

Mesora wishes our warm regards to the Mann and Rosenthal families celebrating their sons' Bar Mitzvahs these past two weeks. To Eliyahu and Jacob, we wish you success in your Torah study and adherence. And to both families, continued success supporting true Torah ideals.



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## IN THIS ISSUE

PARSHA: BESHALACH	1-3
NATURE	1
100 BLESSINGS	1,4,5
ETHICS: LOVE OF GOD IV	6
LETTERS	7,8
FREE CLASSIFIEDS	9

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Weekly Parsha

# Beshalach

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“And Moshe said, “Eat it today (ha’yom) for today (ha’yom) is Shabbat to Hashem. Today (ha’yom), you will not find it in the field.” (Shemot 17:25)

During their travels in the desert, Bnai Yisrael was sustained by mun – manna. The mun fell in the morning. A portion suitable for the day’s

(continued on next page)

## Nature?

**Reader:** A while ago, Time magazine published an article claiming that the plagues in Egypt were caused by natural occurrences. I am on an E-list with lost Jews and I wish to refute this. I would appreciate any help you can give me. Thank you.

**Mesora:** If you request affirmation by plague-critics from the Biblical accounts in their own Bibles, they will not be able to explain such miracles naturally. God created hail mixed with fire. The waters of the Red Sea “piled like heaps” are also described as “walls on their right and their left”. Regarding the Death of Firstborns, how can this be explained naturally: a plague against bodies, but not based not on genetics, germs or cell damage, but on the order of one’s birth? This is equivalent to saying that of a nation, only those wearing red strings will die. There is no biological connection between red strings and death. So too, there is no biological connection between one’s order of birth and this sudden plague. This is certainly a Divine phenomenon.

Each plague happened exactly as Moses predicted, and precisely when forecasted. How could a man predict that frogs will engulf a city, or that lice, locusts, hail, darkness, blood, beasts, boils, and all the rest will occur when he says, and ‘as’ he says? The only explanation is that the Creator of all natural law intervened and altered these laws, what we refer to as a “miracle”. ■

# 100 BLESSINGS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

My close friend Howard mentioned a current movement going on throughout the local schools. Children are urged to say 100 blessings each day. This is both praiseworthy and obligatory. Menachos 43b states:

(continued on page 4)



(Beshalach cont. from pg. 1)

## Weekly Parsha

# JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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consumption was collected. However, on the eve of the Shabbat – Erev Shabbat – a double portion of mun fell. This double portion sufficed for Friday and Shabbat. In our pasuk, Moshe explains that on Shabbat the mun will not descend and the people are to eat the mun collected the previous day.

On Shabbat day we are required to eat three meals. One is eaten on the night of Shabbat and two are eaten on the day of Shabbat. The Talmud explains that the obligation to eat three meals on Shabbat is reflected in our pasuk. In his instructions to the people, Moshe uses the term “today” – ha’yom – three times. Each use of the term ha’yom is a reference to one of the Shabbat meals.[1]

What is the nature of this obligation to consume three meals on Shabbat? Shabbat is essentially a day on which we refrain from creative labor – melachah. Through abstaining from melachah we acknowledge that Hashem created the universe in six days and “rested” on the seventh. How is the obligation to consume three meals related to the theme of Shabbat?

Maimonides includes his discussion of the obligation to partake of three Shabbat meals in his discussion of Oneg Shabbat – indulging oneself on Shabbat. Indulging ourselves on Shabbat, is an extension of our obligation to honor Shabbat. Through fulfilling the obligation of Oneg, we demonstrate that Shabbat is a special day. It is evident from Maimonides’ treatment of the three Shabbat meals that they are an expression of the obligation of Oneg Shabbat.[2]

Maimonides explains that the obligation of Oneg Shabbat was established by the Sages.[3] This does not seem to be consistent with the Talmud’s assertion that the requirement of the meals is reflected in our pasuk. According to the Talmud, it seems that at least this element of Oneg – partaking of three meals – is actually contained in the Torah! Based on this consideration, some authorities argue with Maimonides and assert that the obligation of three Shabbat meals is a Torah level requirement.[4]

There is an obvious reconciliation between the position of Maimonides and the Talmud’s treatment of the obligation of the Shabbat meals. Often, the Sages relate laws that they create to passages in the Torah. This is not intended to imply that the law is actually derived from the passage. Instead, the Sages are attaching their decree to a theme or message contained in the passage.

Aruch HaShulchan is not completely satisfied with this response. He observes that the Talmud provides numerous admonitions regarding the importance of the three Shabbat meals.

Maimonides himself admonishes us to be careful to not in any way detract from these meals. Aruch HaShulchan argues that the Talmud’s stress on the importance of the three Shabbat meals is not consistent with the thesis that these meals are a requirement established by the Sages.

It should be noted that one can argue that this question is not completely compelling. It is not uncommon for the Sages to provide extensive admonitions regarding their decrees. This is intended to reinforce decrees that we might be tempted to treat lightly – precisely because they were established by the Sages. However, Aruch HaShulchan does not suggest this explanation for the Sages’ admonitions in this instance. Instead, he provides an interesting alternative.

Aruch HaShulchan suggests a novel resolution of the apparent contradiction between Maimonides and the Talmud. As noted above, the Talmud explains that the three-time use of the term ha’yom in our pasuk reflects the obligation to eat three meals on Shabbat. Aruch HaShulchan notes that according to Tur, Hashem actually caused each person to be supplied with three portions of mun for Shabbat. By providing these three portions, Hashem communicated that it is appropriate to consume three meals on Shabbat.

Based on Tur’s comments, Aruch HaShulchan offers a simple resolution of the apparent contradiction between the Talmud and Maimonides’ assertion that Oneg Shabbat and the obligation of three Shabbat meals is a decree of the Sages. He explains that the requirement of three meals may have been established by Moshe. Moshe based his decree on the pattern of the mun. A triple portion of mun was provided for Shabbat. Moshe made the obvious deduction that through providing this triple portion Hashem communicated that it is appropriate to partake of three meals on Shabbat. Therefore, although the obligation of three Shabbat meals is a decree of the Sages – perhaps from Moshe – it is reflected in the Torah.

This explains the Talmud’s admonitions regarding the importance of these three Shabbat meals. Although the meals are required by a decree of the Sages, they are reflected in the Torah – in the pattern of the mun. This decree is qualitatively different than most other decrees of the Sages. Other decrees are designed to reinforce laws of the Torah. Because these more common decrees are safeguards for and reinforcement of Torah laws they are treated less stringently than the Torah laws they reinforce. In contrast, the requirement of three Shabbat meals is not merely a reinforcement of the Torah law. It is a reflection of a theme in the Torah itself.[5]

(continued on next page)



(Beshalach continued from page 2)

## Weekly Parsha



**“And Moshe and Aharon said to all of Bani Yisrael, “In the evening you will know that Hashem took you out of Egypt.” (Shemot 17:8)**

How are the three Shabbat meals an expression of Oneg Shabbat? In order to answer this question we must consider this pasuk. Bnai Yisrael complained to Moshe that they did not have adequate food. Moshe responded that Hashem would provide them with food in the evening and in the morning. In the evening, quail would descend upon the camp of Bnai Yisrael. The quail would provide the people with meat. In the morning the mun would appear. They would collect the mun and have food for the day. However in introducing this solution, Moshe and Aharon began with the pasuk above. They explained that in the evening – with the descent of the quail upon the camp – the people would recognize that Hashem had redeemed them from Egypt.

The commentaries are concerned with an obvious problem. How did the descent of the mun reinforce the message that Hashem had taken Bnai Yisrael out of Egypt? Certainly, the sudden descent of the quail was a miracle. But it was not nearly as great as the wonders that the people had already observed during the exodus from Egypt. It cannot be compared to the plaques or the splitting of the Reed Sea!

Sforno explains that Bani Yisrael experienced both physical and spiritual bondage in Egypt. They were slaves. Their labor and their very bodies were not their own. But their spiritual and emotional bondage was as great – perhaps

greater – than their physical bondage. In Egypt, they had developed the habits, attitudes, and outlook of slaves. Their complete redemption required their liberation from their servitude to the Egyptians and also their development of attitudes and habits fitting a free people.

Sforno notes that according to the Talmud, Bnai Yisrael did not have set times for eating. They were dependant upon their masters to provide them with food and the opportunity to eat. After the exodus from Egypt, Moshe established fixed meal times for Bnai Yisrael.[6]

Why were these fixed meal times important? The constant anxiety and preoccupation of Bnai Yisrael over food was a remnant of their emotional bondage. In order for Bnai Yisrael to continue to develop into a free people, it was important that they shed this anxiety and preoccupation and replace it with a sense of security essential to a free person.

Sforno explains that the quail and the mun addressed this problem. The quail descended in the evening and the mun appeared in the morning. Set and regular evening and morning meals were instituted through the pattern of the mun and quail. Moshe suggested that this constancy and regularity would free the people of their anxiety and preoccupation with food.

According to Sforno, this is the meaning of the above pasuk. Moshe and Aharon prayed that through the descent of the quail and the appearance of the mun in the morning, the people would be further liberated from their emotional and spiritual bondage. They were not asserting the descent of the quail was a greater miracle

than the wonders that the people had already observed. They prayed for this miracle to help the Bnai Yisrael continue on their path of liberation from the bondage of Egypt. Moshe and Aharon prayed that through this miracle the people would realize that Hashem was not only redeeming them from their physical bondage but also from their emotional and spiritual bondage.[7]

This insight provides a simple answer to our question. How are the three meals Shabbat meals an expression of Oneg Shabbat? According to the Talmud – as understood by Sforno – the pattern of the mun and quail established a fixed pattern of meals for Bnai Yisrael. This pattern consisted of two daily meals – one in the morning and one in the evening. The triple portion of mun for Shabbat was an exception to this weekday pattern. The triple portion indicated that it is appropriate to have a third meal on Shabbat. Because this third Shabbat meal is an addition to the daily weekday pattern, it is an expression of the special character of the day.[8] ■

[1] Mesechet Shabbat 117b.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Shabbat 30:9.

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Shabbat 30:1.

[4] Rav Yechiel Michal HaLeyve Epstein, Aruch HaShulchan, Orech Chayim 291:1.

[5] Rav Yechiel Michal HaLeyve Epstein, Aruch HaShulchan, Orech Chayim 291:1

[6] Mesechet Yoma 75b.

[7] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Shemot, 17:8.

[8] There is well-known custom to refer to the third meal as Shalos Seudos – three meals. This appellation seems to be inaccurate. The third meal is a single meal, not three meals! I recall that Mr. Meyer Twersky A”H once explained this custom. He explained – based on sources I do not recall – that it is this third meal that gives all of the meals their unique Shabbat character. The Torah recognizes a set of two meals as appropriate for weekdays and a set of three meals as appropriate for Shabbat. The Shabbat set of three meals only emerges and becomes fully evident with our participation in the third meal. This third meal gives all of the Shabbat meals their special character as the set of three Shabbat meals. Therefore, it is appropriate to refer to this third meal as Shalos Seudos – all three meals derive their special Shabbat character from this third meal.



*The Rabbis instituted 100 blessings as an expression of Moses' sentiment that the Torah is not a burden. By blessing God 100 times daily, we are in fact stating, "even 100 blessings is no burden to me, for I love the system".*

*"Rabbi Meir said, 'A person is obligated to bless 100 blessing every day, as the Torah says: 'Now Israel, what does God ask from you, but only to fear Hashem your God, to go in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve Hashem your God, with all of your heart and with all of your soul. To guard the commands of Hashem and His statutes which I command you today, for your good.'" (Deut. 10:12,13)*

We wonder from where in his quoted verse does Rabbi Meir derive the obligation to bless 100 blessings, and to do so each day. The Rabbis explain, that the word "what" ("mah" in Hebrew) is to be read not "mah", but "meah" (meaning 100). So instead of the verse above reading "what does God ask of you" it should be read, "100 does God ask of you." Meaning, God asks 100 blessings of us. Another method says that by adding the letter Alef equaling 1 into "mah" to create "meah", the total value of this verse becomes 100. Regardless of the method of derivation, this specific verse was chosen and no other, so I suggest that in its plain meaning, it must somehow relate to this concept. Meaning, Moses' words "What does God ask..." must in some way convey the idea expressed in blessing God 100 times daily.

To begin, what is the idea behind reciting 100 blessings? What are we trying to say? Of course, it is not the "100" that is our concern, for any number would evoke the identical concern. Had we been told to recite 50 blessings, we would ask again, "why 50?" So let's leave that question, and concern ourselves with the more central issue: What is the idea of blessing numerous blessings each and every day? How is Moses expressing this underlying idea? Be mindful as well, that Moses ended his address to the people with the words "for your own good". Does this play any role in understanding this principle? I believe it does. As Howard, Jeff, Lewis and I discussed the questions, we arrived at the following answer.

Moses' expressed his view of the Torah to the Jews. He said, "What does God ask of you?" This means that to Moses, the Torah system was not something difficult. In another section of Talmud, the Rabbis ask, "Is Torah really a small thing" as Moses expressed? The Rabbis answer, "Yes, to Moses it was a small thing." We now understand Moses' plain meaning: he wished to express, and train the Jews in his values. Moses ends with the words, "for your own good". Meaning, Moses was qualifying why he felt observing Torah was not difficult: since it is for our very good, our relationship to Torah should clearly be one where we run to it, and not from it.

This sentiment, that something for our good should be viewed as a small thing in our eyes, should be expressed in our actions. When something is a burden, we cannot wait until it has passed, or until we have finished that performance. But if something is truly viewed as a good, then we would wish to repeat that good.

This, I believe to be the idea. The Rabbis instituted 100 blessings as an expression of Moses' sentiment that the Torah is not a burden. By blessing God 100 times daily, we are in fact stating, "even 100 blessings is no burden to me, for I love the system".

Unfortunately, as in other cases and mitzvahs, people attach more to a command, than what God did. People feel that through this recitation, positive changes come about in the world, like some magical potion. Eve made the same mistake, as Lewis pointed out: the Rabbis say she added to God's command, and said "we also cannot 'touch' the forbidden fruit", whereas God said only, do not "eat" it. Through her addition to God's words, together with the serpent pushing her into that fruit, then seeing nothing happened as a result of her touching the fruit, she then ate it, violating the real command. The Rabbis said, "Kol hamosafe, goraya", "all who add, diminish." Eve added to God's words, and thereby diminished the significance of the real command not to eat. This caused man's downfall. Here too people add, and suggest some additional good will come about. However, God did not say so, nor does reality substantiate their claims: for we see no causal relationship between blessings and our physical good; nor do we see any connection in time between our blessings and the good in our life. But people will believe what feels good, as opposed to what is true. That is sad, for they accept that which is unproven, and then train their children to live in this same, unexamined philosophy.

But some may respond that King David, according to one view, instituted 100 blessings as a response to the plague killing 100 men daily, and the King's idea was effective: the men stopped dying. However, that was an isolated event, and unless someone is on King David's level of understanding, it is baseless to suggest that our recital of 100 blessings today will be similarly efficacious.

In truth, the Rabbis' institution here, as is the case with all of their teachings, must be understood, and not performed absent-mindedly. Torah is for our perfection, and perfection comes about when we engage our minds, not simply performing physical actions.

Returning to Moses' teaching, we now learn something new: man needs to demonstrate through blessings, that God's system is a good

(continued on next page)



(100 Blessings continued from page 4)

## The Rabbis

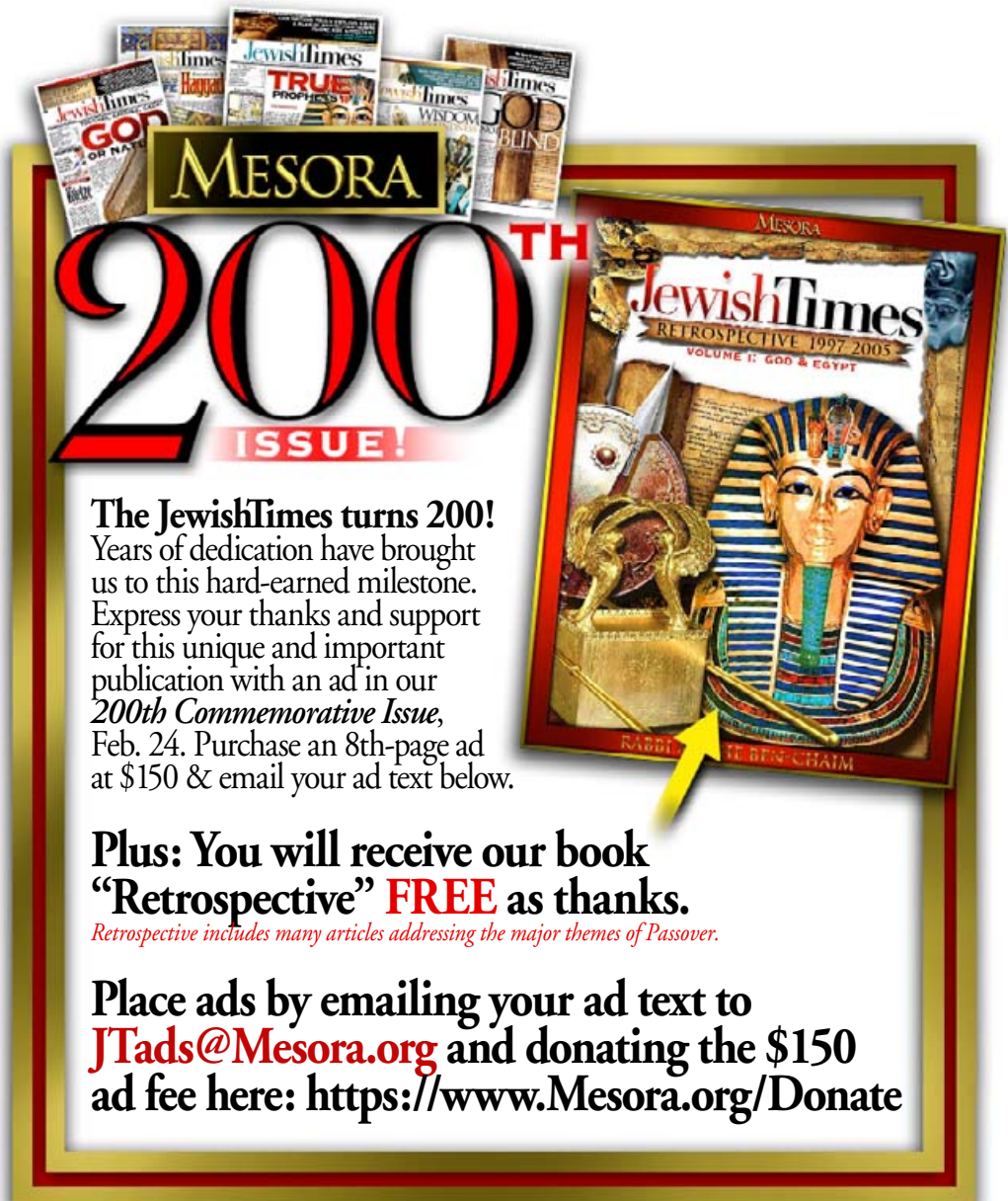
*Man needs to demonstrate through blessings, that God's system is a good for us. We need to make this statement in our actions. It is insufficient that we simply agree with this notion: we must act this out daily. And this act is blessing God 100 times.*

for us. We need to make this statement in our actions. It is insufficient that we simply agree with this notion: we must act this out daily. And this act of blessing God 100 times...is the final objective, we need not seek to add falsehoods, as did Eve, and assume more than what the Rabbis stated. The act per se is the good of this command. We should be overjoyed in understanding this need, and in performing this act. Nothing more should be sought, for that would indicate that we feel the Rabbis did not act properly: "they missed a point". But that is nothing but arrogance.

When the Jews left Sinai after receiving the Torah, the Rabbis said they left "as infants fleeing from school." For this reason, Rabbi Meir stated that we all must recite 100 blessings each day. Our human nature must feel a burden

in the laws of the Torah. That must have been the reason that the Torah demanded to include a verse, which alludes to this idea of correcting our flawed and escapist view, replacing it with a corrected attachment to Torah, and expressing this attachment with 100 blessings each day.

Blessing God, then, is a means to realign our thoughts with what is truly for our good. What is also noteworthy, is that the very lesson to bless God 100 times daily, is derived from a man's sentiments, from Moses, as opposed to God commanding this without a man's example. Thereby, we learn that the Torah teaches principles in a perfect manner: here, as the lesson is how man should view the Torah system, the lesson is derived from a man's perfected view of this system, and his reaction, "What does God ask of you Israel?" ■



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## Pirkei Avos - Ethics

# LOVE

of

# GOD

## PART IV

**RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT**

*Written by student*



**“Ontignos, the man from Socho... said: Don’t be like servants who serve their master to receive ‘pras’. Rather, be like servants who serve their master not to receive ‘pras’ and let Fear of Heaven be on you.”**

We last left off with questions from an analysis of the Rambam’s account of the story of Tziduk and Bitus. To review the history: the Rambam, in his commentary on our mishna, explains that these individuals were students of Ontignos, the author of the mishna, and when they heard this statement, they thought he meant that there is no system of reward and punishment in the system of the Torah. They tried to convince people of this idea in order to start a movement but failed. They then tried to convince people that the Written Law of the Torah was valid but that the Oral Law of the Torah, transmitted through generations of Rabbinic authorities, was invalid. The Rambam comments that they argued this point in order to exempt themselves from many Rabbinic obligations and to have the power of interpreting verses in the Torah in their own manner. In this way, they created a following of people known as Tzidukim and Bitusim, named after them.

We raised two problems with the Rambam’s account. First, the Rambam seems to contradict himself with regards to the motivation of Tziduk and Bitus: first he says they were trying to gain a following of people and later he says that they were just trying to exempt themselves from the authority of the Rabbis. Which one was it? Second, how did the Rambam know that they had these devious motivations? Perhaps they sincerely doubted the authority of the Rabbis!

Let us begin with the first question: what was their motivation to gather a following or remove the authority of the Rabbis? The Rambam apparently held that both are true, that they had both in mind. Though it seems like a contradiction, the Rambam understood that these ‘leaders’ weren’t clear thinkers. For a thinker, only one of these motivations could be the real goal. For one who isn’t a thinker, he may not even realize his own inner workings and motivations. Most people fall into this second category - they don’t clarify their real motivations and for that reason they will do things for a few poor reasons, rather than one good reason. However, one who is an honest and clear thinker will act based on one good reason. Here, Tziduk and Bitus were looking to accomplish two goals: one, to exempt themselves from religious

obligations and, two, to remove their own guilt by gaining approval from the masses.

Now we may move to our second question: how did the Rambam know this? The answer is that the Rambam knew that such a belief, the denial of the validity of the Oral Law, is rationally impossible. That’s why he says that this belief is the opposite of what the Torah itself says with the verse “according to the Torah they teach you and the statutes that they say to you”. It is simply impossible to accept the Written Torah and deny the Oral Torah. Either one denies both or accepts both, for which the commentaries bring proof. Therefore, the Rambam concludes that their irrational claim must have been motivated by ulterior, selfish motives.

Someone once asked how we learn from the verse “according to the Torah that they teach you” that the Rabbis have the right to establish laws, such as preventative measures? Maybe it means that they just have the right to interpret the Written Law? The answer to that question is that by doing the former they are doing the latter - they said that it means that they have the right to set up laws.

It’s impossible to have the Written Law of Torah without the Oral Law. For example, the verse says that on the Sabbath one isn’t permitted to do ‘melacha’, creative activity. What is the definition of ‘melacha’? How does one determine the meaning of ‘creative activity’? The punishment for doing this type of production on the Sabbath is death - it would not make sense for there to be a system that punishes with death for violations which no one knows the meaning.

In this story, Tziduk and Bitus were not guided by reason: there is simply no rationale for their position, so the Rambam must say that they had personal motives. This also explains why the Rambam adds that the Sages did not deal with them. This was because they weren’t interested in the truth so talking to them about the issue would not accomplish anything.

**Chapter 1, Mishna 4: “Yose the son of Yoezer, them an of Tzeraida, said: Your house should be a place of gathering for wise men...”** Rashi explains that this means that it should be a place they go to learn. To understand this, we need ask the simple question: why? What is the significance of the house in this advice? Why not just go to a ‘Beis Medrash’, a place designated for learning? To be continued. ■



# Animal Behavior II

*Response to  
Last Week's  
Question*

## ANIMAL DEATHS

Joshua Plank

EGYPT



In the latest issue of the Jewish Times you asked a question: “Why was the next plague Animal Deaths? Was it to act as a follow-up some how to the Mixture? Write in with your thoughts.” I have two possible answers to this.

First, it seems that the Mixture dealt with wild beasts while the Animal Deaths dealt with domestic animals. Perhaps this was to show Hashem’s mastery over both wild and domestic animals. The Mixture may sever the connection between the Egyptians and wild beasts, but might not affect their view of domestic animals. If this is true it brings up another question though, why did wild and domestic animals need to be addressed specifically in these different ways?

Second, while the mixture may have changed some of the Egyptian emotions toward animals, perhaps they still considered them deities. They may have said, “The animals are still gods, they are just angry at us for some wrong we committed”. They may have thought the animals were acting on their own, without Hashem’s control. That is why the next plague had to be something negative upon the animals themselves. This showed that it was G-d who was in charge. As it says, “behold the hand of Hashem is on your livestock...” 9:3 ■

*Joshua Plank*

## Torah vs. Zohar II

**Reader:** Perhaps I missed something in your line of reasoning regarding the status of Kabbala and the Zohar. In your article, you explained that the Talmud could be traced back to God’s words at Sinai with no break in oral transmission. You then contrasted this with Kabbala stating “no one today can claim to possess verbal transmissions directly back to Moses and God.” I hope you can see already where the flaw is in this argument. Talmud was (past tense) transmitted orally with no break in the transmission until the time it was first compiled in written form. It is not presently transmitted in this manner. Similarly, the teachings of the Zohar were transmitted orally from Teacher to student until the time it was compiled in its written form. I see no difference in the manner of transmission of these two forms of teaching. I do not discount the authority of the Torah above the Zohar, but I do believe that you have failed to make a coherent argument for why the Talmud should supersede the Zohar. I would welcome a clarification of your idea.

*Regards, Shira*

**Mesora:** Shira, thank you for your observation. You are correct; clarification is required.

Your write, “Talmud was (past tense) transmitted orally with no break in the transmission until the time it was first compiled in written form. It is not presently transmitted in this manner. Similarly, the teachings of the Zohar were transmitted orally from Teacher to student until the time it was compiled in its written form.”

You admit of an unbroken chain in both, Talmud and Zohar. However, I am not aware of such a recorded lineage regarding the Zohar. Only regarding Talmud do we find Maimonides’ precise history of the Rabbis, “Who received it from whom”. If you claim this is so regarding Kabbala, I would appreciate you informing me where a similar chain of people is recorded. But I have never heard of any source.

In the beginning of his Mishne Torah, Maimonides lists the unbroken chain of Sages from Moses to Rabbeinu Hakodesh. Thus, we have proof of the Talmud’s (Oral Law) origin at Sinai. Contrast that to the sudden appearance of Kabbala in the 13th century, where no recorded transmission exists regarding Kabbala, tracing itself to Moses. Additionally, authorship of the Zohar has been disputed. This further doubts its validity.

I agree: from Rabbeinu Hakodesh and forward, no one today claims a direct transmission back to Rabbeinu Hakodesh. Nonetheless, no one argues the authenticity of the Talmud. We accept the words of Maimonides as we do regarding all historical accounts. Had an unbroken lineage been proven in connection with the Zohar, we would treat it similarly. ■

## Letters



## Thinking About Thinking

**Reader:** We were trying to go through the proof of the soul, and we were unclear on a key point. On Mesora.org you explain “In order to perceive of any idea, one requires an apparatus which is of the same nature as ideas, i.e., the soul, something not physical, something Metaphysical.” We were wondering about this premise. Why is this necessarily true? Why couldn’t you say the nature of the brain is to perceive non-physical concepts? Why can’t something physical apprehend the non-physical? We have a sense of what you mean, but we were hoping you could make it clearer. Thank you for your help.

*Sincerely,  
Dave and Dani*

**Mesora:** Had the brain alone been required to perceive concepts, we would wonder why animals have not developed speech, discussed morality, or composed books, as does man. You might reply that man’s brain is superior than animals’ brains, but that would lead to a search for where man’s brain differs, qualitatively. I do not know enough to answer if there is much physical difference.

What we can securely rely on are God’s words: “B’tzelem Elokim bara oso”, “In God’s image He created him (man)”. (Gen. 1:27) This is not mentioned in connection with the animals. Thus, man was gifted with an additional component. We term this the “soul”.

In all honesty, I thought about your question, and realized something I cannot answer: for if I maintain that something non-physical is required in man, a soul, necessary for perceiving the non-physical world of ideas, a counter argument exists. For one might retort as follows, “Even accepting the postulation of a non-physical soul, we must then ask, how this non-physical soul relates to a physical man?” It appears we gain nothing by suggesting a soul exists. For we have yet not answered how something physical interacts with that which is not physical. I do not know the answer. I do not think this is within man’s capabilities to know, since the question concerns the soul, of which we have no idea what it is.

Nonetheless, we might distinguish between that which “perceives” ideas, and that perceiving entity somehow “relating” to man. The former – “perception” – is what I addressed, and what you questioned. I previously suggested “perception” cannot be achieved by a rock, wood, flesh, or anything but something akin to concepts: thus, a “non-physical” soul is required to interact with “non-physical” ideas. But when discussing something other than the act of “perceiving”, meaning, the act of “relating”, we are not faced with the same problem. To be clear, there are two issues: 1) what is required to “perceive” ideas, 2) what is required that a physical human body might “relate” with a non-physical soul.

I have only addressed the former, but the latter – I feel – is not in the reach of human understanding. ■

## Repenting

**Reader:** We have a cat (female), she is so tender and we are very fond of her. At first I didn’t want to accept her but my children (and the fact that she needed a place to go) convinced me and I decided to take her (she was two months old when we took her). After some months she started to be very nervous and I realized she wanted to mate. I could not let her do it because I live in an apartment and don’t know anybody that would like cats. Almost everybody told me that I had to sterilize my cat. At first it seemed to me a very terrible think to do, but I was told that it would be a worst crime to let her suffer by not letting her mate and that she would not have this urge after sterilization. The fact is that I had sterilized my cat 3 years ago. She seems to be OK and she is very sweet and curious. However, I sometimes feel very guilty of what I’ve done because I think it was not a correct thing to do. Listening to Noachide Laws I have learned about the prohibition of castrating or modification of the sexual organs of an animal and now I feel worse about what I have done. What can I do to fix my fault?

*Thanks in advance, Aurora*

**Mesora:** I know of a case personally, where a young man confessed to his Rabbi of participating in two abortions for his girlfriend. The Rabbi said that the remorse was the first step to repentance. We learn that the other step is to resign one’s self to never commit that act again.

With 1) remorse, and 2) an honest and complete resignation to never commit that act again, God wipes clean that person’s sin. Read Ezekiel chapter 18 on this absolute removal of sin when one truly repents. This was a greater sin than yours, so certainly your remorse and moral confession before God (you should actually address God) will wipe clean your sin.

As we are born ignorant, God is well aware that every truth must be arrived at, and that takes time. Thus, God allows a person the right to repent, and God fully forgives those who fully repent. Ignorance is unavoidable, and we must not punish ourselves with remorse, if God forgives. We must adhere to what He determines is true and real, and forgiveness is real before God. ■

## Letters

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is the one not asked.”*

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