

Turning 150:

Next week marks our landmark 150th issue. We invite your ads in support. See page 3 for advertising details.

Earning Reward.

Saadia Gaon explains why God did not simply create man with the inability to sin: had He done so, man would not earn a larger reward for acting out of free will. Saadia Gaon states this is a greater kindness of God.

ESTD
1997

JewishTimes

Volume IV, No. 18...Feb. 4, 2005

WWW.MESORA.ORG/JEWSHTIMES

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

Download and Print Free

IN THIS ISSUE:

PARSHA: MISHPATIM	1,4,5
WHEN FRIENDSHIP IS THE FOE	1-3
BOOKS: THEFT	6
LETTERS: KUZARI, CONTINUED	7-9
LETTERS: TREASON II	9
MISHPATIM	10-11
PARSHA: ABSOLUTE TRUTHS	12-15

NEW AT MESORA:

SEE THIS AND OTHER FEATURES AT OUR SITE



Join our new, audible and interactive live classes. Just log-in, listen and interact with your questions.

*See the schedule at this link:
www.mesora.org/liveclasses*

Weekly Parsha

Mishpatim

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"And these are the laws that you should place before them." (Shemot 20:1)

One of the debates that regularly emerge in education concerns the proper role of the teacher in the educational experience. Should the teacher impart knowledge to the

(continued on page 4)

WHEN FRIENDSHIP IS THE FOE

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

In "A Challenge To Christians And Jews" (The Jewish Week, 1/28) Rabbi Yitz Greenberg is quoted as anticipating a "future of acceptance and respect" between Jews and Christians. Certainly, God created all members of mankind, desirous that we attain our true purpose: studying His creation, pondering His infinite wisdom, and acting justly and charitably. Not only must we dedicate ourselves to this lifestyle, we must also secure this good for all members of mankind. For this reason, and due to his concern for his fellow, our forefather Abraham did not keep his discoveries to himself.

(continued on next page)

THE "SILENT" ENEMY

(Friendship continued from previous page)

Religion



*Withholding truth
& wooing Christians
is cruelty: a Jew is
obligated to represent
God's truth over all
else, even friendship.*

Jesus worship is idolatry: it is baseless, it obscures God and all our prophets forbade deification of man as it also violates reason. A Jew should be honest with Christians who can listen...and discuss the flaws of their religion. This was the perfection of Abraham.

The world had sunk to the depths of idolatry and fantasy. Upon his realization of truths, and the fallacies harbored by many cultures, Abraham disproved their corrupt, religious beliefs, demonstrating what is true, and what is God's desire for man. Due to his accurate intelligence, his moral perfection, and his desire for mankind's well being, God established Abraham's seed as a beacon to mankind in the form of Torah educators. God desired the good for all peoples.

Later, God reiterates His plan to the Jews (Deut. 4:6):

"And guard them (the 613 commands) and do them for they are your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations who will hear all these statutes, and they will say, 'but what a wise and understanding people is this great nation'."

Here, God unequivocally distinguishes Judaism from other religions. He desires that the other nations realize the beauty and perfection of the Torah system.

We violate God's word; simultaneously causing a grave injustice to all other religions when we hide God's Torah from them, as they too must follow the Torah's seven Noachide laws. But far worse are claims like those of Rabbi Greenberg when he said; "Judaism and Christianity spread the message of God and morality to the world in different ways." God says otherwise: that other nations will respect Judaism - to the exclusion of their religion. Otherwise, they would not shift their admiration from themselves to the Jews. God desires the world understand truth, and entrusted Abraham's descendants with the mission to teach His one, exclusive religion. On this point, Rabbi Greenberg errs again with his statement, "Maimonides shared his positive historical evaluation of Christianity." In truth, Maimonides actually states the opposite in his Laws of Kings, Law 11:10 (Capach Edition):

"Can there be a greater stumbling block than this (Christianity)? That all the prophets spoke that the Messiah will redeem Israel and save them, and gather their dispersed and strengthen their Mitzvot, and this one (Jesus) caused the Jews to be destroyed by the sword, and scattered their remnants and humbled them, and exchanged the Torah, and caused the majority of the world to err to serve a god other than the Lord."

Maimonides makes it clear: Christianity "serves a god other than the Lord". This is understood: their notions of God violate God's very statements to Moses, "For man cannot know Me while alive" (Exod. 33:21) and to Isaiah, "To what shall your equate Me that I should be similar?" (Isaiah, 40:25) With Christianity's fabrication of a man-god, Christianity does in fact imagine to know what God is, also equating God to man. Christianity denies God's fundamentals, thereby, worshiping fantasy - not God. All of their principles are thereby compromised. Rabbi Greenberg's statement "Jews should appreciate – but not convert to – Christian spirituality" unveils the Rabbi's own struggle with his position. For if Christianity is worthy of a Jew's "appreciation", why shouldn't a Jew convert? Conversely, if a Jew should not convert, then Rabbi Greenberg feels that something in Christianity is not to be "appreciated". Either way, he contradicts himself.

(continued on next page)

(Friendship continued from previous page)

Religion

Friendship is not the final goal if it causes one to silence his obligation of educating others on truth, and unveiling their fallacies.

Most inexcusable is Rabbi Greenberg's statement, "Jesus is not a false messiah, merely a failed one". This is clearly not true, as Jesus was not of Davidic descent – a requirement of the Messiah. Additionally, a failed messiah does not flagrantly contradict Torah principles...however, Jesus did. In Matthew 5:39 Jesus' "turning the other cheek" opposes the Torah principle of preempting your would-be assailant. One must protect himself by Torah law. (Talmud Brachos 58a) In Matthew 23:3 Jesus instructs others not to follow the Rabbis' actions as indicative of law. He calls them hypocrites numerous times. Jesus is not a failed messiah, but a false messiah, as he attacks Torah leaders, and violates "Makchish Maggideha", "defaming the Torah's teachers." This practice also violates the Torah prohibition of "Judges you shall not curse and a prince among your people you shall not accuse." (Lev. 22:27) In Luke 4:18, Jesus claims God spoke to him. But, as Jesus was not of Davidic descent, he cursed the Rabbis, and opposed Torah, he cannot be the Messiah and his claims that God sent him are false. He is thereby the one God describes as, "And it will be that the man who did not hear My word and speaks in My name, I will requite it from him." (Deut. 19:18) And as quoted above, Maimonides states that Jesus "exchanged the Torah, and caused the majority of the world to

err to serve a god other than the Lord."

What is the correct attitude? God did not create "Jews" and "Gentiles" - rather, He made "man" and "woman." There is but one "type" of man, and thus, only one religion makes sense. There was one mass revelation, at Sinai. God also commands us not to alter His Torah at all. Religions are man's fabrications, and after 2448 years since Adam, God gave the Torah to direct all mankind back, towards the lost truth. God desires the Jew educate his own, and all other people. God desires the good for all mankind, and we must follow this directive, showing concern for Gentiles as for Jews.

Friendship is a good, and all agree that Christians and Jews should live in peace. But friendship is not the final goal if it causes one to suppress his obligation of educating others on truth, and unveiling their fallacies. In fact, the greatest friendship is expressed when we enlighten our Jewish brothers and sisters, and Christian friends to their errors. We then also observe God's will. King Solomon said:

"Rebuke a wise man and he will love you". (Proverbs, 9:8)

God's words and those of Maimonides do in fact display Rabbi Yitz Greenberg's position to be unsound. □

THE JEWISHTIMES. EMAIL: ALLMEMBERS-ON@MESORA.ORG SUBSCRIPTIONS

What was the purpose of 10 Commandments inscribed on tablets of sapphire, if those very commands were also received in the Torah scroll?

Read, 'The Tablets, Torah and Sinai' for an answer

believe, or "prove" G-d's existence? Is there proof? Read "Torah from Sinai".

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

JewishTimes

b. 13, 2004

www.Mesora.org/Jewishtimes

Download and Print Free

The Tablets TORAH and SINAI

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Certain facts or events, basic to our beliefs, are sometimes so quickly embraced, that our questions are overlooked, or not even detected. Children often ask us about our accepted foundations. Their questions are undiluted by social pressures, so they see the large holes in our beliefs, and not being repressed, they verbalize them. We hear their questions - from them. We hear their questions - from the mouths of babes - and wonder why we never realized such problems. Of course, our ignorance is the source of these problems. But if we didn't ponder the questions that children ask - and certainly if we have no answers - we are missing some basic principles of

TORAH from Sinai

[Reprint]

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Introduction

Judaism, as seen through the eyes of the scholars of the Talmud, has its unique religious orientation. While basing itself on a cataclysmic event - to miracles as the source of its intimate time occurrence

Turning 150

Next week marks the 150th issue of the JewishTimes. Say thanks with a 1/4 page 3rd anniversary ad at just \$250. Email your text or your 4"x4.5"ad to: info@mesora.org Reserve your ad with a payment on our secure donations page: <https://www.Mesora.org/Donate>

**Cover Page Dedication: \$1800.00
(Appears above "JewishTimes" logo)**

All payments are tax deductible

Weekly Parsha

student? Should the teacher assume a more passive role and merely act as a facilitator in the student's personal learning experience? The technological breakthroughs of the last few decades have caused this debate to resurface. With the use of computers, the internet and other technological devices that have been introduced into the classroom, the option of creating a classroom in which the teacher is more a facilitator and less an instructor has become very real. But it is important to remember that we should not use technology simply because it is available. We always need to ask, "What is the best model for the student?" The first passage of this week's parasha offers some insight into this debate.

In the first passage of our parasha, Moshe is commanded to teach the laws of the Torah to Bnai Yisrael. However, Hashem does not merely instruct Moshe to teach the laws to the people. Instead, He tells Moshe to place the laws before the people. The Sages ask why Hashem refers to placing the laws in front of the people rather than using the more obvious formulation – to teach the people. Various responses are offered. Rashi quotes one of these responses. Hashem's instructions contain an injunction. Moshe cannot fulfill his mission simply by reviewing the laws repeatedly until the people are fluent in them. He is required to teach the laws in depth so that the people understand the underlying principles.[1]

The precise meaning of Rashi's comments is not clear. We would imagine that a thorough knowledge of the law – the achievement of fluency – is quite an accomplishment. What additional element is Moshe required to provide in his transmission of the law? Rabbaynu David, author of the Turai Zahav, explains that Hashem is commanding Moshe to not limit his teaching to the Written Law. In addition, he must transmit to the people the Oral Law. In other words, the Written Law represents only a portion of the corpus of the law. The Oral Law provides explanation and interpretation of the Written Law. Moshe's instruction must include the Oral Law.[2]

There is an interesting insight provided by this interpretation of Rashi. This interpretation of Rashi posits a specific relationship between the Written and Oral Law. The Written Law is the basic corpus of the entire Torah. However, it is very brief and concise. In order to fully understand its meaning a commentary or explanation is needed. This commentary is the Oral Law. This formulation of the relationship between the Written and Oral Laws is expressed in some interesting halachot.

One of the most fundamental differences between the Written and Oral Laws is contained in their names. The Written Law is recorded in written form in the Chumash. The Oral Law

cannot be recorded. Our Sages only allowed the Oral Torah to be recorded in written form because they feared that a strictly oral transmission had become impractical. And if the Oral Law would not be recorded, large portions would be lost.

But let us consider the original requirement – that the Written Law should be recorded and the Oral Torah should not be recorded. Why was it initially prohibited to record the Oral Law in written form? Torah Temimah explains that this is an outcome of the relationship between the Written and Oral Law. As explained above, the Oral Law is a commentary and elaborate explanation of the Written Law. As a result, it can only be properly transmitted through the efforts of a scholar with his students. Because the Written Law is concise and relatively simple, it can be mastered from the text. In contrast, the Oral Law is far more detailed and intricate. It cannot be mastered simply through the reading of a text. It must be transmitted through the more intimate and personal forum of the teacher and student. In order to preserve the student – teacher relationship as the means of transmitting the Oral Law, it was not initially committed to written form.[3]

Following the lead of Torah Temimah, we can also understand the history of the recording of the Oral Law. At first the Mishna was redacted. This was followed by the compilation and recording of the Gemara. Later the commentaries on the Talmud were recorded. In other words, the Oral Torah was recorded in discrete stages. Why was this necessary? Once it was decided by the Sages that necessity dictated that the Oral be recorded, why was it not immediately recorded in its entirety? According to the Torah Temimah, this incremental approach is quite understandable. The Sages struggled with two conflicting considerations. First, it was necessary to commit the Oral Law to a written form. But they also recognized that the Oral Law could only be effectively transmitted through the teacher – student relationship. Recording the Oral Torah undermines this relationship. Once recorded, the Oral Torah can be accessed by any student. The role of the teacher is undermined. In order to resolve these conflicting considerations, the Sages recorded the Oral Law incrementally. At each stage the Sages balanced their concern with the preservation of the Oral Law with their determination to maintain the traditional and essential relationship between teacher and student. Enough of the Oral Law was recorded to assure its preservation. But as much as possible of the Oral Law was left in its original oral form to be transmitted by teacher to student.

Let us consider another interesting halacha. Maimonides explains that it is permitted for a teacher to accept payment for instructing students

(continued on next page)

Page 4



Moses appointing Joshua

in the Written Law. However, it is not permitted to accept payment for providing instruction in the Oral Law.[4] It should be noted the common practice to compensate teachers of Oral Law is based on the position of Shulchan Aruch.[5] But let us consider the position of Maimonides. What is the basis of the prohibition against providing compensation for teaching the Oral Law? Why does this prohibition not apply to teaching the Written Law?

Maimonides provides an interesting response to the first question. He explains that just as the Almighty taught Moshe the Torah without receiving compensation, so too we are required to provide instruction without compensation.[6] This provides an explanation for the prohibition. But now our second question seems even more justified! Hashem did not just instruct Moshe in the Oral Law without compensation. He also provided Moshe with instruction in the Written Law. Based on Maimonides explanation of origins of the prohibition, we would think it should also extend to the Written Law.

Perhaps, based on the above analysis of the relationship between the Written and Oral Laws, we can answer this question. As we have explained, the written and oral formats of these elements of the Torah reflect two different instructional models. The Written Torah is recorded in order to make it readily accessible to every student. However, the Oral Law is not

written in order to foster transmission by teacher to student. If this is the case, let us consider the role of the teacher in the instruction of each Law. In the case of the Written Law, the recorded format is designed to make the Written Law accessible even without the aid of an instructor. Therefore, the instructor is not an inherent element in the transmission of the Written Law. The student learns from the text. The teacher provides assistance and facilitates learning. But he is not the source of the knowledge. The teacher has a completely different role in the transmission of the Oral Law. In this case, the Law is designed to be transmitted from teacher to student. The teacher is not merely a facilitator and aid to the student. The teacher is charged with the responsibility of acting as the agent for the transmission of the Law.

This distinction suggests an answer to our question on Maimonides. A teacher can be compensated for providing assistance to the student in mastering the Written Law. This is because the teacher is not truly acting as an instructor. The student learns from the text with the aid of the teacher. However, we cannot provide compensation for actually providing Torah instruction. In the case of the Oral Law the teacher is actually assuming an instructional role. Maimonides maintains that for such a role, the instructor cannot be compensated.

So is it best for a teacher to facilitate the student's own learning? Is it the role of the teacher to assume a more active role as an instructor? If we use the Torah as a model, there is no one answer. It depends on the material the student is studying. There are some cases in which the teacher can best serve the student by acting as a facilitator. However, in some areas this is not the appropriate role. Some areas knowledge cannot be transmitted without the teacher – student interaction and dialogue. In such cases, the teacher is an essential element of the learning process. □

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 21:1.

[2] Rabbaynu David ben HaRav Shemuel HaLeyve Divrei David Torai Zahav, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1978), p 253.

[3] Rav Baruch HaLeyve Epstein, Torah Temimah, Introduction.

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

[5] Rav Yosef Karo, Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 246:5.

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



Theft

DOUG TAYLOR & RABBI MORTON MOSKOWITZ

"Do you think Griffey will hit a home run?" I asked, adjusting the TV.

My friend, the King of Rational Thought, didn't answer. Probably in the kitchen unpacking the snacks we just purchased, I thought. It had been a long week, and we had decided to spend a lazy afternoon watching the Mariners.

I looked into the kitchen to see him staring thoughtfully at the grocery sales slip and the change in his hand.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

He looked up. "I just realized the store gave me back more money than they should have," he replied.

"Oh," I said, wondering why he was giving it a second thought. "How much extra did they give you?"

"One cent," he said. "I'll need to take it back. Want to come?" He reached for his coat.

I stared. "One cent??? You're going to walk a mile back to that store for ONE CENT? ARE YOU CRAZY?"

"Not the last time I checked," he said, and headed for the door.

"But what about THE GAME?"

"It'll be here when we get back," he replied calmly. "Coming?"

Oh well. I'd heard the Star Spangled Banner before. I threw on a jacket and we stepped out

into the cool autumn breeze.

"Why are you doing this?" I asked, as we walked along. "It's only a penny. And it will take us half an hour to get back."

He looked at me, surprised. "You mean you don't know?"

I shook my head. "No, I don't."

"Hmmm. Well then, let me ask you a question. If you go take \$50,000 out of a bank that doesn't belong to you, what would you call that?"

"Uh, I'd call it robbery."

"Right. But how about if it were only \$1,000?"

"Same thing, obviously."

We turned a corner.

"What if it were only one cent?" he asked.

"Look," I said, "no one's going to get bent out of shape over a penny."

"You didn't answer my question," he said. "Is it robbery or not?"

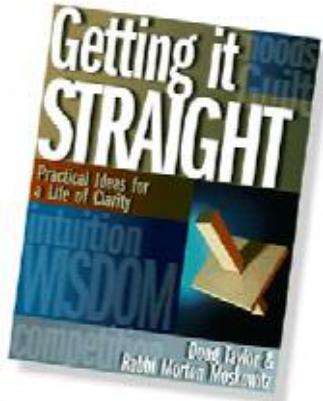
Exasperated, I said, "OK. If you want to split hairs, it's robbery."

"You're right," he said. "And it doesn't matter if it's a penny or a million dollars, it's still robbery. The bank's money doesn't belong to me. Pure and simple. By the same token, this penny doesn't belong to me. It belongs to the store. The principle is the same."

We continued walking in silence as the fresh

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

News: Now on sale as a downloadable PDF book:
<https://www.Mesora.org/OnlineStore.html>



air calmed my mood. Finally I said, "You really take this seriously, don't you?"

"Yes," he replied. "I do."

He stopped and turned to face me. "Look," he said, "I know it seems like a little thing to you. But theft is like pregnancy. There's no such thing as a little pregnant. You either are or you're not. The same thing is true with theft. An act is either theft or it's not. The amount involved is irrelevant. Unfortunately, our society has become lax about this. People copy copyrighted material, denying the author his just compensation. They copy software, denying the programmer his royalty. Or how about this. I recently watched a father take his kids through the grocery store, pull a coffee bean from the bin - in front of his children - eat it, and then continue on with his shopping. What do you suppose the children learned from that?"

"Hmm," I said. "I think I see your point. But why are you so anxious to return the penny now? It could wait until after the game. Or even until tomorrow. The store certainly isn't going to miss it."

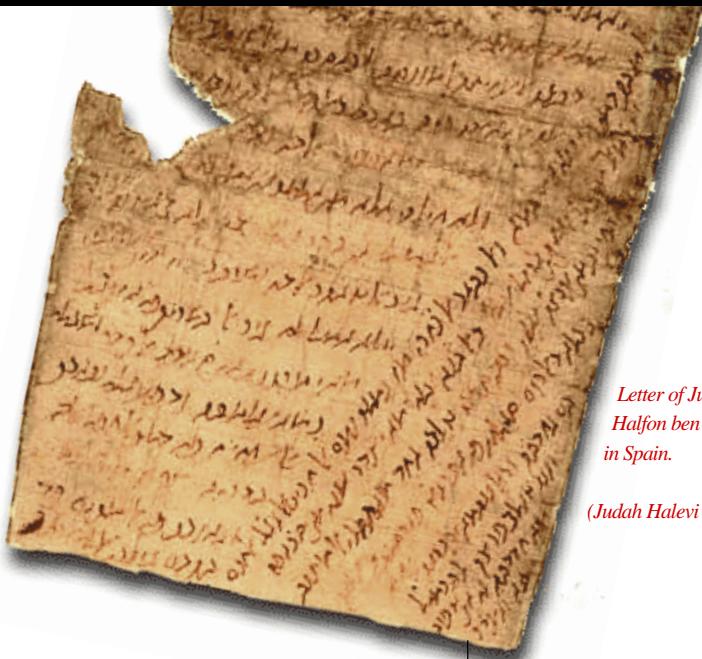
"Two reasons. First, it's a good thing to return someone their property as soon as you're able. It's out of respect for the other person and their belongings. Besides, wouldn't you want them to do the same for you? Second, if I wait I might forget. And then where would I be? I'd be holding onto property that isn't mine and not even know it."

We arrived at the store and I waited outside. When the King of Rational Thought returned, he said, "Now I don't want to confuse you, but there is one thing that it's OK to steal."

I missed the gleam in his eye. "What?" I asked, surprised.

"Third base." □

Letters



Letter of Judah Halevi in Toledo to Halfon ben Nathaniel al-Dimyati in Spain.

(Judah Halevi authored the Kuzari)

Defense of the Kuzari IV

Reader: Dear Rabbi Ben Chaim;

I have read with interest your articles in this and the last issue of the Jewish Times on the defense of the Kuzari argument. While the dialogue was informative, I believe you have not successfully defended the Kuzari argument for the following reasons;

1. You state that the Torah must be verified from another source that its own text. Where have you succeeded in doing this? You claim that Judaism and its Torah must be true because only the Torah was transmitted in an unbroken line from the millions who witnessed the events at Sinai to the present day. But how do you know this? There is no other source whatsoever for the belief that millions of witnesses were at Sinai other than the Torah itself! You have failed to escape the circular logic of the Kuzari argument because the core of your argument, that there were millions of witnesses at Sinai, is based only on the text of the Torah itself. There is no corroborating outside evidence that there were millions at Sinai. For all we know, there may have only been thousands there, or dozens, or no one at all.

Mesora: There is in fact external corroboration: the very ‘testimony’ of Jews throughout time since Sinai. This may not be the type of “tangible” evidence you might be seeking. However, testimony is distinct from the written text. So we are not proving the story, “from the story”...but from “people”...those individuals back then and those alive today that continue to transmit it. The act of “unbroken transmission” is the external corroboration.

Reader: 2. You claim that the Torah was written down at the time the events occurred. How can you prove that? Do you know where the original Torah is being kept? How come no one else knows about it? The fact is there is no written document dating back to the time of the alleged Sinai events. Your belief that there was such a document is based on faith, not evidence. (By the way, if a document were found that could be reliably dated to have been written at the time of the Sinai events, and if what was written in this document was the same as what is in our current Torah, I would accept that as proof of the Torah’s, and Judaism’s veracity, and make the appropriate adjustments in my thinking and life style What, may I ask, would cause you to doubt the truth of your beliefs?).

Mesora: Knowledge of the whereabouts of the original Torah written by Moses is not required to know from ‘when’ the Torah was first written. Again, we have the verbal testimony transmitted through time until today acting as the proof. Had Moses not written the Torah when he did – at Sinai – the account of his doing so would never have been proliferated verbally, reaching us today.

Had Moses lied, his story would have stopped dead in its tracks, and not a soul would have transmitted it. Certainly, no one would transmit to his own child that he stood at Sinai and saw miracles, if he had not. But no ancient document or “original Torah scroll” is required to state the reasoning that we have...proving its truth. And many millions of others “do” in fact know about Sinai. So I am unclear as to why you claim otherwise.

Regarding what would cause me to doubt my own beliefs...the answer is “proof otherwise”. But as I am convinced that other histories actually transpired, I am equally convinced of Sinai. No room exists for doubts. There will never arise the “real” story of the Jews in 2448...because we already know it conclusively.

Reader: 3. You also argue that that the Torah description of Sinai is true because what happened there was easily understood. Really? It seems no more difficult to understand that thousands were fed by one loaf of bread and five fish, or that a man walked on water and rose from the dead, than to believe that a non-volcanic mountain suddenly burst into flame and smoke and a loud voice boomed out and was heard by millions. The Torah narrative, like the Gospel, contains miraculous events. How easily each series of events could be understood has no bearing on whether the events actually happened. If one accepts the possibility that the laws of nature can be suspended miraculously, then the usual criteria of determining what is true don’t matter. One miracle is just as likely to be true as another.

Mesora: Two errors: First, you confuse “ease of comprehension”, with “difficulty in performance”. We state that the miracle of a fiery mountain, intelligent voice emanating from therein, Moses’ face shining, and the shofar increasing in intensity are easily recognizable. We are not determining which miracles are more difficult. That is irrelevant. The proof of Sinai is based on events that any normal person readily identifies with clarity. All people recognize with no confusion what a mountain is, what fire is, a shofar blast, and light, shining, from Moses’ face. No one would confuse these elements and phenomena. Hence, we do not ascribe ignorance to those who witnessed Sinai.

Secondly, no comparison may be made between Jesus’ supposed miracles, which were first recorded 100 years after the “fact”, and Sinai’s miracles. Why didn’t those 5000 supposed men and women tell others of Jesus’ great wonders? Their absolute silence proves that nothing happened. The story was fabricated. Those 5000 people never existed. But Sinai was transmitted from the “point of origin”.

(continued on next page)

(continued from previous page)

Letters

Reader: 4. You argue that the Torah account at Sinai must be true because it has universal acceptance and because millions of people have transmitted the account down through the ages, which would not have happened had there been no witnesses to begin with. Sorry, but this is of little help as well. First, the Torah account is not universally accepted as true. Aside from most Biblical historians and non-fundamentalist Jews and Christians, there are billions of Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, and others who don't accept the literal truth of the Torah. Also, millions of Hindus and Buddhists have transmitted the accounts of the origins of their religions down through time. Do you assume that Hindu and Buddhist parents were less committed to telling their children what they believed to be the truth than were Jewish parents? If not, then the mass transmission argument can be used to prove the truth of all religions and thus, cannot prove the truth of any.

Mesora: You confuse transmission of "fact" with transmission of "belief". I do not deny that millions of Christians and Muslims "believe" what they transmit. But simple transmission alone is not Judaism's proof. Judaism bases itself on a transmission of an "event attended by millions". The other religions do not. They base themselves on blind faith, or transmit stories which reason disproves: the original witnesses never transmitted a word; or there was no one else there when someone received their supposed "prophecies". All the other religions fail to prove their supposed stories, precisely because they did not occur. We determine their fabrication from their very stories containing flaws. I am sure you now see this distinction. Millions of unfortunate religionists desirous of blind acceptance do not ask for reasonable proof, so they follow the leader blindly. Do not fall prey to the erroneous argument that "numbers of adherents validates their religion."

Reader: 5. You try to draw an analogy between believing the Torah account of Sinai and believing in the existence of Caesar and the Holocaust. The analogy fails because, unlike the Torah account, there are hundreds, in the case of the Holocaust, millions, of written accounts of their respective historical occurrence from both friends and enemies of Caesar, Romans and non-Romans; and from both victims and perpetrators of the Holocaust. There are films of the death camps. The Torah account has no outside source to verify what it says. That is why no reputable historian doubts the existence of Caesar or the Holocaust, while the consensus of historians is that the Torah is not completely literally true and that certain narratives like the Sinai events may be rooted in legend and not actual historical occurrence.

Mesora: I am sure you do not accept what you

just said: Had the world only one account of Caesar, no artifacts or films, written by the Romans and no one else, and this account was transmitted throughout the world, and there was no other conflicting account, surely it would be as accepted as it is today. Kindly disprove its veracity in my scenario.

Reader: 6. You question the motives of those who challenge the Torah's veracity by saying that the challenges are based more on the unwillingness of the challengers to change their lives to conform with the Torah than in a genuine search for truth. I question the appropriateness of such comments; it usually reflects weakness of one's arguments but since you raise the point, what about your own motives? It is gratifying to the ego to believe that one has the truth, which no one else has. How do you feel about being Jewish and also believing that only Judaism is true and all other religions are false? Does it make you feel superior? Have you honestly confronted that? What about the need of people to believe in certainty in an uncertain world? Does it help you sleep better knowing that everything that happens in the world is because God wants it that way and you have the inside track, through your Orthodox Judaism, on what God is thinking? You have as much personal motive to believe in what you do than the challengers to Torah veracity have in theirs, if not more so. Besides, a Christian can argue that the real reason why you don't accept Jesus as your personal savior is because you don't want to change your life to accommodate Him. It is irrational to question the genuineness of those who doubt a religion just because of their unwillingness to accept that religion's beliefs. If that were the case, then those who doubt the truth of fundamentalist Islam are not genuine truth-seekers because it could be said that all they really want to do is avoid accepting the obligation to become martyrs.

Mesora: You write, "It is gratifying to the ego to believe that one has the truth, which no one else has." Had ego gratification been a Torah educator's objective, would he not lose such ego fulfillment by enabling others to share his pedestal through educating them up to his level? But you must know that Torah education is an obligation. One has no choice but to teach. If one truly cares for another human being, he desires the best for him. He educates him.

You write, "Does it make you feel superior?" The answer is, of course it does. King Solomon said, "And I saw that wisdom excels foolishness as light excels darkness." (Eccl. 2:13) One must feel more fortunate when he possesses the good, while others do not. But this should promote a concern, followed by educating the ignorant, and

not an egotistical withholding of the good to maintain a superiority.

You write, "Does it help you sleep better knowing that everything that happens in the world is because God wants it that way?" Here, you impute to me something I never said.

You write, "A Christian can argue that the real reason why you don't accept Jesus as your personal savior is because you don't want to change your life to accommodate him." Had I no proof for Judaism, your argument might have a chance to prove itself. Then you might attribute my actions to personal motives.

Just as I am firm that $2+2=4$ and would assume someone who denies this, to possess another motive, as reason demands this truth...I similarly assume that Sinai's 100% proof is denied due to people's emotions. I never hear people contending Caesar's truth, or that of Alexander. Only Sinai's truth is denied. I maintain this phenomenon is attributable to one element contained only in Sinai: obligatory Torah adherence. Perhaps I am wrong about an individual case, and I don't feel I ever concluded one's denial in exclusive terms. But I am not wrong about the distinction between all other histories, and that of Sinai: Sinai obligates man in myriads of restrictions – a powerful motive to deny its truth. No other history imposes restrictions on man. Therefore no other history is met with such denial.

Reader: 7. You say it is irrational to doubt the actual occurrence of the Exodus on the basis of a lack of outside evidence to support its happening because such evidence may yet be found. This argument is irrational. An event that allegedly affected millions of people as the plagues affected millions of Egyptians, and the humbling of a great world power by slaves would certainly have generated many records, if not among the Egyptians themselves, then among their rivals like the Hittites, Assyrians and Babylonians. Yet there are no records at all. Besides, your argument reminds me of the Mormon excuse for the lack of evidence to prove their belief that ancient Israelites migrated to North America in biblical times and set up a great civilization: "Of course the evidence exists. We just haven't found it yet!" How is your argument any different?

Mesora: The Mormon excuse is 100% bereft of evidence, whereas Judaism has an unbroken chain of transmission. The same proof of Sinai proves Egypt and the 10 Plagues. Thus, it is not irrational to suggest that since we already know Egypt and Sinai occurred, that "evidence might yet be discovered" to other parts of the proven story. But to base one's entire argument on undiscovered evidence "alone" - as do the Mormons - is incredulous. Be clear: lack of evidence of Jews in

(continued on next page)

(continued from previous page)

Letters

other cultures cannot uproot our singular, proven, unopposed Jewish history.

Reader: 8. Finally, you often make the argument from authority. "If someone as wise as Maimonides, with such a great intellect, wealth of knowledge, and uprightness of character, believes in the veracity of the Torah account of Sinai, who are you to challenge it?" The same could be said of Thomas Aquinas who matched Maimonides in intellect, wisdom, breadth and depth of knowledge and (as far as I know) uprightness of moral character. Does that mean that we cannot challenge the truth of Catholicism?

Mesora: You take great responsibility and overstep your capabilities by equating Aquinas to Maimonides. And yes, you may challenge the truth of anything. But that is not my point.

When I cite Maimonides and other brilliant thinkers who affirm the absolute truth to Sinai, I do not follow through as you said with the arrogant "Who are you to challenge it?" Rather, do so as a tactic. I will explain.

I intend to move the one with whom I talk away from feeling he is under interrogation. I desire to create a more objective feel to the discussion. In this manner, many times, the person will not feel threatened by entertaining Sinai's reality, as I am not asking him, "Do YOU believe it?" Rather, I ask him or her to consider why 'Maimonides' might have accepted Sinai. Removing the "personal threat" as one may call it, the person does not feel the finger pointing at him, and his thinking is no longer stressed, worrying about changing his mind. He's discussing Maimonides' view - not his own. And when we move a person to think about why 'another' individual may entertain an idea, such objectivity allows the person to ponder the idea himself, unfiltered by his own feelings. We achieve a great good for a person when we can get them to consider ideas untainted by subjective motives. They may see reality clearly. This is the goal.

Reader: I'm sorry that I've gone on for so long, but discussion of religion in general, and Judaism and the Kuzari argument in particular, require, in my opinion, as thoroughgoing an analysis and dialogue as possible. I believe I have shown that you have not succeeded in rescuing the Kuzari argument from its iron, circular cage in that you have failed to show any outside corroboration of the Torah claim that there were millions of witnesses to Sinai. This doesn't mean that the only alternative to Orthodoxy is atheism; that would be simplistic. It does require a willingness to accept challenges to one's belief and a willingness to change one's belief if reason and evidence so dictate. I have stated above my willingness to

accept Orthodoxy if certain evidence is found to verify it. Are you willing to change your beliefs as well? Sincerely, Hal

Mesora: One must follow reason and as Ibn Ezra said in last weeks Parshas Yisro, "if we find a mitzvah which is unintelligible, we do not perform it." However, this did not happen. All the laws make perfect sense. There was but one law, which confounded King Solomon. He understood all others. (Perhaps Moses knew what Solomon did not.)

Since you wrote your final paragraph before reading my response here in this weeks issue, I turn the question back to you: Do these explanations make sense to you, and...why do you think Maimonides accepted the "Proof of Sinai"? □

Defense of the Kuzari V

MICHAEL HOFFMAN

I read that article which Micah wrote. In it he said:

"Judaism neither stands on proof nor ought to be about proof. (In this approach. Obviously R' Saadia Gaon et al disagreed.) Rather, it stands on our having a relationship with Hashem and His Torah."

Chovos Halvavos has an explicit rejection of Micha's argument, that we accept Judaic ideas "because [they are] our heritage" and not because of philosophical proof. He says (using Feldheim translation):

"The 2nd level is the acknowledgement of Gods unity with the heart and the tongue based on what one has received from tradition, because he believes the person from whom he ahs received it. However, one does not grasp at this level, the true meaning of the subject on the strength of one's own intellect and understanding; rather, one is like a blind man who is led by one who can see. It may happen that one receives the tradition from someone who likewise, knows it only from tradition. That would resemble a string of blind men, each of whom has his hand on the shoulder of the one in front of

him, until the file reaches a person endowed with sight, who is at their head and guides them. Should this guide of theirs fail them and neglect to watch over them carefully, or if one of them should stumble or suffer an accident, then all of them would be affected: they would all stray from the path and either fall into a pit or a ditch or blunder into an obstacle that would prevent them from continuing."

This something Micah should consider. A lot of what is wrong with Judaism is people relying on blind faith and forming "a string of blind men". Sadly, Micah is endorsing this view by telling his readers to accept Judaism because it is their heritage (i.e., your parent's believed it) rather than because it makes sense.

Treason II

RABBI JOSHUA MAROOF

Dear Mesora,

In this week's "King of Rational Thought" segment, the King comments on the source of the animosity we feel toward traitors. He concludes that it essentially relates to the violation of trust that treason entails. I believe that there is an additional dimension to the phenomenon that he has overlooked. Take, for example, the case of a foreign spy who has infiltrated our government. For some reason, even he is not despised to the same extent as a "traitor" who betrays his own government, religious group or family. Yet, both the foreign spy and the traitor undermine our trust and security. According to the King, they should be viewed the same way. For this reason, I would suggest that there is another element to "treason" that makes it particularly despicable: the fact that one hurts "his own" people. In other words, it is not just a violation of trust per se, but a violation of the trust of those to whom you would be presumed to owe a real sense of allegiance - the country that protects you, the family that raised you, etc. We expect those to whom we have shown kindness and offered support - our citizens, children, etc. - to deal considerately and honestly with us. Violating the trust of those to whom one owes a "debt" of gratitude is more reprehensible than simple dishonesty or unfaithfulness. A foreign spy owes us nothing, so we cannot characterize his abuse of our trust as ungrateful or selfish, while this is the signature feature of treason. A traitor repays the goodness we bestowed upon him by flagrantly hijacking our sense of trust and security. □



MISHPATIM

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Transcribed by student

This Parsha contains many laws with respect to inter-personal relationships. We would like to analyze one of these laws, which can help us understand the Torah's perspective of a man's relationship with his fellow man.

The Torah states in Exodus Chapter 23 Verse 5, "If you see the donkey of him that hates you lying under its burden, and you shall forbear to help him, you shall surely help him." The language of the verse is difficult, "ve,chadalta me,azov", "you will cease from helping him". Onkelos explains, the verse should be understood literally. Leave what is in your heart and help him. Onkelos' interpretation affords us a penetrating insight of the Torah's perspective of human relations. The Torah demands that one reject his emotional response. When one sees the donkey of his enemy overburdened, his initial response is to refrain from helping his enemy. However, the Torah instructs us to the contrary. Leave what is in your heart; do not allow your emotions to dictate your actions. Act in accordance with justice and help your fellow man. The Torah is not telling one to deny his emotions. One must recognize his emotions and overcome them. To simply deny and obliterate ones emotional reaction is not the Torah's response. We must recognize and be cognizant of our emotions but realize that it stems from the lower part of human behavior. Accordingly, one must modify his ethical behavior and respond in conformance with the

principles of justice.

The greatest danger facing an individual in his struggle for ethical perfection is the external influences exerted by the outside world. The gentle response would be to deny ones emotions. Such denials pose dangerous pratfalls. These denials become construed as virtuous because you are denying an evil emotion, which seems morally repugnant. However, this denial is causing the individual great personal harm. The person by denying any evil proclivities that he may possess is ultimately capable of perpetuating the greatest atrocities. This denial facilitates the performance of terrible cruelty as merely an expression of his G-d like qualities. The crusades perpetrated unspeakable human suffering in the glory of ostensibly virtuous missions, in the name of G-d. The part of man, which is inherently evil and unjust, stems from the corrupt and instinctual component of human nature.

When Jacob wrestled the angel the Torah tells us that he faced a powerful opponent. The struggle lasted late into the night. Chazal inform us that the angel appeared b,demus talmid chacham, the image of a scholar. The evil inclination poses the gravest dangers when disguising itself in the form of the religious emotion. Man must possess great intellectual fortitude and conviction to do battle with such a cunning opponent. Our father Jacob possessed such inner strength.

The Torah is teaching us, by utilizing this

halacha as an illustration, that the greatest danger is denying one's emotions. On the contrary, leave behind your emotions and act with righteousness based upon the ideals of justice. When a person is involved in the painstaking task of doing teshuva he must maintain intellectual integrity in encountering his emotions. The greatest deterrent in doing teshuva is when a person fails to recognize the sin because he denies his emotions. The Torah is not simply concerned with the mundane task of helping the individual get back on the road. The Torah is teaching us the essential elements of ethical perfection. One must recognize the influences of his emotions and the powerful exertion it asserts on his conduct. However, the Torah is teaching us that he must leave these emotions behind and act with justice in the face of such overwhelming emotions. A person can feel very comfortable in denying the wicked part of his personality. However, such a denial causes the person irreparable harm. He will profess himself to be virtuous and thus incapable of perceiving any of his foibles. The Nazi's professed themselves as very respectable cultured people, well educated and patrons of the arts. They were incapable of appreciating the depth of their corruption.

The system of halacha is a beautiful G-d given system, which helps man achieve moral perfection. If a person finds it difficult to perform a Mitzvah it is indicative of a flaw in his personality. The halachic system is a

(continued on next page)

Weekly Parsha

barometer whereby a difficulty in compliance, is a symptom of a weakness in the individual's personality. When a person encounters a difficulty in doing a Mitzvah or following a halacha, it reflects an underlying problem in his human psyche. A person must do teshuva which requires intensive introspection, and if successful can ameliorate the human condition.

Hillel, one of our greatest scholars, stated that the precept of loving your friend as yourself is a qualitatively important Torah concept. Hillel was not merely espousing the human emotion of fraternity. Every individual shares the very powerful emotion that he considers himself to be special. He thereby identifies with people who share common likes and dislikes. His closest clique of friends consists of individuals who share the same emotional attitudes. He thereby imagines that his friends are special and often views his friends as an extension of himself. Hillel was teaching us to guard against such false notions. The standard that a person utilizes when evaluating other people based upon his own emotions is superficial. One's sole criteria for evaluating another person should simply be the person's observance of the Mitzvahs. If an individual observes the Torah, then you have an obligation to love him, irrespective of your own personal feelings. Psychologically you may dislike him and share nothing in common with him, however halachically you must love him. One must elevate his self to live life based upon a higher sense of reality. One must view his fellow man based upon the ultimate reality, not predicated upon his personal and petty likes and dislikes.

A person's sense of pride emanates from the opinion one has of his self. The self is that part of the human psyche, which has likes and dislikes and its essence is molded by said likes and dislikes. Thus people who have similar values he likes because such persons partake of his reality. King Solomon, in Ecclesiastics Chapter 9 Verse 6, states with respect to previous generations that perished: "their love, their hate, their jealousy have already expired..." A persons selfish view of reality is temporal. Halacha demands that a person should function on a higher cognitive level. An individual must be aware that his true essence is a metaphysical essence based upon a system of objective reality. One cannot act upon a system of personal likes and dislikes, whereby his views the self as a personal, psychological essence. The Torah is a system of metaphysical reality. If a person observes the precepts of the Torah, you have an

obligation to love him despite one's personal sentiments. If a person's best friend violates the Torah and is defined halachically as wicked, then you have an obligation to hate him. It is not a personal hatred but a hatred, which demands that one despise falsehood.

These observations Hillel emphasized are basic to Judaism. A person's inter-personal relationships must be based upon metaphysical reality. If a person cannot be affable to a fellow man, it is symptomatic of a deficiency in his relationship to G-d. It reflects that the person cannot live his life in accordance with metaphysical reality. This idea is expressed in the prohibitions of revenge and of bearing a grudge. It is forbidden for a person not to lend his neighbor an object because his neighbor acted in a similar fashion. It is likewise forbidden to lend you neighbor an object and state: "I am lending you this object despite the fact that you refused me." Halacha demands that a person live a harmonious existence based upon metaphysical reality. Society cannot live harmoniously if people conduct themselves based upon a psychological reality. True kindness can only be achieved if one is capable of purging his subjective sense of reality, which is based upon identification emanating from his own psychological make up. The sole basis for an individual's conduct with his fellow man should be a metaphysical reality whereby identification stems from ones Torah observance and a sharing of common intellectual convictions. Identification is such a powerful emotion that if one's criteria is a psychological reality, then invariable disharmony will ensue.

"Talmidei chachamim marbim shalom baolam"; "Scholars increase harmony in the world" because they function on the level of a metaphysical reality. Thus, one's personal sentiments are irrelevant and insignificant.

A person that rejects the authenticity of the Torah or the oral tradition, one is obliged to hate him. This hatred is not a personal hatred but is based upon ones love of truth and his disdain for evil. However, that person's children who are ignorant and are not educated in the principles of the Torah are considered pure and akin to those raised ignorantly. One must treat these people with kindness and vigorously attempt to teach them the true ideas. They are not culpable because of their upbringing and must be treated under the principles of loving your neighbor like yourself. The greatest kindness one can manifest to such individuals would be to teach them the true ideas of the Torah. □

ABSOLUTE TRUTHS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



In this week's Torah reading of parshas Mishpatim, the following verse seizes our attention, Exod. 24:12: "And G-d said to Moses, 'ascend to Me to the mountain, and remain there, and I will give you the Tablets of Stone, and the Torah, and the Mitzvah that I wrote, that you may instruct them.'

This verse recounts G-d's command to Moses just prior to His giving to Moses the Tablets. The Sages differ in their opinions of what is referred to by the two references of "Torah" and "Mitzvah". Saadia Gaon suggests they refer to the Written and Oral Laws respectively. Accordingly, Saadia Gaon is of the opinion that G-d is about to give Moses three entities: the Tablets of Stone, the Written Law, and the Oral Law.

Unlike Saadia Gaon, Sforno states that at this moment in history, G-d is giving but one thing: the Tablets of Stone. The word "Torah" refers to that inscribed "portion (commands) of thought", while "Mitzvah" refers to the "portion (commands) of action". The Ten Commandments may be divided into laws governing thought, and governing action. Sforno suggests this is the meaning behind G-d's distinction of "Torah" and "Mitzvah".

However, Ibn Ezra poses the most difficult explanation. As Sforno states, Ibn Ezra too suggests this verse teaches there was but one thing given to Moses at this point in time, i.e., the Tablets of Stone. But Ibn Ezra states that "Torah" refers to the first and fifth of the Ten Commandments, while "Mitzvah" refers to the remaining eight - an odd division. Ramban's quote of this Ibn Ezra is slightly altered: he replaces the fifth with the second command. I would like to explain Ibn Ezra, but using Ramban's quote. This means that Ibn Ezra says "Torah" refers to the commands of knowing G-d's existence (Command I) and the prohibition against idolatry (Command II). "Mitzvah" refers to the last eight of the Ten Commands.

The question is this: Why when instructing Moses to ascend to receive the Ten Commandments, doesn't G-d simply say, "...ascend to Me and I will give you the Tablets of Stone"? Instead, G-d says, "...and I will give you the Tablets of Stone, and the Torah, and the Mitzvah". If in this verse, the words "Torah" and "Mitzvah" refer to commands inscribed in the already mentioned Tablets, then the words

"Torah" and "Mitzvah" are somewhat redundant. What is G-d teaching Moses when He says come to Me to receive not just Tablets, but the Torah and Mitzvah that is written upon them? Moses knows that G-d is not giving him blank tablets. So what is Moses to learn from G-d's words, "...and I will give you the Tablets of Stone, and the Torah, and the Mitzvah that I wrote..."?

We can say quite certainly that G-d is teaching Moses that He is not simply giving him laws, but these laws belong to distinct categories, i.e., "Torah" refers to knowledge of G-d's existence and the prohibition of idolatry, while "Mitzvah" refers to the other laws. But why must G-d – at this moment – categorize these laws for Moses? We must also explain why G-d says to Moses that he must ascend, and also "remain" on the mountain. What relevance has this with Moses' acceptance of the Ten Commandments? What of the final statement, "instructing them" in these laws? Why must this be included in this verse? (We have a tradition that all elements in a given Torah verse must have a relationship.)

Talmud Moade Katan 9b records two students of Rabbi Shimone bar Yochai who correctly arrived at the Torah's teaching that one must 'weigh' the commands, and select the greater command for himself, allowing others to perform lesser commands. The Torah's commands do in fact have a hierarchy of importance. The Talmud concludes that Torah study outweighs all other commands. Regarding the Ten Commandments recorded in Exodus, Ibn Ezra cites Saadia Gaon, stating that the Ten Commandments are in two sets: the first five address laws between man and G-d, and the second set address laws between men. In both sets, from beginning to end, the commands successively decrease in importance. By definition, this places the conviction of G-d's existence (Command I) and the prohibition against idolatry (Command II) as the most important laws, as they are the first two. Saadia Gaon also states that these Ten Commandments are the head categories for the remaining 603 commands. This places even more importance on the first two of the Ten Commandments.

Maimonides wrote regarding the first two commands, that a prophet has no advantage over others, as their truths are arrived at by reason, which is equally available to all: (For brevity, you may skip to the bold text and then continue after the end quotes.)

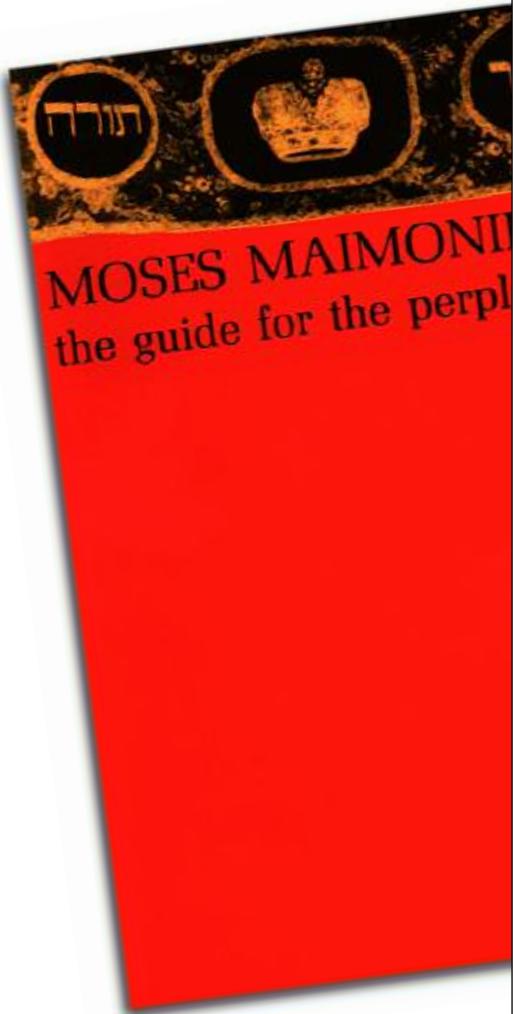
The Guide for the Perplexed, Book III, Chapter XXXIII:

"It is clear to me that what Moses experienced at the revelation on Mount Sinai was different from that which was experienced by all the other Israelites, for

(continued on next page)

(Absolute Truths continued from previous page)

Weekly Parsha



Moses alone was addressed by God, and for this reason the second person singular is used in the Ten Commandments; Moses then went down to the foot of the mount and told his fellow-men what he had heard. Compare, "I stood between the Lord and you at that time to tell you the word of the Lord" (Dent. v. 5). Again, "Moses spake, and God answered him with a loud voice" (Exod. xix. 19). In the Mechilta our Sages say distinctly that he brought to them every word as he had heard it. Furthermore, the words, "In order that the people hear when I speak with thee" (Exod. xix. 9), show that God spoke to Moses, and the people only heard the mighty sound, not distinct words. It is to the perception of this mighty sound that Scripture refers in the passage, "When ye hear the sound" (Deut. v. 20); again it is stated, "You heard a sound of words" (*ibid.* iv. 12), and it is not said, "You heard words"; and even where the hearing of the words is mentioned, only the perception of the sound is meant. It was only Moses that heard the words, and he reported them to the people. This is apparent from Scripture, and from the utterances of our Sages in general. There is, however, an opinion of our Sages frequently expressed in the Midrashim, and found also in the Talmud, to this effect: The Israelites heard the first and the second commandments from God, i.e., they learnt the truth of the principles contained in these two commandments in the same manner as Moses, and not through Moses. **For these two principles, the existence of God and His Unity, can be arrived at by means of reasoning, and whatever can be established by proof is known by the prophet in the same way as by any other person; he has no advantage in this respect. These two principles were not known through prophecy alone. Comp., "Thou hast been shown to know that," etc. (Deut. iv. 34). But the rest of the commandments are of an ethical and authoritative character, and do not contain [truths] perceived by the intellect.** Notwithstanding all that has been said by our Sages on this subject, we infer from Scripture as well as from the words of our Sages, that the Israelites heard on that occasion a certain sound which Moses understood to proclaim the first two commandments, and through Moses all other Israelites learnt them when he in intelligible sounds repeated them to the people. Our Sages mention this view, and support it by the verse, "God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this" (Ps. lxxii.11). They state distinctly, in the beginning of

Midrash Hazita, that the Israelites did not hear any other command directly from God; compare, "A loud voice, and it was not heard again" (Deut. v. 19). It was after this first sound was heard that the people were seized with the fear and terror described in Scripture, and that they said, "Behold the Lord our God has shown us, etc., and now why shall we die, etc. "Come thou near," etc. Then Moses, the most distinguished of all mankind, came the second time, received successively the other commandments, and came down to the foot of the mountain to proclaim them to the people, whilst the mighty phenomena continued; they saw the fire, they heard the sounds, which were those of thunder and lightning during a storm, and the loud sound of the shofar: and all that is said of the many sounds heard at that time, e.g., in the verse, " and all the people perceived the sounds, "etc., refers to the sound of the shofar, thunder, and similar sounds. But the voice of the Lord, that is, the voice created for that purpose, which was understood to include the diverse commandments, was only heard once, as is declared in the Law, and has been clearly stated by our Sages in the places, which I have indicated to you. When the people heard this voice their soul left them; and in this voice they perceived the first two commandments. It must, however, be noticed that the people did not understand the voice in the same degree as Moses did. I will point out to you this important fact, and show you that it was a matter of tradition with the nation, and well known by our Sages. For, as a rule, Onkelos renders the word "vayedaber" by "u-mallel" ("and God spake"); this is also the case with this word in the beginning of the twentieth chapter of Exodus, but the words ve-al yedabber immanu elohim", "let not God speak to us" (Exod. xx.19), addressed by the people to Moses, is rendered "vela yitmalal immanu min kodam adonai" (" Let not aught be spoken to us by the Lord"). Onkelos makes thus the same distinction, which we made. You know that according to the Talmud Onkelos received all these excellent interpretations directly from R. Eliezer and R. Joshua, the wisest men in Israel. Note it, and remember it, for it is impossible for any person to expound the revelation on Mount Sinai more fully than our Sages have done, since it is one of the secrets of the Law. It is very difficult to have a true conception of the events, for there has never been before, nor will there ever be again, anything like it. Note it."

(continued on next page)

(Absolute Truths continued from previous page)

Weekly Parsha**The Significance of the Two Commands**

With this information, we now understand that the first two commands have an elevated status in contrast to the remaining eight. What is their significance? Again, Maimonides states, "For these two principles, the existence of God and His Unity, can be arrived at by means of reasoning, and whatever can be established by proof is known by the prophet in the same way as by any other person; he has no advantage in this respect. These two principles were not known through prophecy alone. Compare, "Thou hast been shown to know that," etc. (Deut. iv. 34). But the rest of the commandments are of an ethical and authoritative character, and do not contain [truths] perceived by the intellect."

On the two Tablets of Stone, the Ten Commandments, G-d teaches Moses an important lesson; there are two branches of knowledge: 1) intellectual truths, arrived at by reason, and 2) ethical and authoritative laws. According to Ibn Ezra, G-d teaches Moses this idea by saying "I will give you Tables of Stones, and the Torah and the Mitzvah..." G-d desires to make this clear to Moses. There are two branches of knowledge, intellectual truths, and ethical and authoritative laws. But the first category is deemed more important, as we stated. What is its importance?

The answer is that acknowledgement of "truths" forms the core of mankind's earthly objective. The most important of commands, (derived from Saadi Gaaon's explanation of their order) are those demanding our recognition of what is absolute and real, they are: Command I: Knowing G-d Exists, and Command II: Denying Idolatry. These are examples of "absolute truths". Unlike ethical laws, which govern man's societal relations, "absolute truths" are not of a subjective nature, in the respect that they are to serve societal needs. Of course even G-d's ethics and authoritative laws reflect His infinite wisdom. But the very nature of a "truth" is that which is not relative to man's existence. Ethical and authoritative laws - by definition - are not absolute, i.e., without mankind, they have no reality. However, the idea that G-d is the Creator, and that He is One, and that there are no other gods, are "absolute truths". They are not relative.

The reality of absolute truths means, by definition, that they embody ideas, "which cannot be otherwise". In contrast, laws of society are truths, but only once societies exist.

There is another subtle point here: not only did G-d make Moses aware of these ideas' significance but He did so 'before' He gave the Tablets. I believe this was done, as there is a priority of importance G-d wished to convey

through this act: man must order his studies. Moses had to be taught that learning has an "order". G-d first taught Moses the concept of "absolute truths" before giving him the body of knowledge contained in the Tablets. In other words, G-d was indicating that essential to one's studies, is to study what is primary first. G-d tells Moses that He is giving him "Torah" and "Mitzvah", as one is more primary to successful study.

Why is knowledge of G-d essential to all other knowledge? The answer is that all knowledge, if it does not eventuate in an appreciation for the Source of this knowledge, is academic. Scientists may ponder the greatest formulations and laws of the universe. However, if they do not recognize the Creator, their years of study fail to have a drop of meaning. In their minds, they marvel at the cosmos, but to them these billions of galaxies are not the work of a Designer. What they have is mere aesthetic appreciation, but no concept of G-d. Their lives were a waste.

If we appreciate the design of a tree, but fail to realize G-d, the Designer of that tree, then we have no real knowledge of the tree. We fail to arrive at the underlying truth of the existence of this tree, and its purpose: to feed man, that man may sustain his body, so he may be free to use his mind and discover G-d's wisdom in all of creation. This is where all knowledge must find its end, if we are to acquire true knowledge. Knowledge of G-d must exist, if we are to have any knowledge. It is primary. This is the lesson.

Fundamentals: Available to All

G-d wished to teach Moses and ultimately all mankind, that knowledge is not only the priority in life, but within knowledge itself, there are concepts, which are most primary. This must be realized. Without knowledge and conviction of the Creator, to the exclusion of any other imagined god, all of man's knowledge, and his life, is a complete waste. If man does not recognize G-d, his sole purpose in his existence, he has failed to realize his objective as a human being.

These two first commands are so crucial, that they are not limited to a prophet, but each member of mankind has the ability to know them. This is Maimonides' point.

Our objective is to arrive at a realization of, and a conviction in, what is "real". This is the function of the intellect, and why Moses had no advantage over others regarding this knowledge, qualitatively. Of course Moses excelled light years beyond all mankind. But Maimonides teaches that the apprehension of G-d, i.e., His exclusive role as Creator; and the denial of any other force or god, are two

(continued on next page)

Page 14

(Absolute Truths continued from previous page)

Weekly Parsha

absolute truths that all members of mankind equally possess the ability to attain.

There are two, essential ideas here: 1) these first two (of the Ten) Commandments are equally attainable by all men, as they are not dependent on an authority's demand, but on reason alone, and 2) precisely why they are equally attainable – is that they are self evident, "absolute truths". Knowledge has as its primary focus those ideas that are "absolute truths". Knowing what is real and true is man's objective as a creature designed with an intellect. To function in the most profoundly happy state, man must be involved in this pursuit of knowing what is true. Only in this pursuit will man find true happiness. Only when man is using his intelligence and reason, is his entire being absorbed in a completely satisfying area of endless inquiry. Only in G-d's wisdom can man never reach the "end", and continue to be excited at new findings.

A Relationship with G-d

Additionally, man's relationship with his Creator plays a role in his studies. G-d said, "ascend to Me to the mountain, and remain there". In other words, man must approach G-d, "ascend to Me", and he must tarry his stay, "remain there". For Moses to receive the Tablets of Stone, he must approach G-d, and he must be of a nature, that he wishes to remain with G-d, to remain in his studies, with little interest in other matters. We all have the ability to derive tremendous enjoyment from Torah study, but this cannot come overnight. We must initially endure a bit of frustration, i.e., studying the language, memorizing new words, and training our minds. But then we suddenly see a new idea, a new insight presents itself, and we start reaping the rewards. Any student of Talmud or Torah will confirm this. G-d told Moses to remain there, and this truly is the means to optimally enjoy our lives. Minimizing our work, maximizing our studies as Ethics teaches, is the correct path, and the only method for becoming proficient in the science of Torah. When one immerses his self

completely in any area, he will succeed. This is the one area each of us has no option to delay immersion. It is an obligation, and it is the source of true happiness. All else is futile.

The Availability of Knowledge

Are absolute truths, by their very definition, observable by man's mind? What prevents a true idea from being unavailable to man's mind? I do not know a reason why it could not be so. But the very fact that absolute truths, these precious and enjoyable ideas, are things we can perceive indicates that G-d desires it to be this way. G-d desires that the knowledge He embedded in this universe is available for man's perception. It is G-d's will that His knowledge fill the entire universe, so wherever man turns, he cannot escape the reflection of G-d's wisdom.

These absolute truths predate Torah. Meaning, they were attainable by an Abraham. With his mind alone, Abraham extricated himself from the fallacy of idolatry, and recognized the absolute truth that a Creator exists, He is one, and there are no other causes for the universe. From Adam through Moses, no member of mankind was left without the tools required to ponder and be convinced of these ideas, and countless others. Absolute truths, then, is the category of knowledge that seamlessly weaves together man's entire history. Man was never withheld from acquiring knowledge of these absolute truths. Although man distorted his life quite well with his man-gods, and deities, but as Abraham proved, man has a divine gift that enables his successful mission as a seeker of truth. Man possesses intelligence, and the sharper his mind becomes, the more curtains of fallacy he may shred, exposing greater truths.

Man is to be confronted by G-d's wisdom at every turn, throughout his entire life. We recite "last in action first in deed", regarding the Sabbath. It was last in creation, but primary in G-d's plan for mankind. The Sabbath is a day bereft of physical labor, dedicated to pondering ideas. □

