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of Authentic Jewish Beliefs and Practices*

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Proof of God & the Commandments:

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

INSEPARABLE

Reader: According to Rabbi Chait it seems like the more people that tell us of an event, the greater the possibility that it actually occurred. If we met someone who told us the 8:30 train to Montreal derailed, we might at first be doubtful. But if several people gave us the same report we would accept it. For Sinai, however, how can we determine which possibility is truth: 2 million people lying, versus the alleged events at Sinai occurring? Not only is lying probable, but also the issue is not even addressed (nothing is mentioned about the phenomenon of Sinai being more probable). The fact

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*Mount Sinai, and an
800 year old Torah scroll.
(Rhodes, Greece)*

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Weekly Parsha

Terumah

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“And they will make a sanctuary for Me and I will dwell among them.” (Shemot 25:8)

The Torah contains thousands of laws. However, there are only 613 mitzvot. The various laws are subsumed within the commandments. For example, there are thirty-nine

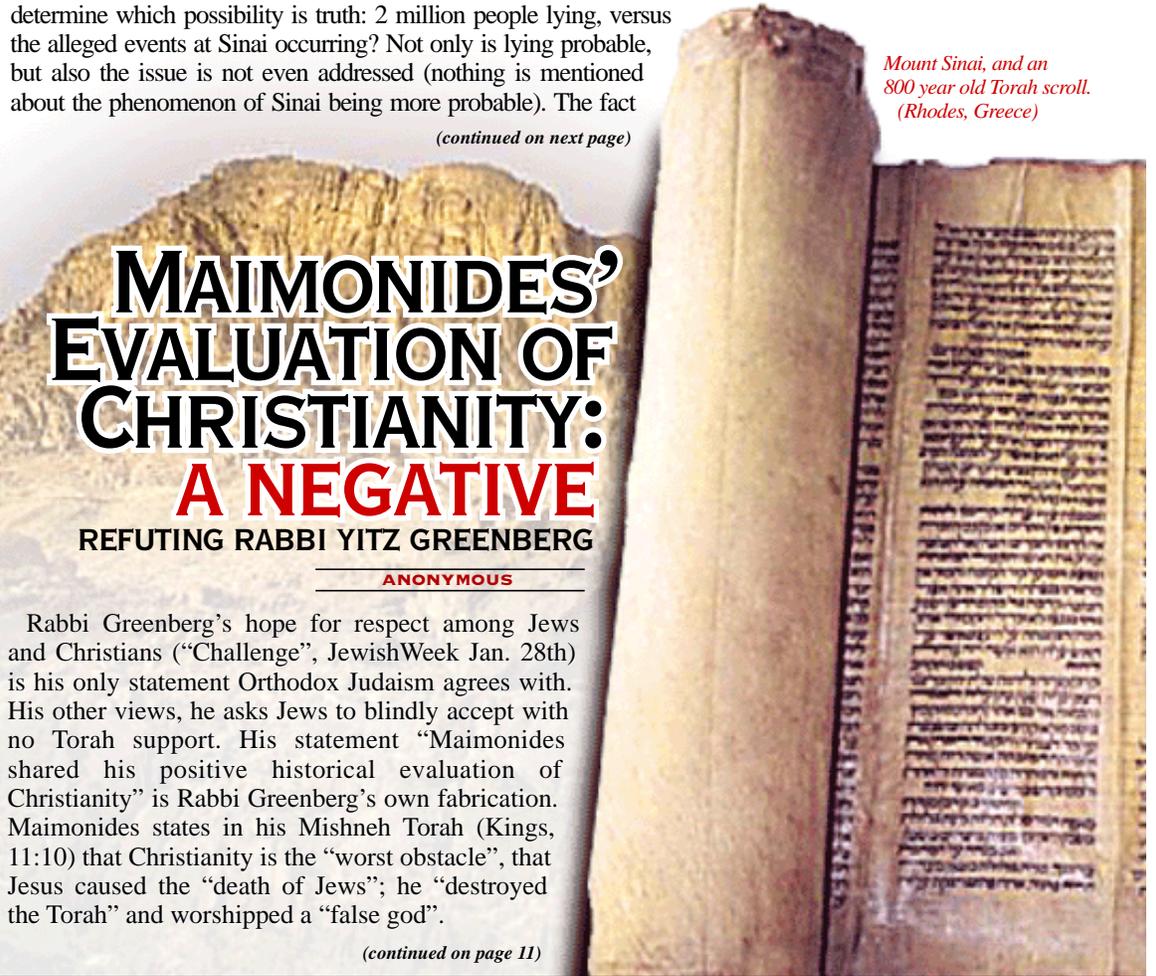
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MAIMONIDES’ EVALUATION OF CHRISTIANITY: A NEGATIVE REFUTING RABBI YITZ GREENBERG

ANONYMOUS

Rabbi Greenberg’s hope for respect among Jews and Christians (“Challenge”, JewishWeek Jan. 28th) is his only statement Orthodox Judaism agrees with. His other views, he asks Jews to blindly accept with no Torah support. His statement “Maimonides shared his positive historical evaluation of Christianity” is Rabbi Greenberg’s own fabrication. Maimonides states in his Mishneh Torah (Kings, 11:10) that Christianity is the “worst obstacle”, that Jesus caused the “death of Jews”; he “destroyed the Torah” and worshipped a “false god”.

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As seen in this enlargement of the 800 year old Grecian Torah, (highlighted words at right) “God will do wonders in front of all peoples.” This again testifies to God’s desire that our adherence to Him be based on proofs. (Miracles prove God’s existence and Torah directives)



that the other side of the equation (i.e. probability of God actually performing the miracles at Sinai) wasn't even mentioned may imply that when it comes to such a massive number of people, we don't care WHAT they claim as long as it isn't impossible. How can we propose (or prove) such an idea that a "mass" has the reliability to claim almost anything? How does this "mass" proof work? For instance, how many people do we need to have?

Mesora: Jacques, There is no "probability" issue here. Rabbi Chait is stating that it is "impossible" to have mass conspiracy. Human nature has a discreet design, and a human cannot function outside of his limited design. Man requires a motive to lie. So we will find individuals lying; they possess a motive specific to a given case, which propels them to lie for some subjective benefit. But this operates based on the very specific desires of the individual. However, put 100 people together in a room and try to get them to lie about something, and you will fail. They do not share a common motive. They cannot lie en masse. This violates the very real and proven principle that lying is based on "individual" desires, and masses do not operate as a single individual. Masses cannot lie. Therefore, the proof of Revelation at Mount Sinai is not a probability theorem, but a solid proof based on real, proven principles of psychology.

And yes, any time we find masses attesting to having witnessed an event, it must be true. But do not confuse this with religions that affirm a "belief", but possess no witnesses transmitting a story in an unbroken chain of generations. Unlike Jesus' supposed miracles, which had no one transmitting these purported wonders, Sinai has an unbroken chain...commencing with the event. There was no "100-year lapse" until stories began to spread, as in the case of Jesus. Such time lapses prove there were no attendees...precisely because there was no event, and thus, no time lapse, but rather, a completely fabricate fable. Jesus performed no miracles.

Reader: I also had a more theoretical question. Assuming the proof does not turn out to be definitive, and in fact can't be used (purely theoretical), at least in one's mind, what should he do? I'm not asking a subjective question, but rather, what should a thinker do if the proof is not

convincing to him, and he has removed any emotional conflicts he had with accepting the Torah. Would the Torah itself say that he should not be religious? It seems it does, but I'm not sure. (I know there are also other proofs for the veracity of the Torah, for instance using the fact that it is so immense and infinite, but I'm assuming those don't pan out either). I've heard that some Rishonim hold it is better to accept the Torah because your father does, and only use a proof if you have to, but that seems genuinely insane. I've also seen the article on your website "God's Existence: Belief or Proof?" so I'm guessing you would agree.

Thank you for helping me find truth, and in general for being one of the few bastions of rational thought.

Mesora: From the standpoint of the Torah, Torah obligations exist, regardless if one has proven their veracity. However, asking from the standpoint of someone knowledgeable of Torah, but not convinced of God's existence, it would seem impossible to fulfill "Love of God" for example. But nonetheless, his ignorance does not exempt him from Torah obligations.

But I would suggest that the practical relevance of such a person's ignorance in this case does not really exist.

For something to have practical ramifications, it must exist in reality...it must have the "quality" of reality. But besides being realistic, it also must partake of reality...in "quantity". For example, something, which exists in reality...but only for a split second once every 1,000,000 years can hardly admit of any practical ramifications, provided it does not affect other things. This is the case with someone's ignorance of God's existence and Sinai's truth. Such ignorance is quite readily removed by going through the proof of Sinai and God. So your question whether one who is yet ignorant of Sinai's proof is obligated in Torah, has really no practical implications: he can remove his doubts quite easily and quickly. Of course during the brief period of his ignorance, one cannot be completely "culpable" until knowledgeable of his offense. (Talmud Sabbath 67b) And this applies to your case as well. But after studying the events surrounding Sinai, one cannot deny the truth of God's existence. If one does remain with his doubts, it is clearly his own emotional resistance,

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*Our Torah adherence
must be the result of
proven, rational
convictions. Torah
was therefore given in
an irrefutable,
miraculous manner,
and reiterated as
such in our verses.*

for which he is in fact culpable. As Jeremiah states, "Who does not fear Your, King of the nations?" (10:7) Meaning, all admit of God's existence.

But this topic you mention is significant. If one reads through the account of Revelation at Sinai in both Exodus and Deuteronomy, one notices a recurring theme.

Exod. 20:17: "For the sake of proving you has God come (on Sinai) and so that His fear shall be on your faces, so that you should not sin."

Deut. 4:4: "And now Israel, listen to the statutes and the laws...that the God of your forefathers has given to you."

Deut. 4:9: "...lest you forget the matters your eyes saw...and you shall teach them to your children."

Deut. 4:10: "[Do not forget] The day you stood before God your God in Horeb, when God said to me, 'Assemble for Me the people and I will cause them to hear My words that they shall learn to fear Me all the days they are alive on the land, and their children they shall teach.'"

Deut. 4:35: "You have been shown to know that God is God, there is none other than Him."

36: "From the heavens He caused you to hear His voice to prove you, and on the land He showed you His great fire and His words you heard from amidst the flames."

What is the theme? It is significant.

Along side each mention of the miracles the Sinai, we find the command to teach or some reference to the Torah. Of course, the entire event of the miracles was regarding Torah, so it could not be otherwise. But I say that this carefully organized event, and its Scriptural juxtaposing of the irrefutable miracles to the Torah's adherence, was orchestrated for a precise lesson: "Torah adherence is inseparable from the proof of God". Sinai (proof of God) is paired with Torah adherence. Our Torah adherence must be the result of convictions based on proofs. God desires this, and therefore gifted mankind with the intelligence necessary to accomplish this. This is the precise message and one, which you must have clear, and fully appreciate.

Review the quotes above once more. A recurring theme indicates that we must not take this idea lightly. God's command that we follow the Torah is joined to the miracles in these verses. Moses in fact teaches us that the very imperative of Torah is the provability of God's existence...your precise point Jacques. I am glad you brought up this issue.

We derive from here the essential principle that God desires our Torah adherence to be the reaction of our complete conviction in His existence. God desires that are actions are to be the result of

intellectual conviction. This applies all the more to our overall attitude regarding Torah: we must view it as God-given. We must be convinced of this, if all our other Torah performances may be truly based on intelligence. Blind faith is not Judaism. God demands we engage our intelligence, and this apparatus can offer us complete conviction – this is its prized function. We must therefore be concerned to arrive at a complete conviction in God's existence, and the truth of the Torah and its myriads of ideas and ideals. Only then do we truly fulfill our mission, as stated by Rabbi Bachya (author of "Duties of the Heart"):

"Whoever has the intellectual capacity to verify what he receives from tradition, and yet is prevented from doing so by his own laziness, or because he takes lightly God's commandments and Torah, he will be punished for this and held accountable for negligence."

"If, however, you possess intelligence and insight, and through these faculties you are capable of verifying the fundamentals of the religion and the foundations of the commandments which you have received from the sages in the name of the prophets, then it is your duty to use these faculties until you understand the subject, so that you are certain of it - both by tradition and by force of reason. If you disregard and neglect this duty, you fall short in the fulfillment of what you owe your Creator."

Deut. 17:8-10 states: "If a case should prove too difficult for you in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, between (leprous) mark and mark, or other matters of dispute in your courts...you must act in accordance with what they tell you."

"The verse [above] does not say to simply accept them on the authority of Torah sages, and rely exclusively on their tradition. Rather, (Scripture) says that you should reflect on your own mind, and use your intellect in these matters. First learn them from tradition - which covers all the commandments in the Torah, their principles and details - and then examine them with your own mind, understanding, and judgment, until the truth become clear to you, and falsehood rejected, as it is written: "Understand today and reflect on it in your heart, Hashem is the G-d in the heavens above, and on the Earth below, there is no other." (Ibid, 4:39)

Proof of God and Torah adherence are inseparable in the verses quoted, precisely because God wishes that our Torah adherence be based on proof of God. ■

melachot – forms of creative labor – that may not be performed on Shabbat. There are many laws regarding each of these melachot. But all of these melachot and the laws that govern them are subsumed under two mitzvot – the prohibition against performing melacha on Shabbat and the positive command to rest or refrain from melacha on Shabbat.

Although there is general agreement on the number of mitzvot in the Torah, neither the Written Torah nor the Talmud clearly identifies the specific commandments. Therefore, there is considerable debate on the specific identities of the commandments. Various authorities have proposed lists of the 613 mitzvot. The most famous list was composed by Maimonides. Maimonides presented his list and his criteria for delineating the commandments in his Sefer HaMitzvot. Others disagreed with Maimonides' list. Nachmanides authored a critique of Maimonides Sefer HaMitzvot and suggested an alternative list.

This raises a question. Why is the specific list important? What difference does it make if a law is included in one commandment or another or if a specific injunction is counted as a mitzvah or included within some other mitzvah? There are various answers to this question. This week's parasha provides one insight into the importance of identifying the specific mitzvot.

In this week's parasha, the Torah begins a thorough description of the Mishcan – the Tabernacle – and its components. The Mishcan was a portable structure that accompanied Bnai Yisrael in the wilderness. After Bnai Yisrael conquered the land of Israel the Mishcan was eventually replaced by the Bait HaMikdash – the Holy Temple – in Yerushalayim. According to Maimonides and most other authorities, the passage above is the source for the mitzvah to construct not only the Mishcan but also the Bait HaMikdash.[1] In addition to this commandment, our parasha includes specific directions for the fabrication of most of the fundamental objects – such as the Aron, Menorah, and Shulchan – that are situated in the Mishcan.

“And they should make an Aron of acacia wood. Its length should be two and a half cubits, its width a cubit and a half, and its height a cubit and a half.” (Shemot 25:10)

This passage begins the description of the Aron – Ark. The Aron held the tablets of the Decalogue. The Aron was covered by the Kaporet – the Ark cover – described later in the parasha. According to Maimonides, the instructions to fabricate the Aron and Kaporet are not among the 613 commandments. Why does Maimonides not regard the requirement to create the Aron and Kaporet as a mitzvah? There are various answers proposed to this question. First, we will consider the most obvious answer.

“And you should make a Shulchan of acacia wood. Its length should be two cubits, and its width one cubit, and its height one and a half cubits.” (Shemot 25:23)

This passage begins the description of the construction of the Shulchan – the Table – of the Mishcan. This table held the Show Bread. Like the instructions for the fabrication of the Aron, the instructions for the creation of the Shulchan are not regarded by Maimonides as one of the 613 commandments. However, in the instance of the Shulchan, Maimonides provides an explanation for his reasoning.

Maimonides' reasoning is based upon a fundamental principle. In his introduction to his Sefer HaMitzvot, Maimonides outlines fourteen criteria he used in developing his list of mitzvot. His twelfth shresh – principle – is that it is not appropriate to count the parts of a mitzvah as separate mitzvot. Maimonides continues to explain that many mitzvot are composed of various components. All of the components are subsumed within the general mitzvah. Maimonides then cites various examples of this principle. His first example concerns the Mishcan and the Shulchan. He explains that the Mishcan is composed of various components. The Shulchan and the Menorah – the Candelabra – are two of these components. Maimonides argues the instructions to fabricate the Shulchan, the Menorah and the other components of the Mishcan should not be counted as mitzvot. Instead, these instructions are included within the more encompassing mitzvah of creating the Mishcan.

Kinat Sofrim applies this same reasoning to the Aron. Maimonides does not count the instructions to create the Aron as a mitzvah. Kinat Sofrim argues that this follows from Maimonides reasoning in regard to the Shulchan and Menorah. Like the Shulchan and Menorah, the Aron is a component of the Mishcan. Therefore, the instructions to create the Aron are subsumed within the mitzvah to create the Mishcan.[2]

Although the basic logic of this explanation is sound, it is subject to two criticisms. The first criticism is based on the language used by Maimonides in describing the commandment to construct the Mishcan and Bait HaMikdash. In his description of this commandment, Maimonides again explains his reason for not counting the instructions in regards to the components of the Mishcan as separate commandments. Maimonides states, “We have already explained that this general commandment includes various parts and that the Menorah, Shulchan, the altar, and the other components are parts of the Mikdash and are referred to as Mikdash.”[3] Although Maimonides clearly includes the Menorah, Shulchan and altar among the components of the Mishcan, he makes no mention of the Aron. Now, one may argue that reference to the Aron is made in the phrase “other

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components.” However, this is unlikely. The Aron was a very essential component of the Mishcan. It is unlikely that Maimonides would not mention the Aron specifically and include this very important component in a general phrase.

The second criticism of Kinat Sofrim’s position presents a more fundamental problem. In his Mishne Torah, Maimonides explains in detail the laws included in the commandment to create a Mikdash. His discussion includes a discussion of the fabrication of the Menorah, the Shulchan and the other components of the Temple. However, Maimonides does not provide a description of the construction of the Aron. The absence of this description from the laws regarding the mitzvah of creating the Mikdash clearly indicates that the construction of the Aron is not part of this mitzvah.

However, this omission is not merely a basis for objecting to the thesis of Kinat Sofrim. It is the basis for a fundamental question on Maimonides. Not only does Maimonides omit any description of the Aron from the laws regarding the Mikdash. Nowhere in his entire Mishne Torah – his comprehensive codification of halacha – does he describe the construction of the Aron! In other words, not only does Maimonides not consider the construction of the Aron to be a mitzvah, he completely ignores this fundamental element of the Mikdash!

Based on these objections to Kinat Sofrim’s explanation of Maimonides and the fundamental problem posed by Maimonides’ complete omission of any discussion of the Aron’s construction in his Mishne Torah, Meggilat Esther offers an alternative explanation of Maimonides’ position.

“Speak to Bnai Yisrael and they should take for Me an offering. From each person whose heart moves him you should take My offering.” (Shemot 25:2)

In this passage, Hashem instructs Moshe to collect contributions for the construction of the Mishcan. Maimonides does not count this instruction as one of the 613 mitzvot. The reason for this omission is explained by another of Maimonides’ criteria for counting mitzvot. Maimonides’ third principle is that it is not appropriate to count as one of the 613 mitzvot a commandment that does not apply to all generations. Maimonides explains that in order to a commandment to be included in the list of 613 mitzvot, it must be relevant to all generations. Any commandment that is given and executed at a specific point in time and thereafter has no relevance, is not included within the 613 mitzvot. The instruction to Moshe to collect contributions for the Mishcan was given in the wilderness and executed immediately. It has no further application to future generations. Therefore, this commandment cannot be counted among the 613 mitzvot.

Meggilat Esther contends that the same reasoning

can be applied to the instructions for creating the Aron. But before we can understand this application, we must consider one basic difference between the Aron and the other components of the Mikdash.

“As all I have shown you regarding the form of the Mishcan and the form of its utensils. And so you should do.” (Shemot 25:9)

In this passage, Hashem tells Moshe that the Mishcan and its components must be constructed according to the instructions that He has provided. Hashem then adds the phrase, “And so you should do.” This phrase seems redundant. However, the Sages offer an explanation for this apparently superfluous phrase. They explain that this phrase refers to future generations. If one of the components – the Menorah, Shulchan or other element – is lost and must be replaced, the replacement must be constructed in a manner consistent with the specifications in our parasha.[4]

It appears that Maimonides maintains that although this requirement applies to the most of the components of the Mikdash, it does not apply to the Aron. Maimonides explains that when Shlomo constructed the Bait HaMikdash, he realized that it would ultimately be destroyed. Therefore, he created a system of hidden storage areas. These secret storage areas would be used to hide the Aron and its contents before the Bait HaMikdash’s destruction. When King Yoshiyahu realized that the destruction of the Temple was approaching. He commanded that the Aron and its contents be removed and hidden in the facilities that Shlomo had constructed.

When the Bait HaMikdash was rebuilt, the Aron and its contents were not recovered. Neither were they replaced. Instead, the Bait HaMikdash was rebuilt without restoring the Aron and its contents to their proper place.

Meggilat Esther posits that Shlomo’s treatment of the Aron and its contents reflects a fundamental difference between them and the other components of the Mishcan. If any of the other components become damaged or lost they can be replaced. But the Aron was constructed one time. It can never be replaced by a new Aron.

Based on this distinction, Meggilat Esther answers our questions on Maimonides. He explains that the commandment to build the Aron was not given to all generations. Instead, the commandment was given at a specific time for execution at that time. The only Aron is the one that was constructed under Moshe’s supervision. No other can replace it. This explains Maimonides’ decision not to count the building of the Aron as a mitzvah. [5] This explanation also explains Maimonides’ omission of the design of the Aron from his discussion of the laws of the Bait HaMikdash. Maimonides’ code is limited to those laws that apply – in some manner – throughout the generations. However, since the

Aron will not and cannot be built again, the laws of its construction are omitted.

It is clear from this discussion that Maimonides’ decision to not count the construction of the Aron as a mitzvah has significant implications. According to Kinat Sofrim, Maimonides’ position implies that the Aron is a component of the Mishcan and can be compared to the Menorah and Shulchan. Meggilat Esther rejects this interpretation of Maimonides. He contends that the Aron is unique and, unlike the other components, cannot be replaced.

However, Meggilat Esther’s explanation leaves us with a problem. It seems odd that the Aron – which was the central fixture of the Bait HaMikdash is not essential. The Aron was not recovered and returned to its proper place in the second Temple. Nonetheless, the second Temple had the sanctity of the Bait HaMikdash. Furthermore, the Mishcan is referred to in the Torah as the Mishcan HaEydut – the Tabernacle of the Testimony.[6] This name is apparently derived from the Aron which is referred to as the Aron HaEydut.[7]

The obvious implication of the name Mishcan HaEydut is that the Aron is central and essential to the Mishcan and Bait HaMikdash. If this is the case, how did the second Temple acquire its sanctity without the Aron in its proper place?

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik Z”tl offers an answer to this question. He explains that although the Aron was not returned to its proper place, it was nonetheless regarded as present in the second Temple. Even though its place was unknown and it was not recovered, it was not considered lost or destroyed. It remained – in its hiding place – a fundamental element of the second Temple.[8]

By applying Rav Soloveitchik’s reasoning to Meggilat Esther, the contrast between his understanding of the Aron and the position of Kinat Sofrim becomes even clearer. According to Kinat Sofrim, the Aron is an element of the Mishcan akin to the other elements. However, according to Meggilat Esther, the Aron is far more central. The Mishcan derives its identity and sanctity from the Aron. Furthermore, the Aron created under Moshe’s supervision is completely unique. It is the only Aron and it cannot be replaced. It is this unique Aron that is central to the sanctity of the Mishcan. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Aseh 20.

[2] Rav Chananya Kazim, Kinat Sofrim, Commentary on Maimonides’ Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Aseh 33.

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Aseh 20.

[4] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 25:9.

[5] Rav Yitzchak DeLeon, Meggilat Esther, Commentary on Maimonides’ Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Aseh 33.

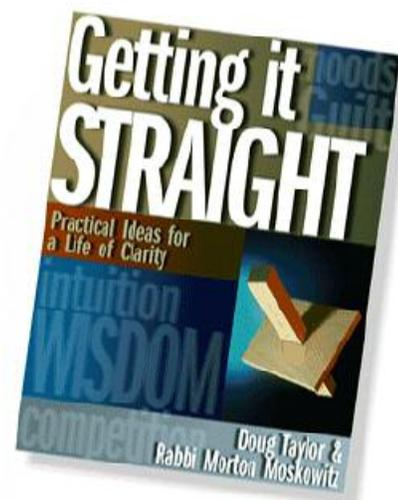
[6] Sefer BeMidbar 1:53.

[7] Sefer Shemot 40:21

[8] Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, M’Peninai HaRav (Jerusalem, 5761), p 335.

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

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Rumors

DOUG TAYLOR AND RABBI MORTON MOSKOWITZ

"Look at this," I said, pointing. "Pregnant dachshund gives birth to three singing chipmunks, two of whom claim to be Elvis Presley."

My friend, the King of Rational Thought, took the bait and actually glanced in the direction of the supermarket tabloids as we made our way through the line.

"Hmm," he said as he read the real headlines, "I think you may need glasses. However, your creativity is admirable."

"OK, I made it up," I said, paying for our mid-afternoon snack of crackers and cheese. "But you'll have to admit, it's not all that different than those headlines or some of the rumors that circulate around these days."

"An interesting subject," he said thoughtfully as we headed for the door.

"Pregnant dachshunds?"

"No," he laughed. "Rumors. Consider this. How do you know something is true?"

I looked at him. "Like how do I know this marvelous repast just cost me \$6.43? Because I paid for it."

"True," he said. "You got the information through your five senses. Call that primary information. But what about information from an external source? What if someone came to you and told you something? Like your headline. What would you have to do in order to determine whether it was true?"

"Well, I'd have to check it out. I'd have to ask the person questions. I'd have to determine if he or she is reliable, trustworthy, and accurate about reporting events. I'd have to gather outside facts, look for corroborating information, ask others who may have seen the dachshund."

"To be perfectly honest," I concluded, "I'd probably have to interview the singing

chipmunks in order to be satisfied."

We took refuge from the supermarket bustle at a nearby park table and began the delightful process of consuming my recent expenditure.

"So you would need to do a thorough investigation if you received information from an outside party?" he said, spreading brie on a cracker.

"Of course."

"And you'd need to look at all the available evidence before reaching a conclusion?"

"Absolutely."

"And you wouldn't leap to a conclusion until you had done all of that?"

I finished a bite and said, "I hope not. I suppose it would depend on how important the information was or whether I was interested. But in important matters, I would certainly do that."

"And would you classify criminal trials as important matters?"

"Well of course."

"How about national ones involving famous people?"

I started to take a bite and my teeth stopped in mid-air as I saw what he was saying.

He didn't wait for a reply. "You see, most people make conclusions on insufficient or unreliable information. A bit of gossip here, some loosely reported information there. Pretty



soon, people decide - sometimes vehemently - that so-and-so is innocent or guilty. Yet if someone did not witness a crime - be it murder, alleged sexual misconduct, or whatever - and has not objectively and rationally examined the evidence, how can he or she have any opinion about it at all? The 'opinion' is nothing more than a fantasy, probably emotionally-based. But emotions don't count. It's the facts we need."

"By the way," he concluded, "this need to thoroughly investigate applies to gossip as well."

I ate quietly, thinking about what he had said. He ate for awhile too, then asked, "So. Do you think he's actually innocent or guilty?"

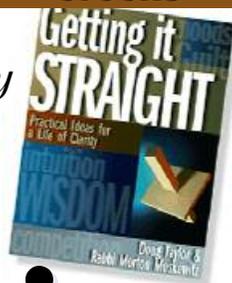
I spread one final chunk of the creamy ambrosia onto a cracker. "I think," I replied carefully, "that I don't have enough facts to pretend to know."

He smiled. □

Crooks

*Not Taken from "Getting It Straight"
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Plagiarism

DUPING TAYLOR RABBI MIMICKING MOSKOWITZ

"From when Adar enters, increase in gladness." The month of Adar – Purim time – commenced yesterday.

Following this principle...I will hopefully increase yours.

Plagiarism: Right? Wrong? What do you think? Why do I ask you? You will find out.

True story...it's a typical winter day...the sun reflects brightly off the large mounds of our recent snow heaped high by plows, into what looks like a sidewalk igloo sale. Maybe it's the lack of leaves outside that gets me yearning for more of them. So I enter my local plant shop...beautiful greens abound everywhere. I purchase a plant just like the ones I have at home...they need no direct sunlight, so I feel this is a secure insurance policy against their withering in not-so-well-lit rooms.

A day or two after I bring it home...and water it...leaves are falling from this quickly dethroned queen of green, more than Hasbro dominoes. I call the plant shop, asking if they have an identical plant as a replacement, as this one appears diseased. They answer, "We do not." I ask for my money back and they say, "Oh, I am sorry, we have a 'no return' policy." (They did not convince me of how sorry they were) I thought I would try to nurture the plant back. But I was bothered by the injustice. I called a few days later asking to speak to the owner. I asked if his clerk's policy of 'no return' was in fact representative of the store's policy. He initially said he would not return money, but would replace the plant. I told him that I preferred that too, and continued, "but your clerk said you had no replacement". I asked him again for my money back. I asked, "If you were sold a watch that was broken, would you feel that store owed you your money?" He hemmed and hawed for 10 minutes until, he finally agreed to return my money, if he had no replacement. I praised him on his honesty. But the goal should not be protection for my own

money alone, but for everyone else's too. I then asked him to amend his policy to accept returns on flawed goods from anyone.

How many times have we experienced this "No Return" policy? Did you ever consider the injustice of this policy? Are policies "unapproachable" laws? Not to me. God's word is the only unapproachable policy. I did not contact the King of Rational Thought, as he resides on the West Coast, and I reside in New York. It was only 6:30 am his time. How might he consider this?

I thought: what does this mean, "No Return"? To me, this means, in other words, "We are not responsible for selling you damaged goods." Translation: "we can rob you". Let's take another, fictional scenario: the storeowner refuses to return my money. I ask him, "Since you feel your policy is fair, I guess you won't mind if I write a letter to the local paper for their "Better Business" column, complaining about your store's unjust practice." He responds, "No, please don't send any letters, I will return your money." He will steal my money, but fears other's knowing about his cheating practice. In truth, it is his greed for other victims' cash that he fears negative publicity. So he will steal as long as it is profitable. But if his stealing results in bad press, and business loss, then he must switch his strategy. His only real goal is profit, and he will do anything to be as profitable as possible. He has no morality. He hides behind a "business practice" to sell damaged goods, robbing people blindly.

No one who cares about honesty and other peoples' money should tolerate a "no return" policy. You should inform the storeowner of the corruption in demanding a customer remain with damaged good, even though he intended to buy perfect goods and was misled. If the storeowner refuses, then tell him you will report him to the press. This probably will not improve his moral code, but it will protect others.



Now...for that title above "Plagiarism". What does it have to do with a "no return" policy? The answer: absolutely nothing. Confused? Don't be.

Look closely at the authors of this article once more...right now... You probably did not read it carefully at first. As I mentioned, Adar is a time to increase one's gladness, so I thought a little Purim humor appropriate for this month. As you see, this is not an authentic "Doug Taylor and Rabbi Morton Moskowitz" article! I wrote it, plagiarizing them. Is plagiarizing wrong? Don't we say that plagiarism is the "highest form of flattery"? Plagiarism is wrong when it causes injury. But without injury, plagiarism is an act of recognition and admiration.

I wish to compliment you both, Doug and Rabbi Moskowitz on your fine book, "Getting it Straight". Many others and I have truly enjoyed your ideas and writing style. I appreciate your submissions for the JewishTimes, and hope this tribute to your work gives you all a smile. On the topic, I also thank Rabbi Bernard Fox for his many years of continued submissions. May all your efforts in education imbue many more appreciative individuals.

Have a pleasant Shabbos and a happy 2 months of Adar to everyone,

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim ■

Rabbi Yitz Greenberg

A Distortion of Maimonides

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: Yitz Greenberg is not wrong!!! You did not complete your own quotation of Rambam's Laws of Kings, chapter 11. For Gentiles, it may be God's plan that Jesus paves the way for a beginning for them, the Gentiles to know Ethical Monotheism and the One God. Of course Jesus is not Messiah, and was evil for the Jews. It was wrong of you to attack Rabbi Yitz Greenberg and only quote what you wanted to. Some forms of Christianity do not believe in a Trinity, or that Jesus is the Son of God. See the Meiri and Samson Raphael Hirsch. I read all this in Rabbi Joseph Grunblatt's sefer, "Geulah and Golus", who was the Jewish philosophy professor of Touro and yeshiva colleges.

Mesora: Do not base yourself on the words of your teachers, if you have not proven their teachings to be sound to your own mind. That is number one, and is addressed in this week's cover article.

Number two; do you not hear yourself talk? How in one breath can you state Christianity paves the way to "Ethical Monotheism", and simultaneously state, "Jesus was evil for the Jews"? God does not "pave the way" of redemption with idolatry, with a false religion bent on Crusades which murder the innocent en masse. Additionally, God does not care less for Gentiles than Jews, allowing them to falter, while incubating Jews from such flawed personalities as Jesus. This is faulty thinking.

You also accuse me of your own crime: you do not quote Maimonides, which explains your complete ignorance of what he says. Yet, you criticize me for not quoting Maimonides fully!

Personally, I did not feel it helpful last week to confuse the reader quoting more than necessary. Since Rabbi Greenberg himself did not quote

Maimonides, I have no way of knowing which statement of Maimonides Rabbi Greenberg was corrupting into his false view that Maimonides had a "positive historical evaluation" of Christianity. But I will quote Maimonides in full now, displaying for you what you gravely distort:

Laws of Kings, Laws 11:10-12 (Capach Edition):

"[10] ...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, i.e., 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. [11] Nevertheless, the thoughts of the Creator of the world are not within the power of man to reach them, 'for our ways are not His ways, nor are our thoughts His thoughts.' And all these matters of Jesus of Nazareth and that of the Ishmaelite who arose after him are only to straighten the way of the king Messiah and to fix the entire world, to serve God as one, as it is stated (Zephaniah 3:9), 'For then I will turn to the peoples (into) clear speech, to all call in the name of God and serve Him unanimously. [12] How (will this come about)? The entire world has already become filled with the mention of the Messiah, with words of Torah and words of mitzvot and these matters have spread to the furthestmost isles, to many nations of uncircumcised hearts, and they discuss these matters and the mitzvot of the Torah. Some say: 'These mitzvot are true, but were already

nullified in the present age and are not applicable for all time.' Others say: 'Hidden matters are in them (mitzvot) and they are not to be taken literally, and the messiah has already come and revealed their hidden (meanings). And when the true Messiah stands, and he is successful and is raised and exalted, immediately they all will retract and will know that fallacy they inherited from their fathers, and that their prophets and fathers caused them to err.'"

Maimonides is clear, as he says, "fallacy they inherited from their fathers, and that their prophets and fathers caused them to err." We cannot suggest that God desired Christianity to arise. God desires no other religion than Judaism. God knew the future, and foresaw all future religions that would arise. Nonetheless, He publicly revealed Himself to man only once, instructing man in only one religion – Judaism.

Maimonides does not indicate that God desired Christianity's existence. This is clearly in direct opposition to God's Torah. All Maimonides says is that God's plan will not be altered by the rise of other religions. The fact that Christianity spread the mitzvot is not equivalent to saying God desires Christianity from the outset. The spread of Christianity may have brought about awareness, but a false one at that, and one that all nations will ultimately see as false, as the quote says, "immediately they all will retract and will know that fallacy they inherited from their fathers, and that their prophets and fathers caused them to err." Look at Maimonides' opening words: "Can there be a greater stumbling block than this (Christianity)?" Also, "and this (one, i.e., 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 defines Christianity as evil. Don't ignore his words. Rabbi Greenberg too distorts Maimonides to fit into his agenda.

What is preferable; that Christianity would never had existed, or actual history? God's will is that Christianity would have never existed. However, now that Christianity exists,

(continued on next page)

Maimonides indicates it cannot compromise God's plan: "Nevertheless, the thoughts of the Creator of the world are not within the power of man to reach them, 'for our ways are not His ways, nor are our thoughts His thoughts.'" We cannot fathom God's plan. Maimonides admits he fails to comprehend a positive goal in the spread of Christianity, but it can in no way compromise God's ultimate plan, as these events were not thwarted by God. A negative may be utilized for a positive. But Christianity remains a "negative".

To distort Maimonides as saying Christianity "contributes" to God's plan, is opposite what he did say, that it "does not compromise" God's plan. The former suggest it is an inherent good, while the latter retains Christianity's true status as one of the worst evils in world history. Maimonides does not say it contributes to God's plan. He writes: "And all these matters of Jesus of Nazareth and that of the Ishmaelite who arose after him are only to straighten the way of the king Messiah and to fix the entire world, to serve God as one." After he openly states that Christianity is the "greatest stumbling block", Maimonides cannot turn 180°, suggesting in the same breath that it is a good. Keep all of the author's words in front of your eyes.

So let us understand Maimonides words: "How (will this come about)? The entire world has already become filled with the mention of the Messiah, with words of Torah and words of mitzvot and these matters have spread to the furthestmost isles, to many nations of uncircumcised hearts, and they discuss these matters and the mitzvot of the Torah. Some say: "These mitzvot are true, but were already nullified in the present age and are not applicable for all time." Others say: "Hidden matters are in them (mitzvot) and they are not to be taken literally, and the messiah has already come and revealed their hidden (meanings). And when the true Messiah stands, and he is successful and is raised and exalted, immediately they all will retract and will know that fallacy they inherited from their fathers, and that their prophets and fathers caused them to err." Maimonides suggests that God's allowance of man's free will, expressed in the rise of corrupt religions, has a benefit. Not a benefit in their ideas, but in another manner. I will explain.

Again, "immediately they all will retract and will know that fallacy they inherited from their fathers, and that their prophets and fathers caused them to err." I believe Maimonides wished to convey the following lesson: a prior fallacy serves to validate a subsequent truth. This is the core idea of the entire quote. Let me explain.

If one errs, believing a fallacy as truth, and subsequently learns the truth, he then dismisses his previous error. Conversely, if the true Messiah arrives, and teaches Torah, others might then develop new, false religions, as was so during the rise of Christianity and all other religions, post Moses. Through their false interpretations of true Torah, Jesus and other false prophets deceived themselves and others, that they correctly interpreted new events as God's fulfillment of His promise of redemption. But, as God plans, if their error in determining the Messiah is subsequently met with the arrival of the true Messiah, and they are then shown false by the true interpretation of Torah, then all previous errors are recognized as fallacy, "immediately they all will retract and will know that fallacy they inherited from their fathers, and that their prophets and fathers caused them to err." This precise scenario prevents any future distortions of Torah and the Messiah, which would not be the case if there were no previous, false religions. The very existence of false religions, subsequently met with the arrival of the true Messiah, will eternally discount all religions, except for Judaism. In this manner, Judaism will forever remain as the true word of God.

I will give another example of this method of God instructing man, where a prior fallacy serves to validate a subsequent truth: Rashi (Num. 13:2) quotes this Rabbinic statement, "(God said) by their lives, I will give them an opportunity to err with the words of the spies so they don't inherit the land of Israel." This would seem like a vindictive statement, but as God is devoid of emotion, how do we understand it? I believe the meaning is this: Had God not permitted the spies to spy out Israel, they would have been harboring an incorrect notion in relation to God. That is, their desire to 'send spies' displayed their disbelief in God's promise that they will successfully conquer Israel. If this disbelief was not brought out into the open, they would remain with this false notion, and this is not tolerable by God. What is meant by "God gave them an opportunity to err"? It means that God gave them an opportunity to act out this notion in reality so it can be dealt with. God's goal was not their loss of Israel. Giving them "a chance not to inherit Israel" is God offering those Jews a generous chance to realize their emotional conflict: they were not desirous of inheriting Israel and denied God's promise. In this manner, the Jews are enabled by God to face their mistake, and perhaps correct it.

I believe this is also the case with God allowing false religions to rise prior to His

delivering the true Messiah. God certainly prefers that the false religions never existed, but He allows man free will, and history to run a course where the truth will ultimately be unopposed. Allowing false religions to rise prior to the Messiah, God secures man a future where all arguments against Torah have been addressed.

It is my belief that the Torah institution of a Messiah serves a primary goal: to unite all peoples in God's worship. God knew how history would unfold, that Judaism would be fragmented into numerous branches, and deviations in levels of observance would arise. A cure to this problem was necessary. I believe that the Messiah is this cure. Upon Messiah's arrival, who is accepted by the many Jewish factions other than authentic orthodoxy, Judaism will thereby be unified, and be followed in its original form. Since all members of Judaism accept the coming of Messiah, in contrast to all other laws, which are so compromised, the institution of the Messiah is the one institution that all Jews accept. All Jews will follow Messiah's teachings. Judaism will return to its pure, original form, hopefully soon, to be taught by the Messiah, God's true messenger.

This is not only true regarding various Jewish factions, but also on the world scale of all religions. Messiah has become the center of religious difference. Upon his arrival, not only will all Jews unite in one practice, but all other religions will also abandon their fallacies, accepting Judaism as the one, true word of God.

The institution of the Messiah serves to unite all Jews and all nations to serve God in one practice. All other religions will be dismissed as complete falsehoods. Such a dismissal of prior fallacy insures that no future deviation from God's word will occur.

God preferred that man never deviated from Torah, be he Jew or Gentile. And even though man has deviated by creating false religions, his actions cannot compromise God's plan, but God uses man's error for an ultimate good. Better that man does not err, but thankful are we that God utilizes our errors and implements corrective measures for all humanity. Rabbi Greenberg completely misunderstood Maimonides. Maimonides viewed Christianity as an evil, and we must be sympathetic with Christians, teaching them their error, not hiding truths from them for any other goals. "Rebuke a wise man and he will love you". (Proverbs, 9:8)

Remember what Maimonides said, "Can there be a greater stumbling block than Christianity? ■

Letters: February 2005

Reader: Considering, Jews celebrate Chanukkah, which is derived from the Books of the Macabees, why don't Jews accept it as part of the Tanach?

Mesora: The Jews do not celebrate Channukah based on Macabees...but rather, based on the Rabbi's teachings in the Talmud Sabbath. □

Reader: Is it true that Judaism rejected the Septuagint because the Christians adopted it? The Christian New Testament citations of what we refer to as the Old Testament come from the LXX, not the Hebrew. Also, why does Judaism reject the authority of the books of the Macabees and other books of the Septuagint canon? For example, the Book of Sirach has been found in Hebrew among the Dead Sea scrolls. As I understand it, the Ethiopian Jews include books that Ashkenazim and Sephardim reject that are found in the LXX among their canon of accepted books.

Mesora: Judaism has always possessed God's divine word since Sinai. As time unfolded and more prophets arose with God's words, they too wrote down their divinely inspired words in the form of Prophets and Writings. In the end, God's Torah or Bible is comprised of the Five Books of Moses, Prophets and Writings.

The Septuagint was a translation into Greek of the Five Books and nothing else. See Talmud Megilla 9a. Even though we find Suptagints today including more, this was done erroneously and does not accurately reflect what the Rabbis translated.

The New Testament is not authorized by God or His prophets, so we reject Macabees, and other books, such as Luke, Matthew, Mark. etc. □

Reader:How do we celebrate the Purim today and does anyone in the family play a particular role?

Mesora: No one has a distinct role. Roles do not apply to Purim. Purim is celebrated by reading or hearing the Megilla scroll once at night and once during the day. We also make a festive meal and indulge in wine, more than what we are accustomed. Some explain the reason being to evoke gladness in the heart which mimics the unbridled joy felt by the Jews back then. We are obligated to send food to our friends and give gifts to at least 2 poor people. All this serves to remind us of the events in which God orchestrated our salvation from annihilation, and to create harmony between all Jews. □

Shechita: Ritual Slaughter

Reader: Where in the Torah does it instruct man that allowed animals must undergo Shechita? Secondly, the Talmud has reinterpreted God's word to allow for the business of Shechita by trained men. This fact has not only added to but also diminished from the words found in Torah. Is this interpretation by men in Talmud changing the words of God?

Mesora: Talmud Yoma 75b states: "Rebbe said [the words] 'and you shall slaughter as I commanded you' (Deut. 12:21) teach that Moses was commanded on the food pipe and the wind pipe; that the majority of one [pipe] must be cut in fowl, and the majority of both [pipes] regarding beasts."

We learn from here that when God commanded Moses in Deuteronomy to slaughter "as He commanded", there was an accompanying instruction in the Oral Law concerning just how Shechita is to be performed "as He commanded". The Talmud transmits this Oral Law to us.

Regarding your second question, one may slaughter his animals himself - he need not hire another. As well, he may create his own Tefillin. But to create Torah-recognized forms of these and other objects of Mitzvah, much knowledge is required. Therefore, one who is relatively ignorant of the Torah's prescribed design and creation of objects of Mitzvah is wise to pay another to create them for him. I see no reason why one cannot make his business the creation of Torah scrolls, Tefillin, Succahs, or performances, like Torah reading, circumcision, or Shechita. There is no law prohibiting the taking of money to assist another...even in areas of Mitzvah. Be mindful, the one paying the professional is doing so willingly. □

Weekly Parsha

PROCEED WITH CAUTION

RABBI RON SIMON

I guess that there is something untoward about reading Plato's Republic in Starbuck's, especially in Cedarhurst Long Island, but that is what I have been doing the last couple of weeks. Well, life has its tensions, and if you're going to do some hard stuff, you might need to do some not-so-hard-stuff too.

While going back and forth on some difficult points, a friend of mine caught my eye in the corridor. They asked a couple of very powerful questions about the set of Parshas related to the Mishkan. One of them is this week's parsha, Trumah. I guess that I haven't been the only one out of sync with the calendar lately (This was a couple of weeks ago).

One of the questions that they asked concerned the presence of the ceruvim in the Mishkan. The Mishkan and Mikdash are both designed as an ascent from the less Holy to the Holy of Holies. Upon arriving at the Holy of Holies, one is greeted by the ceruvim that are over the ark. Isn't it ironic that upon entering the holiest place, you meet up with a couple of statues?

What is more, is that the Ramban actually identified this location, the place from where the Divine voice emanated, as the essence of the Mishkan, the resting place of the Divine presence!

The Rambam also encourages the dissemination of the belief in angels amongst the Jewish people. Wouldn't it be easier just to focus upon the one true being, G-d? The Rambam is the great expositor of monotheism, isn't he?

I believe that the answer to these questions is contained in the fact that the ascent to the understanding of the existence of G-d is marked by a certain tension as



well. We encourage a certain intellectual freedom in Judaism, This freedom is seen both in the inclusion of all of the people in the pursuit of knowledge and the creativity that is seen in the Torah style of debate. The text of the Talmud records a history of lively and colorful discussions that took place between our Rabbis, pursuing their theories as far as they could take them.

The zeal and independence inherent in this tradition, which is itself a type of ascent, is tempered by an awareness that we are bound to a great extent by our physicality and particularity. In the rush to ascend, we can't forget that we are pulled in two directions. Ceruvim impress this upon us. They are sort of going in two directions, although not to the same degree that we are. They are a sort of boundary condition, so to speak.

The ceruvim do not represent G-d either as images, or, in another sense, as spokesmen either. They are boundaries at the ascent. They are consequently seen as infants, in that they rely completely on G-d for their existence.

As Bnei Yisrael, we should see ourselves in some sense as independent, while still recognizing that we are banim, children, as well. In a somewhat fatherless age, let us just pray for more guidance. -Good Shabbos □

SCHOTTENSTEIN EDITION of the TALMUD BAVLI PRESENTED to the LIBRARY of CONGRESS

 CARRIE DEVORAH

FEBRUARY 10TH, 2005 - GREAT HALL OF THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, WASHINGTON DC:

At a time, God and Government is being heatedly debated in the United States Supreme court, an auspicious moment took place at a private event in the Nation's Capitol, one block away in the Great Hall of the Library of Congress' Jefferson building, unnoticed by the ACLU. The event was so quiet the Library of Congress did not send out a press release announcing an accomplishment in contemporary Jewish history, donation of the most comprehensive translation of the Babylonian Talmud, Talmud Bavli, into America's Library.

The project was begun by Jerome Schottenstein. Schottenstein passed away two years before the Schottenstein edition Talmud Bavli was published. Jay Schottenstein stood, in the Great Hall of the Library of Congress, nearby a photo of his late father, reflecting amongst friends, on what they completed and what they are about to embark on. The Schottenstein Talmud Bavli edition, a 15 plus year effort, is the first of several translations being requested from around the world.

James Hadley Billington, Chief Librarian at America's Library of Congress, welcomed into the Library's collection the 73-volume English language Schottenstein edition of the Babylonian Talmud, Talmud Bavli. Mesorah Heritage Foundation Board of Governors organized the reception honoring Columbus Ohio's Schottensteins. The dedication of the Talmud Bavli, oral law, coincidental to the Library of Congress' exhibit "350 Years of Jews In America," was held yards away from the Library of Congress' permanent exhibitions of the Gutenberg Bible and the Bible of Mainz. Guests from around the country were served kosher sushi, along with other finger foods including a desert table of cut fruits, pineapple to be dipped in

chocolate, and pastries accompanied by hot beverages.

The evening was MC'd by Baltimore's Howard Friedman accompanied by his wife Judge Chaya Friedman. Concluding remarks were delivered by Artsroll's Rabbi Zlotowitz, accompanied by Rebbetzin Zlotowitz, a son and daughter-in-law. Artsrolls president Elliot Schwartz was accompanied by his wife Judy, both Yeshiva University alumnae. Representatives from both the House and Senate included Senator Frank Lautenberg, Joe Lieberman, Hillary Rodham-Clinton, Evan Bayh, Patrick Tiberi, Carl Levin, Barbara Mikulski, Sam Brownback, Ralph Regula, Todd Tiaht, Shelly Berkley, Eric Cantor chief deputy majority whip Virginia's Congress and others. Schottenstein staff were in attendance. Former Costa Rican Ambassador Jaime Darenblum and his wife attended as did Eric Schockman, president of LA's Mazon.org, Sol Teichman, Shimmy Stein advisor to Eric Cantor, Simcha Lyons, Gary Torgow, Noam Neusner, President Bush's liaison to the Jewish community conveyed the President's congratulations.

Weeks after, Parsha Yitro, addressing the giving of the Torah, was read in synagogues around the world, Schottenstein looking towards the gathered said his next goal is to assure his edition of the Talmud Bavli, published by Artsroll/Mesorah publications, is "placed in every law school in America." Unbeknownst to the evening's attendees, tucked in a corner in the ceiling mosaic high above them lie 5 letters, M-O-S-E-S, spelling the name of Moses the lawgiver. ■

BIO: Carrie Devorah is a DC based award winning investigative photojournalist. Devorah author of GOD IN THE TEMPLE OF GOVERNMENTS is one of DC's premier authorities of where God is in the Nation's Capitol. February, Devorah's work was submitted to the United States Supreme Court in an Amicus Brief defending God in Government.

MAIMONIDES' EVALUATION OF CHRISTIANITY: A NEGATIVE

REFUTING RABBI YITZ GREENBERG

 ANONYMOUS

(continued from page 1)

Rabbi Greenberg further suggests, "Christianity spreads the message of God and morality to the world." Nothing could be further from the truth. God commands us as part of the 613, not to add or subtract from the Torah, and Christianity clearly altered, abrogated, and abolished God's laws on occasions too numerous to list here. God's words easily refute Rabbi Greenberg.

He writes, "Jews should appreciate – but not convert to – Christian spirituality". Yes...we must live peaceably with other peoples. However, Judaism disagrees with Rabbi Greenberg: we must not appreciate a distorted system which violates God's words, and which God commands against.

Then, the Rabbi claims "Jesus is not a false messiah, merely a failed one." Astonishing! Rabbi Greenberg directly opposes Maimonides' description of the Messiah's qualifications: Jesus didn't possess even one.

Rabbi Greenberg consistently manufactures dangerous views, claiming their Orthodox Jewish origin, but cites not a single quote – precisely because he has none. Rabbi Greenberg's contradiction of Maimonides', Moses', and God's words expose his views as contrary to Orthodox Judaism. ■