

# Why does repentance include prayer & charity?

In "Reward & Punishment II"

ESTD 1997

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## JUDAISM'S FUNDAMENTALS

# REWARD & PUNISHMENT II

**RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM**

*Last week we denounced two orthodox organizations promising fertility, wealth and health in exchange for charity. Two letters asked similar questions.*

**David:** I was pleased to read in the most recent JewishTimes your discouragement of donations to charities that promise results, in return for specific donations for amulets or the like. However, in your article you make the following statement: "We cannot avert G-d's punishments with unrelated activities, or even with mitzvahs."

Yet in the High Holiday liturgy, we proclaim, after saying the Unesanah Tokeph prayer, "repentance, prayer, and charity will avert the evil decree." Further, when we make a misheberach for a sick person, we pledge charity and say that on this merit (b'scar zeh) G-d should provide healing. Is there a contradiction between our practice and your statement?

David E. Maslow

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**Weekly Parsha**

# Behar

**RABBI BERNARD FOX**

"When you make a sell to your friend or make a purchase from your friend, one person should not aggrieve his brother." (VaYikra 25:14)

"And a person should not aggrieve his friend. And you should fear your G-d. I and Hashem your G-d." (VaYikra 25:17)

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(Behar continued from page 1)

## Weekly Parsha

# JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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The first passage above commands us against ona'ah – overcharging or underpaying in a commercial exchange. A seller is entitled to a reasonable price for his product and a buyer is entitled to bargain for a reasonable sale price. However, it is not permitted to charge an unreasonable price that takes advantage of the buyer's situation or ignorance. Neither is it permitted for the purchaser to take advantage of the ignorance of the seller or the situation in which the seller may find himself.

A few passages later the Torah returns to this theme. It tells us that we are prohibited from aggrrieving one another. This behavior is also referred to as ona'ah. Our Sages were concerned with the meaning of this second passage. The first passage already indicates that ona'ah is prohibited in trade. This second passage cannot be a repetition of the same prohibition against inappropriate commercial dealings. What is the new message in the second passage?

The Sages were troubled by a second issue. The second passage warns us that we should fear Hashem. Of course it is important to fear Hashem! Why does the Torah suddenly admonish us to fear Hashem? The Sages concluded that this admonishment must in some way be related to the first portion of the passage that commands us to not aggrrieve our neighbor. What is this connection?

The Sages explained that this second passage is not referring to ona'ah of one's neighbor in commercial dealings. Instead, it is a prohibition against ona'at devarim – aggrrieving another person with words. In other words, we are prohibited from verbally abusing a person.

The Sages explained that this interpretation of the passage accounts for the inclusion of the admonition to fear Hashem. Ona'at devarim – verbal abuse – can often be justified or rationalized. Sometimes the abuse is subtle and not overt. We can tell ourselves that we really meant no harm. Also, sometimes we can rationalize the manner in which we speak with others by claiming to ourselves that our intention was only to correct the other person and not to embarrass or harass him. Therefore, only the one who delivers the abuse and Hashem know the true intent of the statement. The passage tells us that we may be able to fool others regarding our intent. But we cannot deceive Hashem.[1] Perhaps, the Torah is telling us that we often keep our behaviors within the boundaries of civility because we do not want to lose the respect of our peers. In instances of ona'at devarim, we can sometimes explain away our behavior and retain the respect of our peers. This removes one of the

fundamental motivators that regulate civil interaction – our desire to be perceived by others in a positive light. The Torah forewarns us that in order to motivate ourselves in the observance of this command, we must recognize that although we can delude our peers regarding our intention, we cannot mislead Hashem.

Maimonides' treatment of the prohibition against ona'at devarim is somewhat odd. In his code of law – the Mishne Torah – Maimonides places his discussion of this prohibition in the laws regulating commerce. Specifically, after his discussion of the laws regarding overcharging or underpaying in commerce – ona'at mammon – Maimonides discusses the laws of ona'at devarim. This is not the location in which we would expect to find this discussion. Instead, we would expect that Maimonides would place his discussion of ona'at devarim in Hilchot Dayot. Hilchot Dayot discusses healthy behaviors and personality disorders. Included in this discussion are the prohibitions against improper speech. For example, in Hilchot Dayot, Maimonides discusses the prohibition against defamation and gossip. We would expect Maimonides to include the prohibition against ona'at devarim in this discussion. Why does Maimonides instead place the prohibition against ona'at devarim in the laws regulating commerce?

It is helpful to consider Maimonides' examples of ona'at devarim. Not all forms of verbal abuse are included in this prohibition. Maimonides provides four basic examples. First, it is prohibited to embarrass a person regarding his past or family history. For example, one may not remind a convert that his ancestors were not Jewish. Neither is it appropriate to remind a person who has repented from various wrong-doings of his former errors. Second, it is prohibited to say to a person who is suffering from misfortune that his misfortune is due to some failing in his righteousness. Third, it is prohibited to provide someone with false directions. For example, if a person asks for directions to the bank, one may not provide the person with directions to a different location. Fourth, ona'at devarim prohibits asking a person a question that one knows he cannot answer, simply to embarrass the person.[2] What is the common factor in these examples?

It seems that according to Maimonides, ona'at devarim always involves hurting a person through taking advantage of a weakness in the person or in his background. Simply insulting a person is not included in the prohibition. In each example given by Maimonides,

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the victim has some weakness or some area of sensitivity in his life or background. The person who violates the prohibition of ona'at devarim has used this weakness of area of sensitivity as a basis for hurting the victim. Essentially, the prohibition of ona'at devarim sanctions against taking advantage of a person's weaknesses.

This provides some insight into Maimonides' placement of this prohibition in the laws governing commerce. These laws are designed to assure fair, reasonable, and honest trade among the members of society. The laws are needed because the Torah recognizes that without regulation it is not likely that fair, reasonable, and honest trade will be assured. Commerce takes place among trading partners that are not necessarily equals in power and influence. Without regulation, the rights of all parties in a commercial endeavor would not be established or protected.

The prohibition against ona'at devarim expresses this objective. The prohibition is designed to prevent a buyer or seller from taking advantage of the ignorance or weaker bargaining position of the opposite party in the negotiation in order to secure an unreasonable price. Essentially, it prohibits taking unfair advantage of a person in business dealings. In short, all of these laws that govern commerce are designed to foster and nurture healthy, ethical relationships within a society.

We can now begin to appreciate Maimonides' placement of the prohibition against ona'at devarim among the laws of commerce and not among the laws regulating inappropriate speech. As explained above, Hilchot Dayot discusses the elements of a healthy personality and the proper behaviors that are associated with a healthy personality. Apparently, Maimonides feels that the Torah's primary objection to gossip and tale-bearing is that these behaviors are expressions of personality flaws. It is true that these behaviors hurt others. But the Torah's prohibition focuses on the damage done to the person involved in these self-destructive behaviors. Therefore, the prohibitions against these forms of improper speech are placed in Hilchot Dayot.

However, Maimonides understands ona'at devarim as a prohibition against verbally taking advantage of a person's weaknesses and sensitivities. Ona'at devarim is prohibited because it is divisive and destructive to society. Therefore, Maimonides places this prohibition among the laws of commerce. The prohibition against ona'at devarim and the laws of commerce share the common theme of fostering healthy, constructive relations among the members of society.

Maimonides' treatment of ona'at devarim is reflected in the comments of Sefer HaChinuch. In describing the objective of the prohibition against ona'at devarim, Sefer HaChinuch comments that the law is designed to foster peace and discourage discord among the members of society.[3] These comments seem to clearly reflect Maimonides' understanding of the prohibition.

Finally, it is worth noting that Maimonides' understanding of the prohibition against ona'at devarim is reflected in our parasha's treatment of the law. The prohibition against ona'at devarim is juxtaposed to the prohibition against ona'at mammon. This implies that both prohibitions share a common theme. Maimonides suggests that this theme is the importance of creating and nurturing social cohesion and cooperation.

## Bechukotai

**“Then the land will be appeased for its Sabbaths – all the years that it s desolate and you are in the land of your enemies. Then the land will rest and be appeased for its Sabbaths.”** (VaYikra 26:34)

Parshat BeChukotai begins with a promise of rewards and a warning of punishment. If Bnai Yisrael is faithful to the Torah they will be rewarded with peace and prosperity in the Land of Israel. Disregard for the Torah will be punished by disease, famine, invasion and eventually exile from the land.

The above pasuk is part of the narrative of the punishments. We are told that while we are exiled from the Land of Israel, the land will be appeased for the Sabbatical years that were not observed by the nation. In order to understand the meaning of this passage, it is important to review the mitzvot of the Sabbatical year and the Jubilee year. These mitzvot are discussed in last week's parasha. In the land of Israel the years are divided into cycles of seven years. The seventh year of each cycle is the Shemita year – the Sabbatical year. During the Shemita year the land is not worked. Seven of these cycles include forty-nine years. The fiftieth year is the Yovel – Jubilee year. During Yovel the land may not be farmed. In addition, the land is redistributed. Land returns to the descendants of the individuals who originally

inherited the Land of Israel. Another law of the Yovel is that all Jewish slaves are freed.

With this explanation of the Shemita and Yovel years we can begin to understand the message of our passage. The first exile from the land of Israel lasted for seventy years. Rashi explains that this period of seventy years corresponded with the number of Shemita and Yovel years that Bnai Yisrael neglected to observe. Rashi explains that the meaning of our pasuk is that during the exile the land will be desolate. It will not be cultivated and its produce will not be collected. The land will be in the same state that is required during the observance of the Shemita and Yovel years. These seventy years of desolation will atone for the seventy Shemita and Yovel years that the people did not observe while they occupied the land.[4]

It is interesting that the Torah characterizes the exile as a response for the failure to observe the mitzvot of Shemita and Yovel. Of course, these are important mitzvot. However, it is interesting that the Torah specifically warns us about these mitzvot and warns us that the neglect of these mitzvot will be punished by exile. What is special about these mitzvot?

In order to answer this question, it is important to recognize who the Torah is addressing in this week's parasha. Of course, this message is relevant to us, but it is addressed to the generation that was to emerge from the wilderness and take possession of the land. Sforno develops this idea in his commentary on last week's parasha – Parshat BeHar. Parshat BeHar deals primarily with the mitzvot of Shemita and Yovel and the laws related to these mitzvot. Sforno asks why these laws are discussed by the Torah at this point. He observes that originally, the generation that was redeemed from Egypt was to travel through the wilderness, emerge from the wilderness and then take possession of the Land of Israel. This plan changed only later when this generation proved unworthy of taking possession of the land. Moshe tells this generation that they will take possession of the land and must observe the mitzvot of Shemita and Yovel. He warns the people that their failure to observe these mitzvot and their related laws will result in their exile from the land.[5] Sforno's comments provide a first step towards answering our question. It is clear from Sforno's comments that observance of these mitzvot is fundamental to establishing a proper relationship between the people and the Land of Israel. Because of these mitzvot are directly relevant to this relationship, failure to observe them results in exile from the land. However, Sforno does not explain why are these mitzvot so fundamental

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to the nation's relationship with the land?

Before we can fully appreciate the answer to this question, we must identify the transition that was to inevitably take place with the possession of the land. In the wilderness the nation was completely and obviously dependant upon Hashem. The wilderness did not contain adequate water or food. The survival of the nation during its travels in the wilderness was only possible through the intervention of Hashem. At every encampment Hashem provided the nation with a source of water. Each day – except Shabbat – manna fell from the heavens and provided the nation with sustenance. Bnai Yisrael were constantly reminded of their dependency on Hashem and their own helplessness. This would change with the possession of the land. The people would enter a land “flowing with milk and honey.” They would plant crops and reap bountiful harvests. This would create an obvious challenge.

In the wilderness, the presence of Hashem was constantly evident in the lives of the people. Hashem was not just an abstract theological concept. His presence was evidenced by the daily experiences and the very survival of the nation in this hostile environment. Once the people entered the land they would live off the prosperity of the Land of Israel. Hashem's presence would not be clearly evidenced each day. It would be easy for the people to forget about Hashem and to begin to believe that their own efforts were the source of their comfort and prosperity. In other words, possession of the land presented a strange paradox. The abundance of the land of Israel was a blessing. It was provided to the people so that they would be free to develop spiritually without the distraction of a struggle for material survival. However, the real danger existed that the land's very abundance might result in exactly the opposite outcome. The people might be seduced by their material wealth and begin to believe that their efforts were the true determinant of their fates. They would become absorbed in material lives and deny the dependence of all human beings on the benevolence of Hashem.

We can now appreciate the mitzvot of Shemita and Yovel. These mitzvot directly address this danger. Sefer HaChinuch explains that the seven year Shemita cycle reinforces the Torah's contention that the universe is not eternal. The land is worked for six years and rested in the seventh year. This recalls that Hashem created the universe in six days and rested from creation of the seventh day. In addition, resting the land and the requirement to share the produce of the seventh year express

Hashem's authority over us and the land. He has this authority as creator.[6] Similarly, Yovel reinforces the idea that everything belongs to Hashem. He gives the land and all other elements of the material world to whom He pleases. In this case, He wishes that the land should be redistributed according to the distribution that was established when the land was initially divided.[7] In short these mitzvot are devised to remind us that the land is really Hashem's. He is the creator. He is the true master of the land and He has the ultimate authority over its use. Through observing these mitzvot that land becomes a reminder of the presence and authority of Hashem. The natural tendency to forget Hashem is countered by a powerful reminder of His presence and authority.

Of course, the mitzvot of Shemita and Yovel can only achieve these goals when they are observed. If they are neglected they cannot act as reminders of Hashem's presence and authority. This results in an interesting dynamic. The possession of the land can undermine our relationship with Hashem. The mitzvot of Shemita and Yovel are designed to counter this tendency. If we neglect these mitzvot, our relationship with the land and with Hashem will quickly, further deteriorate. Therefore, the Torah directly links possession of the land with observance of these mitzvot. If we are to retain possession, these mitzvot must be observed. We are warned that if we abandon these mitzvot, we will be exiled.

In short, The Torah recognizes that the very blessings that the nation will enjoy in the land can act as a distraction from spiritual growth and observance of the mitzvot. Therefore, it stresses the importance of the mitzvot of Shemita and Yovel and warns that failure to observe these mitzvot will result in exile. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer VaYikra 25:17.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Mechira 14:13-14.

[3] Rav Aharon HaLeyve, Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 341.

[4] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer VaYikra 26:34.

[5] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer VaYikra, 25:1.

[6] Rav Aharon HaLeyve, Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 84.

[7] Rav Aharon HaLeyve, Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 330.



(Reward &amp; Punishment continued from page 1)

**Fred:** Dear Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim, I read with interest, and enjoy your publication most every week. I also very much agree, much to the consternation of my wife, many relatives, and most shul colleagues, with your opinion on not only the uselessness of Segulas, but also on their prohibited status. (This is a huge understatement of what my opinion of segulas is and what other's opinion of me is for thinking that way is, but that is not the thrust of this letter).

That notwithstanding I am unsure how to react to your most recent article where you write, "We cannot aver God's punishments with unrelated activities, or even with mitzvahs". This seems to contradict the very famous and popular posuk we say on Rosh Hashona immediately prior to Unesana tokef, namely "U'teshuva, U'teffila, U'tzdeka maavirin es roah hagezeirah" (please tolerate the transliteration).

Granted teshuva is in line with your article, but tzedaka seems to fly in the face of it. Gving Tzedaka, even if you say ineffective in the absence of teshuva, clearly helps to avert bad decrees (how a decree from God can be bad is in itself another whole discussion) more than Teshuva alone. It is also not clear that each of the itemized activities is ineffectual in isolation. This implies to me that doing a mitzvah can indeed avert God's punishments. It would also seem to lend at least some credence to the practice of "visitors give charity and utter heartfelt prayers on the spot" (in that case the resting place of R'Shimon, but in reality it would apply equally as much to any place) as a method of averting divine punishment. I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely, *Fred Wolfish*

**Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim:** David, Fred, thank you for sharing your thoughts.

David, misheberach's and charity for others was explained by Rabbi Reuven Mann as follows: from the prayers made by the righteous individuals in our Torah for their wives or others, we learn that God will consider how one's punishment might negatively impact another's life. And if Shimone is righteous, God may very well save Reuven – not for his own merit – but because it impacts Shimone. In this manner, Shimone's prayer may affect Reuven's fate. Giving charity works in a similar way.

The answer to your main question is within the very quote you cite: "teshuva (repentance) tefila (prayer) and tzedaka (charity) avert the evil decree"...emphasis on "repentance". For without repentance, a man remains a sinner, not



regretful of his sins. Therefore, God will justly hold accountable this man for his sins, granting no atonement. Now although repentance is in fact a separate mitzvah, nonetheless, repentance is not to be viewed as 'extraneous' to a sin, as you may have implied. For if repentance is extraneous to sin, then your questions stand, supported by the Torah and Sforno: "God does not take a bribe". (Deut. 10:17) Rabbi Reuven Mann cited Sforno's comments as follows, "God will never at all remove a punishment for a sin on account of a merit for a mitzvah which the sinner performed, as the Rabbis said, 'A mitzvah does not extinguish a sin'." As we have said, repentance is not an extraneous mitzvah. So it is effective to atone for sins.

How then, must we view repentance? And as you asked Fred, why are each of these three apparently ineffective when performed in isolation of the two others? Good question.

Repentance must be viewed as the very termination of that sin. Repentance is not extraneous to a sin, but "part" of that self-same matter...in the form of its termination.

Tefila (prayer) as well is an act where man "judges" himself, as the root word of Tefila is "pelale", to judge, as a Rabbi once taught. In prayer as well, man is not performing an act

extraneous to his sins, but he is taking stock of himself, and approaching God with requests that might assist him in a Torah lifestyle, all the while beseeching God.

And what is Tzedaka? Tzedaka is a display of justice. Man recognizes the institution of justice, and supports it by being charitable to others. As man attests to God's justice – charity in specific – man partakes of the system of God's charity; and God's charity to this man is in the form of His atonement.

In his Laws of Repentance 2:4, Maimonides states, "It is of the ways of repentance, that the penitent shouts out regularly before God with cries and supplications, performing tzedaka in line with his capabilities, distancing himself far from the matter of his sin, and changing his name, thereby saying, 'I am another man, and not the man who did those acts, and he changes all his actions to good and to an upright path...' Maimonides too groups together repentance, prayer and charity. Why?

The answer is because repentance straddles three issues. Firstly, man must feel remorse and abandon his sin. But what was the damage of sin? It is that man has broken his relationship with his Creator. Maimonides' introductory "kesser" (crown) to the laws of Repentance say this: "Teshuva - One positive command; that being that the sinner returns from his sin before God, and confesses." Maimonides expresses part of repentance as man repenting "before God". Now although repentance includes confession ("viduy") to satisfy the requirement to "repent before God", perhaps the "continued" relationship of being "before God" exists only when one is engaged in prayer...a dialogue with God. This explains the words, "the penitent shouts out regularly before God". Having broken a relationship of obeying God through sin, an essential feature of repentance is to reestablish an "ongoing" relationship with Him. But there is one further step: charity.

As a Rabbi once explained Maimonides' last chapter in his "Guide", charity is the barometer of the perfected person. Although Torah study is the greatest good, the prophet teaches that study without acts of kindness is incomplete. As long as one does not engage in charity and justice, his learning has not become part of his value system. To complete one's return to God, he must perform acts of charity.

With repentance, prayer and charity, man is not forgiven for engaging in extraneous activities: he is forgiven since he is correcting his very wrong and reestablishing his connection with God in a three-step process that encompasses all of human perfection: theoretical and practical. ■

## Letters



# Letters

*from our*

# READERS



## Letters

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*"The only poor question is the one not asked."*

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## Answered Prayers

**Reader:** Dear Rabbi, I read with great interest your recent article "Reward & Punishment" and have a question with respect to a possible distinction. First of all, please be assured that I am neither a heretic nor an extremist so that you may not need to be concerned of the source and motive for the question; I am not attempting to advocate or controvert. I have Judaic learning during my youth at a Yeshiva in New Jersey.

The article addresses a phenomenon that is quite prevalent these days, especially in some orthodox circles. My personal disposition has always been that the practice of believing that any entity, no matter how much of a Tzaddik, can be "utilized" to directly intercede is, in fact, a form of idolatry...no matter how well-intentioned the protagonist, or the value of the "intermediary". So your article struck a note for me to be sure.

By the same token, I do have personal experience that would suggest something more than natural and certainly less than an open miracle. So now your article really has me thinking, since I did not consider my approach to be what your article, or I, would determine as "heretic". In attempting to understand and harmonize the point of the article (and its authority) as against my experience, I felt compelled to send this email and ask for your esteemed opinion.

Without elaboration as to my experience, and without particulars as to circumstances or identities, my event was out of the norm, immediate, and symbolically earmarked. My "enlistment" however was not for direct intercession of any kind but, rather, for independent prayer of a Tzaddik (and others) in addition to my own direct prayers to G-d. I therefore sense a distinction from what Rambam was addressing in that there was no "agency" requested but, instead, the independent supplication of others (of worth) for the same result. As such, I humbly sense a significant difference between asking an entity to pray for ones-self, and asking an entity (alive or not) to also pray with ones-self. In thinking further, it occurred to me that every orthodox denomination, in one manner or another, espouses that its Rabbi/Tzaddik/congregant/etc. will pray for/with you in times of need or other circumstance. And, in fact, it also reminds me of the Chazan's personal prayer on behalf of the congregation during the Hinneni before Musaf during Rosh Hashana.

So...is there a distinction that is clearly not idolatrous even, and especially, when Rambam's passage is applied?

Thank you for your consideration and a "Gitten Shabbos" to you and yours.

Respectfully, *Rick Schuller*

**Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim:** Moshe Rabbeinu, Eliyahu, and the Tanaaim in the Talmud prayed for others. This is acceptable before God...but it is not at all the topic I addressed: the false notions of intermediaries and mystical powers, supported by those two organizations. This refers to beliefs that one cannot approach God directly, that one needs an "advocate", that one communicates with the dead Rabbis somehow, that one merits others by newly invented rituals, or that another existence or thing possesses greater and even supernatural abilities.

As you raised the important issue of man praying for another, I will cite Rabbi Reuven Mann's explanation regarding praying for others. (I don't see much of a distinction between praying "for", or "with" others, as you suggested.)

We see the patriarchs prayed for their barren wives, and Moses for the Jews. They understood that a person is punished for their own sins, and that all things being equal, repentance is required to reverse a person's fate. Extraneous events are irrelevant and inconsequential. However, from the prayers made by these righteous individuals for others, we learn that God will consider how Reuven's punishment might negatively impact Shimone's life. And if Shimone is righteous, God may very well save Reuven – not for his own merit – but because it impacts Shimone. In this manner, Shimone's prayer may affect Reuven's fate. Giving charity works in a similar way. ■

## Real Demons

**Reader:** How do we know, using rational proof of course, that demons or spirits don't exist? I have no reason to believe that they do, but many people do believe it. I'm not sure how to answer them.

**Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim:** The method of rational thought is this: we do not accept anything as true, without proof. Thus, until one proves the elephant is in the room, I do not suggest, "Maybe it is, even though I cannot prove it." For with this reasoning, one is also justified to say, "Maybe elephants do

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## Letters

not exist at all”.

Now, a person will immediately say, “I know elephants DO in fact exist...I’ve seen them.” The person thereby claims “evidence” is what provided him with proof of elephants. To be consistent, and in line with rational thought, the person must also maintain that “evidence” is required to prove the elephant is in the room. Referring to what a person resorts to for obtaining proof, we have shown his allegiance to, and need of evidence to validate anything as true. Thus, with no evidence, suggesting, “Maybe demons exist”, is inconsistent. ■

## Do We Know?

**Anasazi:** Why the Tanach hasn’t stated straightforwardly that God is indivisible. Especially, if according to Rambam, a failure to accept this idea denies a person of Olam Haba. This would have spared the world from ideas like the trinity or pantheism, which has found its way into the minds of many observant Jews.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Moses tells the people “you saw no form” (on Sinai), God tells Moses, “Man cannot know me while alive”. The Torah clearly states that we cannot fathom God. Thus, any idea of the physical, i.e., “division” cannot apply to God. God created laws, and they do not govern Him.

**Jack:** I understand the logic, but still it seems that you are projecting ideas onto the Torah--ideas that may be “obviously” correct, or at least have solid evidence, but are not necessarily directly derived from the Torah. God says, “Man cannot know me while alive”, but why must it be that he has no parts, just from this phrase? I believe this question came up before, and I still do not understand. While Anasazi’s answer was clear, I do not see how we can claim that that phrase necessitates God’s absolute unity. If we literally take it to mean that nothing can be related to him that we understand, how can He “exist”, if He created existent beings?

I do, in fact, think that it is a good argument of God’s unity, just not one that is directly implied by the Torah. However, as you say, “God created laws, and He is not governed by them.” If I understand correctly, it is not possible for a law or description to both be created and applied to the same entity. This

leads to another question that I posted up before, of which the answer still eludes me. If God created good, then He, by the same logic, is not good. If we can call him good, on the other hand, then that means He did not create the idea of Good, and therefore it is defined outside of His control. This may not be a necessarily bad outcome, but it is a bit crazy.

**Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim:** In as much as we are human with limited perceptive abilities compared to God’s absolute knowledge, and God gave us intelligence, thereby telling us we are able to apprehend truths...we are forced to answer that we can in fact understand matters concerning God.

True...God is not governed by His creations, and “existence” is God’s creation. Does this mean “existence” cannot apply to God? Yes...“created existence” cannot apply to God. But God’s existence, what ever it is, is not a created existence. God allows man to acquire true knowledge. So ideas the Torah conveys like God’s existence and His role as Creator must be truths. This is also true regarding God’s goodness. He did create “good”, but why can’t created good be modeled after His very values?

Note that there are two realms: 1) creation, and 2) eternal truths, like goodness. Speaking loosely, creation is less like God in as much as it is physical, and compares nothing to God’s being. However, “truths” like righteousness, goodness, and other matters which we call “God’s Attributes” must be discussed in a different manner, and are more “closely” related to Him. Although the first realm has nothing to do with God’s nature, the second realm lends itself to an equation

between God and our partaking of those values. For this reason, God’s opening words of Parshas Kedoshim are, “Be Holy, for I am holy”. God equates what is true about Him with what is true about us. God addresses your question directly. ■

## Unforgiving

**Ozzy:** Another answer to the apparent contradiction between hilchos Avodah Zara (2:5) and Teshuva (3:14) regarding whether a specific sin is ever forgiven is given by R’ Bachaye (quoted in a footnote to hilchos teshuva in Rambam L’am). He explains that in hilchos teshuva the Rambam is writing about man’s relationship to Hashem. For this teshuva always works (ain lecha davar she’omaid bifnei teshuva). In hilchos Avoda Zara the Rambam is talking about how the rest of Bnei Yisroel should treat him. We shall never accept his repentance because we can’t know if his teshuva is genuine or not. ■



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# the Book of Job

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Transcribed by students

## PART X FLEETING FORTUNES

### Chapter 28

(28:1,2) *"1. Surely there is a vein for the silver, and a place for gold where they fine it. 2. Iron is taken out of the earth, and brass is molten out of the stone."*

Job's idea about the silver mine is that there is change in the physical. At one time you will see that a mine will give forth gold or silver, and later, that town that was full of mines will be empty like a ghost town. This phenomenon Job discusses refers not only to geographical locations, but it is also a metaphor for man's success. Someone can be extremely wealthy one day and the next, he could lose all of his money. Job also maintains that since God acts with wisdom, there must be an explanation as to why this happens.

A question was raised as to how Job could say that there is really wisdom (verse 12) if he never witnessed it: "But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?" The same can be asked about a person who studies physics, and when he sees a certain idea that does not make sense to him, should he negate all of his previous knowledge, discounting all of physics, or should he assume physics as a science remains intact, but attribute his problem to his own misunderstanding? Of course a wise person will opt for the latter. The same applies to Job. He was not about

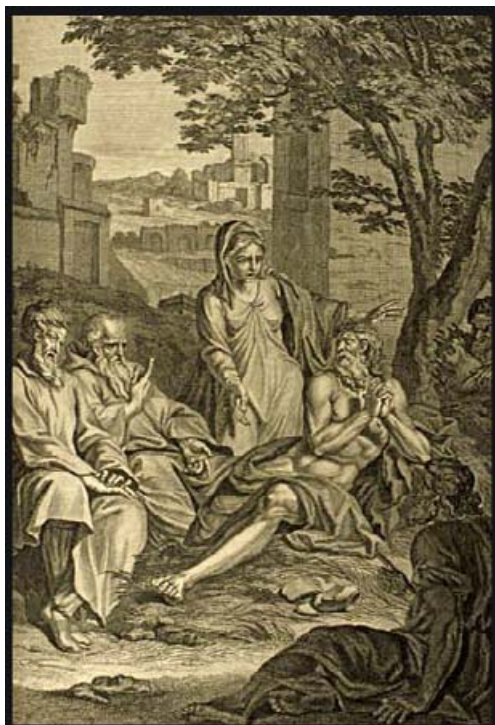
to say there is no system of how God works, because he did not understand this area.

Why in this chapter does Job allegorize wisdom with gold? The reason is because the search for gold is really the search for happiness. However, true happiness only comes via wisdom. So Job equates gold with wisdom. That is why he maintains that gold cannot equal wisdom because gold relies on wisdom for its true value. So here again, Job maintained that there is understanding, but man cannot attain it. He maintained that since God created everything and God works with reason, hence everything must have reason. But he said, "[wisdom] is hidden from the eyes of all living beings" (28:21). Job maintained the reason why man cannot obtain this knowledge (metaphysics) is because this would be tantamount to obtaining knowledge of God, which is impossible. In 28:28 Job describes the kind of knowledge available to him: the fear of God, and doing good. This means that understanding ethics is all man can obtain: "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding". What is ethics? Ethics embodies two areas: 1) our personal knowledge of a Supreme Source of wisdom, and 2) knowledge of good and evil. This is man's lot. (We also note that Job did not list metaphysics as an area of man's understanding.)

Why did Job use the term "fear" of the Lord? This is because man realizes God's awesomeness, and that we cannot understand Him. The reason Job does not include areas of physics that man does understand, is because it does not fall into the area of philosophy, and this is what Job is addressing. Job also felt he would be at peace with himself if he had this knowledge of metaphysics. (This is why it is better than gold, for he felt it could offer him some comfort.) But why should this metaphysical knowledge ease his pain? It is because when man knows the nature or source of a phenomenon or experience (in this case the Source of the universe) he may then conform his emotions to that nature. But if man remains ignorant of that knowledge, he becomes frustrated and experiences pain. This is why Job felt that if he could understand God in some manner, he would be happier.

Tangentially, this explains the popularity of idol worship. For with tangible idols, man relates directly to the "source." He has a form with which to attach his emotions, and this is very satisfying. But "forms" do not exist in Judaism, and are prohibited. All cults wherein followers elevate individual leaders are no different: there too, man attaches himself to a tangible person, just like an idol.

Job is seeking to remove his frustration; realizing an explanation for his suffering would alleviate him. He felt that with an answer for why he is so troubled, he would no longer be painfully trapped with his unanswerable question. ■





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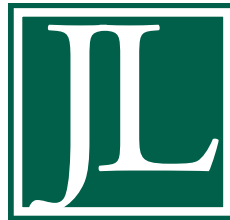
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