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## Weekly Parsha

# JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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efforts to persuade Paroh to release Bnai Yisrael. Most of the plagues are described in this parasha. Each of these plagues was miraculous. Each afflicted the Egyptians with suffering and misery. Each demonstrated that Moshe was Hashem's prophet. Nonetheless, Paroh withstood these plagues and remained steadfast in his refusal to release Bnai Yisrael.

Our passage describes Paroh's response to the first of the wonders that Moshe and Aharon performed before him. Moshe and Aharon appear before Paroh. Aharon throws his staff to the ground and it is transformed into a serpent. Paroh instructs his magicians to duplicate Aharon's feat. They throw their staffs to the ground and they also are transformed into serpents. But Aharon's serpent swallows the serpents of the magician.

Our pasuk tells us that Paroh was unmoved by this demonstration. The Torah uses two terms to describe Paroh's reaction. First, we are told that Paroh's heart was strong. Then, Hashem speaks to Moshe and describes Paroh's heart as heavy. Apparently, these two descriptions are intended to communicate two ideas regarding Paroh's obstinacy. However, the precise difference between these two ideas – that Paroh's heart was strong and it was heavy – is not completely clear.

In order to understand the meaning of these two terms it is useful to first consider a related issue: Until the sixth plague, each time that the Torah refers to Paroh's "strong heart," the Torah tells us that Paroh's heart was strong. However, with the advent of the plague of shechin – boils – the Torah introduces a different phraseology.

**“But Hashem strengthened Paroh's heart, and he did not listen to them, as Hashem had spoken to Moshe.”** (Shemot 9:12)

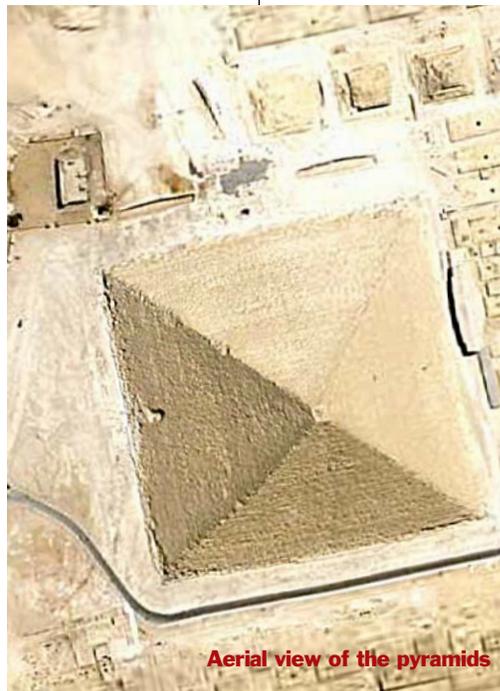
After experiencing the plague of shechin, the Torah does not tell us that Paroh's heart was strong. Instead, we are told that Hashem made Paroh's heart strong. This seems to imply that until this plague Paroh's obstinacy was "self-induced." Now, Hashem is inducing Paroh's obstinacy. What had changed? Why was it now necessary for Hashem to influence Paroh's reaction and reinforce his obstinacy? Nachmanides discusses this issue: He

contends that there was a basic difference between the initial wonders performed by Moshe and Aharon and the last five plagues. In order to understand this distinction, it is helpful to review these initial miracles.

Let us return to the first wonder performed by Moshe and Aharon. Both Aharon and Paroh's magicians performed wondrous transformations. However, there was a distinction between their feats. Aharon's serpent consumed the serpents created by the Egyptian magicians. Rashbam suggests that despite this distinction, Paroh concluded that there was no fundamental difference between the wonder performed by Moshe and Aharon and the transformation executed by his magicians. He assumed that both were achieved through magic or illusion.[1]

**“And the magicians of Egypt did likewise with their secret rites, and Paroh's heart was strong, and he did not heed them, as Hashem had spoken.”** (Shemot 7:22)

The first plague brought about by Moshe and Aharon was the transformation of all uncovered water in Egypt into blood. Again, Paroh's magicians claimed that they too could perform this transformation. They filled a vessel with water and transformed it into blood. Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra notes that there was a substantial difference between the wonder performed by



Aerial view of the pyramids

Moshe and Aharon and the trick of the Egyptian magicians. The magicians did succeed in turning a small amount of water directly in front of them into blood. However, Moshe and Aharon transformed all the uncovered water in the land into blood. Furthermore, the phenomenon that they brought about was lasting. As new water flowed into the land, it too was transformed into blood.[2] Rashi explains that despite this obvious distinction, Paroh chose to view both transformations as essentially equal. He asserted that Moshe and Aharon's methods were no different from those of the magicians.[3]

**“And the magicians did likewise with their secret rites to bring out the lice, but they could not, and the lice were upon man and beast. And the magicians said to Paroh, “It is the finger of God,” but Paroh's heart remained strong, and he did not**

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## Weekly Parsha

**listen to them, as Hashem had spoken.”** (Shemot 8:14-15)

Aharon struck the dust and lice were brought forth. These lice infested the Egyptians and their animals. This was the third plague. Again, Paroh's magicians attempted to duplicate the wonder performed by Moshe and Aharon. However, this time they failed. They were forced to acknowledge that this plague was not a manipulation of the forces with which they were familiar. They admitted that this plague was an act of G-d. Again, Paroh's heart is strong and he remains obstinate.

However in this instance, Paroh's reaction is difficult to understand. How could he remain obstinate even after his own magicians admitted that this plague was an act of G-d? Furthermore, the passages juxtapose the admission of the magicians with Paroh's continued stubbornness! This seems to imply that their admission somehow encouraged Paroh's continued obstinacy.

There are various responses to this problem. Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra contends that the magicians did acknowledge that this plague was different from those that preceded it. However, he notes that they did not advise Paroh that it had been brought about by Hashem – the deity introduced by Moshe and Aharon. Instead, they described the plague and an act of G-d. Their intention – in making this distinction – was that the plague was a natural phenomenon and did not represent an act of providence. Paroh accepted the magician's explanation and continued to refuse to release Bnai Yisrael.[4]

Nachmanides explains that in each of these instances Paroh did experience fear and anxiety. However, in each instance, he accepted the contention of his magicians that the wonder, or plague, could be explained or minimized. With the encouragement of his magicians he overcame and dismissed his fears. In other words, in each of these instances, Paroh engaged in a pseudo-intellectual analysis of the phenomenon he had witnessed and experienced. The fallacy of the magicians' claims was evident. But Paroh chose to dismiss his fears and doubts and accepted the questionable explanations offered by the magicians.[5] Now, let us consider the plague of shechin – boils.

**“And the magicians could not stand before Moshe because of the boils, for the boils were upon the magicians and upon all Egypt. But Hashem strengthened Paroh's heart, and he did not listen to them, as Hashem spoke to Moshe.”** (Shemot 9:11-12)

Nachmanides explains that the plague of shechin completely undermined the influence of Paroh's magicians. They too experienced the misery of the plague. They could not duplicate the plague or even protect themselves from the affliction. They were embarrassed to appear before Paroh and offered no

further explanations of Moshe's power. Paroh could no longer resort to his pseudo-intellectual rationalizations. His heart could no longer draw strength from the encouragements offered by the magicians. But now Hashem strengthened Paroh's heart. He gave Paroh the ability to dismiss the overwhelming evidence of Moshe's power and relationship with Hashem.

Based on this analysis, it seems that “strengthening of heart” describes Paroh's analysis of the wonders and plagues he observed and experienced. Paroh did not wish to accept Moshe's claims that he represented Hashem and acted as His agent. He was presented, time and again, with evidence supporting Moshe's claim. But in each instance, he dismissed the objective implications of the evidence in order to sustain his corrupt, biased world-view. Let us compare this to the reaction described by a “heavy heart.”

**“When Paroh saw that there was relief, he made his heart heavy, and he did not listen to them, as Hashem had spoken.”** (Shemot 8:10)

The passage describes Paroh's response to the second plague – frogs. Aharon extended his staff over the waters of Egypt and a swarm of frogs emerged. The frogs overran the land. Paroh's magicians were also able to bring forth a few frogs. But their unimpressive imitation of Moshe and Aharon's plague did little to relieve Paroh and the Egyptians from the infestation. Paroh was reduced to begging Moshe to end the plague. Moshe complied and the frogs died – leaving the land covered with their carcasses. Here, there is no mention of Paroh strengthening his heart. He had been forced to submit to Moshe and beg for his assistance. No explanation offered by the magicians could relieve Paroh of his humiliation. Yet, Paroh remained obstinate. The Torah does not indicate that Paroh's stubbornness was founded upon any rationalization. Instead, the Torah tells us that Paroh saw that the plague had ended. With the removal of the pressure that the plague had exerted upon him, he returned to his former obstinacy.

**“And Hashem did according to Moshe's word, and He removed the mixture of wild beasts from Paroh, from his servants, and from his people; not one was left. And Paroh made his heart heavy this time also, and he did not send forth the nation.”** (Shemot 8:27-28)

The fourth plague was an invasion of wild beasts. In this instance, Paroh's magicians did not make an appearance. They did not offer Paroh council or attempt to minimize Moshe's actions. With Egypt overrun with wild beasts, it is unlikely Paroh

would have had much interest in or patience for the magicians' explanations. Again, Paroh is forced to appeal to Moshe. Moshe prays to Hashem and the wild beasts retreat from the land. Paroh makes his heart heavy and refuses to release Bnai Yisrael.

As in the instance of the plague of frogs, Paroh's stubbornness is not founded upon any rationalization or minimization of Moshe's claims. Again, with the removal of the suffering and fear engendered by the plague, Paroh returns to his previous obstinacy.

We can now appreciate the difference between these two phrases: “strengthening of the heart” and “making the heart heavy.” Paroh's “strong heart” describes his dismissal of any evidence that would threaten his world-view. It describes a complete retreat and embracement of a false and imagined view of reality. It is an intellectual failure. Paroh's “heavy heart” describes a different reaction. Heavy objects are difficult to move. If an object is extremely heavy, only a massive force cannot budge it. The moment that force is eliminated, the object will come to rest. The plagues were this massive force. They were powerful enough to move Paroh. But the moment a plague ended, Paroh's “heavy heart” came to rest. Paroh's “heavy heart” describes his total inability to alter his engrained patterns of behavior.

Perhaps, there is a little bit of Paroh in most people. We need to be careful not to become so attached to our views and perspectives that we are dismissive of evidence that challenges our world-view. We must also recognize that we too can become fixed in a pattern of behavior that is outmoded and unrealistic. We must take care that our decisions are not merely an attempt to preserve these habitual patterns. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Shemuel ben Meir (Rashbam) Commentary on Sefer Shemot, 7:13.

[2] Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer Shemot, 7:22.

[3] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Shemot, 7:22.

[4] Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer Shemot, 8:15.

[5] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 7:19.

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## Idolatry

kitten walked this way, and not another route.

The rule that applies to any number of cases is this: man is prohibited to gauge his activities based on events or objects unrelated to another. Similarly, as Rashi describes, if one was eating and his food fell out of his mouth, he must not view that as any sign to remain home, or stop eating, or that it carries any meaning at all. It makes no difference whether it is a stick falling from your hand, or a red bendel bound on your wrist. The rule is this: God prohibits both Jew and Gentile from attributing any meaning to objects, or events, unless proven by natural law. (Tal. Sanhedrin, 56b) It therefore follows that while it is permitted to refrain from walking on frozen ground, out of fear of "evil" occurrences (slipping on ice) it is clearly prohibited for one to refrain from a business transaction due to his keys falling from his hand. Ice causes harm, but keys dropping is meaningless, and creates no effects. Creating a sign that "dropping my keys is meaningful" is the precise prohibition. It does not appear to matter at all whether the event occurs and then we gauge our activity, or if we are the ones performing the event, like baking a key in a challa, and then forecast unrelated effects. Since there exists no natural relationship between keys and fertility, this popular practice is a severe violation. God gave us a mind and He created natural law. He wishes that we use our minds and work within the laws He created. Sarah, Rachel, Leah and Chana did not respond to their infertility by baking keys in challas, or other foolishness. They prayed to the One who alone affects our fate.

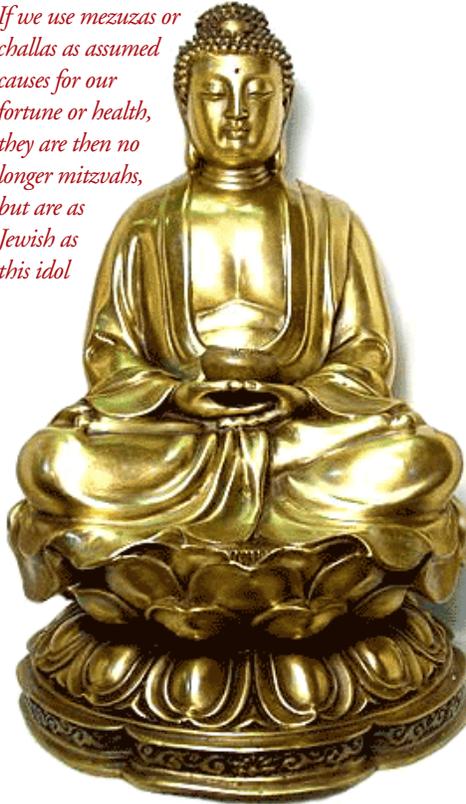
No woman in her right mind would suggest that baking a key in a challa would re-grow an amputee's right arm. Nor would any sane individual claim that an amputee would re-grow her arm if she immerses in a mikva, following a pregnant woman in her ninth month. Such nonsense violates all natural laws God created, and all reason. It violates the prohibition of Nichush. A similar impossibility applies to infertile women who would practice these idolatrous methods seeking fertility. Baking a key in a challa cannot affect fertility. Medicine might help, or surgery. But a key?

Equally absurd would be a woman suffering with cancer who abandons chemotherapy, and instead, bakes a key in a challa. To those who follow these notions, ask yourself this: "If I had cancer, would I abandon chemotherapy, and bake keys instead?" Your answer should make you realize that keys do not relate to fertility any more than they relate to cancer.

Reason demands that you visit a doctor and accept his treatments when sick.

God demands that we do not violate His laws.

*If we use mezuzas or challas as assumed causes for our fortune or health, they are then no longer mitzvahs, but are as Jewish as this idol*



Our Yeshiva's can discuss these idolatrous prohibitions and make positive change. And leaders would benefit so many if they would openly address this issue. In either case, both parties cause great harm to Jewish communities if they remain silent.

This practice is one of the most obvious infractions of a D'Oraissa level. So fundamental to Judaism is the abolishment of idolatry, that the Rabbis teach, "One who denies idolatry is akin to having fulfilled the entire Torah; One who commits idolatry, is akin to denying the entire Torah".

It should be noted that rarely does God refer to something as an "abomination". But He does so here: "And due to these abominations, Hashem your God has driven these nations out from before you." (Deut. 18:12) God's very words prohibit Nichush, and attest to the exile of people who practice it. God says that He drove these nations out of Israel precisely because they practiced this very same Nichush practiced today. Therefore, if today's communities continue to encourage these heathen violations of God's commands, inviting husbands of pregnant wives to open the Ark; allowing red bendels to be worn; and encouraging women to bake keys and immerse in mikvahs believing these acts to be effective, we can thank these misled individuals for our continued exile, and delay of Moshiach. God exiles peoples due to

Nichush. Those are God's very words.

Isaiah commences with the Messianic forecast, when all nations will literally stream to Jerusalem to learn God's Torah. They will see the truth of Judaism and the fallacy of their religions. However, that event where they respect Judaism cannot possibly occur, while Jewish communities commit idolatrous practices. If you truly seek the Messianic era, you will do your part to insure that others abandon Nichush, and uphold Torah: the Book of ideas that make sense to the minds of other nations.

But if we retain such prohibited and foolish practices that reason unveils as lies, we have ourselves to thank for delaying Moshiach.

## Protective Mezuzas?

**Reader:** I like your publication very much. I publish excerpts of it in our weekly 36-pages-plus Shul booklet, and have rarely disagreed with your views. BUT, the final paragraph on page 5 Volume V, No 12...Jan 13, 2005 astonishes me, to put it mildly. Your entire article deals with some of the shenanigans some people go into with references of Mezuzas. But your final paragraph damns the basic concept of Mezuzas with a totally disconnected harangue. You could not possibly have meant what you said because it is my understanding that Mezuzas DO protect Klal Yisroel, and you seem to be saying as plainly as possible that this belief is erroneous – indeed you are even making fun of this belief!

**Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim:** Kindly support your claim with reason, and a Torah source, explaining how mezuzas have some protective quality.

**Reader:** Not being all that learned, I called in for reinforcements, please see below:

"The Talmud relates that when Unkelos, the Ger, (proselyte) adopted the Jewish faith the Roman emperor sent a company of soldiers to arrest him. As he was taken from his home, he stopped to place his hand over the Mezuzah. When the soldiers asked him to explain the meaning of his action he replied, "A mortal king lives within and hires guards to stand outside to protect him, but the Holy One has his servants inside while He stays outside to protect them, as the scriptures say, 'G-d shall protect you as you come and as you leave, forever'. The soldiers were so impressed by this remark that they let him go, and they, too, became converts."

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## Idolatry

**Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim:** This quote contains the words “the Holy One stays outside to protect them”. This is not literal, as God is not “outside” or in any position. “Position” is a physical phenomenon unrelated to God, Who is in no way related to the physical world. This forms one of our 13 Fundamentals of Judaism. This truth should now awaken your mind to ponder if other statements herein are also part of the metaphor.

Yes, Unkelos was quite wise to offer this specific response! Consider this: Unkelos was addressing the emperor’s servants, individuals who lay themselves on the line, and who are unprotected by others. Certainly, they would welcome a release from their risky business. Unkelos wisely played on their fears, offering them a lifestyle where they could rid themselves of their fears. He described God as protecting his people, something quite appealing to the emperor’s servants. He expressed that the mezuzah is affixed towards the outside of the house, and that observing God’s laws entitles a person to God’s providence.

The mezuzah is no more protective than a pebble on the street. It is the person who follows God’s laws who earns God’s protection. Unkelos in no way intended to elevate mezuzah above its brute, physical characteristics. “Any” mitzvah entitles the performer to earn God’s protection.

Certainly you do not believe if a wicked person places a mezuzah on his doorpost, that God will not punish him! That is absurd, and violates another of the 13 Fundamentals: God rewards the good people, and punishes the wicked. A wicked person deserving of God’s punishment will not be saved, despite his mezuzah. God knew evil people throughout time who had mezuzahs on their homes, and nonetheless, God punished him. But let us understand the rule, and not examples: Ironically, the Shema inscribed on the mezuzah states that if we violate God’s prohibition of idolatry, He will exile us from Israel...regardless if there is a mezuzah on our house! The very mezuzah that people feel protects them, is actually their refutation!

There are many Jews who believe that the mezuzah has some “power” of protection. Ask these people if you can light a match to a mezuzah and it should not burn, and they will respond, “of course it burns.” Our obvious response, “If a mezuzah cannot protect itself, how can it protect anything outside itself?”

Maimonides admonished foolish people who look to the mezuzah for physical protection. (Hilchos Mezuzah, 5:4). There, he calls such people fools for seeking protection. He states that they take a command, which is in fact for the



*Read God's Torah. It was "written" so that it should be read – not ignored in favor of what the masses follow. God made it quite clear: "do not make signs". Additionally, they don't work.*

lofty purpose of guiding us towards profound ideas on the Unity of God, His love and His service, and they make it into an amulet of physical benefit. Maimonides states they have no share in the next world.

These unfortunate individuals make the same error as those who wear red bendels. Just as the Tosefta in Talmud Sabbath (Chap. 7) says red strings on fingers are prohibited, so too those who mock God’s command of mezuzah. I would like to quote the Shulchan Aruch, in the Gilyon M’harsha, Yoreh Daah, 289, page 113 on the bottom: “If one affixes the mezuzah for the reason of fulfilling the command, one may consider that as reward for doing so he will be watched by G-d. But, if one affixes the mezuzah solely for protective reasons, it in fact has no guidance, and the mezuzah will be as knives in his eyes”. These are very strong words. But what is his lesson? He is teaching us that God is the only source of protection, and that physical objects have no power. Rather, if one feels they do, these objects, even a mezuzah, will be the opposite, “knives in his eyes” - something destructive.

Maimonides writes, “A person should pay heed to the precept of the mezuzah; for it is an

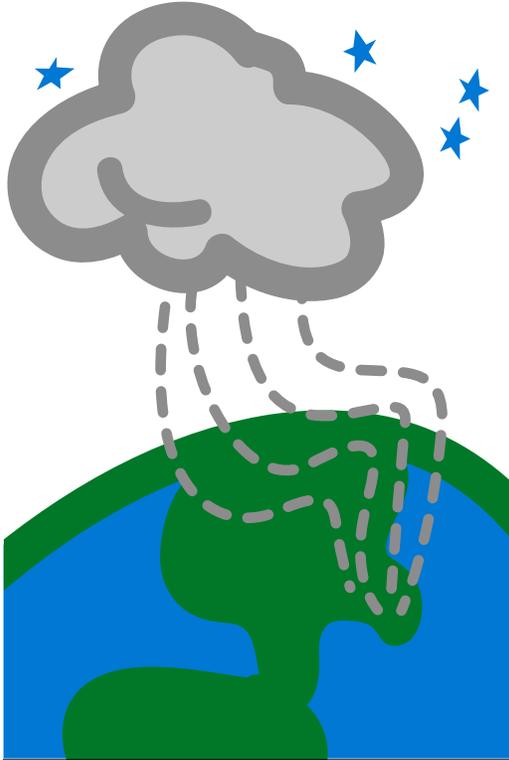
obligation perpetually binding upon all. Whenever one enters or leaves a home with the mezuzah on the doorpost, he will be confronted with the declaration of God’s unity, blessed by His holy name; and will remember the love due to God, and will be aroused from his slumbers and his foolish absorption in temporal vanities. He will realize that nothing endures to all eternity save knowledge of the Ruler of the universe. This thought will immediately restore him to his right senses and he will walk in the paths of righteousness.” Maimonides teaches that mezuzah is simply a reminder.

The Rabbis quoted herein knew the reference in Menachos 33b which “suggests” God protects from the outside. Nonetheless, they wrote “But, if one affixes the mezuzah solely for protective reasons, it in fact has no guidance, and the mezuzah will be as knives in his eyes”. You must conclude that this source is a metaphor. The Rabbis did not understand as you do.

Again, the Shema inscribed on the mezuzah states that if we violate God’s prohibition of idolatry, He will exile us from Israel...regardless if there is a mezuzah on our house. Therefore, it is our “perfection” that earns for us God’s protection, not the mezuzah. ■

## MAIMONIDES

# GOD'S PROVIDENCE

**Book III, chap. XVII**

"My opinion on this principle of Divine Providence I will now explain to you. In the principle, which I now proceed to expound, I do not rely on demonstrative proof, but on my conception of the spirit of the Divine Law, and the writings of the Prophets. The principle which I accept is far less open to objections, and is more reasonable than the opinions mentioned before. It is this: In the lower or sublunary portion of the Universe Divine Providence does not extend to the individual members of species except in the case of mankind. It is only in this species that the incidents in the existence of the individual beings, their good and evil fortunes, are the result of justice, in accordance with the words, "For all His ways are judgment."

But I agree with Aristotle as regards all other living beings, and a fortiori as regards plants and all the rest of earthly creatures. For I do not believe that it is through the interference of Divine Providence that a certain leaf drops [from a tree], nor do I hold that when a certain spider catches a certain fly, that this is the direct result of a special decree and will of God in that moment; it is not by a particular Divine decree that the spittle of a certain person moved, fell on a certain gnat in a certain place, and killed it; nor is it by the direct will of God that a certain fish catches and swallows a certain worm on the surface of the water. In all these cases the action is, according to my opinion, entirely due to chance, as taught by Aristotle.

Divine Providence is connected with Divine intellectual influence, and the same beings, which are benefited by the latter so as to become intellectual, and to comprehend things comprehensible to rational beings, are also under the control of Divine Providence, which examines all their deeds in order to reward or punish them. It may be by mere chance that a ship goes down with all her contents, as in the above-mentioned instance, or the roof of a house falls upon those within; but it is not due to chance, according to our view, that in the one instance the men went into the ship, or remained in the house in the other instance: it is due to the will of God, and is in accordance with the justice of His judgments, the method of which our mind is incapable of understanding. I have been induced to accept this theory by the circumstance that I have not met in any of the prophetic books with a description of God's Providence otherwise than in relation to human beings. The prophets even express their surprise that God should take notice of man, who is too little and too unimportant to be worthy of the attention of the Creator: how, then, should other living creatures be considered as proper objects for Divine Providence! Compare, "What is man, that thou takest knowledge of him?" (Ps. cxliv. 3): "What is man, that thou art mindful of him?" (ibid. viii. 8). It is clearly expressed in many

Scriptural passages that God provides for all men, and controls all their deeds -- e.g., "He fashioneth their hearts alike, He considereth all their works" (ibid. xxxiii. 15); "For thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men, to give every one according to his ways" (Jer. xxxii. 19). Again: "For his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings" (Job xxxii. 21). In the Law there occur instances of the fact that men are governed by God, and that their actions are examined by him. Comp. In the day when I visit I will visit their sin upon them 11 (Exod. xxxii.34) "I will even appoint over you terror" (Lev. xxvi. 16): "Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book" (Exod. xxxii. 33): "The same soul will I destroy" (Lev. xxiii. 30): "I will even set my face against that soul" (ibid. xx. 6).

There are many instances of this kind. All that is mentioned of the history of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is a perfect proof that Divine Providence extends to every man individually. But the condition of the individual beings of other living creatures is undoubtedly the same as has been stated by Aristotle. On that account it is allowed, even commanded, to kill animals; we are permitted to use them according to our pleasure. The view that other living beings are only governed by Divine Providence in the way described by Aristotle is supported by the words of the Prophet Habakkuk. When he perceived the victories of Nebuchadnezzar, and saw the multitude of those slain by him, he said, "O God, it is as if men were abandoned, neglected, and unprotected like fish and like worms of the earth." He thus shows that these classes are abandoned. This is expressed in the following passage: "And makest men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them. They take up all of them with the angle" etc. (Hab. i. 14, 15). The prophet then declares that such is not the case; for the events referred to are not the result of abandonment, forsaking, and absence of Providence, but are intended as a punishment for the people, who well deserved all that befell them. He therefore says: "O Lord, Thou hast ordained them for judgment, and O mighty God, Thou hast established them for correction" (ibid. ver. 12). Our opinion is not contradicted by Scriptural passages like the following: "He giveth to the beast his food" (Ps. cxlvii. 9): "The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God" (ibid. CiV. 2 1); "Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing" (ibid. cxlv. 16): or by the saying of our Sages: "He sitteth and feedeth all, from the horns of the unicorns even unto the eggs of insects." There are many similar sayings extant in the writings of our Sages, but they imply nothing that is contrary to my view. All these passages refer to Providence in relation to species, and not to Providence in relation to individual animals.

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The acts of God are as it were enumerated; how He provides for every species the necessary food and the means of subsistence. This is clear and plain. Aristotle likewise holds that this kind of Providence is necessary, and is in actual existence. Alexander also notices this fact in the name of Aristotle, viz., that every species has its nourishment prepared for its individual members; otherwise the species would undoubtedly have perished. It does not require much consideration to understand this.

There is a rule laid down by our Sages that it is directly prohibited in the Law to cause pain to an animal, and is based on the words: "Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass?" etc. (Num. xxii. 32). But the object of this rule is to make us perfect; that we should not assume cruel habits; and that we should not uselessly cause pain to others: that, on the contrary, we should be prepared to show pity and mercy to all living creatures, except when necessity demands the contrary: "When thy soul longeth to eat flesh," etc. (Deut. Xii. 20). We should not kill animals for the purpose of practicing cruelty, or for the purpose of play. It cannot be objected to this theory, "Why should God select mankind as the object of His special Providence, and not other living beings?" For he who asks this question must also inquire, "Why has man alone of all species of animals, been endowed with intellect?" The answer to this second question must be, according to the three afore-mentioned theories: It was the Will of God, it is the decree of His Wisdom, or it is in accordance with the laws of Nature. The same answers apply to the first question.

Understand thoroughly my theory, that I do not ascribe to God ignorance of anything or any kind of weakness; I hold that Divine Providence is related and closely connected with the intellect, because Providence can only proceed from an intelligent being, from a being that is itself the most perfect Intellect. Those creatures, therefore, which receive part of that intellectual influence will become subject to the action of Providence in the same proportion as they are acted upon by the Intellect. This theory is in accordance with reason and with the teaching of Scripture, whilst the other theories previously mentioned either exaggerate Divine Providence or detract from it. In the former case they lead to confusion and entire nonsense, and cause us to deny reason and to contradict that which is perceived with the senses. The latter case, viz., the theory that Divine Providence does not extend to man, and that there is no difference between man and other animals, implies very bad notions about God; it disturbs all social order, removes and destroys all the moral and intellectual virtues of man."

### Book III, chap. XVIII

"HAVING shown in the preceding chapter that of all living beings mankind alone is directly under the control of Divine Providence, I will now add the following remarks: It is an established fact that species have no existence except in our own minds. Species and other classes are merely ideas formed in our minds, whilst everything in real existence is an individual object, or an aggregate of individual objects. This being granted, it must further be admitted that the result of the existing Divine influence, that reaches mankind through the human intellect, is identical with individual intellects really in existence, with which, e.g., Zeid, Amr, Kaled and Bekr, are endowed. Hence it follows, in accordance with what I have mentioned in the preceding chapter, that the greater the share is which a person has obtained of this Divine influence, on account of both his physical predisposition and his training, the greater must also be the effect of Divine Providence upon him, for the action of Divine Providence is proportional to the endowment of intellect, as has been mentioned above. The relation of Divine Providence is therefore not the same to all men; the greater the human perfection a person has attained, the greater the benefit he derives from Divine Providence. This benefit is very great in the case of prophets, and varies according to the degree of their prophetic faculty: as it varies in the case of pious and good men according to their piety and uprightness. For it is the intensity of the Divine intellectual influence that has inspired the prophets, guided the good in their actions, and perfected the wisdom of the pious. In the same proportion as ignorant and disobedient persons are deficient in that Divine influence, their condition is inferior, and their rank equal to that of irrational beings: and they are" like unto the beasts" (Ps. xlix. 21). For this reason it was not only considered a light thing to slay them, but it was even directly commanded for the benefit of mankind. This belief that God provides for every individual human being in accordance with his merits is one of the fundamental principles on which the Law is founded.

Consider how the action of Divine Providence is described in reference to every incident in the lives of the patriarchs, to their occupations, and even to their passions, and how God promised to direct His attention to them. Thus God said to Abraham, "I am thy shield" (Gen. xv. 1): to Isaac, "I will be with thee, and I will bless thee" (ibid. xxvi. 3); to Jacob, "I am with thee, and will keep thee" (ibid. xxviii. 15): to [Moses] the chief of the Prophets, "Certainly I will be with thee, and this shall be a token unto thee" (Exod. iii. 12): to Joshua, "As I was with Moses, so I

shall be with thee" (Josh. i. 5). It is clear that in all these cases the action of Providence has been proportional to man's perfection. The following verse describes how Providence protects good and pious men, and abandons fools;" He Will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness: for by strength shall no man prevail" (I Sam. ii. 9). When we see that some men escape plagues and mishaps, whilst others perish by them, we must not attribute this to a difference in the properties of their bodies, or in their physical constitution," for by strength shall no man prevail" : but it must be attributed to their different degrees of perfection, some approaching God, whilst others moving away from Him. Those who approach Him are best protected, and" He will keep the feet of his saints"; but those who keep far away from Him are left exposed to what may befall them; there is nothing that could protect them from what might happen; they are like those who walk in darkness, and are certain to stumble. The protection of the pious by Providence is also expressed in the following passages:-"He keepeth all his bones," etc. (PS. xxxiv. 2 1):" The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous" (ibid. ver. 16):" He shall call upon me and I shall answer him" (ibid. xd. 15). There are in Scripture many more passages expressing the principle that men enjoy Divine protection in proportion to their perfection and piety. The philosophers have likewise discussed this subject. Abu-nasr, in the Introduction to his Commentary on Aristotle's Nikomachean Ethics, says as follows: Those who possess the faculty of raising their souls from virtue to virtue obtain, according to Plato, Divine protection to a higher degree.

Now consider how by this method of reasoning we have arrived at the truth taught by the Prophets, that every person has his individual share of Divine Providence in proportion to his perfection. For philosophical research leads to this conclusion, if we assume, as has been mentioned above, that Divine Providence is in each case proportional to the person's intellectual development. It is wrong to say that Divine Providence extends only to the species, and not to individual beings, as some of the philosophers teach. For only individual beings have real existence, and individual beings are endowed with Divine Intellect; Divine Providence acts, therefore, upon these individual beings.

Study this chapter as it ought to be studied; you will find in it all the fundamental principles of the Law; you will see that these are in conformity with philosophical speculation, and all difficulties will be removed; you will have a clear idea of Divine Providence. ■

## Letters



# Letters

*from our*

## READERS



### Solar Powered Prayers

**Reader:** I learned that afternoon is opportune for prayer... is that correct? Something to do with the sun's rays?

**Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim:** My long-time friend Rabbi Kaplan taught me a Talmudic lesson 20 years ago. Talmud Sabbath (118b) teaches one should pray with the "redness" of the sun, i.e., the rising and setting of the sun which is red at those times (ibid, Rashi). Unlike what was suggested by the reader last week, that Mincha holds some greater status...the sun's rising is equally opportune for prayer. But what role does a solar phenomenon play in prayer? Why is praying at sunrise and sunset more preferable than any other time?

The Talmud asks what source teaches this lesson, and cites Psalm 72: "They shall fear you with the sun and before the moon for all generations". (Verse 5) King David stated this in connection with his son King Solomon, that he might direct the nation's fear towards God "always", i.e., before the sun and moon which stand for all times. That is the literal meaning of the verse. The Rabbis then use this verse to underscore an additional concept, that greater "fear" of God exists when prayer is aligned with the sunrise and sunset. The term "fear" in this verse is correlated with prayer.

I believe the concept to be that in as much as prayer is "fear of God" – i.e., that we fear Him

and no other – we enhance our fear of God when we align it with one of His wondrous acts: sunrise and sunset. These two daily "events" are just that: amazing events. While imbued with the awe of such great solar phenomena, our attitude in prayer is all the more enhanced. The Rabbis taught that when performing a command, enhancement of our emotional state through endorsed actions is proper. Thus, if one feels elated due to alcohol, regardless, he may not use it to enhance his prayers. But as a verse exists that teaches the praying with the sun, such an act is thereby endorsed as a Torah action, and not a subjective whim.

As we pray with the events of sunrise and sunset, our intellectual relationship to God is now accompanied by an emotional awe. The total person is now involved in service of God, as the Shima states, "Love your God with all your heart". The term "all" refers to both parts of the heart: intelligence and emotion. (Rashi) ■

### Noachides & Torah

**Reader:** In reference to your current article titled "Gentiles and Torah Study" I would like to comment that not only are observant Noachides allowed to study the Torah but Orthodox Jewish Rabbi's are responsible for teaching them. Not only are there 7 laws but there are at least 66 other laws of the 613 Mitzvoth that an observant Noahide must keep. Over the years many Orthodox Rabbis have been responsible for my Noahide education and all of them seem to have a different interpretation of the Rambam's (of blessed memory) view on the 7 Noahide Laws. I have been taught that more than 90 % of the written Torah and passages relating to the 7 laws in the Talmud may be studied for the purpose of making the world better and ultimately for assuring a place in the Next World.

The prohibitions I have been taught are that a Noahide is forbidden to celebrate Shabbat in the ways that a Jew was commanded by Hashem. This includes most festivals. Also forbidden to a Noahide is the wearing of phylacteries or trying to pass himself off as Jewish.

I would like to advise you, if I may, that many of your subscribers are not Jewish. The people of the nations are very hungry for the spirituality Mesora.org provides. Please don't discourage us in our journey to be worthy of the world to come.

Sincerely,  
Mark A. Shaw

**Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim:** Mark, we are in agreement. My article last week addressed your fact, that Noachides may learn what pertains to them. In no way do I seek to limit the most prized activity of Torah study, for any individual. I actually give a class each Sunday for Noachides. As I mentioned many times, there is no difference of design or potential of a Jew or Gentile. The difference is in God's will as pertains to the actions He demands of each. And in doing so, God does not limit the perfection reachable by a Noahide. But to be honest, a Noahide is limited in his areas of study, for the reasons mentioned in my article. Please refer to the Talmudic and Maimonidean sources again. ■

### God's Kindness

**Reader:** Dear Rabbi: In our daily weekday Ashrei prayers, letter lamid, we are commanded to inform human beings of His mighty deeds. With this in mind, I would like to inform your readers of one of Hashem's mighty deeds, which I experienced.

About ten years ago, while coming home from work on Forty-seventh Street, the snowstorm got worse. The Monsey bus left the corner of fifth avenue and Forty-seventh Street right on time, at five fifteen, and then made it to the Port Authority terminal one hour later.

Everyone was aware of this February storm, for the severe weather reports were predicting two to three feet of snow. Everyone was probably counting on the storms full fury to hit after they returned home. I think everyone picked this bus at the same time with this thought in mind.

I was one of the first passengers on board and found a seat near the rear of the bus. As the bus trudged it's way toward the Lincoln Tunnel more and more people packed their way in. There must have been seventy-five people or more, crammed into our bus. I could no longer see the front of the bus, however, having a window seat enabled me to see the fluffy snow on the sidewalk getting deeper and deeper.

Impatient voices were complaining aloud, "What, we didn't get to the tunnel yet?" "At this rate, we will never get through to the New Jersey turnpike, and then, it might not even be drivable!"

It was so crowded and stuffy, plus the stench of wet overcoats, made my mind ask, "What am I doing here? Do I need this? I should just vault out of this bus and take my chances of getting home with a later bus, or even try hitchhiking. I could also get off now and treat myself to a delicious Chinese meal at Moshe Peking only three blocks away."

*(continued on next page)*

(continued from page 8)

## Letters

Then somehow, these thoughts became a reality! At that moment, I said to myself, "Do it! Why not?" People were giving me strange looks as I pushed and shoved my way towards the front door. "Open the door!" I told the driver. "Go ahead, you must be a little mashuga!" (I didn't even ask him for a refund.)

As I stepped down into the foot deep snow I took a deep delicious breath. "What a difference! Boy, am I smart! People have to be crazy to stay in an environment like that," I thought. "Moshe Peking, here I come!"

After a short fifteen minute walk, (I really had an appetite now!), I approached Moshe Peking. "Maybe it isn't open. Maybe they closed early because of the storm." Wrong! It was open, and I was happily greeted by, not one, but two maitre Ds, but why? Then I discovered the answer. The restaurant was empty! The snowstorm turned everyone away, and I was the only live one. Instead of being served by one waiter, three waiters were attending to my requests!

With compassion, my thoughts went back to my neighbors, who probably were still on the bus. I felt bad for them and their plight. I pictured them slowly inching their way home to Monsey. They should have been sitting around me, feasting on sweet and sour glazed chicken. Too bad they didn't have my saychel!

I looked at my watch, and couldn't believe it was seven fifteen. The last bus stops at seven thirty, so I paid my bill and zipped out of Moshe Peking towards the Port Authority terminal. As I approached the terminal, I saw from a distance, what seemed to be a Chassidische young man standing at the bus stop.

This section of the terminal is a very dangerous place. It is outside the doors, and every low type of character hangs around this spot. Having taken the bus from this location before, I have witnessed drug dealers, homeless, drunks, panhandlers, and bums hanging around. In addition, the area was completely deserted because of the storm. This young man was waiting in a very bad place.

I walked up to him, and stood no more than two feet away. (This would show anyone with bad intentions that he was with me.) I began a conversation. I asked this young man if he was waiting for the Monsey bus. (He couldn't have been older than fourteen years). We both were holding the collars of our overcoats close to our necks because it was so cold and snowing. He finally answered me in a shaky voice. "I'm trying to get home to Monsey, but there hasn't been a bus here for the last hour. Are you going to Monsey?" [Having six sons of my own, (Baruch Hashem!) I recognized a brother Jews' child in distress, and decided to take him under my protection.]

I told him I was going to Monsey and we should wait here for another fifteen minutes. "If the

Monsey bus doesn't come, we can go upstairs, into the terminal, and take the Red and Tan Bus Line." During the next fifteen minutes I was able to realize that this young man was, *nebbach*, slow. He also showed me his bus ticket, and asked me if the other bus company would honor it. "My father gave me only this ticket, no money." Seeing that he was scared and shook-up, I immediately put his mind to rest by telling him, "Don't worry! You are with me! I will buy you your ticket, and I will take you home to Monsey!"

I let him sit next to the window, and now in a warm bus his mood changed, showing his calmness and a sweet smile.

The snow really came down on Monsey. He followed me to my car in the parking lot, got in, and proceeded to show me where he lived. As we drove into his street I recognized some of my friends' houses. And then, to my amazement, he pointed to my friend Hershel's house, as his! This young man was my friend Hershel's son! Hershel waved, a thank you wave, as I pulled away.

Why did Hashem choose me, out of all the other people on the bus? I'm sure there were others, who were aware of Moshe Peking. I'm sure they were as uncomfortable as me, all squashed up. Maybe I was more logical, or loved Chinese food more than anyone else. Maybe my *middos* of *rachmonos* was needed to meet the situation. Either way, one thing became very apparent to me the following day. I wasn't so smart as I originally concluded. As I recalled the experience and satisfaction with myself, while sitting and eating in Moshe Peking, I had no thought at all, that Hashem's kindness and great deeds were taking place. This revelation thoroughly shocked my soul! It showed me how important this young Chassid's safety was, and how Hashem protects the needy of his chosen people. What evil was out there? What evil, did Hashem go to such great lengths to prevent from happening?

This experience was very important. It has helped me recognize signs of Hashem's wisdom, and at the same time two Jewish souls came out of a crisis, ahead. It has enabled me to draw near and come close to G-d.

You may be wondering why I waited ten years to tell you about this event. Last week I bumped into my friend Hershel, and he told me to give him a MAZEL TOV, because his son just went under the Chuppah!

Of course, as Prophecy no longer exists, we have no absolute knowledge when God is acting, unless we witness a miracle, which is not the case here. But we also cannot say with absolute knowledge that God was NOT involved in this case. If He was, this is yet another kindness and great deed from Hashem! ■

—The Monsey Maggid

## Letter from the North

Friends, As much as we would like to sink into the mindless comfort of our untruthful media reporting from our lying politicians, we who love Israel, and of course those who actually live here and whose lives are at stake, prefer to hear the unvarnished truth from untainted sources who use their eyes to see and brains to figure things out they are not spoon-fed by spin-masters. I'm one of them. Another is my friend up north Devora Evgi. Below, her take on the border with Lebanon.

—Naomi Ragen

From: Devora Evgi  
To: Naomi Ragen  
Subject: "Their flag is still there...  
More bombs bursting in air!"

Hi Naomi,

It appears as though the Hizbollah is preparing for Round 2. Up our way (Moshav Avivim), the entire border is now dotted with Hizbollah flags and moving figures. There is not a single Lebanese army flag in sight. In my opinion, this is NOT okay. A flag is not only a symbol that represents concepts and ideals, but also used to stake

claims. Does this mean that the Hizbollah have reclaimed Southern Lebanon? While driving home from work one evening, will I encounter terrorists who have infiltrated through tunnels they have dug under the border-underneath the noses of the UN base that lies opposite my house?

For years these UN troops have been observers. They observed the way the Hizbollah prepared for the last war and armed themselves to the teeth, so why should anything be different now? And BTW, where IS the Lebanese army that was supposed to keep the border clean? Perhaps it was largely comprised of Hizbollahs in disguise? Oops, sorry. If I don't keep quiet we'll never have peace with Syria...

Looks as though we can all stay tuned to the same channel and same program for a repeat broadcast of the last war, coming soon to a neighborhood near you...

—Devora Evgi, Moshav Avivim

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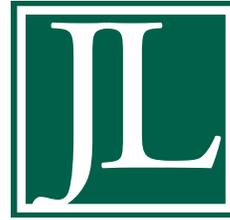
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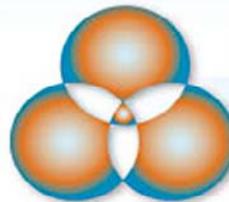
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