replied and said to him..... you shall live by your sword, and you shall serve your brother. When you have cause to be grieved, you will throw off his yoke from your neck." And on the words "when you have caused to be grieved," Rashi writes, "... meaning to say, when the Israelites will transgress the Torah and you will have justification to grieve over the blessings which he took, [then] you will throw off his yoke." And so in parshat Vayishlach Yaakov makes it very clear to Eisav, his brother and enemy, that this time had yet to come. □

Letters

Judaism: Uncompromising

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

**CONCERN FOR MANKIND DEMANDS
WE CRITIQUE HARMFUL IDEAS
AND FALSE RELIGIONS, IN PLACE
OF CONCEALNG THE TRUTH TO
SEEK THEIR FAVOR.**



*God's commands
are absolute*

Gerard: I came across your website by chance. From reading it seems that there is little hope of peace for Israel and its neighbors based on the hard-line views expressed. I live in Ireland where the media always portrays the Israelis as the problem, and revered Arafat, so I decided to find out for myself. I would be pro Israel / pro Bush (a minority in Ireland) but the hard-line "Taliban" type views expressed on your site do not help your case at all. Maybe the deceitful French are right after all, I hope not, but you have to compromise too.

Regards, Gerard

Mesora: Gerard, Not explaining to which articles you refer I cannot offer feedback. However, if you refer to our recent articles on Arafat, and the Bible's command to obliterate the likes of him, this is not an area where we can compromise for one reason: God's commands are absolute: God commands to kill the murderer, as he destroys society. God Himself created the Flood during Noah's era for this reason, and

destroyed all the inhabitants of Sodom. He alone knows what is best for mankind, as He alone defines "morality". His laws must be upheld.

Gerard: I agree with you that the world is much better off without Arafat; he will now pay dearly for his crimes. My issue with your website is its views on Christianity. Neither Muslims nor Christians are going to disappear so it is as well to get along with each other and in the end, let God himself decide who is/was right. On the Palestinian / Israeli issue, it always surprises me how badly the legitimate views of the Israelis are ignored by Irish media, perhaps the Israeli Embassy in Ireland could make its views known more forcefully. RTE News for example would say "IDF shot X Palestinians today" without telling us that these Palestinians were armed, or up to no good. This type of bias is molding (ignorant) public opinion to Israel's disadvantage. Sadly nowadays "perception is reality."

Anyway, stand your ground and I wish you well and have a good week.

Gerard

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Letters

If Jewish leaders and Rabbis do not speak out against the harmful nature other religions defend, they commit a grave injustice to all members of mankind.

Mesora: Regarding the anti-Semitic slant of Irish news, we are in agreement. But regarding Muslims, Christianity, and other religions...again, we follow God's Bible, which defines what is idolatry, and what are correct and incorrect modes of worshipping Him. God created the Bible, so we must take care to adhere meticulously, and uncompromisingly. Just as one does not compromise his medication to secure his physical life, certainly, one must not compromise his attachment to truth: his spiritual life.

We will continue to address other religions and explain how they deviate from God's one religion: His Biblical law. This must be done, if other religions are to learn how they falter, and if we are to teach Jews how Judaism differs from other religions and is God's only will for mankind. Teaching what is true, demands that we also demonstrate how other possibilities are false. Truth, by definition, is 'exclusive' by nature, so when we wish to teach that Judaism is true on a given point, we must display arguments exposing the absolute fallacy of all opposing views.

Yes, people may perceive us as "attacking" other 'religionists', although what we value is not that, but rather to expose the fallacy of false 'religions.' There are two variables projected onto us here: "attacking", and "religionists". Our response: attacking is a false perception. Judaism's goal is to educate, and not to attack. Additionally, we do not address "religionists", but rather, a "religion". Addressing an individual person serves no purpose, as he comes and goes, while it is the false religion that breeds fallacy and evil, and which unfortunately continues when unopposed. Unfortunately, the strength and conviction echoed in one's words is often misinterpreted as religious fanaticism. But what the listener must do is consider the ideas uttered, not the passion in one's voice. If they are sensible, follow them. If not, disregard them.

Judaism's Goal: Uncompromising Truth

I agree with you, Christianity and Islam are not "going away"...so long as they believe their religions are God's will. This makes the work of Jewish educators and leaders all the more crucial for the world at large. It demands that we do not seek world approval in place of truth. We harm Jews and Gentiles alike, when we compromise the truth for other, selfish agendas. Unfortunately, many of today's Jewish leaders fear man more than God, and seek handshakes and public venues with cardinals and popes, instead of deplored harmful, false religions which massacred Jews, exposing their idolatrous notions, and educating their followers back to God's undiluted Bible, His Torah. Judaism and Jews do not exist for the goal of obtaining favor. Those seeking public adoration, destroy Judaism, certainly when they

position themselves as Jewish leaders.

Although religions have apologized for the murders of Jews, their corrupt religions, which are the cause of these murders, have gone unchanged. It still puzzles me that we hear Christianity claiming its love for Jews; yet admitting that Jews will burn in hell for rejecting Jesus. What then does Christianity love about Judaism? This reveals the lie of this religion. And if Jewish leaders do not speak out against the harmful nature these religions protect, they commit a grave injustice to all members of mankind. Sadly, Jewish leaders fail at leading Jews. A true Jewish leader must accept that teaching truth will create friction. But if he educates properly, demonstrating his objective is for the good of all peoples, only then does he fulfill his God-given role. Only then will the other religions have the opportunity to learn God's will. But as long as such leaders downplay their true obligation, concealing truth to retain popularity, mankind suffers.

Judaism is based on man's search for truth, and Torah knowledge. Our goal is to learn and teach, so that Jew and Gentile benefit from the wisdom God has permeated throughout His world. This is where man derives true happiness and fulfillment. Therefore, all that a Jew does must reflect this position as a "chosen people": the one's who are to proliferate truth, by God's will. This demands that we do not seek objectives that compromise truth. Therefore, we must denounce ideologies and religions that are corrupt and continually mislead others, forfeiting generations of human minds and souls in their wake.

Any act of recognizing another religion directly opposes God's will. God created but one Bible, one law, and one religion. So the popular notion of "just get along" with other religions must be defined. Yes, we must be peaceful in our actions with all men. But we must not let this peace derail our obligation to educate Jews and these other religions of their fallacy. Abraham demonstrated such perfection. For this reason, God appointed him as the founder of His religion. Had Abraham simply kept peace with others, to the point of not seeking to educate them, he would not be Abraham – he would not be the prized soul worthy of such appointment. "Peace" to the point of disregarding another human being's soul is not "productive peace" and must not be sought out. This is another error of both Jews and Gentiles: they feel "peace" is the ultimate goal of mankind. This is absolutely false. Peace is merely a backdrop for man's search for truth. To simply live in peace, while disengaged from truth, is a useless peace. Man misses his mark – his existence is worthless.

We would gravely distort Judaism if we were to be more concerned with public approval, than

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Letters

All other religions are false - their claim to prophecy does not stand the test of proof, as does Judaism.

Judaism alone is based on a mass revelation at Sinai – “incontrovertible history” – as is any history witnessed by millions.

When one sees another as possessing equal rights to existence and knowledge, as he too is created by God’s hands, this should engender a sense of concern for him, equal to one’s self.

with truth. We understand this will cause animosity, and this will be, so long as others remain attached to emotional beliefs, instead of being attached to intelligent truths. We cannot allow any other concern to obscure the tenets of God's one religion. He knows the future, and nonetheless, gave but one system to mankind, and that should be followed by all. He did not need to 'update' his system based on unforeseen events, as Christianity claims, or alter any of His laws or His intended descendant of Abraham, as claimed by Islam. All other religions are false, as their claim to prophecy (God's selection of their religion) does not stand the test of proof, as does Judaism. Judaism alone is based on a mass revelation at Sinai – "incontrovertible history" – as is any history witnessed by millions. Conversely, all other religions are based on the words of one, or a few individuals: you either believe he received God's word or you don't. However, blind faith is a terrible reason to select how to live.

What we hope occurs, is that readers of all religions will judge Judaism's arguments, determining with reason alone what makes sense to their minds...without feeling Judaism is "out to get them." We are not. The Jew's mission is to make Bible study and Biblical truths available to all religions, so in the future, all will have access to God's one system, selecting their lifestyle using free will and intelligence, not faith. Missionaries do not care why one changes their religion. The Mormons' post mortem conversions prove this. We are not missionaries, wishing to coerce. Coerced religious practice is of no value: the person is not practicing as a result of his thinking, but out of some fear or emotional need for acceptance. Such religious practice displays no merit by the adherent. Such a life is of no value. This applies to one who follows Judaism as well, if his mind is disengaged, and does not understand Judaism's distinction over all other religions.

The bottom line is that all religions cannot be correct, as they oppose each other. The question: which one is truly God's law? This question is what we hope to elucidate, with honesty, no politics, and with no animosity towards any other human being. The true Bible teacher teaches out of a concern for others, and nothing else.

I have many friends from many religions, and I do not withhold my opinions, as I feel they will respect that my words are spoken out of my

concern for them. I discuss Kosher laws with my Islamic grocery store owner, red bendels with Jews, and why I reject Jesus with Christians. But many Jews remain silent, fearing friction in their relationships with other Jews and Gentiles. Their silence allows those ignorant of truth to remain this way. They are truly selfish and inconsiderate Jews.

When a human sees another as possessing equal rights to existence and knowledge, as he too is created by God's hands, this should engender a sense of concern for him, equal to one's self. This is what Hillel taught as man's primary goal: loving your neighbor as yourself. His concern must then extend to the most primary of areas: this person's attachment to truth. Teaching should be a natural desire of one who cares for others. And to teach, one must be concerned with truth alone, although he understands that he will ruffle the feathers of some individuals. But this passes, and eventually, the teacher should be viewed as possessing genuine concern for others, and the students will then appreciate his words, no longer emotionally defending their views, but transferring this initial defensive mindset, to a desire to simply know what is true, and what is false.

If someone has arguments against what we write, we always invite such dialogue. Unfortunately, what we usually experience are members of other religions, or extremists within Judaism, as simply sounding off against us, with no rational argument supporting their views. So far, on every occasion where readers wrote in claiming we attacked other religions or sects of Judaism, our subsequent request for their supporting argument against our view went either; without any response, or a demand we be more 'accepting', or we received arguments bereft of reason. We have posted these responses online so others too may realize how these positions are baseless, corrupt, or simply ignorant. This exposes their lack of reason, and hopefully, they and others will recognize this.

Abraham went from culture to culture, using reason to expose false religions, and teaching truth. I hope you appreciate our goal: the only path God approves is an uncompromising, dedication to truth.

Thank you,

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim