

Children: Always encourage their natural inquisitive natures. Follow “their” area of inquiry. They will naturally desire greater knowledge, and will appreciate Torah in its proper time.



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IN THIS ISSUE

PARSHA: TOLDOT	I-3
PURPOSE OF THE WORLD	I,4,5
LETTERS	6,7
NEWS	8,9

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Jerusalem	4:18	Pittsburgh	4:39
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London	3:42	Tokyo	4:12
Miami	5:11	Toronto	4:28
Montreal	3:58	Washington DC	4:30

Weekly Parsha

Toldot

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“And Yitzchak answered and said unto Esav: Behold, I have made him your lord, and all his brothers I have given to him for servants; and with corn and wine have I sustained him; and what then shall I do for you, my son?” (Beresheit 27:37)

(continued on next page)

Why the World was Created

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

“Shimone the Righteous said, ‘The world exists on account of three matters: Torah, service, and kindness.’” (Ethics, 1:2)

(continued on page 4)



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(Toldot cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

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Our parasha discusses the birth of Yaakov and Esav and the relationship that developed between these two brothers. The parasha focuses on two incidents involving the brothers.

The first incident is described in the beginning of the parasha. Esav is the firstborn. However, Esav thoughtlessly trades to Yaakov his rights as firstborn for a bowl of porridge. Towards the close of the parasha, the second interaction is described. Yitzchak summons Esav to him to receive a blessing. Rivka discovers Yitzchak's intention to bless Esav and intervenes. She instructs Yaakov to disguise himself as Esav and stand in his place. Yitzchak is indeed deceived by this subterfuge, and erroneously bestows the blessing upon Yaakov – believing the entire time that he is blessing Esav. Esav discovers the deception and asks his father, Yitzchak, to bless him as well. Yitzchak responds that he cannot provide Esav with the blessing he seeks. He has already blessed Yaakov. He has assigned to Yaakov supremacy over his brothers and he has blessed Yaakov with the material well-being. Esav continues to appeal to Yitzchak and eventually he does secure a blessing, of sorts.

Our passage describes Yitzchak's initial response to Esav. He tells Esav that he has made Yaakov a master over his brothers. The commentaries are bothered by a simple problem with this passage. The passage implies that Yaakov has a number of brothers. Yitzchak tells Esav that all of Yaakov's brothers have been given to him as servants. Yitzchak uses the plural – brothers. But, Yaakov and Esav were Yitzchak's only children. Who are these brothers to whom Yitzchak refers? The commentaries offer two basic responses to this question.

Before we can consider these two answers, it is important to review two previous incidents.

Yitzchak was not Avraham's only son. Before Yitzchak was born, Avraham had another son. Sara gave her servant – Hagar – to Avraham. Through Hagar, Avraham fathered Yishmael. In addition, the Torah tells us that after the death of Sara, Avraham took another wife – Keturah. Through Keturah, Avraham had additional sons.

Now, let us consider the first answer to our question. Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra explains that Yitzchak used the plural – brothers – to include

the children of Avraham's concubines. Although the children of Avraham's concubines were actually Yaakov's uncles, and not his brothers, Ibn Ezra contends that they were the "brothers" that Yitzchak included in his use of the plural.[1]

Nachmanides rejects this interpretation. He insists that although Yitzchak used the plural – brothers – the reference was to Esav alone. Of course, this raises the question: why did Yitzchak use the plural – brothers – if he only intended to refer to Esav? Nachmanides responds that the use of the plural was intended to allude to the ongoing nature of Yaakov's supremacy. He would enjoy supremacy over his brother, Esav, and Yaakov's children would experience the same relationship with Esav descendants.[2] In other words, the plural is used to allude to Esav's many descendants.

This is a fascinating dispute. Nachmanides does not explicitly state his objection to Ibn Ezra's interpretation of the passage. However, it is not difficult to anticipate his reservation. Yitzchak had two children. We can understand his desire to clarify – through this blessing – the relationship between his sons. He wished one son to assume dominance over the other. However, why would Yitzchak be concerned with granting one of his sons supremacy over Avraham's other children? Why did Yitzchak feel that it was necessary to establish a relationship between his son and the

(continued on next page)

(Toldot continued from page 2)

Weekly Parsha

children of Avraham's concubines?

There is another problem with Ibn Ezra's interpretation of our passage. As Ibn Ezra explains, Yitzchak granted Yaakov primacy over Avraham's children from his concubines. Who were these concubines? Conceivably, both Hagar and Keturah can be described as Avraham's concubines. However, Ibn Ezra seems to be referring to Keturah alone.[3] In other words, it seems that according to Ibn Ezra, Yitzchak's intention was to grant his son dominance over the sons of Keturah. But, he was not concerned with addressing the relationship between his son and Yishmael. If Yitzchak felt that it was important to grant his son primacy over the sons of Keturah, why did he not feel compelled to establish a relationship between his son and Yishmael?

It is possible that these questions can be answered through analyzing an interesting dispute in halacha. Hashem gave the mitzvah of milah – circumcision – to Avraham. Hashem told Avraham that this commandment applies to him and to his descendants. Bnai Yisrael – the children of Yaakov – is not the only nation that can claim descent from Avraham. The descendants of Esav, Yishmael, and the sons of Keturah can also trace their lineage back to our forefather, Avraham. Does the commandment of milah apply to these people, or does it only apply to Bnai Yisrael?

The Talmud concludes that the mitzvah of milah does not extend to the descendants of Esav and Yishmael.[4] However the Talmud's position regarding the status of the descendants of the sons of Keturah is not clear. Nachmanides contends that the commandment does not extend to the descendants of the sons of Keturah.[5] In other words, the commandment exclusively applies to Bnai Yisrael – the descendants of Yaakov. Maimonides disagrees. He argues that the commandment does extend to the descendants of the sons of Keturah.[6]

It is easy to understand Nachmanides' position. The mitzvah of milah was given to Avraham and his descendants. Although it is true that Yaakov and his descendants are not the only people that can trace their lineage to Avraham, certainly Bnai Yisrael have a unique and exclusive status as Avraham's fundamental progeny. Therefore, it is reasonable to contend that this commandment should only extend to Bnai Yisrael.

Maimonides' position is more difficult to understand. Maimonides agrees with the Talmud's ruling that the commandment of milah does not extend to the descendants of Yishmael and Esav. Yet, he contends that the mitzvah does apply to the descendants of the sons of Keturah. Apparently, Maimonides does not regard the commandment as exclusive to Bnai Yisrael. Yet, he argues that it applies to some of Avraham's descendants – in addition to Bnai Yisrael – but not to all of these

other descendants. In other words, if Maimonides maintains that the commandment is not exclusive to Bnai Yisrael, why does it apply to the descendants of the sons of Keturah, but not to the descendants of Avraham's other children?

Maimonides offers a fascinating explanation for his position. He explains that the commandment of milah was given to Avraham and his descendants. When Yitzchak was born, Hashem told Avraham that this son would be regarded as his primary progeny.[7] Maimonides explains – based on the discussion in the Talmud – that there are two elements in this message. First, Yitzchak will be Avraham's primary progeny. Second, Yishmael is excluded from the status of zera Avraham – the progeny of Avraham. Why does this exclusion not extend to the sons of Keturah? At the time that Hashem made this declaration, Avraham only had two sons – Yitzchak and Yishmael. The declaration was only intended to address the relative status of these two sons. Yitzchak would be Avraham's primary progeny and Yishmael was excluded from the status of zera Avraham. The sons of Keturah were not yet born. The exclusion was not intended to make reference to them.

Similarly, at the end of our parasha, Yitzchak addresses Yaakov and tells him that he alone is the recipient of Avraham's spiritual legacy.[8] Yitzchak's intention was to distinguish between his two sons. Yaakov would be regarded as Avraham's primary progeny. Esav was excluded from the status of zera Avraham.[9]

In short, the descendants of Yishmael and Esav are explicitly excluded from the status of zera Avraham. Therefore, the mitzvah of milah does not extend to their descendants. However, the sons of Keturah and their descendants are not excluded from the status of zera Avraham. Although they lack the positive quality of being Avraham's primary progeny, they are not excluded from the status of zera Avraham. Accordingly, the mitzvah of milah does extend to the descendants of the sons of Keturah.

We can now understand the dispute between Ibn Ezra and Nachmanides. Apparently, both agree on one issue. In granting one of his sons primacy, Yitzchak intended to preempt any contention regarding the primacy of this son. According to Nachmanides, the only contentious issue that required resolution was the relative status of his two sons – Yaakov and Esav. There was no

need to address the status to descendants of the sons of Keturah. Nachmanides maintains that the status of these descendants of Avraham is unequivocal. The exclusion of the descendants of the sons of Keturah from the mitzvah of milah signifies that they are not regarded as zera Avraham. Yitzchak had no reason to establish the dominance of his son over these people.

However, according to Ibn Ezra, Yitzchak felt compelled to also address the status of his son relative to the descendants of the sons of Keturah. This is consistent with Maimonides' ruling that these descendants – unlike the descendants of Yishmael and Esav – are included in the mitzvah of milah. This inclusion signifies their status as somewhat equivocal. They are not excluded from the status of zera Avraham. Therefore, according to Ibn Ezra, Yitzchak felt compelled to declare his son's dominance also over the descendants of the sons of Keturah. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 27:29.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 27:37.

[3] Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 25:6.

[4] Meseshet Sanhedrin 59b.

[5] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on the Talmud Mesechet Yevamot 46a.

[6] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Melachim 10:8.

[7] Sefer Beresheit 21:12.

[8] Sefer Beresheit 28:4.

[9] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Melachim 10:7-8.



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Why the World was Created

(continued from page 1)

Talmud Sanhedrin 108a states that the great good God bestowed upon the generation of the Flood caused them to say this: "Depart from us [God], and the knowledge of Your ways we do not desire. What is God that we should worship Him? Of what benefit is there in approaching him? Do we need Him, except for a drop of rain? We have rivers, we'll make use of them [instead]."

God thereby destroyed that generation, conveying the very idea from Ethics above, that in the era of the Flood, man became so corrupt; the world's purpose was lost. If we are discerning, we will find in the words of that generation, the same elements found in Shimon's words.

That generation received great blessings from God, as God desires man to have all his needs addressed. The Talmud teaches that due to those benefits, the people grew haughty. This is our first lesson: man's ego is unrelenting, and seeks to surge forth at all times. Although ego is a necessary psychological component, which assists man to strive towards accomplishments to secure a good life, it can be abused like anything else.

What are these three elements required for the world's creation?

The first, Torah, means that a life not guided by reason, is not worthwhile. Socrates said, "An unexamined life is not worth living". If man were to simply follow the lead of the generation of the Flood, seeking physical pleasures and nothing else, his soul would expire with his death. There would then be no purpose in his life on Earth. This means that the true good, is only that which is eternal: temporal, Earthly life is not God's desire for man. If man does not eventuate in a state where he is attached to understanding God's wisdom, his purpose is lost. God did not create a world, simply to exist "for itself". That statement is false: to suggest X exists "for" some goal, means that a purpose is realized. But since the entire universe is an expression of God's wisdom

and cannot exist without God, the goal of all creation must, in some form, be relegated to an "appreciation for God". Therefore, an inanimate world cannot have any purpose; unless a being perceives it's tremendously wise design and arrives at an appreciation for the Designer. Thus, the world was created for intelligent beings to arrive at knowledge of God – Torah. But that alone is insufficient.

The next element is service of God. Man is created in a fashion, where his true convictions must lead to actions. If man says he is convinced of something, like charity being worthwhile, yet he gives no charity, he is not convinced. Therefore, a person who truly is convinced that God created the world must act towards God in a subservient manner. This is "service". Examples include sacrifice to God, Temple worship, and prayer.

But God is not the only being with which man interacts: there are societies. Man must realize that he is not the only human, and it is God's will that many people exist. This must cause man to treat others as himself, for this is a true expression of his understanding of God's will. If man does not give charity, or mistreats others, he denies this will of God. We now understand Shimone's statement: wisdom, service, and kindness are God's goal in creating the world.

The generation of the Flood first said "the knowledge of Your ways we do not desire." They rejected a life of wisdom. Then, "What is God that we should worship Him?" They rejected service of God. Ultimately, we learn that God sealed their fate due to robbery, "Their fate was not sealed except for robbery". (Rashi on Gen. 6:13) They rejected kindness.

The primary objective in the world's creation is that man might engage in wisdom and continually draw closer to God through studying His works, becoming convinced of God, and His will. And this wisdom is measured as "conviction" only when man acts on that wisdom. So the formula is this: "the world exists so that God's wisdom become human convictions."

The generation of the Flood, and all generations prior to Sinai possessed no Torah, just seven commands. It is clear from God's punishments that our Torah was not necessary for man to arrive at perfection. Furthermore, God rightly destroys violators, since man deviated from God's will. God deemed seven commands sufficient for 2448 years. Until Egypt, Canaan and other cultures deviated from God's will, a Torah could not command "against" following such lifestyles. Only once something exists, can it be addressed. Similarly, God cannot command man to celebrate the Egyptian Exodus, until it occurred. So it is

clear that the Torah of 613 commands could not possibly exist in early generations. The Rabbinic commentaries that state, "Abraham celebrated Passover", must be understood on a deeper level, since the Exodus did not yet transpire. This simply means that Abraham possessed the same perfections "as if" he celebrated Passover. (Rabbi Reuven Mann)

I mention this, as I discovered an interesting two verse: "My laws you shall do and My statutes you shall guard to walk in them, I am Hashem your God. And you shall guard My statutes and My laws that man shall do them and live by them, I am God." (Leviticus 18:4,5)

These two verses are almost identical, so we wonder at such a repetition. Each and every Torah verse must teach something new. There is no superfluity in Torah. That is part of God's perfection. So what distinctions can we uncover in these verses?

The first verse places "laws" before "statutes". The second verse reverses the order. The first verse alone discusses "walking" in the commands. The second verse alone says "and you shall live by them". We must note that "law" refers to agreeable commands, like murder, rape, and stealing. We readily agree to such prohibitions. But a "statute" refers to items like Tefillin, Tzitzis, mixing milk and meat, wearing wool and linen, and other laws that we would not have developed independent of God's instruction.

In connection with the latter verse, Maimonides makes an interesting statement:

"The rabbis stated, 'That because of the sacrifice worship the world exists'. For in performing the statutes and the laws, upright people merit the World to Come. And the Torah placed the command of statutes before laws, as it says, 'And you shall guard My statutes and My laws that man shall do them and live by them'."

We wonder; did not Maimonides see the verse that immediately precedes his quoted verse? We just noted that Leviticus 18: 4 places "laws" before "statutes"! How then can Maimonides suggest that since the next verse orders statutes first, that this conveys a greater importance of statutes over laws? "Statutes" and "laws" appear to equally share the limelight. Accordingly, Maimonides should not have prioritized statutes over laws. So why did he? Recall, statutes refer to commands, which are not readily understood. According to Maimonides, it is our performance of "statutes" which earn the world's existence.

Perhaps Maimonides understood as follows: our subjugation to God is why God created man. Not that we be "enslaved", but that we strive

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towards a life of wisdom. As a Rabbi once said, "Serving God truly means serving ourselves", since in doing so, we enjoy the best life replete with the thrill of discovery. Statutes are matters, which we do not perform because they pass our test of reason. We may abstain from murder, rape and robbery since we readily see such crimes corrupt society. These are "laws". However, our adherence to statutes indicates that we do not make our understanding a prerequisite for following God, but we follow Him regardless: since He commanded us. Adhering to statutes displays our full subjugation to God, as it should be, since He created us.

It is this subjugation that the generation of the Flood rejected, and why they were destroyed. Why then didn't God give "statutes" to the first generations?[1] I believe the answer is found in the first verse we quoted: "My laws you shall do and My statutes you shall guard to walk in them, I am Hashem your God." The operative term here is "walk". In this verse, "laws" is placed first. Why? I believe it is because this verse is not describing the post-Sinai system, as a response to corrupt cultures. This verse alludes to a life where one follows that which his mind tells him is correct. Thus, "laws" is mentioned first. In this verse, God teaches man – even though he is now post-Sinai – that the we must still strive to 'also' live, as did the first generations, when they lived not based on a highly formulated system of 613 commands. They "walked" in a lifestyle learned simply by studying the universe, as was God's plan for Adam, Eve, Noah, and all others at that time.

These two verses teach that we must live on two tracks: 1) based on reason alone, we should naturally "walk" in what our minds tell us, and not follow emotional impulses; and 2) we must subjugate our actions to God's will, regardless of our understanding.

The original generations had the opportunity to follow their minds alone, with only seven commands. They failed. A new system was required to force man to subjugate himself to God in all areas. The Megilla states, "They arose and accepted, that which was already accepted." This means the "love" – the natural attachment – of Torah was arrived at during the Megilla, and not at Sinai, when the Jews were coerced to follow the Torah system. The Megilla highlights these two lifestyles we mentioned, and which I believe these two verses in Leviticus underline.

We now grasp why Maimonides said "And the Torah placed the command of statutes before laws". He is not denying the previous verse that reverses the order. But he does not quote that verse, as that verse is stating an imperative of a different nature than Maimonides' present discussion. Maimonides only addressed man's need to fully subjugate himself. And this is outlined in his



properly quoted verse, where statutes are prior. But this does not dismiss the gravity of living our lives on a double track: one of subjugation as Maimonides cites, and another, where we strive towards the lifestyle where we naturally follow our minds. It appears that the first verse, which describes a life naturally attached to God, is a higher level. Similarly, the Jews during the Megilla reached a higher level, noteworthy of being recorded in the Megilla.

Abraham lost nothing living without Torah, since with his mind alone; he arrived at the lifestyle God desires. But as a Rabbi said, "Most people aren't an Abraham." Thus, we need a Torah to assist us towards the lifestyle Abraham led. With this great subjugating tool, we can arrive at a love of Torah highlighted in our first verse. Although we must live by the 613 commands, we learn from the first verse above that there is another, higher level of life we must arrive at. Again this lesson is taught in the fact that love of God is greater than fear of God. Living Torah lifestyles out of an attachment to its beautiful wisdom outweighs living out of a fear of punishment. But the latter must precede the former, since we are not Abrahams.

I find it interesting that even post-Sinai, God embeds a verse in the Torah calling our attention to the lifestyle originally mapped out for the original generations. That's lifestyle still holds prominence.

"Shimone the Righteous said, 'The world exists on account of three matters: Torah, service, and kindness'."

A system now including statutes addresses the shortcomings of the generation of the Flood. It offers us a means to arrive at wisdom, and how to relate to our fellow man. It is only for the objective of man following wisdom, and acting upon those convictions in his relationship with God and society, that the world was created. But be mindful that this 613 system is a "response" to previous civilizations that corrupted mankind. Before that corruption, man was capable of engaging all his faculties to arrive at a love of God. Man is certainly of greater merit when he utilizes his design alone to reach God, as compared to when he is forced. Nonetheless, even with the forceful nature of Sinai – where God "held a mountain over our heads in threat[2]" – we can use this system to arrive at a true love of Torah where we mimic that generation of the Megilla.

One final note: Maimonides did not end with "subjugation" alone as man's goal, but rather, "For in performing the statutes and the laws, upright people merit the World to Come". Maimonides teaches that subjugation will lead upright people to eternal life. God's will is not that we are subjugated per se, but that through such subjugation, we begin to enjoy His wisdom, and enjoy it eternally. If we learn for the sake of seeing truths, we will desire to see more, and God will grant us an eternity to do so. This is why Maimonides quoted the second verse, which states "and live by them". This word "live" refers to eternal life. (Rashi) ■

[1] Eating a limb from a live animal was commanded. I simply talk in general.

[2] God did not truly suspend a mountain over those Jews' heads. This metaphor means that Sinai proved God beyond all doubt, that those Jews felt no way they could deny Him and His Torah, just like no one could deny a request from one who suspended a mountain over their head. Therefore, at that time, Torah observance was of a coerced nature. The Rabbis state the Jews left Sinai afterwards, like a child fleeing from school. The Rabbis also taught that the Jews "cried by the household" regarding Torah law. They explain this to mean "regarding" the household, i.e., members of the household; with whom they previously engaged in sexual intercourse, but could not do so any longer due to Torah prohibitions. Torah is truly restrictive, and pains the follower, until he or she can comprehend the benefit to his or her soul. Torah law competes with our natural emotions, and caused a rejection of Torah. But with time, a Torah student will rise above emotions, realizing truths to outweigh momentary gratifications. Love of Torah will ensue, if one takes the first steps in honest inquiry.

Letters



Letters

from our

READERS



See the Light

Reader: Dear Rabbi Moshe Ben Chaim, while I do not necessarily disagree with your hypothesis on the age of the universe, I do not believe the proof you attributed to Rav Chaim Ozer to be bullet proof. You said "For light to reach us from a star 10,000,000 light years away, the universe MUST have existed that long, in order that the light traveled this distance." The old phrase "From a false premise anything follows" comes to mind. Who said the light in fact traveled that distance? Perhaps God created the star together with a "10,000,000 light year long light stream" connecting it to Earth, thereby allowing it to be immediately visible; despite the fact that nowhere nearly enough time had elapsed to allow the light to travel that distance on its own.. I do not posit this as to what actually happened, only to only to suggest that this particular proof is not "irrefutable."

Sincerely,
Fred



Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Fred, you posit that God could have created the light "in travel already reaching Earth" at the moment the star was created. According to you, the wisest of men (Einstein) viewing this object's light and using reasoning will miscalculate its age. God is really fooling us. Your theory imputes a deception to God. That's problem number one. But as we know that fabrication is of human origin, and

cannot be ascribed to a perfect Creator, whose Torah says "From a falsehood, distance yourself"... we know this suggestion is something we must distance ourselves from.

Furthermore, you contradict yourself. Based not only on senses, but also teamed with your reasoning, you accept that the star only "appears" smaller than it truly is, due to its distance. But you do not equally accept the star's age, based on the same use of senses and reasoning. We see an object at a distance, and then up close. It appears to have changed size. But we use reasoning together with our senses and conclude that the object has not changed at all. We correctly reason for ourselves that objects "appear" smaller at a distance. So why reject the reasoning that the star's light accurately reflects its age? In both cases, we must engage our senses, and our reasoning. In both cases, our deductions are correct. Without basis, you reject your senses and reason in connection with age issues, but not other issues.

I agree, "From a false premise anything follows". ■

Seeds of Doubt

Reader: Dear Rabbi: In reference to Abraham questioning G-d's promise to make his seed as numerous as the stars", did Abraham explore the option to mate Isaac before sacrificing him? Seeing how G-d performed a fertilization miracle with Sarah, surely he could have done the same with Isaac. We have to assume that Abraham was very intelligent, and indeed, did explore this option. Why is there no mention of this in the Parsha? Why haven't prominent Rabbi's, down through the ages addressed this possibility? Why didn't Abraham read into G-d's command to sacrifice Isaac, his requirement to preserve Isaac's seed? It wouldn't have been Satan providing the rationalization, but G-d's promise. Satan is internal, where G-d is external. Abraham could have arranged to do this in half a day, so instead of arriving in 3 days, it would have taken 3 1/2.

Thank you

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: First of all, once God commanded Abraham to slaughter his son, this is the only action he must now do. He cannot interrupt with any other consideration. And we see that Abraham "Rose early in the morning" to fulfill God's command.

Creating offspring per se was not the true objective behind God's plan to multiply Abraham's

(continued on next page)

(continued from previous page)

Letters

seed. Rather, God desired children of a "Forefather". Meaning, God wished to increase Abraham's seed in order that his seed would adhere to Abraham's teachings and direct the world in truth. But how would Isaac's seed accomplish the proliferation of Abraham and Isaac's monotheism, with both of them dead? Isaac's seed would be bereft of any tutor and mentor. With Isaac about to die at Abraham's hands in sacrifice, the mere creation of Isaac's offspring satisfies nothing about God's promise. Certainly, since it was God who made a promise, it is for HIM to keep, not for Abraham to force "His hand." ■

Seedling Deceit?

Reader: Isaac asked Abraham "where is the lamb for the offering?" I have found two different translations of Abraham's answer: The Art Scroll Weekday Siddur: "G-d will seek out for Himself the lamb for the offering." The Complete Metsudah Siddur: "G-d Himself will show the lamb for a burnt offering." Which of these translations is more accurate?

I am more inclined to select the Art Scroll's translation because there may be a hidden message for us to "seek out" the hidden lessons of the Torah.

Do you think that Isaac was completely unaware of Abraham's mission? Or was he playing along with the ruse?

When Abraham deceived his son, being a pious person, wasn't it important for him to avoid any finger pointing in the future, as to his deception? Do you think that Abraham could have used a different answer to Isaac's question, like "we must look hard for the animal", or Abraham could have taken along a lamb from his stock before leaving on this journey?

I think I just might have answered my first question. If Abraham used any of the two alternatives I suggested, we wouldn't have had the opportunity to evaluate the meaning of "seek out". (How old do you think Isaac was?)

Thank you, Anonymous

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Upon Abraham's binding of Isaac on the altar, Isaac knew very well he was the sacrifice. He could have fled, but he did not, thereby teaching the perfection of both Abraham and Isaac. This is Ramban's view.

Ibn Ezra differs, suggesting that if Isaac knew he was to be slaughtered, he should receive greater merit than his father, who was not risking his life. Ibn Ezra adds that had Isaac known he

was to die, he would have fled. He concludes that Isaac must have been old enough to carry the wood, about 13 years of age. And that Abraham had to force Isaac onto the altar and bind him down. The term "naar" in Gen. 22:12 alludes to a youthful Isaac, and not an adult. Ibn Ezra's estimation of 13 is in line with the Torah's words.

I enjoyed your question concerning why Abraham appeared not to disclose the truth, as he said, "God will 'reveal the sheep.'" (This is the translation according to Unkelos) In accord with Ibn Ezra, we now understand that Abraham had to keep up the ruse, if he was to successfully get Isaac near the altar so as to offer him to God. ■

Not as it Seems

Reader: Hi Rabbi Ben-Chaim, Just wanted to say thank you for corresponding with me on my prior queries. I did want to ask you something that I have encountered from the camps of both Muslims and from Gnostic or certain types of Jewish groups that follow Jesus.

It is my understanding that when they read Jeremiah 8:7-9 within their more modern version of their Old Testament, for example, it says that the scribes who wrote the Torah had lied and falsified the Torah. In other words, we can't trust the Torah we have today. Here's a quote from their bible:

"...7 Even the stork in the sky knows her appointed seasons, and the dove, the swift and the thrush observe the time of their migration. But my people do not know the requirements of the LORD. 8 'How can you say, 'We are wise, for we have the law of the LORD,' when actually the lying pen of the scribes has handled it falsely? 9 The wise will be put to shame; they will be dismayed and trapped. Since they have rejected the word of the LORD, what kind of wisdom do they have?"

What is the consensus understanding, from the point of Judaism and the actual Hebrew Scriptures on what the context of this text is dealing with? I've given my understanding from the King James Version, which reads different than the above quote. I was hoping you would be able to elaborate on what Jeremiah is really talking about here.

Here's the same from the King James Version:

7.Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the LORD.

8.How do ye say, We are wise, and the law of the

LORD is with us? Lo, certainly in vain made he it; the pen of the scribes is in vain.

9.The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken: lo, they have rejected the word of the LORD; and what wisdom is in them?

The latter seems pretty clear to me, but what is your take on this.

*Thank you in advance,
Hiram*

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: The sense of both quotes you cite is basically accurate...but Torah accuracy is not from the written word alone. We received an Oral Law as well: an essential compliment to the Written Torah. Therefore, a simple read will confuse even the wise. Torah must be studied, and not just read. Let us now learn the truth of this section.

The commentator Radak explains that this rebuke of God was directed towards the supposedly "wise men" of Israel. Yes, Radak explains that God rebuked the Torah writings of these scribes: not because they falsified Torah texts, but because they did not follow what they wrote. Instead of following their writings, they worshiped the heavens. A few verses earlier, the prophet describes that the Jews' enemies will drag the bones of Jewish kings and (false) prophets from their graves to humiliate their memory. They will lay their bones facing the sun and moon – the objects of their corrupt worship – a fitting response to their crimes.

Yes, the description is correct: certain Jewish leaders were corrupt. But the flawed interpretation that all Rabbis and our current Torah cannot be trusted is not what this portions states. Only the sinful Jews are mocked herein. God does not say the Torah was falsified.

We can certainly trust our current Torah as an accurate replica of Moses' Torah for two reasons: 1) the sin described here was not in falsifying the Written Torah, but rather, their "actions" were contrary to their writings as they were sun and moon worshippers; 2) God has promised that the Torah will never leave Israel. (See Rashi on Isaiah, 59:21)

As a matter of fact, this portion provides the exact opposite of what these heretics claim: God's accusation is that what these scribes wrote was in fact accurate Torah, but their sin was their deviation from the truth of their written words. God thereby endorses that what they wrote, was accurate. Radak states that since they deviated from the Torah's words, therefore their writings were of no use, since they did not follow what they wrote. ■



WorldNEWS

" Hamas Political Leaders Granted Immunity by Security Cabinet", by Yechiel Spira.

The Security Cabinet on Wednesday decided to step-up targeted precision strikes against Gaza-based terrorists.

Despite the move, the cabinet accepted the opinion of GSS (General Security Service/ Shin Bet) director Yuval Diskin, that political figures such as Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyah should be granted immunity. They will not be targeted by the military in the ongoing war on terror, placing an emphasis on halting rocket attacks into the Sderot and western Negev areas.

Diskin told members of the National Security Cabinet that targeting PA (Palestinian Authority) elected officials would not advance Israel's agenda, stating it did not do so in the past and the same holds true today.

The members of the security forum did agree to give a green light to the IDF and other agencies to strike out against terrorists known to be involved in the firing of rockets and other acts of terror.

"Israel Opts for Major War Campaign in 11th Hour of Hamas Build-up"

DEBKAfile Special Military Report: DEBKAfile's military sources disclose that Israel's security cabinet decided Wednesday, Nov.

22, that there is no option but to launch a major offensive against Hamas and its terrorist allies in the Gaza Strip - both to pre-empt their war build-up and reduce Qassam missile attacks which climbed to 80 in the last ten days. The date remains to be set. Operational proposals were not submitted by the army chiefs, said the announcement, but held back for presentation to a smaller forum which the Prime Minister Ehud Olmert will summon.

"Ulysses Starts New Journey Around The Sun's Poles"

Sixteen years after its launch on Oct. 6, 1990, the Ulysses spacecraft has begun its third "solar polar orbit" -- a journey around the poles of the sun. The mission, a joint NASA-European Space Agency venture, studies how the sun's gaseous outer atmosphere spews into space, creating huge space storms. This violent "space weather," in turn, can affect Earth's electricity, satellite and cell phone communications.

Observations by previous spacecraft viewed the sun from its equator. Ulysses is the first mission to move out of that plane and maneuver into an orbit that allows it to study the sun's poles. That view gives a more complete perspective of the sun's atmosphere.

"Lebanon's industry minister Pierre Gemayel is murdered near Beirut"

The Christian minister's convoy was attacked driving through the Christian Sin el-Fil district as Lebanon faced a Hizballah threat to the anti-Syrian Fouad Siniora government unless it is granted veto powers. Gemayel died on the way to hospital shot at point blank range with 8 bullets. Majority leader Saad Hariri, architect of the anti-Syrian pro-Western New Lebanon, said he sees the hand of Syria behind the murder. His own father was assassinated last year in a suspected pro-Syrian plot. US state department condemned the assassination as "an act of terror" and attempt to intimidate the government which is already shaky after the resignation of six pro-Syrian ministers, including Hizballah's, ten days ago. It is feared the murder could tip the country over into civil war.

"PA Residents Unleash New Weapon"

An Israel Air Force strike in northern Gaza was canceled during the night after Palestinian Authority residents acted as human shields.

Once again, determination and a willingness to die for a cause has left the IDF without an immediate solution as PA residents step-up their defiance against Israel.

A planned aerial assault against a northern Gaza building was called off during the night when hundreds of PA residents gathered in the home, acting as human shields, willing to die rather than permit the IDF to continue targeting terrorist objectives in PA (Palestinian Authority) controlled Gaza.

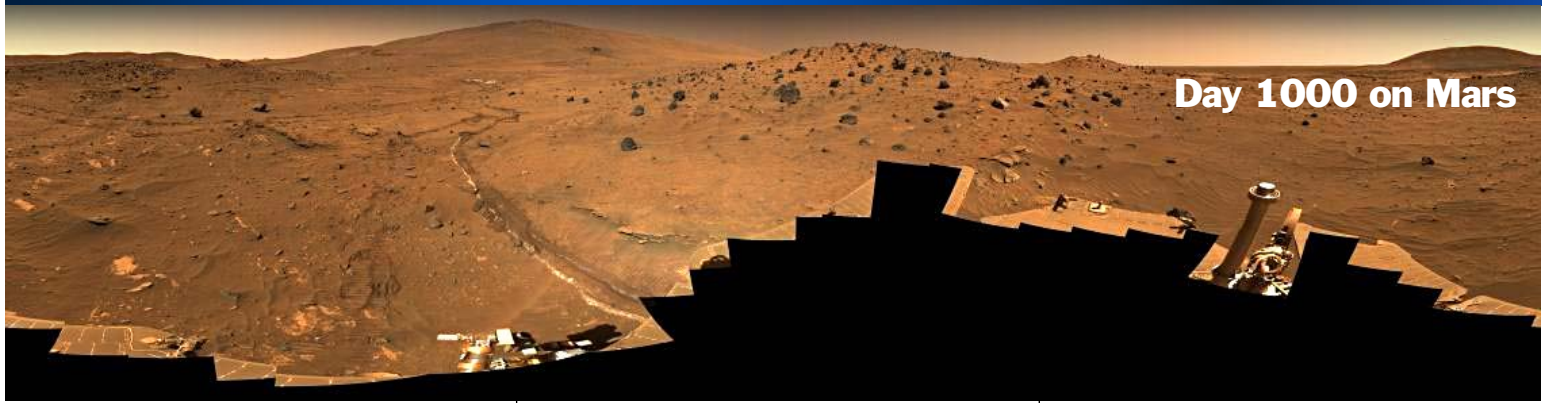
As is the usual practice, the IDF notified residents of the structure about 30 minutes ahead of the attack to evacuate the premises. This is done to prevent casualties among civilians. When the word of the impending aerial assault spread, hundreds of area residents arrived at the home, signaling a willingness to die rather than to permit Israel to destroy another home.

"UN General Assembly carries Arab condemnation of Israel on Gaza by 156-7 vote, no mention of Palestinian missiles"

Cited was Israel's Nov. 8 artillery misfire on Beit Hanoun which killed 19 civilians, but no

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Day 1000 on Mars

mention was made of systematic Palestinian cross-border missile offensive against Israeli civilians. US ambassador John Bolton said the assembly resolution, which is mostly symbolic, was "one-sided and unbalanced" and raised questions about the world body's ability to confront global problems. Israeli ambassador Danny Gillerman cautioned delegates that a "yes" vote would make them "accomplices to terror." Nonetheless European Union members backed the Qatar measure, including a call on Israel to withdraw troops from the Gaza Strip, despite its full evacuation a year ago.

The no votes were cast by the US, Israel, Australia, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru and Palau; abstainers: Canada, Ivory Coast, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

"Tens of Thousands Ascended to Hebron to Relive Biblical History"

Tens of Thousands of Jews will ascend to Hebron for the annual reading of Chayei Sarah, the Torah portion which records the Jewish patriarch Abraham's purchase of the Cave of the Patriarchs.

Each year tens of thousands arrive at the site where the Jewish patriarchs and matriarchs Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, and Jacob and Leah are buried, for the annual reading to retell and relive Biblical history.

"Nov 17 - IDF Taking Limited Action to Reduce Kassam Attacks"

The IDF destroyed four buildings overnight in anti-terror operations in Gaza. Defense Minister Amir Peretz has ordered the IDF to prepare plans to slow, but not eliminate Kassam rocket fire.

The air force struck buildings in Rafah, Beit Lahiya, Jabalya and Khan Yunis before Friday

morning, in response to a recent onslaught of Kassam rocket attacks on the Israeli cities of Sderot and Ashkelon which left one dead, and two others in serious condition.

According to the IDF, three of the destroyed buildings were being used as Hamas weapons storage facilities, while the fourth was a weapons production facility belonging to Islamic Jihad. Warnings were given to the local populations prior to the aerial attack.

"Shabak Chief Warns - Again - of Gaza-Initiated War"

Nov 14, by Hillel Fendel. Appearing this morning (Tuesday) before the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, Diskin said that the terrorists in Gaza are preparing and arming themselves for the coming clash. The extremist factions in particular are strengthening themselves, he said.

Diskin told the MKs that the terrorists in Gaza are carefully studying the lessons of the recent war in Lebanon, and are receiving mass quantities of weapons smuggled in from Egypt. He added that terror experts are also making their way into Gaza in various clandestine ways, as part of the preparations for the frontal clash with the IDF.

"Ahead of US Visit, PM is 'Ready to Release Many Prisoners'"

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert is leaving for the US Saturday night for meetings with senior American officials. Among the topics to be discussed is Olmert's readiness to "release many prisoners."

In a Newsweek-Washington Post interview ahead of his trip, Prime Minister Olmert said, "I am ready to release many, many prisoners. I made

it clear long ago that I am anxious to open up a new dialogue with [Palestinian Authority President] Abu Mazen, and for that purpose, I'm ready to release many prisoners."

However, Olmert went on to say that the current ruling power in the PA, the Hamas terrorist organization, is preventing the release of the prisoners, "because they refuse to let us have our soldier [kidnapped IDF Corporal. Gilad Shalit]...." According to the prime minister, the Hamas "is not really interested in the well-being of its prisoners. They want to topple Abu Mazen at any cost."

"Day 1000 on Mars"

October 26th marks the 1000th sol, or Martian day, of operations by NASA's indefatigable planetary rover. To celebrate the occasion, the agency has released this 360-degree view (image above) of the red planet's Columbia Hills region, compiled by Spirit over the past 6 months. The rover has been sitting on the side of a hill called Low Ridge and tilting its solar panels toward the sun to maximize power during the planet's long winter. Barring unforeseen circumstances, Spirit's twin, Opportunity, will reach the same milestone on 15 November--an impressive feat, considering both rovers were designed to endure for only 90 sols.



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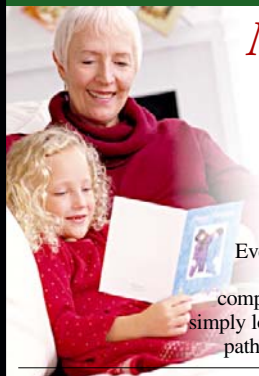
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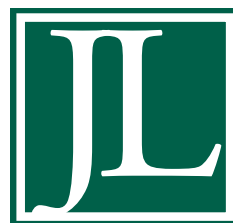
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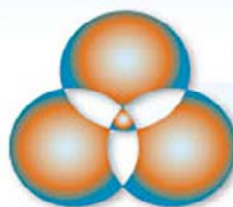
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