

What is “objective study”? It is when we are not loyal to any person or view, but to truth alone. This demands our refutation of falsehoods, regardless of whom, or how many speak them. Reputations and mass acceptance are no barometers of truth. Therefore, as you read our articles, be mindful that we all have no choice but to be honest, for without honesty, we live a lie. Refutation of fallacy is how those from Moses through Maimonides correctly steered the Jews away from falsehoods, and what we must continue to uphold. All opposing views cannot be correct. What determines truth? Reason alone.

ESTD
1997

JewishTimes

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

Volume IV, No. 42...July 29, 2005

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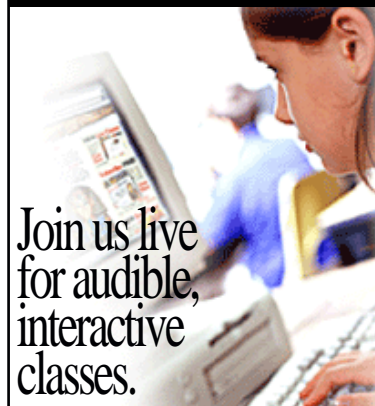
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Weekly Parsha

Mattos

RABBI BERNARD FOX

The Parshat Shelach edition of Thoughts discussed the obligation to take possession of and live in Israel. This week's edition continues that discussion.

“Take vengeance for Bnai Yisrael against the Midianites and afterward you will be gathered to your people.”(BeMidbar 31:2)

Maimonides does not include within his

(continued on page 5)

Kabbala

*Returning to Egypt:
With mystical beliefs, earthbound
afterlives and reincarnation,
are we adhering to Torah
or Egyptian culture?*

REINCARNATION & GOD'S JUSTICE

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The following email message was sent to Tamar Yonah who broadcasts a talk show from Israel. It was sent to her in response to a reader, Michoel, who was alarmed at numerous claims of one of Tamar Yonah's guest, a Kabbalistic Rabbi. Michoel emailed me a link to the broadcast. I listened to it, and felt, based on the numbers of people who listened; these false views must be corrected. Below is a letter to, and response from Tamar Yonah, as well as some additional thoughts. Before continuing, please read the paragraph at the top of this cover page. It is essential that you read this article with that sentiment in mind:

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Tamar, This week, I received a letter from Michoel, a reader who heard, what he felt, were questionable views of the Torah. He sent to me the link of your archived radio broadcast. I listened, with great anguish, to your recent, live discussion with Rabbi Ariel Bar Tzadok of KosherTorah.com. I cannot express how much the Torah disagrees with his views. Rabbi Bar Tzadok claimed reincarnation is an accepted, Torah view. He failed to inform your public that Rav Saadia Gaon, one of the most brilliant minds, called reincarnation “absurd” and “stupid”. Moshe

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(Kabbala cont. from page 1)

Fundamentals

JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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Rabbeinu (Moses) speaks against it, as does Sforno. But Rav Saadia Gaon did not leave it at that. Rav Saadia Gaon continues, using rationality to display those absurdities, which emanate from this belief in reincarnation. Rav Bar Tzadok went on discussing aliens, fallen angels, justifying terrorists as "victims", and describing a "race of intelligent, terrestrial existences" other than man.

I called your office and spoke with Benjamin, asking you to consider a follow-up session where I may – unlike Rav Bar Tzadok – quote sources from our Torah and accepted Torah authorities: Maimonides, Saadia Gaon Rashi, Sforno and the Talmud. I feel your audience has been gravely misled and deserves to hear actual quotes from our precious Torah...not simply the distortions of one man.

Tamar Yonah: Shalom Rabbi. Thank you for your letter. I appreciate getting feedback on my program. I understand there are different approaches to the issue and acceptance of Kabbala, and the idea of reincarnation and other beliefs in Jewish mysticism. My listeners are free to

agree or disagree, depending on whether they are Breslov, Chabad, Knitted kippah, Charedi, or even secular. I leave it up to them and listeners are welcome to call in to my show as it airs live to agree, disagree, challenge, etc. However, the show is not a point/counterpoint program. Yet, you do make a good point to remind listeners that there are different views on accepting the Kabbala and Jewish Mysticism. I appreciate you reminding me of this. What I have decided to do is to read out some of your letter and add that the view Rabbi Bar Tzadok shared is not shared by every Jew. I will do this on my upcoming Tuesday morning show here in Israel (Monday night where you are, in the Exile).

I thank you for your letter and wish you much hatzlacha in bringing our brothers and sisters closer to Hashem and teshuva. I do hope you will be able to come home soon on aliyah and join us here in Israel, our inheritance. We need you here!

Again, thank you for your letter.

With love of Israel, Tamar Yonah

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Thank you for your response Tamar. In the case that you will share some of my letter on air, there is one other corruption that Rav Bar Tzadok claimed: that suicide bombers are "victims", i.e., not truly guilty. He claimed God has "another" method of justice than what is applicable to man.

First of all, this is a contradiction, for all of God's justice is precisely "with man"! Rav Bar Tzadok is suggesting the impossible: in the Torah, God claims one justice system with man, but He then functions by another set of justice...with man! This would mean that God lies to us. However, we know that God cannot do the impossible. And this is not a limitation on God, but in fact, His very perfection. Just as God literally "cannot" punish he who is with no sin (Ezekiel 18) so too, God cannot say one thing, and then change. "I am God I do not change". (Malachi, 3:6) Nothing is unknown to God, and therefore, nothing "new" to Him arises that He



must reconsider, and change His mind.

Rav Bar Tzadok's view is against the Torah, as God tells man to kill the enemy many times, such as Amalek, and this clearly teaches that God wishes

man to share in God's evaluation of Amalek's evil. God does not have one view of Amalek, and we have another. God wants us to share His view, and he is not forgiving Amalek behind our backs after we fulfill the mitzvah to kill that nation. However, according to Rav Bar Tzadok, Hitler too may be a "victim", as perhaps Hitler too may defend himself, blaming his upbringing. How absurd and painful this must have been to your listeners to hear.

It must be clear: God does not command man in His Torah, calling Torah absolute truths, while He does not embody those very principles! But this is Rav Bar Tzadok's position. To quote Rav Saadia Gaon, Rav Bar Tzadok's view is truly absurd.

But what is worse, is that Rav Bar Tzadok's view portrays God as inconsistent, and insincere. What type of God is that? The answer: his imaginary god, for the true God is not this way in reality. God is truly consistent and sincere. According to Rav Bar Tzadok, how can a Jew follow God, when he feels that God presents one value system for man, but Himself, acts with

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(Kabbala continued from page 2)

opposite values? This would mean that God does not value what He demands of man: a contradiction. This is impossible. Anyone who suggests this is unrealistic, and may even border on heresy. Of course we know quite little about God and how He works. But we do know what He writes in His Torah, and we know it is true. Therefore, any idea that contradicts the Torah's words must be false. Certainly, when it also contradicts reason and what little we do in fact know about God.

This view – that God works differently than He wants us to work – would cause droves to abandon Torah, and justifiably so. Due to such destructive views, it is vital to Judaism that those who can, must vocalize opposition with clear proofs as to what are Torah's true values and ideals. Judaism must be presented in its true form: a system that makes sense to the human mind. A system whose every path is pleasant, "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." (Proverbs, 3:17)

Additionally, the Torah is firmly based in this fundamental principle: "What God is, so shall you be" (lit. "Ma Hu, af atah"). This principle and value system is the basis for our middos, our character traits. We learn from here that just as God is a "rachum", a "merciful" One, so too we are to reflect His perfection, by mimicking His mercy. We become more in line with reality, when we mimic reality, i.e., mimicking God. This applies to all traits we see God exemplifying in His Torah. Therefore, the Torah is unequivocally stating that God "is a certain way" as far as man's mind may comprehend. There is no room for claims that God is the opposite, that He views suicide bombers as "victims", and not villains, as Rav Bar Tzadok claims. I am certain Rav Bar Tzadok does not feel a tzaddik is really going to be treated as a rasha, one who is evil. So if he feels God is consistent with the tzaddik, why does he feel different in connection with a rasha? Rav Bar Tzadok is the one who is inconsistent. In contrast to the approach of Rav Bar Tzadok, reason must always be our guide. Deut. 4:39,40 reads as follows:

"And you shall know today, and you shall place it on your heart, that God is governor in heaven above, and on the Earth below, there is no other. And you shall guard His statutes and commands which I command to you today, that he will do good for you and your children after you, and that you shall have a length of days on the land that Hashem your God gives to you, all the days."



Moshe Rabbeinu (Moses) first tells the Jews they must "know" these matters, and then he instructs them to "place them on their hearts", which means to prove them. The first principle, before all else, is to adhere to a life where rational proof guides every thought and action. The author of "Duties of the Hearts", Rabbi Bachya, echoes Moshe's mandate, that we all follow what is rational, and not simply what the Rabbis tell us, for Rabbis also err. The Talmud too teaches that we are not to simply follow a reputation, even one as great as Moshe's successor Joshua: "Even if Joshua the son of Nun said it, I would not accept it." (Talmud Chullin 124a) The Talmud teaches us this lesson quite clearly. But the primary reason why we are not to follow without proof is that we violate the entire objective of our intellects: God gave us minds so that we engage them. Not using our intellects, our tzelem Elokim, we deny God's will, and we never see reality, our quintessential obligation demanded by God.

So much of what Rav Bar Tzadok claimed is not even a tenable Torah position. The only time we say varying positions may have merit, is if they all fall under the category of what is "possible". But if a Rabbi states things which are not based on reason, and worse, are impossible, his claims lose all validity, and "aylu v'aylu divray Elokim chaim" is inapplicable.

The bottom line is that two opposing views cannot both be correct. Therefore Tamar, your sentiment that "there are different views on accepting the Kabbala and Jewish Mysticism" must be clarified as follows: "all but one of opposing views are truly false." This means to say that although many Jews side with various opinions, such differences do not validate each and every respective view: all must be false except one. This point was not made clear on your show. The way you presented matters implied that all views are equally acceptable, even contradictory ideas, and even impossible ideas. I am sure you do not mean to measure acceptable Judaism as "anything that is followed". This cannot be, as I mentioned, all opposing views cannot be correct, by definition. For this reason, I mentioned to you that Rav Saadia Gaon did not simply utter a view, but he refuted reincarnation with rational arguments. And we too use reason herein to arrive at truth, for God's gift of our Tzelem Elokim – our intellects – demands that we use this gift, and use it well, until we arrive at what our minds dismiss as fallacy, or accept as truth. We have no other choice, and we are ecstatic with this mission.

Moshe's Refutation of Reincarnation

What's more are Moshe Rabbeinu's very words. At the end of his life, Moshe warns the people to adhere to the Torah (Deut. 30:15,19):

"Behold, I place before you today; life and goodness, and death and evil." "...and choose life, so that you and your seed live."

Now, we must ask: what was Moshe telling the Jews? He says there are two options, and one is mutually exclusive to the other. That is, if one dies, he does not receive life, and if he receives life, then he does not receive death. Think for a moment: if one receives death, and therefore, it is not life, does this not refute reincarnation? It most certainly does. Moshe tells the people that by choosing one, you cannot obtain the other. Therefore, choosing death means the absence of life: no reincarnation. Sforno, in explaining the words "life" and "death" in this verse says one identical word for each: "La-ed," or "eternally," thereby teaching that the "death" Moshe describes here, is eternal...no reincarnation.

Moshe said that each person lives once, and dies once, and therefore said: choose a path in life that will be true life, a good life. For if you do not, then you choose death...eternal death. Moshe Rabbeinu did not tell the Jews they will

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(Kabbala continued from page 3)

return. He clearly told them reincarnation is false.

Furthermore, with the belief in reincarnation, what is so tragic about the deaths of Korach, his followers, Bilam, the generation of the Flood, and so many others? If this is not a truly 'permanent' death, and reincarnation exists, why then did God write such stories as "warnings", that if we adhere to their evil, we too will end so rudely? If all these people get to "come back", where is their death? Where is the evil in their actions? And if I kill someone as others did, why should I be punished? My victim returns again to life...I did not truly "kill" him! You see, the idea of reincarnation leads to many false views, since it is false itself, as is proven by the Torah's words. The Torah also has a penalty called "Karase" which means the death of the soul. But how can this be, if there is reincarnation? With these proofs, we refute reincarnation.

I say this path of Rav Bar Tzadok is based on unclear thinking, and his misconstrue of what he has read. I hear it all too often. But calling something "Kabbala" does not mean we now abandon our minds. Calling some idea "Kabbala" does not make a fallacy true. This is a great pitfall of the masses, which are uninitiated with the precision and clear reasoning of Torah. People feel Kabbalistic works must be true, "it's some great secret", "I now am privy to know deep matters", "I will tell others", "They will be impressed". Why are people jumping to Kabbala when they have not yet mastered Chumash, Mishna or the Talmud? With absolutely no proof or reasoning for their words, they speak. But defenseless words are better never spoken.

Torah ideas are truly based on clear logic and are pleasant to our minds. It is so unfortunate that many people present Torah in this type of "mystical" light, which is incomprehensible, violates reason, assumes blind acceptance, and portrays God and His Torah as inconsistent, unproven and contradictory. This explains why so many Jews run away from observant lifestyles. They fail to see the beauty in Torah, because Judaism's teachers are not teaching the Torah's beauty. And this is because Judaism's teachers do not know its beauty. Like the blind leading the blind, Judaism's teachers are running to the occult and mysticism, areas that are half untrue, and half misconstrued. Jews run to teach, before they are accomplished students. They run to mysticism and Kabbala because everyone else "oohs" and "ahhs" it. These leaders are really followers, as they teach only what the people want to hear. They seek large followings, instead of just one student who wishes truth. They don't start Jews on a rational course of study, commencing with basic reading, translating, and

understanding, then, on to Chumash, Mishna and Talmud. No. They jump right into baseless mysticism, not Judaism at all, and violate the words of the Rabbis: (I now quote from my good friend Rabbi Daniel Myers' article on "Studying Kabbala Today")

"Into that which is beyond you, do not seek; into that which is more powerful than you, do not inquire; about that which is concealed from you, do not desire to know; about that which is hidden from you, do not ask. Contemplate that which is permitted to you, and engage not yourself in hidden things." (Bereishith Rabbah, 8:2)

The Rambam, after discussing deep ideas regarding Maaseh Bereishith and Maaseh Merkava, writes:

"The topics that we have discussed are known as Pardais (lit. "garden", or higher matters). Even though the Tanaaim were great, brilliant people, they did not all have the abilities to fully understand Pardais. I maintain that one should not visit the Pardais until he is first satiated with "bread and meat", which refers to knowledge of the Mitzvot. Even though the greatest knowledge is that of Pardais, the former knowledge must come first because; 1) it is "M'yashaiv Daato Shel Adam Techila," teaches one to think clearly; and 2) it is the good that God has given to all of us to observe in this world and reap the benefits in Olam Habah, the afterlife. Everyone can partake of this revealed Torah, the young



and the old, men and women, geniuses as well as average individuals."

"Most people who involve themselves in Kabbala prematurely suffer great Divine Retribution." (Vilna Gaon, the "Gra")

"One must not learn Kabbala because our minds simply are not deep enough to understand it." (Beer HayTave)

Does not Rav Bar Tzadok value the greatest minds, like Maimonides and these other leaders? If so, he is wise to cease from Kabbalistic study and teachings. Anyone teaching or studying Kabbala is wise to cease. Again, "One must not learn Kabbala because our minds simply are not deep enough to understand it."

Reincarnation and the belief that God views suicide bombers not as villains but as "victims," violates many Torah fundamentals. Such positions corrupt man's view of God's true system of justice. It mitigates the severity of death and punishment, and all Torah prohibitions. Reincarnation violates reason, and the words of God and Moshe Rabbeinu. ■



list of the 613 mitzvot an obligation to possess or live in the land of Israel. However, Maimonides does maintain that we are obligated to possess and live in the land of Israel.[1] His exclusion of this obligation from his list of the 613 mitzvot is based on technical considerations and does not reflect a disregard for the centrality of the land of Israel within the Torah.

However, Maimonides' position regarding the land of Israel does present a problem. In order to understand this problem, an introduction is needed. The Torah urges us to always pursue peace. Nonetheless, the Torah recognizes that sometimes the Jewish nation must engage in war. Even in war, the laws and ethics of the Torah cannot be disregarded. The Torah mandates various laws for the conduct of war. In general, the Torah outlines two categories of war – milchemet mitzvah and milchemet reshut. Milchemet mitzvah is a war which is a mitzvah. Milchemet reshut is a war which is not a mitzvah. It is optional.

Obviously, these terms need some clarification. Under what circumstances is a war regarded as a mitzvah? Maimonides does not include in his codification of the mitzvot a specific mitzvah to wage war. Instead, Maimonides records two mitzvot regarding specific wars – war to destroy Amalek and war to destroy the seven nations of Cana'an.[2] This indicates that according to Maimonides, a milchemet mitzvah is a war authorized by some specific obligation in the Torah. In other words, a war waged to destroy Amalek is a milchemet mitzvah because it fulfills the mitzvah to destroy Amalek. A war against the seven nations is a milchemet mitzvah because it fulfills the mitzvah to destroy the seven nations. Maimonides adds that milchemet mitzvah includes a third case. A war to rescue the nation from an attacking adversary is also regarded as a milchemet mitzvah. Although, there is some controversy regarding the identity of the specific mitzvah that is fulfilled in this last case, it is reasonable to assume that we are obligated to defend our fellow Jew. Therefore, a war waged to defend and save other Jews meets the criterion for being defined as a milchemet mitzvah. In contrast, a war which is not required by a specific Torah obligation is not a milchemet mitzvah. It is a milchemet reshut.

There are various differences between a milchemet mitzvah and a milchemet reshut. For example, all members of Bnai Yisrael are obligated to participate in a milchemet mitzvah. However, there are various exemptions for a milchemet reshut.[3] Because a milchemet mitzvah is waged in response to a Torah obligation, no further authorization is required for this war to be waged. However, because a milchemet reshut is not waged in response to a specific Torah obligation, it must be authorized by Bait Din – the court.[4]

As explained above, Maimonides agrees that we are obligated by the Torah to possess the land of Israel and to live in the land. Therefore, we would expect that a war waged in order to seize control of the land would be a milchemet mitzvah. However, as indicated above, Maimonides only identifies three forms of milchemet mitzvah – a war to destroy Amalek, a war to destroy the

seven nations of Cana'an, and a war to save other Jews. He does not include in this list a war waged in order to take possession of the land of Israel. Yet, it would seem that such a conflict would meet Maimonides' criterion for a milchemet mitzvah.

In order to answer this question, we must return to an issue mentioned earlier. According to Maimonides, a war waged in order to save members of Bnai Yisrael is a milchemet mitzvah. It is reasonable to regard such a war as obligatory. However, as mentioned earlier, there is some controversy regarding the exact identity of the mitzvah that obligates such conduct. Let us consider this issue more closely.

In the above passage, Moshe is instructed to wage war against Midyan. This war fulfills a commandment outlined in last week's parasha. There, Hashem reminds Moshe that Midyan had attempted to destroy Bnai Yisrael. Therefore, Bnai Yisrael must eliminate Midyan.[5] In our parasha, Hashem tells Moshe that the time has come to fulfill this obligation. The midrash comments that one is permitted to take another's life in order to defend oneself. In other words, if a person is aware that another individual is preparing to attack him, he may take the measures needed to save himself. He may even take the life of this person that plans to assail him. The midrash explains that this law is derived from Hashem's instructions to Moshe regarding Midyan. Midyan had proven through previous behavior that it was determined to destroy Bnai Yisrael. In instructing Moshe to annihilate Midyan, Hashem specifically noted Midyan's previous attempts to destroy Bnai Yisrael. The midrash asserts that the message of the Torah is clear. If one plans to kill you, you may protect yourself by killing this would-be assailant before he can attack you.[6]

This midrash would seem to contradict a well-known teaching of our Sages. The Torah informs us that if we discover a burglar in our home, we are permitted to kill him.[7] The Sages explain that this is an act of self-defense. It is assumed that if the homeowner opposes the burglar, the thief is prepared to kill his opponent. Therefore, the homeowner's actions against the burglar are regarded as self-defense. Rashi suggests that this law is the source for the dictum that one is permitted to kill someone in order to defend oneself.[8] In other words, it is agreed that one may kill another person as a preemptive measure to save oneself. However, the source for this law is disputed. The midrash suggests that the source is Hashem's instructions to Moshe to destroy Midyan. Rashi seems to disagree with the midrash and suggest an alternative source. According to Rashi, the source is the law permitting the homeowner to kill a burglar.

Rav Aharon Soloveitchik suggests that there is not contradiction between Rashi and the midrash. Rashi is identifying the source for an individual's right to take preemptive measures against an attacker. However, the midrash is extending this rule to the nation. In other words, the midrash is explaining that just as the individual is permitted and encouraged to defend himself and preempt an attack, so too the nation of Bnai Yisrael

is authorized and expected to take the same action.

Rav Aharon explains that this midrash is the source for Maimonides' ruling that a war waged to save fellow Jews is a milchemet mitzvah. Even if one is not under personal attack, the midrash rules that we are obligated to take preemptive action on a national level. In other words, the midrash extends to the nation as a whole the right of the homeowner to protect himself.

Rav Aharon further explains that his thesis has important implications. According to his explanation of Maimonides, the obligation of the nation to defend itself is an extension of the prerogative of the homeowner. He notes that the homeowner may exercise this prerogative in order to protect his property. In other words, the homeowner is not expected to step aside and allow the thief to rob him. He is permitted and encouraged to oppose the robber. Rav Aharon points out that if the thief succeeded in ejecting the homeowner from his property, the homeowner would not be deprived of his prerogative. He would have every right to forcibly reclaim his property even at the expense of the thief's life.

Rav Aharon suggests that the same reasoning applies to the national prerogative or obligation to defend itself. This obligation includes the right and obligation to protect its property – the land of Israel – from all those who seek to steal it. Furthermore, if we are removed from the land, we have the right to reclaim it – just as the homeowner may reclaim his property. In short, according to Rav Aharon, the obligation of the Jewish nation to defend itself implies a right and obligation to defend the land of Israel.

Based on this reasoning, Rav Aharon answers our question on Maimonides. Why does Maimonides not include within his list of conflicts that are milchemet mitzvah a war waged to possess the land of Israel. Rav Aharon answers that Maimonides does include this war in his list. This war is regarded as a war of self-defense. Just as the homeowner is regarded as acting in self-defense when he protects his property, so too Bnai Yisrael is acting in its own self-defense when it protects its land from those who would take it from the Jewish people.[9] ■

[1] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Melachim 5:9-12.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Melachim 5:1.

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

[4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Melachim 5:2.

[5] Sefer BeMidbar 25:17-18.

[6] Midrash Tanchuma, Parshat Pinchas, Chapter 3.

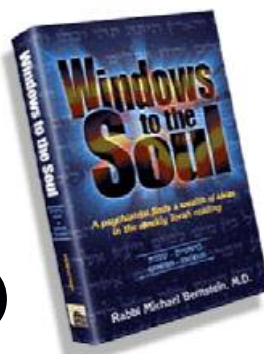
[7] Sefer Shemot 22:1.

[8] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 22:1.

[9] Rav Aharon Soloveitchik, Settling the Land of Israel and Milchemet Mitzvah in Current Times, Or HaMizrach, October 2003.

Taken from "Windows to the Soul"

Mattos

**RABBI MICHAEL BERNSTEIN**

A MATTER OF VOWS

A Matter of Vows

After the debacle of Zimri, in which the Midianite women ensnared the Jewish men, God tells Moses to harass and crush Midian. But before this war takes place, the Torah veers off on several tangents, including the appointment of Joshua as Moses' successor and the laws regarding the nullification of a woman's vows. Only then does the Torah return to the business at hand, the campaign against Midian (31:1-2), "And God spoke to Moses, saying, 'Take vengeance for the children of Israel against the Midianites.'"

How are laws concerning a woman's vows so germane that they warrant interrupting so conspicuously the natural flow of the story of the war with Midian?

Essentially, these laws restrict a woman's ability to make unilateral vows. The husband or the father of an unmarried woman can, with certain qualifications, annul them. The deeper premise that underpins these laws is a profound concept about a woman's relationship to the home of her birth and the home of her making. The home is not an entity external to her with which she is involved. Rather, it ideally becomes an essential part of a woman's identity. Her sanctified role emerges in the greater framework of her home into which she integrates herself. The head of the home, be it her father or her husband, is thus intimately involved as a partner in all her affairs that may have bearing on the conduct of the home. Consequently, he has the right to object to any vows that interfere in those areas that relate to the home and annul them.

Had Zimri had this profound understanding of the special qualities and role of the Jewish woman, perhaps he would never have consorted with the Midianite princess. It is certain that Zimri offered some justification for his actions. Perhaps he claimed he was trying to form an alliance with Midian. He rationalized his physical lust to himself until he actually believed he would be drawing Midian into the Jewish orbit as a satellite of the enlarged tent of the Torah community, thereby fulfilling God's final plan for all mankind. He may have compared himself to Moses who had embraced the *eruv rav*, the Egyptian rabble who joined the Jewish people in the Exodus. The Midianites had

already been excluded from full integration with the Jewish nation, but Zimri may have hoped to include them in a diminished role. If so, the Midianite women would have become concubines.[1]

In order to highlight the error of Zimri's rationalization before the actual confrontation with Midian, the Torah presents the laws of vows, which reveal the deeper concept of Jewish womanhood. The ideal role and path of perfection for a Jewish woman lies in her selfless dedication to the home and, by extension, in her selfless submission to the will of the Creator. The Midianite women, products of an idolatrous and cruel culture, could not aspire to such a life, and therefore, they had no place in Jewish society, not as wives, not even as concubines.

In this light, we can better understand God's command that the Jewish people not only attack but also harass the Midianites. Doing so would create an abiding antipathy and prevent them from ever again attempting to merge with and corrupt the Jewish people.

WHO MENTIONED MENASHE?

The Jewish people stood on the threshold of the Holy Land. They had captured all the lands of the Amorites in Trans-Jordan and were now poised to cross the river into Canaan. The tribes of Gad and Reuven now approached Moses and asked to take their portion in the rich pastureland of the Trans-Jordan (32:1 ff). Moses looked askance at their request, but agreed to it provided they met certain conditions. He then divided the newly conquered lands among (32:33) "Gad, Reuven and part of the tribe of Menashe."

Who mentioned Menashe?

Only Gad and Reuven approached Moses; Menashe did not accompany them. Why then, as the Ramban asks, did Moses include Menashe among the recipients of land in the Trans-Jordan? Furthermore, why did Moses split the tribe of Menashe, given some of them land in the Trans-Jordan and the rest in Israel proper?

After the deportation of the Ten Lost Tribes and the demise of the northern kingdom centuries later, the tribes of Judah and Benjamin accounted for most of the remaining population of Israel, although elements of the other tribes had migrated south over the years.

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Providentially, the remnant of the Jewish people represented both matriarchs, Leah and Rachel, the respective forebears of Judah and Benjamin.

When Moses decided to apportion the lands of the Trans-Jordan to Gad and Reuven, he wanted to create the same balance in this extended area of the land of Israel. Since Gad and Reuven both descended from Leah, he wanted to balance their presence with a tribe descended from Rachel. He chose Menashe, but only part of it. Menashe, never having asked to settle in the Trans-Jordan, deserved to share in Israel proper along with the other tribes. Therefore, Moses delegated only part of the tribe to settle in the Trans-Jordan. Furthermore, by having one tribe straddle both sides of the Jordan, the group living in the Trans-Jordan, as a whole, would have a familial connection to the heartland. This would cement the link between the two parts of Israel.

The question remains, why choose Menashe? Moses could have chosen any of three tribes descended from Rachel: Benjamin, Ephraim and Menashe. Why Menashe?

We can easily explain Benjamin's exclusion. This tribe was destined to have the Temple in his territory, the place on earth reflecting God's oneness. Moses may have considered it inappropriate to have any fissure in their territory; it had to remain fully contiguous. As for Ephraim, it would be Joshua the Ephraimite who would lead the conquest of Canaan, and it was important that the people have full confidence in his personal commitment to the conquest. Had Ephraim already partially settled in the Trans-Jordan, people might have lost a measure of confidence in Joshua's commitment. Therefore, as a practical matter, Moses selected Menashe as the best candidate among the three tribes descended from Rachel.

On a deeper level, Menashe may perhaps have been most suited for the role of establishing a presence from Rachel in the Trans-Jordan. In Joseph's naming of Menashe (Genesis 41:51), he acknowledged that all the hardship he had endured in his separation from home and family (*galus*) would yet find eternal value. The tribe that joined Gad and Reuven would be separated from the rest of the Jewish people who lived in Israel proper. They would face their own trials and threats outside the natural boundaries of Israel without the reassuring presence of all the other tribes nearby or proximity of the Temple. Therefore, Moses chose Menashe, whose name reflected the abiding trust in God that its patriarch Joseph had expressed when providence had separated him from his family. ■

[1] These events occurred after the Jews had enjoyed an idyllic existence in the desert, learning Torah and drawing ever closer to God for thirty-eight years. It is, therefore, inconceivable that Zimri and his followers did not have some justification for their acts. Perhaps the superficial similarity of their rationale to Moses' inclusion of the *eruv rav* may explain why specifically Moses forgot certain relevant laws during this crisis.

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Taken from "Getting it Straight"

Questions

DOUG TAYLOR & RABBI MORTON MOSKOWITZ

"But does all this rational thinking stuff apply to the Bible too?"

I had waited a long time before asking him this question since religion is a touchy subject with some people. But the King of Rational Thought and I were having a good discussion over lunch, so I took the plunge, got the words out, and then took a big bite from my sandwich just in case I encountered a long silence. To my surprise, he answered without hesitating.

"Of course," he replied. "Here. I'll give you an example from the book of Proverbs. 'He who hides hatred is lying lips, and he who utters slander is a fool.'"

"Well, that's easy," I said, all prepared to demonstrate that I knew how to think rationally just as much as he did. "It means--"

"Wait a minute," he interrupted. "First tell me what the questions are."

"The what?" I had no idea what he was talking about.

"The questions," he said. "You want to jump right into interpretation without asking questions."

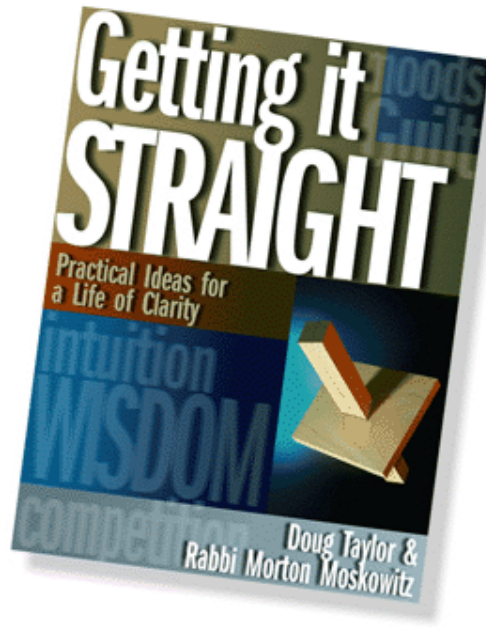
I stuck my toe in the water. "What kind of questions?" I asked.

He responded matter-of-factly, graciously avoiding making me feel like an idiot.

"Questions that guide you to the true meaning of the proverb," he said. "For example, why is someone who utters slander called 'a fool'? And why is someone who hides hatred called 'lying lips'?"

I bit into my sandwich again, hoping he wouldn't notice I was stalling.

"Asking good questions," he continued, "is



one of the keys to gaining knowledge. It's part of the practice of rational thought. Asking good questions is often more important than struggling for answers, because good questions will guide you to the answers."

I could only fake looking contemplative so long. Besides, I was running out of lunch. "So what does the proverb mean?" I asked.

"Well, let's take the questions one at a time," he said. "Why would someone who utters slander be called 'a fool'?"

He paused, waiting for an answer.

"Uh, because I'll sue them?" I offered.

"Sort of," he replied. "If someone is angry at you and slanders you, you know to be careful

of that person. You can take steps to protect yourself."

"So now let's look at the second question," he continued. "Why is someone who hides hatred called 'lying lips'?"

"Well," I said, "they really hate me, but they're pretending to be nice to me. Isn't that lying?"

"Right," he said. "But why would they do that?"

"Because they want to hurt me in some way?" I tried.

"Exactly," he said. "When someone is angry at you and wants revenge, they'll do one of two things. If they're foolish, they'll slander you publicly. That's foolish because now you know to protect yourself. But the more cunning person will pretend to be nice to you while secretly plotting against you."

"So," he concluded, "the proverb is about protecting yourself from hatred."

I took all this in and reached for my sandwich, unaware that I'd finished it.

"Do you see how asking the right questions leads you to the answer?" he added.

"I see it," I said. "But I'm not sure I could have gotten there on my own."

"Asking good questions takes practice," he replied. "Just like any skill."

He was right, and I was eager to do more. But when I suggested questioning my boss about why he doesn't give me a raise, the King of Rational Thought, having observed how deeply I appear to think while eating, had a better idea.

He recommended I have another sandwich. ■



THINK

the Basics Must Come First

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Isn't it interesting, that the most central prayer, the Shema, does not mention reincarnation, mysticism, Kabbala, and all those areas that Jews gravitate to today? And since the Shema is what the Rabbis said contains "Torah's Central Tenets", then aren't we wise to follow these brilliant Rabbis, and Moses who wrote the Shema at God's word? Aren't we foolish to veer away from the most central

issues that God wrote for us to contemplate? Isn't Kabbala study foolish, if the greatest minds warned against it?

Let us learn from what God designated as our primary focus. Study the Shema. Understand the central themes of Torah, as God desires. Your mastery of the Shema and Halacha, as the Rabbis demanded, and the volumes written on them, must come before any other area.



Kabbala

Studying it Today

RABBI DANIEL MYERS

*All areas of life are
guided by halacha,
Jewish law. What do
our rabbis say about
Kabbala study today?*

Question: Mr. Avishai Rubinstien: Is one allowed, prohibited, or obligated to learn Kabbala today?

Answer: Before discussing this topic, it would be appropriate to quote from the introduction to our discussion regarding Hallel on Yom Haatzmaut: The issue of reciting Hallel on Yom Haatzmaut has always been a very complicated and controversial one. Both sides argue with passion and excitement, stressing the legitimacy and correctness of their respective opinions. While it is highly praiseworthy to be passionate in our convictions and actions, it is improper for our passions to lead us to our positions. Rather, we should approach a sugya, a topic, with “Chochma”, “Bina” and “Daat”. Malbim (Proverbs, 24:3) explains that “Chochma” is that which we learn from others; “Bina” is “Hamaivin Davar Mitoch Davar”(deduction) and “Daat” is intuition. For example, a trained doctor may have a legitimate intuition how to deal with a cancer patient, (God have mercy we never hear of such), choosing chemotherapy, surgery or another option. A layman, on the other hand, who has no Chochma or Bina in medicine, cannot have legitimate intuition in this matter. The same applies to every Mitzvah in the Torah; one can have Daat – intuition – regarding a Mitzvah, but only after he has the first two types of wisdom. For example, only a judge with thorough knowledge in the Yoreh Dayah (Laws regarding Kashrut) could decide whether a meat spoon found in a dairy dishwasher needs koshering or not. This same approach applies to Yom Haatzmaut and the recitation of Hallel. Only after going through the relevant sections such as Baal Toseef, Batlah Megillat Taanit, Chiyuv Hallel after Geula, etc. can one really have a legitimate understanding of the topic. Until then, he should follow his Rabbi and respectfully differ with those who follow other “judges of Halacha”, or “poskim”.

With regard to Kabbala as well, we should approach this topic with one goal: namely, to understand and embrace the teachings of our Baalei Ha-Mesora (our unanimously accepted transmitters of the Oral Law) to learn what they determined whether the ideas are in line or against our natural beliefs and inclinations. Therefore, a “rationalist” should not simply dismiss the relevancy of Kabbala, and a “mystic” should not impulsively delve into

Kabbala. Both individuals should mold their beliefs and feelings to be in line with the Mesora (accepted Torah traditions), and never follow the opposite path, God forbid, by distorting the Mesora to be in line with their own preconceived notions.

We will proceed by quoting from the Rabbis of our traditions (Baalei ha’Mesora) from the Mishnaic era, down to the greatest Rabbis of our generation.

Mishna

The Mishna in Chagiga (11b) prohibits a Rabbi from teaching Maaseh Merkava (Ezekiel’s vision of the Divine Chariot) to anyone but a great Talmid Chacham, a wise Talmudic scholar. The Mishna also forbids one from investigating deep, philosophical ideas about God, and it states, “It would have been better for such a person not to be created.”

Talmud

The Gemara (13a) writes that even great Mishnaic authors (Tanaim) were not prepared to delve into these topics, and some of them did and were destroyed. According to the Maharsha (Chagiga 13a, “Tah”) Kabbala is more esoteric than Maaseh Merkava (Ezekiel’s vision of the Divine Chariot) and must be hidden to an even greater extent than the latter.

Talmudic Commentators

See further in Maharsha where he writes that Kabbala is not mentioned in the Mishna, Gemara, Tosefta, Mechilta, Sifra or Sifrei.) The implication is obvious: The average person and greatest minds - who certainly would never consider themselves comparable to Chazal - must certainly avoid Maaseh Merkava and Kabbala. This does not mean that this knowledge is not important; on the contrary, a Gadol (a great mind) who can understand these deep and abstract ideas about God and Divine Providence should deepen his knowledge and love of God by delving into the deepest area that are accessible to him. (Mishna Torah Hilchot Yesodai Hatora 4:13. See Pelah Yoaiz “Limud” where he writes that one has a Chiyuv to learn the deepest areas of Torah that are within his reach.)

However, everyone must have the humility to accept his limitations, limitations that are certainly more restricting in our knowledge than the great

(continued on next page)

(Kabbala continued from page 9)

Rabbis, and be content to understand as much of the revealed Torah that he can. One who studies topics that are beyond his intellectual capabilities will, by definition, embrace irrational and possibly heretical concepts, since he is trying to formulate concepts about topics where his rational faculty can not assist him; he will be doomed to embrace nonsensical notions that stem from his irrational and instinctual nature, not from his Tzelem Elokim, his intellect.

Maimonides

In his "Guide for the Perplexed", 1:32, 1:51 and 1:73, Maimonides contrasts the Tzelem Elokim (intellect) with the faculty of Dimyon, (imagination) and warns us not to be guided by the latter.

Ramban

The Ramban, the great Talmudic, Halachic and Kabbalistic authority (see Faith and Folly by Rav Yaakov Hillel Shlita p.37) of the mediaeval era ends his introduction to Sefer Bereshith (Shilo Publishing, translation by Rabbi Chavel p.15) with the following warning:

"Now behold I bring into a faithful covenant and give proper counsel to all who look into this book, not to reason or entertain any thought concerning any of the mystic hints which I write regarding the hidden matters of the Torah, for I do hereby firmly make known to him (the reader) that my words will not be comprehended nor known at all by any reasoning or contemplation, excepting from the mouth of a wise Kabbalist speaking into the ear of an understanding recipient. Reasoning about them is foolishness; any unrelated thought brings much damage and withholds the benefit. "Let him not trust in vanity, deceiving himself", (Job, 15:31) for these thoughts will bring him nothing but evil as if they spoke falsely against God, which can not be forgiven...Rather let such see in our commentaries novel interpretations of the plain meanings of Scripture and Midrashim, and let them take moral instruction from the mouths of our holy Rabbis: "Into that which is beyond you, do not seek; into that which is more powerful than you, do not inquire; about that which is concealed from you, do not desire to know; about that which is hidden from you, do not ask. Contemplate that which is permitted to you, and engage not yourself in hidden things." (Bereishith Rabbah, 8:2)

The Ramban, after discussing deep ideas regarding Maaseh Bereishith and Maaseh Merkava, writes:

"The topics that we have discussed are known as Pardais (lit. "garden", or higher

matters). Even though the Tanaaim were great, brilliant people, they did not all have the abilities to fully understand Pardais. I maintain that one should not visit the Pardais until he is first satiated with "bread and meat", which refers to knowledge of the Mitzvot. Even though the greatest knowledge is that of Pardais, the former knowledge must come first because; 1) it is "M'yashaiv Daato Shel Adam Techila," teaches one to think clearly; and 2) it is the good that God has given to all of us to observe in this world and reap the benefits in Olam Habah, the afterlife. Everyone can partake of this revealed Torah, the young and the old, men and women, geniuses as well as average individuals."

Rivash

The Rivash, (a 'Rishon', of the first Talmudic commentators) writes (Siman 157) that his Rebbe Rav Peretz Hakohain prayed with intent only to God, not to any Sefirot, (Divine Emanations) like the Mekubbalim do. He also quotes philosophers who were very critical of the Mekubbalim and cynically claimed that the gentiles believe in 3 beings, the trinity, while the Mekubbalim believe in 10, God forbid, referring to the 10 Sefirot. The Rivash quotes a Mekubal who explains that the Mekubbalim pray only to God, but they ask God to respond to their prayers via the various messengers that He has created for their specific tasks; they never pray, God forbid, to anyone but God. Although the Rivash accepts this explanation, he still writes that one should simply pray to God, and He knows how to respond to the prayer.[1] The Rivash then quotes Rabbainu Nissim who maintained "The Ramban was too involved in Kabbala, and that I would not learn it since I did not receive it from a Mekubal Chacham. I saw explanations of the principles of the Ramban but they do not reveal the wisdom of Kabbala, rather they uncover a bit and cover up so much more; one can easily stumble in this study. Therefore, I have chosen not to be involved in hidden matters." After discussing the 10 Sefirot and the various approaches to understanding them, the Rivash concludes that one should not rely on explanations of the Sefirot unless he hears it from a Chacham Mekubal, and even then, only "maybe" (lit. "ulai").

Ramah

The Ramah, the great Halachik ruler for Ashkenaz Jewry, quotes the Ramban that one should not study Pardais until he knows laws concerning permissible and prohibited matters and laws governing the Mitzvot. (S"Y"Y"D 246:4)

Vilna Gaon (Gra)

The Gra (ibid 18) cites the Gemara in Chagiga (13a) as the source for this restriction. The Shach

(ibid. 6) writes that the "Mekubbalim and later Rabbis (Acharonim) strongly prohibited learning Kabbala until one is a great Torah scholar, with a thorough knowledge of 'all' Talmudic tractates ("Shas"). Some even maintain that one must be at least 40 years old. One must also be filled with Kedusha, Tahara, Zerizut, Nekiyut, literally, "sanctity, purity, zeal and cleanliness." Most people who involve themselves in Kabbala prematurely suffer great Divine Retribution."

Be-er Haitev

The Be-er Haitev (ibid 3) quotes the Shach verbatim, and the Pitchai Teshuva (ibid 4) also writes: "One must not learn Kabbala because our minds simply are not deep enough to understand it." The Ramah elsewhere (Torat Haolah part 3 chapter 4) writes:

"I have seen even an true Kabbala recipient in his generation [approximately 500 years ago!] who clearly understands authentic Kabbala. Regarding the masses, they simply jump to learn Kabbala, which is a lust to their eyes, such as Zohar, Rekanati and Shaarai Orah, even though the ideas cannot be properly understood since we no longer have an authentic, oral transmission, mouth-to-mouth. Not only that, there are common men who do not know their left from their right, who can not even explain Chumash with Rashi, who run to learn Kabbala. This is all because we are an orphaned generation. There are those that glorify themselves by giving public lectures in Kabbala after dabbling just a bit in the topic. God will punish these people." ■

EDITOR'S COMMENTS:

[1] Maimonides Fifth Principle of his "13 Principles" states that one may not pray to anything except to God alone, to whom exclusively it is fitting to pray. Maimonides includes in this fundamental, that one may also not pray to anything, even admitting it is not God, but relating to it as an intermediary to God. Maimonides writes: "Principle V: That He, blessed be He, is fitting to serve, to laud and to publicize His greatness, and to perform His commands. And that we must not do so to lesser existences among the angels, stars, planets, and the elements, or anything made from them. For these are natural objects and on their designs there is not judgment or free will, except God alone who is blessed. Similarly, one must not serve them as an intermediary to God, but to God alone must we direct our thoughts, and abandon all else. And this is the Fifth Principle which warns against idolatry, and most of the Torah warns against this."

Disengagement from Reality

RABBI SHEA HECHT

Over recent years a major part of Israel's economy collapsed, causing Israeli citizens great financial hardship. Tourism which used to be the number one moneymaker for Israel was killed off by the latest Intifada. This made the financial situation so difficult that for a time Jewish organizations found it necessary to advertise a "Go Israel" campaign to encourage people to visit the country - making use of Israeli airlines, hotels, car rentals, etc. These organizations also wanted tourists to spend their money in the local shops. Additionally, Israeli vendors traveled around the USA advertising "Buy Israel." Americans wouldn't travel to Israel so the Israeli vendors, on the verge of bankruptcy, were forced to come to the USA to sell their wares.

Israel's second moneymaking proposition has always been export - mainly of fruits and vegetables - particularly citrus fruits. I'm not a military expert or even a financial expert, but to me it seems that under the guise of peace the Israeli government is looking to give up a chunk the country's second biggest source of income. The residents of Gush Katif, one of the settlements that Israel plans to give to the Palestinian Arabs, sell millions of dollars of its produce inside the country and export more than \$60 million in produce to other countries. The Israeli economy is still reeling from the suicide attacks, and now the Israeli government plans to give those that sent the bombers, a part of their major money making interest.

I certainly don't think we should be giving the land away, not from a religious perspective or a spiritual perspective or safety perspective, and I am not minimizing the issue of the government giving away homes or the farms that were cultivated or the businesses that were built up over the years. Some of those factors against giving away land can be disputed, but how can we ignore the financial aspect of this issue? Numbers don't lie.

Many years ago Israel made a similar mistake. For political reasons, Israel gave Egypt the Sinai desert with oil fields that they developed - in fact gave it back earlier than actual agreed upon date. Oil is something Israel needs. Why didn't Israel keep one pipe line flowing into their county? Why didn't they lock in a low price for oil to

Israelis or a guarantee of supplies?

Even if there is merit to giving land away for peace, why must they lump the businesses in with the land deal? Maybe we shouldn't be negotiating on this developed land or maybe we should get money for the businesses. Why are we giving away a \$60 million business, which also means so many people lose their jobs? The Israeli government hurt their own economy then and they seem to be doing the same now.

Another issue is, where will Israel get the money to replace all the lost business that is to be given away? If they cripple themselves financially, they'll need financial aid from outside countries. That help would most likely come from the USA who will no doubt use this as an opportunity to dictate what Israel should do. If Israel is reliant on the USA financially, they'll be bound to listen to their advice.

If the plan goes through, Israel will end up losing much more than money. They are giving away their economic empowerment. I can't say often enough that without money Israel lacks standing at the world round table. Without money, Israel has no negotiating power. In fact I can't remember a time that the USA or the UN, or any country for that matter, sat and negotiated with a nation that didn't have money or resources.

Shortly after Ariel Sharon was elected and appointed Benjamin Netanyahu finance minister, Netanyahu lectured in a Manhattan hotel about the financial future of Israel. Netanyahu said that there was a time that Israelis were admired for their brain and not their brawn. Jews were viewed as smart, but unable to defend themselves. From 1948 Israel proved to the world that they can defend themselves. Somehow with that change in attitude people forgot that Jews have good brains and business acumen.

These days Israel has areas of booming agriculture, business growth and advanced technology. Each of us should take a moment to understand what harm the Israeli government is doing by giving away the land, and try to influence world opinion. More importantly, let us challenge the Israeli government and ask them to keep the land, keep the business, and keep the Israeli economy alive. ■

God's Appearance

Child: What does God look like?

Mesora: That is a good question. We have never seen God, so how do we know what He looks like? I thought of this myself. But then I realized there are some things on Earth that we can't see, but we know they are there. Like the wind. We cannot see the wind, but we feel it when it blows, and we see what it does, when we see the trees and the leaves blow in the wind. So maybe, there can be other things that are really out there, but they are invisible, so we cannot see them.

Another example is something called "gravity." Do you know what that is? Gravity is a power, or a force, that pulls things down to the Earth, and that is why things fall when we let go of them. That is why rain falls to the ground, and does not go up to the sky. But do you know something? You cannot see "gravity", but what you see are the results of gravity, or what gravity "does". You see rain falling, and other things dropping. This is because the Earth is like a magnet, and it pulls everything towards itself. So you don't see gravity, but you see what it does to other things.

Now, how does the Earth "know" to keep pulling things down everyday? Well, the Earth is not alive, so it can't be thinking that it will keep pulling things...so what is making things fall? The answer is: a "law". A law is something like the wind, which we can't see, but we know it must be there. We can't see or point to the law of gravity that tells the Earth to pull everyday, but we can see what it does. We know it is there.

God is the same. He is there, and He is stronger than everything else, since He made everything we see, including the Earth, the sun, the moon and stars, and all else.

Even the smartest adults don't know why God is invisible. We don't know why He is this way, but we do know He has to be there, because with no God, this whole Earth and sky and all people wouldn't be around.

So we don't know what God looks like, because He is like the wind and gravity, things that have no color. But even though we can't see Him, we know He is there, and we can talk to Him and he hears us.

We have to know that there are some things in life that we will never know. But most of what we search for, we will know. You just happened to ask one of the smartest questions that even the smartest adults don't know the answer to! ■

Learning is the Greatest Thing?

Ron: I'm having trouble understanding the concept of learning Torah. We know that learning Torah is the greatest thing a person can do – it's "Knegged Kulam" – "greater than all of them" (Mitzvos). But I don't understand that. How can my sitting down reading a Chumash, without any understanding of it whatsoever, give me the greatest pleasure and grant me Olam Haba?! It's reading, not so difficult! I understand if you want to say "Lifum Tzar Agra" (in accord with the toil is the reward), but technically speaking, I can open up Tanach, and read and read, and it's the "greatest"? Why? How? Shouldn't helping an old lady across the street, or saving a life be greater?

Thank you in advance, Ron

Mesora: Let's first understand your value system, and then we can determine what is "greater."

What is the barometer you use to estimate the value of something? Saving and protecting life are the cases you mentioned. And you are correct...life is to be preserved, even to the point, that we even violate Sabbath to save someone's life. So then I would ask you, "Why is life so important?" You would say "so a person might live and be happy and enjoy the best life". But keep in mind, that you admit that helping an old lady across the street, or saving a life, themselves, are not the ultimate good. Because you would admit that these are only a good, provided the saved person uses their life positively, in accord with your measure of what is truly positive.

As we continue, I ask you, "How does a person become happiest?" What is "happy?" If we answer it is when a person is not hungry, not in pain, or not poor at all, what we have described is called "removal of pain". These are not positive things. It is true, we need not to be hungry, in pain or poor, but these too are "for something else". As removing pain, hunger and poverty do not make a person happy. We ask, "Why not"? The answer is because a person is made up of more than a physical body, which needs food, comfort, and money to have a home and clothes. We also possess many emotions, and also, an intellect. And if these are not

satisfied, then a person is not happy. For example, a person has a strong social component, and needs friends. Without friends, a person becomes unhappy. So "friends" gets added to our list of things that make us happy. But is "any" friend good enough? Well, we need friends who have good values. We won't be happy if our friends tease us, or take advantage of us. We also need recognition in a positive manner. We have a self-image, and we need to feel good about ourselves. But aside from all these needs that we can mention, which make us feel good in an emotional way, we also need to be involved in what we feel is "important".

We each have a value system and intelligence, and we sense when our lives are not serving any higher purpose. Many people work many years, build beautiful homes, and have many possessions; yet, they wake up one day and sense a feeling of emptiness. Their life is not "going anywhere" they say. This feeling comes about because each of us has intelligence, and we understand on some level, that this is our highest element. (A proof that we value intelligence over all else is that the worst insult is being called stupid.) We realize that repetitive labor, the accumulation of wealth, and entertainment, simply do not satisfy us, novelty wears off. But most people simply don't know why. They foolishly feel their lifestyles must be right, since everyone else is also living this way! They finally arrive at the wrong conclusion, "I know what would make me happy: MORE!" Since these individuals never examined human nature as a study, like anything else they have studied, they have little or no knowledge about what man truly needs to be happy and live a fulfilled life.

But at some point, most people do wake up to the realization that all the wealth, possessions, vacations, and prestige...simply wear off. People are searching for something, because God designed us to be happy with something else, and not the physical as an end in itself. And there is no way to escape His design of us, and we should not want to escape, but conversely, we should want to learn what His plan is. Well, His plan is as you said at the very outset: He desires that we engage in Torah study. This activity more than all others will enlighten our minds, provide us with absolutely proper morals, and will engage our thought and curiosity to the point, that we forget everything else. Certain scientists at times became so engrossed in studying God's universe that they forgot to eat! This example illustrates how satisfying the search for knowledge is. As we study, we uncover new ideas that are very

(continued on next page)

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Letters

appealing, and satisfy us deeply.

Why is the life of wisdom the happiest life? It is because it satisfies in all of us, the most primary feature of our being: our intellect, our soul. When man's most primary component is satisfied, he will be satisfied. But when man is not pursuing God's plan for us, seeking wisdom and answers, then he can immerse himself in as much as he wants: buying the fanciest car, and building the most luxurious home. But he will eventually tire from these, and realize they don't afford happiness, simply because they do nothing for his soul, this central component which affords us happiness.

Additionally, as a Rabbi once taught, physical desires require proper conditions, such as good weather and energy for vacations or sports, and hunger so as to enjoy a meal. But once we have eaten, eating becomes painful, and when weather is poor or we are tired, vacations drag and sports are not enjoyed. But the life of wisdom is not dependent on any condition: all we require, we have with us day in, and day out! All we need is our minds. So the element of pain is not present in this one pursuit, in the life of wisdom. For this reason too, this life of Torah study affords us an additional pleasure, as no pain is associated with it.

Now regarding your statement, since you have no real understanding of Torah, by your own admission, you truly cannot suggest anything compares to learning. It is equivalent to saying "What is behind the first curtain is of less value than this dollar." Since you are ignorant of what is behind the curtain, your statement is meaningless. What you experience when reading unintelligible words is not learning...since, you are not "learning" anything! Reading is not "learning." Certainly, any reading wherein you are oblivious to the meaning contains no merit at all.

In conclusion, we realize the best life is one where man's central component is engaged, where he realizes new truths, and where this realization affords him a satisfaction not only in the ideas themselves, but also in knowing what is important, and what he is to value. He realizes he is following what his Creator designed him for, and he senses less need to engage in the material world, as he realizes it cannot make him happy. It is a slow but enjoyable process to learn and to apply in our lives what we learn, but it works, if we are honest, and patient.

We also realize that actions which we at first assume to be of greater value, like escorting the elderly, under further examination, will reveal a more primary objective: as you said, "Talmud Torah Kinneged Kulam", "Torah study surpasses all other commands." ■



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Regional Lists

Connecticut

• **Fairfield County Shuls (75)** An announcement list serving the Jewish community and all shuls in the greater Fairfield County Connecticut location.

New York

• **Jewish Community (1576)** The Jewish Community is intended to combine the efforts of the local "shul" groups (NYC, Teaneck, Fair Lawn, Monsey, Essex County etc) and create a single resources for the New York and New Jersey metropolitan orthodox community for announcements of interest and common events. Certain announcements are very local in nature and belong in the local "shul" groups. Other announcements are regional in nature and should utilize this group to get the word out on a larger scale.

• **brooklynshuls(60)** A list for those affiliated with Brooklyn shuls.

• **bronxshuls(53)**

• **events_for_jewish_women (182)**

• **FiveTownsJewishCommunity (1595)** The purpose of this email list is to enable local shuls, yeshivot and organizations to communicate with members of the Five Towns Jewish Community. The list should be used primarily for the dissemination of information regarding local shul, yeshiva and organizational or charity events and functions in accordance with the list policy posted on this site. It is the hope of the moderators of this group that this service will bring the community closer together by enabling the publicizing and enhancement of the

• **FiveTownsBiz (52)** **NEW** Established to allow free business contact for all Jewish communities, generating more business for all involved.

• **FiveTownsShuls (1345)**

• **FiveTownJewishCommunity**

• **HillcrestOnline (220)**

• **flatbushJewishAction (81)**

• **JFlatbushOnline (633)** Welcome! This is a group to allow members of the Brooklyn, New York Jewish community in Flatbush and other neighborhoods, to communicate. It is a place to let others know about events or programs at your shul or school, religious and cultural events, and singles events. We can also cover neighborhoods such as Boro Park or Crown Heights. It is also a place for various neighborhood topics, such as goods needed or available, different community efforts, concerns, etc.

• **lessshuls (112)** Discussion group for issues, topics and events of interest to the Jewish community of the Lower East Side of Manhattan.

• **MonseyShulsChat (72)**

• **manhattanshuls (95)**

• **NYCShuls (533)** NYCShuls@YahooGroups.com is an announcement list for the Jewish community in New York City. The primary goal of the group is to be an effective tool in the building and maintenance of our community.

• **PlainviewShuls** Established to enable area residents a quick and effective means of information distribution. Please use this new forum to post shul/Torah class times,

announcements, business, share ideas, and converse on matters relevant to the Plainview Jewish communities. As Torah Jews we must follow what God demands of us. Let us all strive to learn more Torah, and practice the unmatched codes prepared by our Creator. Rising above our personal preferences, let us achieve something great...together.

• **queensshuls (102)** A general list for those affiliated with Queens shuls.

• **QueensCentralShuls (44)** An announcement list for the Jewish community and Shuls of Central Queens.

• **RiverdaleShuls (541)**

• **SiShulList (123)**

• **statenislandshuls (27)**

• **UWSyoungprofessionals (715)** The list is intended for announcements of interest Young Professionals living on the upper west side. HOW TO SUBSCRIBE: To subscribe go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/uwsyoungprofessionals/join> or send a blank email to uwsyoungprofessionals-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. INFORMING OF EVENTS: To get an event added to our weekly e-mail send grubey1@yahoo.com information about the event and it will most likely be distributed to our list.

• **WestHempsteadShuls (270)**

• **WesleyHillsShuls (383)**

• **WhitePlainsShuls (26)**

New Jersey

• **BergenfieldShuls (40)** Information for and about shuls in the Bergenfield / New Milford / Teaneck area.

• **EdisonHighlandParkBulletinBoard (563)**

• **EnglewoodShuls (635)**

• **LakewoodShuls (160)**

• **PassaicJews (651)**

• **TeaneckShuls (5958)** TeaneckShuls is an announcement list for the Jewish community and shuls in the Teaneck / Bergenfield / New Milford vicinity.

• **TeaneckShulsUnrestricted (60)**

• **TenaflyShuls (204)**

• **WestOrangeJewishCommunity (79)** The Vibrant, Diverse, and Growing Jewish Community of West Orange, NJ USA This mailing list is intended for the sharing of information between, and communication among, all members of the West Orange Jewish Community and its many Jewish Institutions - regardless of religious affiliation.

• **WestOrangeShuls (638)** The list is intended for announcements of interest to shul-goers in the West Orange vicinity

Topical Lists

Business

• **buscardexchange (22)**

• **jcbusinessforum (322)**

• **JewishBusiness (173)** Business ethics and practices according to Jewish law.

• **JewishBusinessnetworking (380)** A place for Jewish business people to network, develop leads and contacts, exchange ideas, find jobs, provide employment, and shmooze!

• **JewishBusinessAssoc_Colorado (255)** We have monthly luncheons to discuss various business topics as well as Happy Hour get togethers to socialize with others in the Jewish Community.

• **JewishBusinessNetwork (490)** Hear Exciting Speakers, Exchange Business Leads, and Job Opportunities, Promote Your Business, and/or Come Socialize at Our 3rd Tuesday, Monthly Meetings, 6:00-8:15pm at the Jewish Community Association of Austin, 7300 Hart Lane

• **jewishwork (334)** The Jewish (and Bnai Noach) job market. For employers and for people seeking employment, anywhere in the world. On this email list you can announce positions available, and positions being sought. This list is not for ads to promote your business, product, or services.

• **UCLAAnderson-JBSA (99)**

Dating

• **Bay_Area_Jewish_Singles (29)**

• **Frum-Jewish-Singles (101)** The purpose of this group is for Orthodox Jewish singles to be able to get together, exchange information about each other, post information about gatherings / singles weekends, to ask questions and possibly be able to set up a shidduch. You MUST be an Orthodox Jew to join this group and you will NOT be accepted until you answer the questionnaire that is emailed to you.

• **JDate_Jewish_Online_Dating (50)** Are you Jewish? Are you Single? We have the solution for you! At JDate.com, you can meet like-minded Jews that are also single! This isn't an ONLINE dating site full of fake profiles! These are REAL PEOPLE just like you.

• **Jewish_Matchmaker (108)**

• **jewish-singles (350)**

• **jewish-single-doctors (28)**

• **mercerc_jewish_singles (294)**

Home Life

• **1davening (60)**

• **1-JewishComputing (64)**

• **1Jewish_Homes (83)**

• **chiddush (232)** Chiddush is an advanced group that offers Yeshiva-level Jewish scholars (talmidei chachamim) the opportunity to share original insights into Jewish ritual and lore. Submissions may be up to one screen long, and must include traditional sources for reference. Include a statement that the submission was your own and that it has not been published elsewhere.

• **davening (337)**

• **Frum-Jewish-Parents (90)**

• **Gabbai (143)**

• **Jewish_Cuisine (623)**

• **jewish-food (1749)** Jewish-Food is a moderated list for all interested in the discussion of GENERAL aspects of Jewish food which includes the exchanging of recipes, and cooking techniques of Jewish food using Kashruth (laws of keeping kosher).

• **JewishGeography (334)**

• **jewishhomes (719)**

• **JEWISH-RECIPE (492)**

• **jewish_stitchery (112)**

• **Jewish_Weight_Watchers (169)**

• **Vegetarian_Jewish_Cuisine (392)**

Religious

• **Jewish_Converts (260)**

• **Teshuvah (123)** This is a group for those returning to Halachik Judaism, or already-frum Jews interested in assisting others.

• **Torah_study (79)**

Social

• **1-JewishPhilanthropy (113)** Jewish Philanthropy offers information about philanthropic activities and surveys of foundations that fund Jewish institutions. It networks Jewish fundraisers and donors.

• **Jewish_Action_Alerts (178)** This is an action alert listserv for Jews and friends of Jews from around the world to participate in local, national and international action alerts to governments, businesses, agencies as they effect the safety, security and welfare of Jewish people at home, abroad and in Israel. Groups from which action Alerts will be posted include, but are not limited to: AIPAC, UJC, JCPA, ADL, HonestReporting.com, CAMERA, and others.

• **Jewish_Self-Defense (841)**

• **Jewish-Humor (318)**

• **jewish-jokes (455)**

• **jewish-american-veterans (83)**

• **Jewish-Outdoors-Club (1521)**

• **Jewish_World (428)**