

HAPPY SHAVUOS!
**HOW FORTUNATE ARE WE TO
 HAVE BEEN GRANTED THE
 TORAH - GUIDING US TO
 MARVEL AT WISDOM**

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

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Weekly Parsha

Naso

RABBI BERNARD FOX

**“May Hashem lift His
 countenance to you and
 establish shalom for you.”**
 (BeMidbar 6:26)

One of the most common
 Jewish practices is prayer. Yet,
 although we prayer on a regular

(continued on page 8)



WISDOM VS KINDNESS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: Last week's
 Haftarah concludes with
 familiar words recite while
 tying the Tefillin strap three
 times on our finger, “And I
 will betroth you to Me
 forever; and I will betroth you

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Love & Commitment

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Judaism is very meticulous
 about the manner in which it
 celebrates Festivals. Thus we eat
 Matza on Passover because it
 recalls the suddenness the
 liberation that happened so
 quickly there was no time for the
 dough to rise. On Sukkot we leave
 our homes and establish residence
 in the Succah to remember “In
 Sukkot did I house the children of
 Israel when I took them out of
 Egypt.” Hashem protected us and
 provided for all our needs in the
 wilderness. Our dwelling in a
 fragile hut facilitates our
 concentration on these
 significant ideas.

A question can be raised

(continued on page 4)



JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought

SINAI & SHAVUOS:

GOD DESIRES CONVICTION—
NOT FAITH



RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

“**Guide for the Perplexed**” Maimonides (final chapter):

“A person that has a true knowledge of the whole Law is called wise in a double sense: he is wise because the Law instructs him in the highest truths, and secondly, because it teaches him good morals. But as the truths contained in the Law are taught by way of tradition, not by a philosophical method, the knowledge of the Law, and the acquisition of true wisdom, are treated in the books of the Prophets and in the words of our Sages as two different things; real wisdom demonstrates by proof those truths which Scripture teaches us by way of tradition. It is to this kind of wisdom, which proves the truth of the Law, that Scripture refers when it extols wisdom, and speaks of the high value of this perfection, and of the consequent paucity of men capable of acquiring it, in sayings like these: “Not many are wise” (Job xxxii. 9):” But where shall wisdom be found” (ibid. xxviii.12)? In the writings of our Sages we notice likewise many passages in which distinction is made between knowledge of the Law and wisdom. They say of Moses, our Teacher, that he was Father in the knowledge of the Law, in wisdom and in prophecy. When Scripture says of Solomon, “And he was wiser than all men” (I Kings v. 11), our Sages add, “but not greater than Moses”: and the phrase, “than all men,” is explained to mean, “than all men of his generation”: for this reason [only] “Heman, Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol” the renowned wise men of that time, are named. Our Sages further say, that man has first to render account concerning his knowledge of the Law, then concerning the acquisition of wisdom, and at last concerning the lessons

derived by logical conclusions from the Law, i.e., the lessons concerning his actions. This is also the right order: we must first learn the truths by tradition, after this we must be taught how to prove them, and then investigate the actions that help to improve man’s ways. The idea that man will have to render account concerning these three things in the order described, is expressed by our Sages in the following passage:” When man comes to the trial, he is first asked, ‘Hast thou fixed certain seasons for the study of the Law? Hast thou been engaged in the acquisition of wisdom? Hast thou derived from one thing another thing?’” This proves that our Sages distinguished between the knowledge of the Law on the one hand, and wisdom on the other, as the means of proving the lessons taught in the Law by correct reasoning.”

“**Duties of the Heart**” R. Bachaya ben Josef ibn Paquda (Excerpts from the author’s introduction)

“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 G-d’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

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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."

This ends my quotes of these great minds. Both of these thinkers concluded that our obligation ends not with understanding Torah based on learned traditions, but on proofs, using our own reasoning. But let us understand how they arrived at their singular position.

God created the unduplicated Revelation at Sinai for this very reason. God orchestrated undeniable miracles witnessed by millions. This would certainly survive all generations as incontrovertible proof of His existence and will, that man follow His Torah.

Why did God create man? Why did He create a being that possesses the unique faculty of reason? He did so; for He wills it that man use this faculty. No other

creation possesses reason. It is God's plan that man immerses himself in study, arriving at clear, indisputable proofs for his findings. Had God desired man to live by simple faith, all required would be the faculty of memory, and not deductive and inductive reasoning. We all know we possess the ability to "prove" something. We all know that proof is unshakable, while faith may be swayed by newer, more appealing ideas.

Even those claiming faith as better than proof use "arguments" to defend their positions. But with this mode of defense, they contradict themselves: they use the "method" of reasoning, and not faith, to defend themselves. Had they truly felt faith surpassed reason and proof, why do they use "reasoning"? Why do they resort to argumentation? However, argumentation and reasoning are used only to arrive at a proof. While arriving at faith, requires no mental activity. Their use of reasoning is a confession that proof is superior: for if this reasoning can "prove" their point, then they will use such reasoning. But then, their contradiction is clear.

One selects a faith based on the only other part of his makeup: his emotions. And with emotional attachment, comes the possibility of detachment when stronger emotions swell inside. Additionally, it is of no value to a person to claim a faith in something, if it is not something he selects using his mind, so it is baseless.

For when man selects a faith based on anything but his mind, he is functioning b y

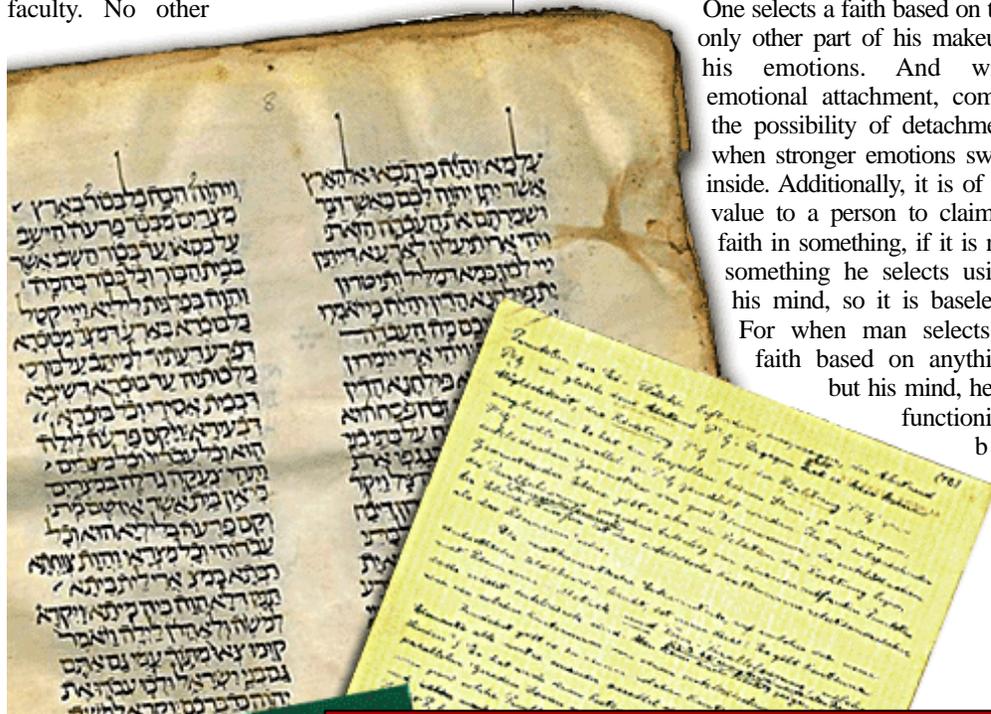
feelings, and not intellect. Man has no other mode of selection. And feelings are no barometer at all of objective reality. They are completely useless for gauging what is true. Therefore, one who lives by faith testifies thereby, that he has no desire to live in accord with what is proven to be true. But God's gift of one Torah teaches that God desires a specific lifestyle for man, and not that any man can faithfully follow whatever appeals to his emotions.

This being the case, that one's faith is selected by emotions, his faith is then subject to deviation. He may defect from Judaism. He must also agree that any other faith is acceptable, including Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, et al, because he feels one has the right to select whatever "appeals" to him. Since the faithful choose religions not based on proof, they take the position that proof is not the means by which one determines which religion is proper. Therefore, they cannot argue against other religions that are also equally "faithful". Thus, these faithful Jews must thereby accept their child's wish to convert to Christianity. However, this is not God's desire.

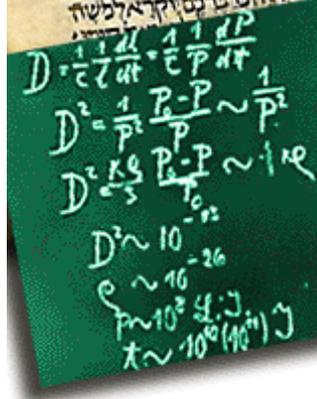
Just as no appeal may sway us from realizing that we exist, God also desires that we use this ultimate level of conviction - reason and proof - when realizing His existence, and all the truths which surround Him. These are the words of the Rabbis quoted above. For with this absolute conviction, we live in line with the very faculty God desired we possess, granted to no other creation.

Shavuos is the holiday, which celebrates "proof". It is much like Shabbos, when we celebrate creation. Our very act of rest on Shabbos is a weekly, public confirmation of God's existence and role as exclusive Creator, who rested on day seven. Where else would we derive the idea of resting on every seventh day, were it not borrowed from an original model: from God's act of rest on the very first "7th Day"? We realize there is no need to labor, as he created everything on this day, including His system of providence over man, and reward and punishment. We are convinced of the Torah, which guarantees our monetary needs are provided when we abide by His laws. We feel no sense of loss when not working on Shabbos, Holidays, and Shmita. This conviction in the Torah is based on Shavuos; on the undeniable event of Revelation at Sinai. Nothing biological can create a voice, which emanates from fire, and lives. That which is not subject to natural law generates such a voice. That can only be the Creator of natural law: God.

Shavuos is a yearly testament to God's primary directive for mankind, Jew and Gentile alike, and it is this: the Torah lifestyle demands we arrive at truths and moral principles using our minds, not merely relying on traditions. ■



All is designed with reason:
Whether we study Einstein, Newton or Torah, we are studying God's creations. They must all equally reflect the same precision and impenetrable depth of Divine intelligence, as God created them all. We would be humored by one who might say to Einstein, "Oh Al, just use faith, why bother seeking rational proof." It is an equal loss if one were to say, "just have faith in the Torah, don't seek out its reasonings." As God embedded proofs of His wisdom in the physical world, He did so with the Torah. Furthermore, Torah is so much more crucial - certainly, God desires we use His gift of intellect in this area.



(Love & Comm. cont. from pg 1)

Holidays

with regard to Simchat Torah—the Holiday of rejoicing with the Torah. The purpose of the day is to give expression to the profound feelings of joy in the study and observance of Torah. However the timing of this holiday seems strange. We observe it on Shmini Atzeret, which is the eighth day of Sukkot. It would seem that Simchat Torah ought to be connected to Shavuot for the theme of this Holiday is the giving of the Torah. The purpose of the Exodus was to fashion a unique nation, which would govern its private and public affairs according to the commandments and philosophy of the Torah. Our love of Torah is so great that we anticipate the day of Revelation by counting the forty-nine days from Pesach to Shavuot. Why then don't we sing and dance and rejoice with the Torah on Shavuot? This would, at first glance, seem like a more appropriate time than Shmini Atzeret.

Judaism insists on honesty and truthfulness and frowns upon displays of shallow emotionalism. Profound sentiments of joy do not come easily. How often do we feel so happy that we just want to burst out in song and dance? We need something personal and compelling like a major family simcha to arouse powerful feelings of joy. Is it reasonable to expect us to get so excited over a Book containing commandments, prohibitions and exhortations to act with justice and compassion that we want to sing and dance with it



for hours and hours? Indeed it is—but these emotions must be cultivated over a long period of time. The goal of Torah observance is not mere obedience but joyful exuberance with the lifestyle of Kedusha (Holiness). Joy in the service of Hashem is the highest ideal. The Rambam says (Laws of Lulav 8:18) “The rejoicing one experiences in the performance of Mitzvot and love of G-d who commanded them is a great service. Whoever holds himself back from this simcha is fit to be punished as the Torah says, “because they failed to serve Hashem with joy and a good heart...”.”

The joy of which the Rambam speaks does not come quickly or easily. It requires effort, devotion and the ability to withdraw from superficial pleasures. You must put heart and soul into the study of Torah. Then you will appreciate its great beauty and fall in love with it.

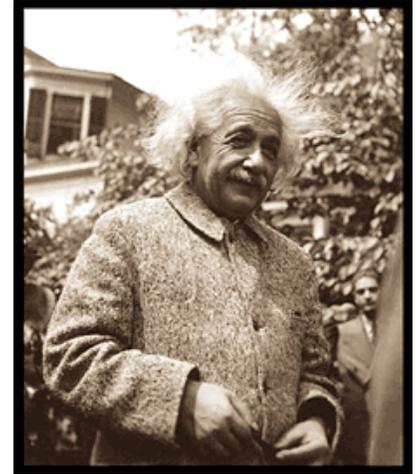
Shavuot marks the beginning of our relationship with Torah. This is the time when our ancestors demonstrated their faithfulness by saying, “we will do and we will listen.” The Creator had made us an offer we could not refuse. We knew that Torah is the greatest treasure. However, the Torah does not magically transform us. It takes a great deal of dedicated effort to achieve the emotional joy and satisfaction that the Torah promises. On Shavuot we renew that commitment. Many

observe the beautiful custom of learning through the night to demonstrate their willingness to part with the pleasure of sleep in order to gain more Torah knowledge.

We now understand why Simchat Torah could not be observed on Shavuot. The relationship has just begun and there is so much work to do. Singing and dancing will come later. We rejoice on Shmini Atzeret because that is when we complete the annual Torah reading cycle. We thereby affirm that one who is faithful and constant in his studies will uncover the beauty of Torah. Our relationship to Torah is framed by profound commitment to the hard work of studying the Torah and performing the commandments as well as a realization that the ultimate goal of our service to HaShem is a feeling of sublime joy. May we merit attaining it.

Chag Shavuot Sameach. ■

Letters



A Rejoinder to Einstein

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Regarding the question raised in connection with Einstein two weeks ago in the JewishTimes, Einstein was stated to believe in “Spinoza’s God; a God who reveals Himself in the orderly harmony of what exists, and not in the God who concerns Himself in the fate and actions of human beings.” I would ask Einstein, “Did you not oppose all forms of oppression and brutality, while also revering Maimonides and other great people? Did you not express your gratitude to the Jewish people for their compassion for man? So why would you be concerned about the fate of man, to be a compassionate man? Is man significant or not, in your estimation? Would God - having created man - not be concerned with the fate of man, who you, Einstein, maintain such an estimation? Is there not a contradiction in your words?” Why are you concerned about mankind, of whom you feel God is unconcerned?

I say this with all respect for Einstein. I am nothing compared to him. But no man is beyond reproach. Einstein contradicts himself. Einstein says that it is important that man recognize God, even Spinoza’s God. If so, then God is in fact concerned with man. For who else will recognize Spinoza’s God, other than man? If it is important that God of the cosmos be recognized, who shall recognize Him? None other than man can recognize God.

Thus, man’s fate is quite important, and God does in fact desire man to recognize Him. The God of the cosmos indeed is concerned about the fate of man. ■

to Me in righteousness and justice, and in kindness and in mercy; and I will betroth you to Me in trust, and you will know God." I wish to know "Who is betrothing who?" Is God betrothing the Jews to Him, or the reverse, is a Jew betrothing God to himself? The confusion arises due to our act of tying Tefillin simultaneously with the recitation of these two verses: we are doing the act of tying, so we feel that we too are the ones doing the act of betrothing.

Moshe Ben-Chaim: The words mean that God is betrothing the Jews to Him. Let's review the context.

"And it will be on that day says God, you will call me "My close one", and you will cease calling Me "My Master". And I will remove the name of idols from your mouths, and you will never again mention their names. And I will cut for a treaty on that day with the wild beasts of the field, and with the birds of heaven, and the creeping ones of the land; and the bow and swords and war I will remove from the land, and I will cause you to dwell in tranquility. And I will betroth you to Me forever; and I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and statutes, and in kindness and in mercy. And I will betroth you to Me in trust, and you will know God." (Hosea, 2:18-22)

This last statement, "you will know God" must be referring to God's address of man. It cannot be man's address to God, for God already knows Himself. Therefore, when we tie the Tefillin straps, we are reiterating what God already said in Hosea regarding His ultimate plan to create a bond between Him and us.

God's sentiment is that He will first create a relationship between man and Himself where we are more closely related; we will not refer to God as "master", but as "a close one". (Rashi) Meaning, we will serve God from love and not fear (i.e., not because He is our Master). He will also, eventually, remove idolatry from our vocabulary, to the point that we never again mention the idols' names. He will remove all strife, caused by beast, by man (war), and we will arrive at a most tranquil state of peace. God then says He will betroth us to Him, 1) forever, 2) in righteousness and justice, in kindness and mercy, and then He concludes, 3) I will betroth you to me in trust, and you will know God.

The first betrothal defines our relationship with God as an absolute good: absolute means it is eternal. (That which is absolutely good, God perpetuates.) Thus, He promises to betroth us to Him "forever". But what is the nature of this

betrothal? It spans areas of equality (righteousness and justice), and also beyond this, where those involved are not 'equals', but where one is benevolent to another in need, with acts of kindness and mercy. As a Rabbi once explained regarding charity and mercy, we seek to emulate God's character of not prohibiting a creation from functioning properly. So too with those less fortunate; they were not made to subsist meagerly, so we copy God, and attempt to raise their level of existence to one which is inline with their true level of function.

God thereby teaches that our betrothal to "Him" is in fact measured through our relationships with our fellow man: are we fair to our equals; sensitive to those in need; do we act as a Rebecca, seeking how thoroughly we may respond to the needs of others; and, are we merciful and kind. Clearly, God teaches that we betroth ourselves to Him when we act in accordance with Torah principles of correct justice, and sensitivity to others. Rabbi Reuven Mann added that we see that justice must precede kindness. The reason being, that our sense of kindness and mercy must be based on God's just truths. For if we simply follow our subjective feelings of mercy, we might repeat the fatal mercy shown to Agag king of the Amalekites, through which his stay of execution enabled the wicked Haman to come to be. Had King Saul killed Agag when he was commanded, and had not been merciful, Haman would have never existed. Thus, man's sense of mercy and kindness must be guided by God's definitions of what is just.

On this point, that only through kindness, justice and righteousness is how God accepts our betrothed relationship with Him, Maimonides talks. He states the following in his last two paragraphs in the "Guide for the Perplexed." But I will first quote the two verses from Jeremiah on which Maimonides speaks:

Jeremiah, 9:22-23

"Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD."

The Guide for the Perplexed

"The prophet does not content himself with explaining that the knowledge of God is the highest kind of perfection: for if this only had been his intention, he would have

said, "But in this let him who glorieth glory, that he understandeth and knoweth me", and would have stopped there. Or he would have said, "that he understandeth and knoweth me that I am One," or, "that I have not any likeness," or, "that there is none like me," or a similar phrase. He says, however, that man can only glory in the knowledge of God and in the knowledge of His ways and attributes, which are His actions, as we have shown (Part I. liv.) in expounding the passage, "Show me now thy ways" (Exod. xxxviii. 13). We are thus told in this passage that the Divine acts which ought to be known, and ought to serve as a guide for our actions, are, "chesed" (loving-kindness) "mishpat" (judgment) and "zedakah" (righteousness.)"

Maimonides is clear: the prophet did not conclude his description of man's perfection with "wisdom" as man's final objective. Maimonides shows how the prophet continued, describing man's ultimate perfection as one who adheres to "kindness, justice and righteousness".

But we must ask: why is it that "kindness, justice and righteousness", is that which God praises as man's true perfection? Why is it that only through these does God say we are betrothed to Him? Why is it not when we study Torah? After all, Torah study is stated by the Talmud to be the greatest mitzvah. Even this very prophet Jeremiah stated, "Understand and know Me" as citing man's ultimate performance. Maimonides also expresses this very point, quoting the words of the King Solomon who says there cannot be anything greater than wisdom. Yet, our prophet openly states that ethical perfections are in fact what God bases His betrothal. Maimonides' himself compounds this question by stating the following, in this very chapter: "the various kinds of worship and the moral principles which benefit all people in their social intercourse with each other, do not constitute the ultimate aim of man, nor can they be compared to it, for they are but preparations leading to it." Maimonides also classifies man's various perfections, i.e., monetary, bodily, ethical and intellectual, each one ascending in importance. Again, wisdom is defined as man's ultimate perfection. So our dilemma could not be greater. What is superior: wisdom, or character perfections?

Resolving the Contradiction

A Rabbi once lectured on this very conflict. He stated that it is true: in the Torah lifestyle, nothing compares to wisdom. However, wisdom alone without man's subsequent action, displays a blatant deficiency in his knowledge of, and

(continued on next page)

(Wisdom vs Kindness continued from previous page)

Perfection

appreciation for these truths. In matters like math, man may apprehend a truth, with no effect on his soul. He may admit of an equation, and be completely convinced. And such a conviction requires no other response. Math is divorced from man's values, from man's soul. However, in areas of the soul, in metaphysics, man's realizations of new truths cannot be separated from his soul's yearning to express such convictions, and movement towards God. Man is designed in such a manner, that his realization of a truth about God and His will for mankind, must move man to action, he must "live" in accord with this new realization. In fact, a person truly convinced of metaphysical truths will feel stifled until he does act in accord with his soul. Abraham expressed this par excellence. So when on the one hand we say that character perfection precedes

i n t e l l e c t u a l

perfection, this is in terms of preparing one uninitiated with wisdom, to render his soul capable of hearing truths. One, whose values are still immersed in lusts, cannot subjugate his mind to ideas which conflict with his strong urges. In such a deviant soul, all energies are not devoted to wisdom and therefore, the soul's apprehension of wisdom cannot take place. This describes the function of "refining" one's character, the beginning of the road towards perfection.

But when we discuss the end of this road, the truly perfected man, we do not discuss the process of refining one's character in a 'preparatory' sense, but rather, we refer to man after having studied for years, and now acting in line with righteousness, charity, kindness and justice: but not as a means, rather, as an end. Here, man is moved to act justly as he sees the undeniable truth and beauty in God's will. If he does not see this beauty, if he is not convinced, then his learning was sorely deficient.

For man is designed that he

will be greatly moved by his recognition and conviction in God's will.

So when we say that Jeremiah did not conclude his description of man's perfection with the attainment of wisdom, but with his moral perfection, we do not usurp the throne from wisdom. Wisdom, intellectual perfection and conviction in Torah truths still remain the undeniable goals of Torah life. But the barometer of how convinced one is in these truths is his character perfections. This is how the Rabbi removed the apparent contradiction.

Hosea's Final Betrothal

God concludes that we are betrothed to Him in "trust", and that we will know God. What does this mean? I believe it refers to from "where" comes our attachment to kindness, justice and righteousness. For if it is merely an emotional response; it is not perfection. Rather, our kindness and sense of justice must be in God's terms, on a recognition that all morality and judgment of truth and justice emanates from He who created man. For without conviction in God's existence, there is no objectivity in justice, kindness, or any morality. Only from He who created man and governs him, can come the absolute, authoritative morality. So when God says "I will betroth you to Me in trust, and you will know God", God now defines the "source" of our attachment to justice and kindness: it is our conviction in His existence and exclusive role as mankind's Creator and Governor. Thus, this last verse ends with "And you shall know God." Meaning, our entire relationship with God, must be based on "knowledge" of His existence. Only through engaging our intellects, do we relate to God...do we know Him. And with this ultimate act of Torah study, we must eventuate in true perfection, when we express our conviction in proper values with our very actions. We must not only understand, but also agree with God's values of kindness, justice and righteousness. The principle of "Ma hu, af atah", "Just as He is, so are you [to mimic God]", teaches that we must realize God's perfections and embody these truths via our own intellectual conviction, and subsequent performance.

Therefore, we may categorize these three betrothals as: 1) the "nature" of this betrothal as absolute, it is forever; 2) God betroths us to Him only when our knowledge results in true human perfection; kindness, justice and righteousness, and 3) this attachment to kindness, justice and righteousness must be based on knowledge of God.

Wisdom certainly surpasses all perfections. However, one is only attached to his wisdom in as much as he follows through in his actions. Only then has his wisdom touched his soul. Only then has he truly learned. ■



Appreciation



AMERICA IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR

– Rabbi Reuven Mann –

Congregation Rinat Yisrael of Plainview, New York

PRESENTED AT THE ANNUAL PARADE & MEMORIAL SERVICE
HICKSVILLE VETERAN'S MEMORIAL PARK, NEW YORK
MAY 30, 2005

Almighty G-d, Creator of the Universe, we have gathered here today, men and women from diverse backgrounds and persuasions, to remember and pay tribute to all the brave souls who fought and died for our liberty.

Remembering the vital lessons of the past is crucial to our survival in the present and that of our children in the future.

The great Jewish sage, Moses Maimonides writes, "In times of prosperity we must remember the harsh and difficult days of our past. We will thereby be induced to thank G-d repeatedly and lead a modest and humble life."

We live today in freedom and prosperity but it was not always this way. It is incumbent on us to remember all the difficulties that had to be overcome, all the sacrifices that had to be made to get to this point. We must never forget that we are a unique nation, which has been graced by the blessings of the Creator who has sheltered and protected us and empowered us to defeat all enemies who have risen against us. With humbleness and gratitude let us say, "Blessed art thou Lord our G-d King of the Universe who has kept us alive, sustained us and brought us to this day,"

I call on all Americans to recognize the great opportunity we have been given by reaffirming our belief in the Creator of the Universe and commitment to honor the dignity of all people who were created in His Image.

Let us celebrate the noble deeds of this nation's finest sons and daughters who answered the call of duty and made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of our country. They believed America is something special, worth fighting and dying for. We shall never forget them and always be inspired by their memory to become better people; more loving, wise, compassionate, loyal and patriotic.

Ladies and Gentlemen, our troops today are on distant shores fighting a brutal war against a cruel foe who seeks to destroy civilization as we know it.

Please join me in prayer: Almighty G-d, may Your Guidance and Protection be with our men and women, who are right now in harms way, to give them the strength, courage and fortitude to complete the mission in which they have performed so magnificently. May they speedily return in good health to their country, their homes, their loved ones, and let us say: Amen. ■

basis, we often do not fully appreciate the meaning of our prayers. One term that recurs in our prayers is shalom. In the blessings preceding the recitation of the Shema, we praise Hashem as the king who fashions light and creates darkness, makes shalom and creates all that exists. The above passage is the final of the three blessings recited by the kohanim. This blessing of the kohanim is inserted into the Amidah. The kohanim ask Hashem to bestow shalom upon us. In the final blessing of the Amidah, we ask Hashem to bestow shalom upon us and the entire nation of Israel. What is the meaning of this term, shalom?

The term shalom is commonly translated as "peace." However, a study of the contexts in which the term is used, indicates that this translation is inadequate. The first of the blessings preceding the Shema praises Hashem as creator of the universe. In this context, it is difficult to translate the reference to Hashem as He who makes shalom as "He who makes peace."

However, there is another instance of the use of the term, shalom, that very clearly indicates that the term cannot be adequately translated as peace. In Shmuel Bet, David sends a message to his general, Yoav. He asks Yoav to report back on the shalom of the war. Clearly, in this context, the term shalom cannot mean peace. So, what is the meaning of the term, shalom?

“And the kohen shall write these curses on a scroll and erase it into the bitter waters.”
(BeMidbar 5:23)

In this week's parasha, the Torah discusses the mitzvah of sotah. The sotah is a woman suspected of adultery. However, this suspicion cannot be confirmed through testimony of witnesses. The Torah devises a miraculous test to either clear the suspected wife, or confirm her guilt. The woman is given a mixture to drink. She is told that if she is guilty, the mixture will cause her death. The section of the Torah that discusses the sotah is recorded on parchment. The ink is allowed to dry, and the letters are scraped from the parchment into the mixture that the sotah will drink.

The Talmud explains that the parasha of the sotah contains the name of Hashem. It is normally not permitted to erase the name of Hashem. However, in this instance, the parasha discussing the mitzvah of the sotah is written – including the name of Hashem – for the explicit purpose of erasing the name by scraping the words of the section into the mixture. How can we account for this lenient

treatment of the sanctity of Hashem's name? The Talmud comments that this unusual treatment of Hashem's name underscores the importance of shalom between husband and wife. The shalom in this relationship is of such importance that the name of Hashem is erased in order to resolve the suspicion regarding the wife and restore shalom to the relationship.

How is the term shalom used in these comments? The term shalom does not merely mean peace. Instead, it means harmony between people. If we explore this interpretation further, we can understand David's use of the term. The term, shalom, is apparently derived from the term, shalem. Shalem means complete or perfect. Shalom is a completion or perfection that emerges from the harmony between the components within some enterprise, or object. In the case of marriage, shalom refers to the perfection of the marriage that only emerges when harmony exists between husband and wife.

Now, let us consider David's use of the term. David asked Yoav to report on the shalom of the war. The execution of a war requires the coordination of numerous resources and people. These various inputs must operate in harmony towards the common purpose of victory in order for the campaign to be successful. David asked Yoav to report on the shalom of the war. He was asking Yoav to report on whether the various resources and people needed to secure victory were all working in harmony to secure this end.

Based on this interpretation of shalom – perfection stemming from perfect harmony – Iyun Tefila explains the meaning of shalom in reference to the first blessing preceding the Shema. As we have noted, this blessing praises Hashem as creator of the universe. The blessing actually paraphrases a passage from NaCh. The prophet Yishayahu quotes Hashem as describing Himself as the He who forms light, creates darkness, makes shalom and creates rah. The term rah is often translated azevil. In order to avoid confusion, the Sages substituted the phrase "and creates all that exists" for the phrase, "and creates rah." But, in this context, the term, rah, refers to decay and demise. The intent of Hashem's statement to Yishayahu is that the material world includes forces of growth and decay. A seed is planted and it grows. But, ultimately, the tree that has grown from the seed dies and decays. The perfection of the physical universe depends of the existence of both types of forces – creative forces and forces of decay. But, this perfection only emerges from the perfect harmony between these forces. Therefore, Hashem is characterized as the

creator of both the creative forces, the forces of decay, and as the One who orchestrates perfect harmony – shalom – between these opposing forces.

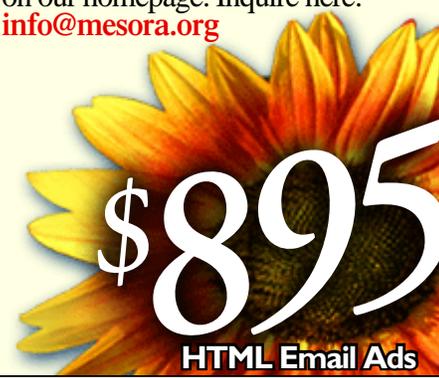
There is one unusual use of the term, shalom, that seems to contradict this interpretation of the term. Our Sages tell us that one of the names of Hashem is Shalom. As we know, one of the most fundamental principles of the Torah is that Hashem is a perfect unity and has no parts or aspects. We have interpreted the term, shalom, to mean harmony between elements or people. But, how can this interpretation be applied to Hashem? Hashem has no parts. The concept of harmony among parts or components is completely inapplicable to Hashem.

Sefer HaIkkarim deals with this question. His response is not completely clear. However, he seems to maintain that the name, Shalom, refers to Hashem's actions. At times, the pattern in Hashem's actions may not be apparent to us and His actions seem disharmonious. However, despite this appearance, there is perfect harmony in all of His actions. This harmony is not merely a result of His wisdom. It is a result of Hashem's unity. Hashem is a perfect unity. All of His actions stem from His unity. Therefore, there is no possibility of disharmony. The application of the name, Shalom, to Hashem reflects his unity. His unity is the cause of the perfect harmony of His actions. □

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HTML Email Ads

The Book of Ruth Lessons in Virtues

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“And it was in the times that the judges judged that there was a famine in the land and a man from Bait Lechem in Yehuda went to sojourn in the fields of Moav – he and his wife and his two sons.” (Megilat Ruth 1:1)

One of the issues we encounter in teaching students TaNaCh is that the interpretations of our Sages often seem far removed from the literal translation and intent to the passages. It is important that the teacher relate these interpretations to the passage by explaining the basis for the insight within the wording of the passage.

The above passage introduces the Megilah of Ruth. The pasuk tells us the land of Israel was stricken with a famine. In response, Elimelech left the land of Israel with his family and relocated to the land of Moav. Malbim quotes the midrash that explains the there were actually two famines that afflicted the land of Israel. One was a famine involving a scarcity of foods. In addition, the land was also afflicted with a scarcity of Torah. The midrash does not elaborate on the specific form or nature of this scarcity of Torah. Neither does the midrash explain its basis for this interpretation of the passage. However, Malbim suggests that the nature of this scarcity of Torah is indicated by another teaching of the Sages. Based on his analysis, he also indicates the basis in the passage for our Sages' comments

Malbim begins by referring us to a comment of the Sages quoted by Rashi. According to our Sages, Elimelech was a wealthy person. As a result of the famine Elimelech was approached by many impoverished individuals needing his support. He fled the land of Israel in order to

avoid his duty to support the poor. [1] At first glance, this seems to be another amazing comment that lacks any connection to the text. However, a careful analysis does provide significant support for these comments of our Sages.

Our passage describes Elimelech as “a man.” Only in the next passage does the Megilah reveal his identity. Like the Chumash, NaCh does not waste words. Ideas are expressed in as precise a manner as possible. So, we would have expected the Megilah to reveal Elimelech's identity in the first passage instead of referring to him as “a man.” The Sages often comment explain the term eysh – a man – usually refers to a person of importance. The Megilah is telling us that Elimelech was a person of significance.

Furthermore, the Megilah is referring to Elimelech as an eysh in describing his abandonment of the land of Israel. The implication is that his decision to leave was in some manner associated with his status as a person of significance. What is the connection to which the pasuk alludes?

In order to answer this question, we must ask one further question. In what sense was Elimelech an eysh – a person of significance? How was he special? The only remarkable characteristic of Elimelech that is mentioned in the Megilah is his wealth. It seems that the Sages concluded that this must be the distinction to which the Megilah refers in describing Elimelech as an eysh.

Now, we can better understand the message communicated in the passage in relating Elimelech's decision to leave the land of Israel to his status as an eysh. The apparent message of



the passage is that Elimelech's wealth was the basis for his decision to leave the land of Israel.

So, how did Elimelech's status as a wealthy person influence his decision to leave the land of Israel? Our Sages conclude that his decision must have been motivated by a desire to preserve this wealth. They continue to explain that as a result of the famine Elimelech was accosted by the poor seeking relief. Elimelech was not willing to provide this support but neither was he comfortable turning the poor away. In order to evade his dilemma, he elected to leave the land of Israel and relocate to the land of Moav.

Based on the comments of the Sages quoted by Rashi, Malbim explains that nature of the famine for Torah. He explains that this famine was characterized by this attitude towards tzedakah – charity – expressed by Elimelech. In other words, the reluctance to provide support for the poor is described by the Sages as a famine for Torah.

In summary, although at first glance it would appear that the comments of the Sages are not reflected in the passage, a careful analysis of the passage does indicate that the Sages are responding to specific problems in the passage and resolving these problems based upon a thorough analysis of the text.

Let us now consider another issue. Malbim continues to explain that this is not the only instance in which the Sages use very harsh terms to describe a person who is remiss in performance of the mitzvah of supporting the poor. Malbim quotes two statements of the Sages. The Sages comment that anyone who hides his eyes from the poor is regarded as serving idolatry. In another instance, the Sages

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comment that anyone who does not involve oneself in acts of kindness is comparable to a person who has no G-d.

Malbim suggests that the Sages – like the TaNaCh – choose their words carefully. These two comments are not reiterations of the same idea. The subtle differences in the phrasing are significant. He quotes Rav Hai Gaon. Rav Hai explained that there is an important difference between hiding one's eyes from the poor and not involving oneself in acts of kindness. When one hides one's eyes, the person is attempting to not see something. In other words, there is a situation with which the person is confronted and the person turns away to avoid seeing and needing to respond to the situation. According to Rav Hai, this characterization describes the person that is confronted with a poor person – the poor person is knocking at his door – and he refuses to open the door or – like Elimelech – he flees from his responsibility. In contrast, in referring to a person who does not involve oneself in acts of kindness, the Sages are describing a different behavior. This person makes a decision to not get involved in acts of kindness. Perhaps, if a poor person came to the door, he would respond and provide assistance. But this person will not seek out the poor and those in need of help in order to provide for them.[2]

Although Malbim does not comment on the issue, it is interesting that the Sages refer to the person who hides his eyes as an idolater and the person who does not involve oneself in acts of kindness as not having a G-d. Can we explain the difference between these two characterizations and why each is used in reference to its respective behavior?

When a person turns away and avoids a needy

person, a calculation is being made. The person is confronted with someone needing help and is aware of the obligation to respond. At the same time, that person is reluctant to give of his wealth. He balances his love for his wealth against his Torah obligation to support the poor and decides to ignore his obligation in favor of his attachment to his possessions. In this calculation, the person is giving precedence to his love for his wealth over his commitment to Hashem and His Torah. In deciding that the love of wealth comes first, the person has given his wealth a position in his outlook that is reserved for Hashem. He has placed love of wealth above love of Hashem. In assigning this position – reserved for Hashem – to his wealth – he has replaced Hashem with his wealth. In this sense, he is characterized as an idolater.

A person who does not involve oneself in acts of kindness is not making this calculation. In fact, through removing himself from involvement in acts of kindness – chesed – the person has avoided the necessity of any such calculation. However, this person is also making a clear statement regarding his relationship to Hashem. Who is this person? Our Sages accuse him of abandoning G-d because he does not perform chesed. The implication is that the Sages are referring to a person who is otherwise conscientious in his observance. But in the area of chesed he is remiss. He is establishing boundaries for his relationship with Hashem. He is establishing a realm or framework in which he must serve Hashem and defining a corresponding realm or framework in which duty to Hashem is irrelevant. This person is not denying that he must serve Hashem. Instead, he is establishing perimeters to this service. He relegates his service to the synagogue or the bait

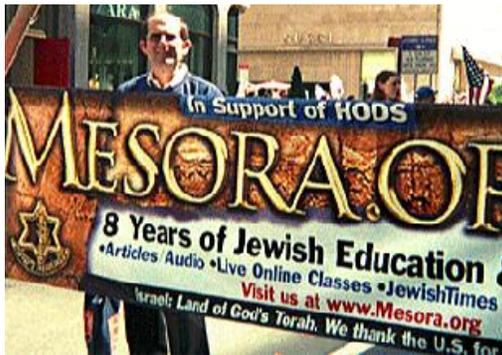
hamidrash – the study hall. But he banishes Hashem from important elements of his personal life. The message of our Sages now emerges more clearly. We cannot establish artificial boundaries designed to exclude Hashem from portions of our life. Devotion to Hashem – by definition – requires recognition of Hashem's mastery over all elements of a person's life.

An analogy will help convey this idea. Assume a king decrees that his subjects should pay a five-dollar tax every year. The subjects respond that although you are king, we do respect your right to demand taxes. You do not have authority over our possessions. Does this king truly have power over his subjects or does he rule only by virtue of the indulgence of his subjects? Clearly, he rules by virtue of their indulgence. They have the power to decide the areas over which he does and does not have authority.

Now, let us apply this analogy to our discussion. If we accept that Hashem has complete authority over us – that He is truly our G-d – then He does not need our indulgence in order to dictate behavioral expectations. We must acknowledge His authority in every aspect of our lives. However, if we insist that Hashem does not have the authority to prescribe behaviors in some areas, then we are implying that Hashem cannot dictate to us but instead rules through our indulgence. If Hashem requires our indulgence, then we do not really regard Him as our G-d. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Megillat Rut 1:1.

[2] Rav Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel (Malbim), Geza Yeshai – Commentary on Megillat Rut, 1:1.



Salute to Israel Parade:

Mesora was among many organizations and schools carrying their banners, as we took pride in our 8 years of Jewish education and activism.

We thank Halachic Organ Donor Society (HODS.org) for inviting us to march with them; we thank Rabbi Reuven Mann for joining us in support; and we thank our friends Yehoshua, Mordy and David who sweated the bright rays to assist.

