

God did not create Jew and gentile;
rather, "man and woman".
The claim of a "Jewish" soul
signifies a corrupt one.



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Weekly Parsha

Ki Tisa

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"And you, take for yourself spices of the finest sort: of pure myrrh five hundred [shekel weights]; of fragrant cinnamon half of it two hundred and fifty [shekel weights]; of fragrant cane two hundred and fifty [shekel weights]." (Shemot 30:23)

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Perfection:

Human Accomplishment – Not a Jewish Birthright

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Too often we hear the term "Jewish soul" expressing baseless, Jewish arrogance. Others accept the heretical belief that God literally blew a "piece" of Himself into man: "And He breathed into his nostrils a living soul" (Gen. 2:7) and, "And God created man in His image; in the form of God He create him [man]..." (ibid, 1:27) Certainly, if Maimonides, Ramban,

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JEWISH LEADERS
SILENCE ON
SUPERSTITIONS:

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MOSES
& the
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(Ki Tisa cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

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The laws regarding the construction of the Mishcan – the Tabernacle – compose one of the most fascinating areas of halacha – Jewish law. This week's portion discusses the creation of the Shemen HaMishchah – the oil of anointing. The process of appointing a Kohen Gadol – a high priest – included being anointed with this oil. The original components created for the Mishcan were anointed with this oil. Some of the kings of Bnai Yisrael were anointed with this oil. In our pasuk, Moshe is commanded to create this oil. The pasuk

also lists various ingredients that are included in this fragrant oil. The Torah is an immense system of law that impacts virtually every aspect of personal, communal and national life. However, the multitude of individual laws is subsumed within Taryag mitzvot – six-hundred thirteen commandments. For example, the Torah tells us that we must honor our parents. This is a commandment. There are many laws that define the manner in which we are obligated to express this honor. These laws are all subsumed within the single mitzvah to honor our parents. The Torah does not expressly provide a list of the Taryag mitzvot. However, various scholars have suggested possible lists of the 613 commandments. It is not easy to compose such a list. The scholar must first develop a set of criteria for defining a mitzvah. Only after these criteria have been delineated, can the scholar develop a list of commandments.

One of the most famous lists of the 613 mitzvot was developed by Maimonides. His list is the subject of his Sefer HaMitzvot. Maimonides provides an extensive introduction to his list. In this introduction, he identifies fourteen criteria for defining mitzvot. For example, one criterion is that Taryag mitzvot only includes those command-

ments that are specifically included in the Torah. Any obligations or prohibitions established by the Sages are not included in the list.[1] Therefore, the obligation to observe Purim cannot be included. Another criterion is that only obligations that apply for all generations are included in the 613 commandments. But obligations or prohibitions that were commanded by Hashem for a specific moment in history are not included in Taryag mitzvot. Although, at Revelation, only Moshe was commanded to ascend Sinai and the rest of the

nation was forbidden from ascending or approaching the mountain, these instructions cannot be included in Taryag mitzvot. These instructions were intended for a specific moment in time – Revelation.[2]

Maimonides' tenth principle is that it is not appropriate to count as mitzvot obligations that are prerequisites or preliminary steps in the fulfillment of some greater objective. Maimonides offers a number of examples that illustrate the application of this principle. One example deals with our passage. Maimonides explains that Hashem's instructions to Moshe regarding the creation of the Shemen HaMishchah cannot be counted as one of the 613 commandments. This is because the Shemen HaMishchah is only created in order to

accomplish a more fundamental objective. This objective is the actual anointing of the Kohen Gadol, the original components of the Mishcan and some kings. The mitzvah of Shemen HaMishchah is to anoint the appropriate individuals and the components of the Mishcan. The instructions to Moshe for the creating of the Shemen HaMishchah should be regarded as a prerequisite, or preliminary step, to this mitzvah.

There are a number of problems with these comments. The most obvious of these difficulties is identified by Kinat Soferim. In his code of law – Mishne Torah – Maimonides introduces each



(continued on next page)

section with a brief list of the mitzvot that will be discussed in the section. The first mitzvah listed in his introduction to the laws regarding the vessels of the Bait HaMikdash is "to create Shemen HaMishchah." Kinat Soferim objects that this formulation of the commandment regarding Shemen HaMishchah directly contradicts Maimonides' comments in his Sefer HaMitzvot. There, Maimonides argues that the sole commandment regarding the Shemen is to use it for anointing. Creation of the oil is regarded as a prerequisite to this objective. However, in his Mishne Torah, Maimonides identifies the creation of the Shemen as the fundamental element of its mitzvah.[3]

There is an even more obvious question that Kinat Soferim does not ask. In his tenth principle, Maimonides explains that the mitzvah regarding the Shemen HaMishchah is to use it for anointing. However, in the actual list of commandments in Sefer HaMitzvot, Maimonides suggests an alternative definition for the mitzvah regarding the Shemen. He writes that the mitzvah regarding the Shemen is to have it available for use when needed.[4]

In short, Maimonides offers three different formulations of the mitzvah regarding Shemen HaMishchah. In the discussion of his tenth principle, he explains that the commandment is to use the oil for anointing. He insists that the creation of the Shemen HaMishchah cannot be the fundamental element of the mitzvah. In his Mishne Torah, Maimonides defines the mitzvah as the creation of the Shemen. Finally, in his actual enumeration of the mitzvot in Sefer HaMitzvot, he states that the commandment regarding the Shemen is that it should be available for use as needed.

Kinat Soferim does not note the discrepancy in Sefer HaMitzvot between the definition of the mitzvah of the Shemen suggested in the tenth principle and the definition offered in the actual enumeration of the commandments. This suggests an important inference. Kinat Soferim does not acknowledge the difference between these two definitions. He maintains that the two formulations are really alternative expressions of the same idea; they are the same idea viewed from two perspectives. This is difficult to understand. Anointing with the oil and having the Shemen available for anointing seem to be different ideas. How can Kinat Soferim regard these two formulations as alternative expressions of the same idea?

Kinat Soferim is suggesting an important subtlety in Maimonides' position. An object can be defined by its physical characteristics. It can also be defined by its objective or purpose. For example, we can define a pencil as an object that is composed of a thin stick of graphite encased in a tube of wood. Alternatively, we can define an

object by its purpose. A pencil can be defined as an implement designed for writing. Sometimes, both of these methods can be combined to define an object. According to Maimonides, Shemen HaMishchah is defined by both of these means. It is a material substance. Its ingredients are essential to its definition. But, this oil is referred to Shemen HaMishchah – oil of anointing. This name is not just a convenient means of identification. The name communicates that the oil is designated for a specific purpose and that this purpose is part of the fundamental definition of the oil. The oil must be used for the anointing. If it is not used for this purpose, it does not meet the definition of Shemen HaMishchah.

This formulation has important ramifications. Assume a Kohen Gadol is appointed and the available Shemen HaMishchah is not used. What mitzvah is violated through this omission? Obviously, the Kohen has not been properly appointed. But according to Maimonides, there is an additional issue. The mitzvah of Shemen HaMishchah has been violated. The Shemen has not been used for its designated purpose. Therefore, the commandment to have the Shemen available for anointing can be described as an obligation to use the oil for anointing. This purpose is an essential element of the definition of the Shemen! In other words, the use of the oil does not fulfill an independent commandment to appoint people properly. It is a fulfillment of the commandment to have the Shemen HaMishchah available for its proper and designated use. When the oil is used, the mitzvah of Shemen HaMishchah is fulfilled. With its use, the Shemen fulfills its design and purpose.

This insight resolves explains another nuance on Maimonides' treatment of the Shemen HaMishchah. Part of the process of appointing a Kohen Gadol is his anointing with Shemen HaMishchah. We would expect Maimonides to explain the process of anointing the Kohen Gadol in his discussion of his appointment. However, in discussing the appointment of the Kohen Gadol, Maimonides merely mentions that anointing is required. The details of the process are not mentioned. Where does Maimonides discuss the details of the process? This discussion is included in the laws regarding the Shemen HaMishchah. Why does Maimonides discuss these details in this context? Maimonides maintains that the details of how the Shemen is used are part of the mitzvah of Shemen HaMishchah. The oil – by definition – is designated specifically for anointing. When the anointing is performed properly, the mitzvah of Shemen HaMishchah is fulfilled. Therefore, the details of the process of anointing are included in the laws of the Shemen HaMishchah.

One question remains. How can Maimonides state in his Mishne Torah that the mitzvah of the

Shemen is its creation? In Sefer HaMitzvot, Maimonides explicitly rejected this formulation!

Kinat Soferim suggests an interesting interpretation of the tenth principle. Maimonides explains that instructions that are prerequisites for the fulfillment of a mitzvah are not to be counted as a mitzvah. But what is the status of these instructions? After all, they are legal requirements. Are they merely practical measures that must be undertaken to fulfill a mitzvah or are they subsumed within the mitzvah they facilitate? Kinat Soferim suggests that a prerequisite is not a separate mitzvah. But it may be part of the mitzvah that it facilitates. In our instance, the creation of the Shemen HaMishchah is part of the commandment to have the Shemen available. In his Mishne Torah, Maimonides is not stating that the commandment of the Shemen is merely to make it. The commandment is to bring it into existence so that it will be available.[5] In other words, Maimonides consistently maintains that the fundamental mitzvah regarding the Shemen is that it should be available. But, in Mishne Torah, he is explaining that part of the mitzvah is the process of creating this availability.

Kinat Soferim's comments do resolve the apparent contradiction between Mishne Torah and Sefer HaMitzvot. Nonetheless, it is interesting that in his Mishne Torah, Maimonides focuses on an element of the mitzvah that is de-emphasized in his Sefer HaMitzvot. Kinat Soferim does not address this issue.

In short, the mitzvah of Shemen HaMishchah has three components: an action, an outcome, and a purpose. These are all components of the mitzvah. The action is the creation of the Shemen -- creating the state of availability. Maimonides explains that this action cannot be counted as a separate mitzvah. It is performed in order to produce an outcome – the state of availability. The required outcome is that Shemen must be available. Finally, this Shemen has a purpose that is fundamental to its definition. It is designated to be used for all required anointing.

[1] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Sefer HaMitzvot, Principle 1.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Sefer HaMitzvot, Principle 3.

[3] Rav Chanaya Kazis, Kinat Soferim, Commentary on Maimonides' Sefer Hamitzvot, Principle 10.

[4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Aseh 34.

[5] Rav Chanaya Kazis, Kinat Soferim, Commentary on Maimonides' Sefer Hamitzvot, Principle 10. ■

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Perfection

Rashi, Unkelos and literally all other Rabbis rendered such anthropomorphisms as false and heretical, we must fully understand why these genius minds reinterpreted these verses, and then adopt these truths.

Maimonides teaches that since God is not physical, He possesses no physical qualities or accidents, such as “division”. (13 Principles; Principle III; Yesodei HaTorah 1:7) All Rabbis agree; God has no “parts”; thus, metaphors like the “Tzelem Elokim” (“Form of God”) placed in man, must be understood differently: simply indicating the “higher status” which humans possess over all other creations. As a Rabbi taught, God called our soul Tzelem “Elokim” – including His name – to underscore the great potential of our souls. For only with our souls, can we learn about God. But in no way can God have parts, and therefore, man’s attempt to abandon responsibility by feeling God is “inside” him, is a fallacy. (This pantheistic view led Jews to believe that God existed even inside sin, and other absurdities.)

Ironically, these arrogant Jews contradict themselves, basing their view of a Jewish “superior” soul, on those verses above...which address the “gentile” Adam the First. Continuing with the Torah’s lessons, God’s selection of the convert Ruth as the forerunner of our future Messiah, and Kings David and Solomon, clearly teaches that God finds no favorite in the Jew. In fact, God created man only once, and all humans are direct descendants of that first gentile couple. God never re-created man or the soul, giving the Jew a “new and improved model”. We all share the exact same design and potential. It was only due to mankind’s idolatrous sins and Abraham’s monotheistic lifestyle, that God selected Abraham and his children to receive and guard the Torah...for “all” mankind. God’s plan was, and remains, that “All sons of flesh call His name”. (Alenu Prayer) Furthermore, since God planned to give His Torah to descendants of gentiles, this means that gentiles are fully capable of practicing Judaism and obtaining Torah perfection. The born Jew has no advantage.

It is not the “receipt” of Torah that perfects humans, but our adherence to the commands...and this applies to Jew and gentile alike. Human perfection is not a Jewish birthright, but an accomplishment, available to all God’s creatures. And if a gentile is wise, he will love the Torah as does a knowledgeable Jew, and he will take on more than his mere seven Noachide laws. He will see that God’s commands perfect a human, and he will wish to share in that lot. Gentile converts throughout history showed themselves as the wisest members of their cultures – and ours – many becoming great, Jewish leaders.

Those seven commands are not a “limit” for the gentile, or as some say, “their” system. A Rabbi



**Ruth humbly collects food
as Boaz observes her modesty**

once taught: the Noachide laws are the bare essentials that entitle a human to retain his right to life. It is not “his” system, or a perfection system. Rather, Noachide laws are a starting point – not an exalted destination. Since the gentile is no different than the Jew, he too benefits equally by adhering to the Torah’s commands, as the Torah teaches: “One Torah and one statute you shall have for yourselves, and the convert who dwells among you.” (Numb. 15:16) This proves all humans share the identical design and potential.

The foolish view that converts always had some Jewish “spark” is equally arrogant, and baseless. For all the Talmud means by “future Jews and converts stood at Sinai” (Shavuot 39a) is that any person, who sees the truth of Torah, is “as if” he or she witnessed Revelation, which proves Torah beyond all doubt. Just as witnessing Sinai removed all doubt of God’s existence and the Divine nature of Judaism, those today who realize this truth are viewed “as if” they stood at Sinai. Equally true: a Jew today who abandons Torah is “as if” he wasn’t at Sinai.

Abraham was no more Jewish than Sodom’s sinful inhabitants annihilated by God. But Abraham’s difference was in his use of his Tzelem Elokim, extricating himself through reason alone from an idolatrous youth, and discovering and teaching monotheism to his fellow man. He viewed

all humans as equal expressions of God’s will. All men are created equal.

Abraham was a prophet, and more perfected than anyone alive today; Jews and Rabbis included. He was not Jewish, yet God loved him. Talmud Sanhedrin 59a states: “A gentile who studies Torah is akin to a High Priest.” And the prophet Isaiah 2:2 teaches that in messianic times, gentiles will literally stream to Jerusalem to learn Torah. But gentiles cannot simply wake up one day and desire Torah, and thus, Moshiach cannot arrive...if Jews hide the Torah from gentiles by voicing acceptance of other religions. No, that deludes them into believing that we view their religions on par with Torah. However, the Torah teaches, “From a false matter distance yourself.” (Exod. 23:7) Hence, we must be honest and clear: Judaism views all others religions as imposters, since no other religion was God given. This explains why others preach faith, and not proof, as does Judaism. Our core tenet is that Judaism alone is Divine, proven by the mass witnesses at Sinai...the same manner in which all history is proven. Such a mass revelation is absent in literally all other religions, and why we do not accept their baseless claims. Furthermore, if we recognize any other religion, we violate God’s words: “Do not add to it [Torah] and do not subtract from it.” (Deut. 13:1) All other religions defy this fundamental directive of God in their addition to, or subtraction of Torah law. Again, God said, “One Torah...for yourselves, and the convert.” This means no other laws are acceptable, for any people.

One other popular misquotation is from Job 31:1,2: “A treaty have I made with my eyes; for what shall I gaze at a virgin? And what portion of God above shall I have, and an inheritance of God on high?” Job rightfully defends himself, claiming that he never gazed at a woman for any other reason than examining her qualities, to determine if she was a fit bride for his sons. For by gazing longer, it would be out of lust, and he would forfeit his share of God’s reward. But many Jews and a popular, chassidic work misquote this verse, illiterately isolating the words “portion of God above” (“chelek Elokim mimaa”) to mean that God placed a part of Himself into man: truly an inexcusable corruption of Torah. This is also an outright denial of our greatest Rabbis who state such beliefs forfeit our Olam Haba, our afterlife. And this is all in the name of feeling that as Jews, we are better? Since when does illiteracy and denial of God’s Torah and Rabbis elevate one’s soul over the gentile?

In truth, the arrogance of these Jews, is the exact opposite trait which Ruth the convert expressed, and earned her great status, and the role as ancestor to Messiah and our great kings. God did not create gentile and Jew; rather, He simply created “man and woman”. ■

RABBI DR. MICHAEL BERNSTEIN

Parsha: Ki Tisa



The Semblance of Evil

Having found favor with God, Moses now asks (33:13), "Please make Your ways known to me." And God replies (33:23), "And I will remove My hand, and you will see My back, but My countenance will not be seen."

What ways did Moses want to be taught? The Talmud explains (Berachos 7a) that he wanted to understand how divine justice and providence interfaced with free will. In the language of our Sages, why do the wicked sometimes prosper while the righteous suffer?

Explaining God's justice, one of the thorniest issues in religious philosophy, is a topic discussed extensively in the Bible, Talmud and Rabbinic writings.

A related passage in the Talmud (Berachos 60b) provides a useful framework in which to view this issue. The Talmud seeks Scriptural support for the requirement to bless God when bad things happen, just as we must bless Him when good things happen. Four opinions are given.

Rabbi Levi quotes (Psalms 101:1), "Kindness and justice, I will sing to God." In other words, I will sing not only when I receive kindness but even when facing judgment.

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmeni quotes (Psalms 56:11), "With God I will praise [with the] word; with the Lord, I will praise [with the] word." I will praise God (the Tetragrammaton, the Name signifying the Attribute of Mercy), provider of benevolence. I will even praise the Lord (Elo-him, the Name signifying the Attribute of Strict Justice), sender of tribulation.

Rabbi Tanchum quotes (Psalms 116:13), "I will raise a cup of salvation and invoke God's Name. Although I encounter affliction and grief, I will call out God's Name."

The Rabbis quote (Job 1:21), "God has given, God has taken away, may the name of God be blessed."

It is quite possible that there is no fundamental dispute among these Sages of the Talmud, that each is addressing a different aspect of the same phenomenon (mar amar chada umar amar chada velo pligi). With respect to God's providence, we can categorize unfortunate life events in three ways^{3/4}how we view God's actions, how we view God's relationship to us as a result of those actions and how we react to them. The first three views cited in the Talmud correspond to these three perspectives.

Rabbi Levi states we must bless God regardless of whether we see His actions as kindness or justice. Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmeni states we must bless Him regardless of whether we perceive Him as a compassionate or a strict judge. Finally, Rabbi Tanchum's verse proves we must bless Him regardless of whether our responsive emotional

state is joyous or sad and grief-stricken. The Rabbis, based on the Book of Job, transcend the principles of the first three. They endorse a type of surrender to the Omniscient One, for man is incapable of forming any judgment other than that God is the source of all "giving and taking."

The Talmud concludes the discussion with an anecdote. Encamped for the night outside a town where he could find no lodging, Rabbi Akiva has the seeming misfortune of successively losing his candle, rooster and donkey. "Kol mah de'avid Rachmana letava avid," he reassures himself. "Everything God does is for the good." The following morning, he discovers that raiders had ransacked the town; his life was saved by the loss of his light, rooster and donkey, any of which might have betrayed his presence nearby.

Upon consideration, we can find allusions to the basic realms of human activity^{3/4}physical, emotional and intellectual^{3/4}in Rabbi Akiva's three losses. The donkey represents the physical world; the word for donkey, chamor, is cognate with chomer, material substance. The candle represents the intellect. The rooster, a winged creature of the heavens tethered to the earth, represents the emotional heart; it is there, our Sages say, that the lifelong battle between the intellect and the earthly instincts rages.

Although Rabbi Akiva could have initially perceived these occurrences as misfortune, he remained confident despite the veil that obscured the "good" in the inconvenient events while they were occurring.

Appropriately, after the story of Rabbi Akiva, his disciple Rabbi Mayer comments, "Man should limit his words before God." The interpretation of this may be that man should not excessively complain or petition God, since he may unwittingly be asking to change a providence already perfectly tailored for his ultimate good.

This then is the philosophical answer to the puzzle of our suffering when introspection reveals no immediate explanation. Since we do not have the Creator's infinite knowledge, we are not qualified to draw final conclusions about difficult times.

God's final response to Job's suffering underscores this point (Job 38:4,12; 40:8). "Where were you when I laid the Earth's foundation? Tell Me if you know understanding . . . Did you ever in your life command the morning or teach dawn its place, to grasp the edges of the Earth and shake the wicked from it? . . . Will you discredit My judgment? Will you declare Me wrong in order to make yourself right?"

We, in our ignorance, are only left to bless God for the bad as well as the good, secure only in our faith that all God does is for the good.

Rabbi Akiva's attitude toward suffering is

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Weekly Parsha

further evident in a famous passage in the Talmud (Makkos 24a). While walking in Jerusalem, the Rabbis and Rabbi Akiva heard the rumble of Roman legions and saw the ruins of the Temple Mount. The Rabbis wept bitterly, but Rabbi Akiva laughed. As the ensuing conversation reveals, the Rabbis were focused on the present calamity, while Rabbi Akiva saw the tragic events as another step in the fulfillment of the prophecies that promised to bring the Jewish people from their present nadir to the zenith of triumphant redemption.

These different perspectives are actually manifest in the different words they use for "why" in their questions. Rabbi Akiva asked the Rabbis, "Why (mipnei mah) do you cry?" But the Rabbis asked Rabbi Akiva, "Why (lamah) do you laugh?" Rabbi Akiva used the words mipnei mah, literally "in the face of what," because he knew their reaction was related to the awful present they faced. The Rabbis, on the other hand, used the word lamah, literally "toward what," because they understood that Rabbi Akiva's laughter could only be caused by his vision of the future.

Incidentally, the appearance of this story in Tractate Makkos is illuminating. According to Rav Tzadok Hakohein, our sages judiciously placed the Agaddic passages in tractates appropriate to their themes. The theme of Makkos is rehabilitation through punishment. The story about the punishment that has befallen the Jewish people also bear the implicit promise that it would result in rehabilitation and redemption of the Jewish people through exile and suffering. ■

The Center of the Universe

Forty short days after God revealed Himself to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai and gave them the Ten Commandments, they made a Golden Calf. True, only some of the people were guilty of the actual deed, with the rest only guilty of silent acquiescence. True, the people were disoriented by the prolonged absence of Moses on the mountain. Still, their precipitous fall in such a short time shocks us.

Just a short while earlier, there is already a harbinger of this Jewish fickleness. With the spectacular images of the splitting of the sea still vivid in their memories, they walk through the waterless desert and ask (17:7), "Is God among us or not?"

We see in these events that people can experience God intimately and then quickly "lose sight" of Him. Such is the nature of the free will with which the Creator endows mankind. He creates an area where His presence is sufficiently "distant" or "hidden" to allow what our Sages refer to as the milchemes hachaim, the battle of life.

The ambivalence of God's perceived presence,



alternating between proximity and transcendence, is singularly manifest in the first blessing of the daily Shemoneh Esrei prayer. "Blessed are You, O God, Lord of our forefathers, Lord of Abraham, Lord of Isaac, Lord of Jacob, the Power, the Great One, the Mighty One and the Awesome One, the Supreme Power who bestows true kindnesses as Possessor of everything, Who recalls the kindnesses of the patriarchs and brings a redeemer to their descendants for the sake of His Name with love. O King, Helper, Savior and Shield, blessed are You, God, the Shield of Abraham."

Let us look carefully at the progression. We begin with God's intimate relationship with us through our patriarchs. The next term, the Powerful One, refers to God as the exalted power, followed by expressions of three logical categories that arise when considering any subject³/₄the nature of the entity in itself, in this case, the Great

One; His relationship to us, in this case the Mighty One, might being an expression comparative power; and finally, our reaction to Him, in this case, the Awesome One.

Immediately afterwards, however, we refer to Him as the Supreme Power, stating in effect that our perception of Him is inadequate, that He is transcendent. But this is immediately balanced by the next statement, that He "bestows true kindnesses," a manifestation of His proximity. We then anticipate the misconception that His giving diminishes Him and declare that He is "the Possessor of everything," beyond needs and limitations. In other words, transcendent.

The blessing again returns to God's intimate relationship with us through His providence in history; He is with us from our beginnings with our patriarchs to our ultimate destination in the Messianic era. But this proximity is immediately tempered by the next words, "for the sake of His Name." He does it as a result of His own transcendent perfection. And then we swing right back to proximity by declaring that He does it "with love."

In its conclusion, the blessing identifies God as King, more accessible than the remote Power. The three measures are again identified, this time for the King. Helper delineates His essence, Savior his relationship with us and Shield our resulting state of being protected. Applied to God as King, these attributes express a more intimate relationship than those applied to God as Power.

This constant flux between proximity and transcendence, visibility and invisibility, is the dynamic which makes free will possible and gives meaning to our lives.

Scientists have observed that man is uniquely positioned in the universe. He can perceive and understand the microscopic world, estimated as 10-25 of his size. At the same time, he can relate to the cosmic realms of the universe, estimated at 1025 times his size. If he were only a factor of 10 smaller or larger, it is thought he would be unable to fathom the opposite extreme of the universe.

This positioning corresponds to the moral spiritual universe as well, where God's revelation is balanced between being distant and proximate, creating the optimal environment in which man can exercise his free will. Man has the freedom to oscillate between accepting the Torah and forty days later worshiping a Golden Calf.

The structure of the first blessing addresses another issue as well. Our Sages were wary of our forming false conceptions of God. The Rambam devotes much of his Guide for the Perplexed, his major philosophical treatise, to demonstrate that we can only gain true knowledge by stripping away false conceptions. We may say that in the first blessing we say as we stand before God, our Sages repeatedly and carefully jarred us from thinking we fully know Him. ■

M S E S

& the gold coin

*The
"Gold Calf"...
alive and
well today.
But this time,
it's the creation
of the leaders.*

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

This week's Parsha Ki Tisa includes the sin of the Golden Calf. So great is this sin, that God visits its punishment upon future generations. Of course we must be culpable too, for God does not punish one with no blemish. But if we were not yet alive during that event, in what manner are we culpable?

Subsequent to the nations' miscount of the 40th day Moses was to descend from his communion with God, the Jews said to Aaron, "Arise and make for us a god that will go before us, for this Moses, the man, who took us up from Egypt, we know not what has become of him." (Exod. 32:1) We are perplexed at the phrase "the man". Of course Moses is a man. It is also significant that the Jews' creation of the Golden Calf took place precisely when the Luchos (Ten Commandments) were being given to Moses.

This Purim I attended a simcha...only for the simcha to be suddenly lost. None other than the shul's Rabbi was handing to each member a gold coin, which he promised would grant success...of course in exchange for a check. This violates the worst Torah sin – idolatry – and common sense. It is tragic that our very leaders ignore God's words. God teaches a system of reward and punishment where only our righteous acts earn God's grace, and our sins earn His punishments. It makes no difference what extraneous activities we perform, if we do not abandon our sins. (Sforno, Deut. 10:17) Yet, this Rabbi misleads others with the false hopes that gold coins offer success. At Sinai, the Jews abandoned God even while awaiting His Torah. The grandest gift was about to be received, yet, their idolatrous instincts preferred imagined, gold remedies. The Torah quotes the Jews who said the "man" Moses appeared to have died; the Torah highlights this statement, for this overestimation of the "man" is the cause of their sin. Those Jews desired Moses more than God. The congregants in this shul too gave more credit to their leader, than to God's Torah, and accepted his idolatrous gold coins.

Rashi comments on Exodus 32:34: "There is no punishment that comes upon Israel that does not

partake of some punishment of the Gold Calf'. We see why God visits the punishment of the Gold Calf upon us, and why Moshiach has not yet arrived. We too continue the sin of the Gold Calf with our attachment to man and devices: Rebbes, gold coins, mezuzas, segulas, challa keys, red bendels, and an array of lies lead Jews back to idolatrous Egyptian ways.

Many times I write to women on Jewish email groups to stop misleading others. They form challa-baking groups where they insert keys into those loaves, preaching this idolatrous rite can make a barren woman fertile. They organize mikva sessions, where they proliferate the belief that following a pregnant woman into the mikva will make those barren pregnant. And Rabbis say nothing.

Gentiles, who have abandoned Christianity in favor of Noachide laws, are much more perfected than these Rabbis who deny God's great fundamental of Reward and Punishment. The Shema Yisrael teaches "And if you veer away and worship other gods...you will quickly be driven from the good land." (Deut. 11:16,17) Sin drives us out of the land, regardless of our posted mezuzas. So it is truly useless to check mezuzas when calamity befalls you: check yourself instead. And if a woman is barren, and it is due to a sin, she must repent. Foolish keys and mikvas cannot correct an internal flaw. But if she is sinless, then medical help is warranted, not idolatrous rites...regardless of their incorporation of Torah objects. The Gilyon M'harsha (Yoreh Daah, 289) teaches that the mezuzah is of no protection and will be "knives in our eyes" if we assume it to be protective.

Today, the Jew believes it is not Teshuva that earns God's goodness, as God teaches. Today's Jew feels he or she can sin all they want, and with physical objects like mezuzas, mikvas and challa keys...they can overpower God's will for them.

This is not Judaism, but Pharaoh's idolatry. To all community leaders and Rabbis allowing this to continue, thank you for delaying Moshiach. ■

THE CURSE OF THE WISE COMES TRUE



RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM
& LEV MOSHE

Exodus 32:32, “And now, lift their sin, and if not, erase me please from Your book that You wrote.” (“Book” referring to the Torah)

Moses says this to God, attempting to obtain a pardon for the Jews’ Golden Calf sin. God responds to Moses, “Those who sinned against Me, I will erase from My book.” Is God disagreeing with Moses? It would appear that He is.

The Elders of Tosafos (Talmudic commentators) said that Moses made a bargain of sorts: “If you forgive me for breaking your tablets,

forgive them, for You are not one who is biased in judgment’. God responds: ‘Whoever sinned against Me will I erase. They caused you to sin Moses, and the sin of the Tablets is theirs (not yours). You acted properly, as they were not fit to receive the Tablets.’ Nonetheless, Moses’ name was erased from the entire Parsha of Tetzaveh, for [the name] ‘Moses’ is not found there. This was done because ‘the curse of the wise comes true, even if made on a condition.’”

Of course, we need to understand Moses’ equation between his breaking the Ten Commandments, and the Jews’ Golden Calf sin. But let us address the main idea: “The curse of the wise comes true, even if made on a condition.” Moses cursed himself, in suggesting his name be erased from the Torah if the Jews would not be forgiven. However, God seems to suggest that He will not uphold Moses’ wish of erasure, as he says, “the sin was the Jews’ as they caused you to sin Moses.” Our obvious question is, if that is so, and God says Moses did not sin, why then does God erase Moses name from the Torah, albeit the single Parsha of Tetzaveh?

God says this, “He who sins will I erase”, and God did in fact erase Moses’ name. How do we understand God’s contradictory words: on the one hand He indemnifies Moses, saying the Jews caused him to break the Tablets. On the other hand, He erases Moses’ name from Parshas Tetzaveh! I see only one possible answer: Moses’ name deserved erasure. I do not mean that Moses sinned; there may be another reason why his name must be obscured. I will elaborate shortly. For now, let us line up the questions:

- 1) What is meant by, “The curse of the wise comes true, even if made on a condition”?
- 2) Why was Moses’ name erased from Tetzaveh, as opposed to nay other Parsha?
- 3) Is it due to its coming immediately prior to the Parsha containing the Golden Calf?
- 4) What was Moses’ sin?
- 5) How does erasing his name address the issue?

Hold on to these questions. Let us further investigate our principle.

King David’s Curse

The Talmud cites another case where we apply an almost identical principle, “The curse of the wise comes true, even if made for free.” (Here it is made for “free”, while Moses’ curse was

made “conditionally.”) Talmud Makkos 11a records the episode when King David was digging out the Temple’s foundation, the sea threatened to flood the Earth. A metaphor. King David inquired if it was permissible to write God’s name on a chard to be tossed into the sea, so as to contain it. None answered him. He cursed with suffocation, anyone who knew an answer and remained silent. Achitophel then considered that since God’s name may be erased from the Sotah’s document to create marital harmony, certainly it could be erased in this case to save the world, and he instructed the King accordingly. King David did so, and all was saved. Nonetheless, later, when Achitophel saw his counsel to Avshalom was disregarded, he hung himself, dying precisely in line with King David’s curse of suffocation. (Samuel II, 17:23) The Talmud teaches that although Achitophel heeded King David’s threat, nonetheless, Achitophel seemingly died by the very curse of the king. We thereby support, “The curse of the wise comes true, even if made for free.” But what is this justice?

We must be careful. We have a tendency to evaluate a Talmudic portion, or any part of Torah, based on the first notion that pops up. We may think that King David possessed the ability to curse. After all, he was a king, and it appears on face value that his “curse” came true. But this is a superficial and false view of a curse, which is merely the opposite of a blessing. No man has the ability to alter nature or someone else’s free will or fate, merely by uttering words, as with a curse or a blessing. It is the ignorant reading of stories like these, which spreads fallacy.

Let us approach this Talmudic portion, as would a scholar. King David was human. He possessed no greater capabilities than any other person. So how may I understand that his “curse came true”? Look at all the facts in the story...one stands out. Achitophel did not readily assist the king, not until King David made a threat. Why would Achitophel remain silent at first? It must be based on some reluctance to assist the king. We see later on as well, Achitophel counseled Avshalom, King David’s son, on how to successfully rebel against his father the king. A picture begins to emerge...Achitophel harbored some animosity towards King David, and this explains why he counseled the King’s son on how to succeed over King David. David’s need to threaten Achitophel shows Achitophel in the same light – displaying Achitophel’s animosity in the form of silence.

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So let us explain the phenomenon: King David has no powers, yet Achitophel does in fact die the way the King cursed. How did this happen? The answer is, "observation." What do I mean? King David "observed" a negative trait in Achitophel. His "curse" that anyone who withholds information die, means that the king was pointing out that Achitophel possessed some negative trait, deserving of punishment. Again, all King David did, was "observe and identify a flaw" – what we mean by a "curse". But the king's words cannot cause Achitophel's death. We even see that Achitophel hung himself! It was not David! So why does the Talmud attribute it to King David? The Talmud is merely agreeing with the king. When it says, "The curse of the wise comes true, even if made for free" it teaches that when the "wise" say something, they are observing reality accurately. This is why the Talmudic principle only applies to the "wise". What they say – be it a curse or a blessing – is in fact an accurate observation, but it is not causative. Thus, King David observed that Achitophel possessed a flaw, which he knew would cause him his own downfall. King David did not 'cause' Achitophel's death; Achitophel hung himself. But his death is euphemistically ascribed to the king, as if to say the king was right.

King David said whomever remains "silent" will suffocate. Why suffocation? It makes sense. Achitophel sinned by his mouth (throat) and King David knew that this type of life must cause his downfall. King David knew that a counselor (Achitophel) whose tools are his throat and mouth, and who is also deviant, would eventually, when using his mouth, suffer by it. (Anyone who is deviant who also functions in a specific capacity the majority of the time, will find his end connected with that function.) King David may have assumed that Achitophel was too wise not to know this himself, and upon his own self-realization that he erred with his mouth, would kill himself in connection with it through hanging himself. Perhaps Achitophel suffered from a certain amount of guilt regarding using his counseling abilities for evil, to destroy King David. Perhaps his animosity towards the king was because of his role as king – a coveted position to say the least. Radak states that Achitophel hung himself because he knew Avshalom would not succeed without his advice. Thereby, the king would discover Achitophel as a rebel, and would seek to kill him. Achitophel therefore saw the writing on the wall and preempted the king's decree. We conclude that King David's curse was merely an observation of what was probably inevitable. He

knew that Achitophel's deviance used in counseling would bring him to his death. There is no causal relationship between man's words, and reality.

Moses' Curses

Now, how does this apply to our case of Moses and the Jews? Moses too cannot cause a change in nature or people, simply by uttering words. God alone controls the very natural laws exclusively under His guidance. God's laws were fixed before Moses or any prophet entered the world's stage, so how can they change what God already completed? They cannot! However, we are forced to reconcile God's statement that the Jews sinned, and the fact that God did in fact erase Moses' name, which appears to be a fulfillment of "Whomever sinned against Me I will erase." Moses' name required erasure...but why?

In Exodus 32:1, the people first demand to create a god (Golden Calf), as "Moses the man" who took us out of Egypt is gone. Moses...the "MAN"? Why the extra word? Of course he is a "man". But the Torah is offering a spotlight on the issue...and a direction to the answer. The Torah is pointing out the precise flaw: the people were overly attached to Moses, the "man". What does this mean? Look at what they did: they created a very physical, Golden Calf. Meaning, they became so attached to Moses' presence, they could not tolerate his absence for even a few hours longer than his scheduled descent from Sinai. They panicked, and immediately desired some physical icon to act as their head.

Perhaps Moses felt in some way, that he contributed to their Golden Calf sin. Perhaps he was not clear on his words about his return; or maybe something else led them to such an act. We even learn that it was through Moses' prayer – a change in himself – that God pardoned the Jews. Meaning, the fate of the Jews was bound to Moses' level of perfection. Evidently, Moses too realized his flaw. He asked specifically to be "erased", because he did not wish his flaw to act as a stumbling block for future generations. A righteous person, concerned with the welfare of future generations may use this logic so that his sins are not recorded. This explains Moses' specific request of "erasure". God replies, "Whomever sinned against Me, will I erase." It would seem that God agrees; Moses name had to be erased. God complied and erased Moses' name in one Parsha.

There may be another understanding. Perhaps the dialogue went as follows: "God, if you do not forgive the Jews, please erase my name so I do not act as a stumbling block to future generations." God replies, "Moses, I do not erase someone simply because they wish to shield others. That is not why I will erase someone. I erase someone who "sins against Me". It is for this type of sin alone that I erase someone."

Why Erasure?

Now that God erased Moses' name, we are taught that Moses sinned "against God" somehow. But a "sin" here does not mean a violation of some law, but that Moses – without guilt – was somehow connected to an error of the "people". God said, "The people caused you to break the Tablets". God thereby indemnified Moses of breaking the Tablets, but not of some other matter. If we are careful with our reading, we do see that God adds two unnecessary words... "whomever sins AGAINST ME..." This teaches an entirely new idea: God will erase someone who not only sins, but sins "against Him". Perhaps this means that if a man becomes too central, he is sinning against God...he "obscures God". We see the people had an attachment to Moses, to the point, that they could not tolerate his absence for a few hours. And God's response is perfect: He obscured Moses. When God says "I will erase he who sins against Me", God means to say that He will remove from the Torah, that person who sins against God, he being one whose actions counter the focus of God. Perhaps, somehow Moses' existence obscured the Jews' focus from God, onto himself. But not that Moses did so himself. It may have been the Jews' overestimation of his persona. It seems this is so, as they could not be without Moses for too long. But this does not mean it was the fault of Moses. God's use of the word "sin" may simply indicate Moses' somehow contributed to a negative state in the Jews. Similarly, Moses' grave was hidden from the Jews, so they could not outlet this sinful emotion after Moses dies.

We can resolve the contradiction found in the Elders of Tosafos: God indemnifies Moses of the Golden Calf sin. Yet, God erases Moses' name from one section, teaching that Moses somehow obscured God from the focus of the Jews, and therefore, the only remedy is to obscure Moses, allowing God to reemerge in "full view". This explains God's description of Moses as he who "sins against Me". But I do not mean a violation deserving of any punishment. Thus, Moses own self-curse took hold, as he

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was correct that one who “sins” must in some way not harm future generations. So inasmuch as God erased Moses’ name, He shielded future generations, as was Moses’ wish. So Moses’ curse, “even for free” (he really did not sin with the Calf) still took hold, and he was erased. Thus, erasure of Moses’ name is the correction required, as “name” represents one’s ‘identity’, and it was Moses’ very identity, which obscured God’s.

Moses, just like King David, observed a flaw, albeit in himself, but he did not bring anything upon himself through mere words. It is important that one understands clearly from these two accounts that man possesses no ability to curse or bless in the commonly misunderstood sense. Man’s true curses and blessings are mere observations about negatives or positives in others, respectively. When man curses someone, he is simply defining a negative trait, but his words cannot effectuate any change in reality. What a wise man does when he curses, and this is only an act of a wise man, is to unveil a poor character trait in another person. Perhaps the person will desire to abandon this flawed character. Similarly, when someone blesses another, all he is doing is describing a positive, which causes the person to cleave stronger to that positive trait.

We learn that God’s will is that man is not elevated above Him. Many Jewish communities today make such a fuss over Rebbes and their blessings. Certainly we have proved that man has no powers. But from our study in this area, it would appear that overindulgence in man, any man...even Moses, obscures our focus on God and must be avoided as well. Nothing may steal man’s attention away from God. This theory also explains why King David could not build the Temple: his popularity due to numerous, military victories would overshadow the Temple’s status as “God’s” Temple. There was nothing wrong with his bloodied hands, as he fought on behalf of God’s fame, not his own. But when the people exalted him for his “tens of thousands”, they bestowed fame upon King David, and this threatened to steal the focus away from God. This could not be tolerated. God gave the Temple’s construction to King David’s son...not as a penalty, but actually a deferred recognition of King David’s zeal.

Our last question: Why did God erase Moses name from Tetzaveh, as opposed to any other Parsha? Write in with your suggestions. Good Shabbos to all. ■



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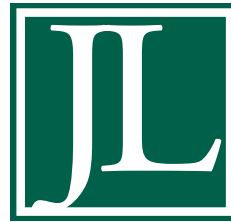


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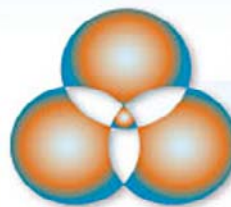
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