

DEMONS: ADOPTED BY EGYPT...AND LIKE THEIR
OTHER BELIEFS: NEVER SEEN. NEVER HEARD.



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Weekly Parsha

Yitro

RABBI BERNIE FOX

Yitro's Amazement with Hashem's Providence

Now I know that Hashem is greater than all of the gods. For it is in the manner that they acted wickedly He

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DEMONS

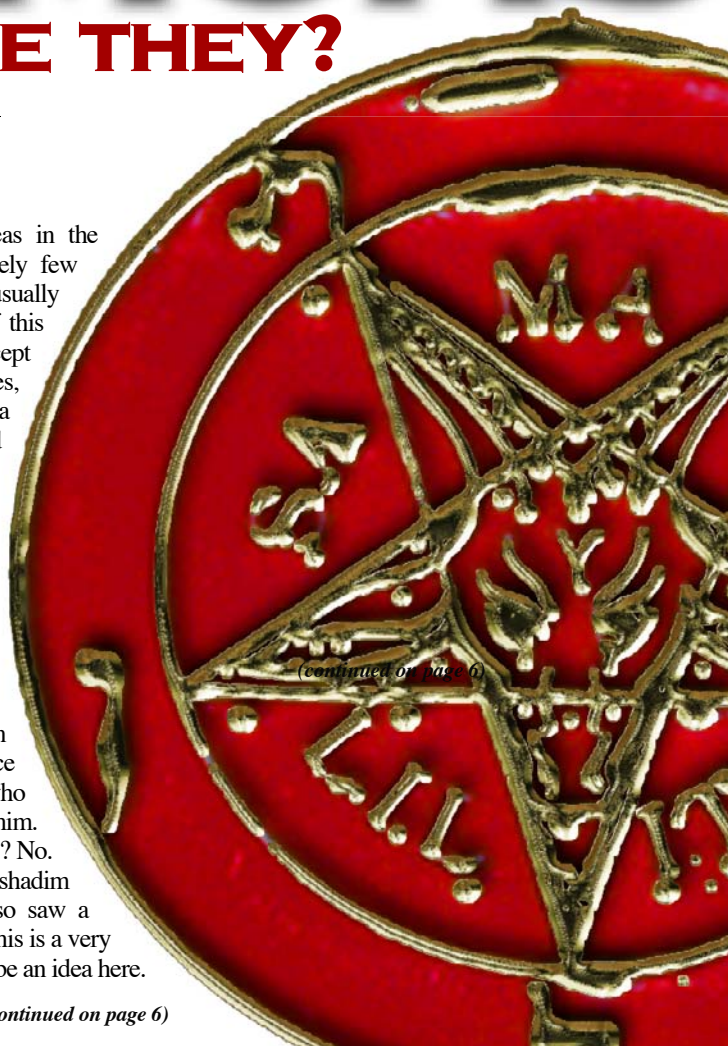
WHAT ARE THEY?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Compared to the thousands of ideas in the Babylonian Talmud, there are relatively few instances of the term "shadim", usually translated as "demons". Regardless of this infrequent appearance, the concept deserves elucidation. As in all cases, especially when one approaches an area where the Rabbis discuss unusual and almost impossible phenomena, a rational and objective approach must be maintained. If we look into the instances regarding shadim, we find that the Rabbis tell us not to give greetings to others, if we are in a field, or at night, lest he be a "shade". Other cases where one is warned also include pits, and mountain tops.

Additionally, a Talmudic portion (Gittin 66a) states that if one hears a voice calling from a pit, (telling anyone who hears) to divorce his wife, we listen to him. The gemora asks, "perhaps it is a shade? No. It is when you see a shadow. But the shadim also can have shadows? No. You also saw a shadow of a shadow." On the surface, this is a very strange gemara indeed. But there must be an idea here.

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Weekly Parsha

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punished them. (Shemot 18:11)

Yitro, Moshe's father-in-law, comes to meet Bnai Yisrael in the desert. Moshe tells Yitro of the miracles of the redemption. Yitro reacts with joy to the account. He sees the work of an all-powerful creator. In the above pasuk, Yitro notes the appropriateness of the punishment applied to the Egyptians. His comments seem to refer to the drowning of the Egyptians in the Reed Sea. The Egyptians had attempted to destroy Bnai Yisrael through drowning the male children. The Egyptians had met their end when the sea crashed down upon them.

Targum Unkelous offers an alternative translation to the pasuk. Unkelous explains that Yitro was impressed by a different aspect of the Egyptians' fate. Their punishment corresponded with and reflected the evil they had conspired to do to the Jews. Unkelous stresses a relationship between the punishment of the Egyptians and their plans—not their actual actions.

Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik Zt"l explained the meaning of Unkelous' translation through a story. Rav Yitzchak of Volozhin Zt"l was approached by a minister of the Czar. The minister asked Rav Yitzchak to explain the meaning of a pasuk from Tehillim. The pasuk states, "Glorify Hashem all peoples. Praise Him all nations. For His kindness to us is overwhelming." The Minister asked, "Why should the nations of the world praise G-d because of the kindness He shows to the Jewish people?"

Rav Yitzchak explained that the Jews have no knowledge of the ministries' various plots developed to undermine and persecute them. Therefore, the ministers who design these devious plans have the best opportunity to assess G-d's intervention on behalf of the Jews. The pasuk instructs those who seek to destroy the Jewish people to consider the outcome of their plans. This reflection should inspire the plotters to repent and recognize the greatness of the Creator.

This explains the meaning of Unkelous' translation. The Talmud in Tractate Sanhedrin teaches that Yitro was not always a friend of Bnai Yisrael. Before meeting Moshe, he had actually been one of Paroh's three principal advisors.[1] He was involved in designing the campaign against Bnai Yisrael. He had an intimate knowledge of Paroh's plans to harass and destroy the Bnai Yisrael. He

recognized the thoroughness of Hashem's justice. Hashem's judgment was not limited to punishing the evil actions of the Egyptians. The punishment extended to even the wicked conspiracies that were not successfully executed. This established, for Yitro, Hashem's omniscience and omnipotence.[2]

The Torah's Preference for Mediation of Disputes Rather than Judgment

And it was on the following day and Moshe sat to judge the nation. And the nation stood before Moshe from the morning until the evening (Shemot 18:13)

One of Moshe's responsibilities was to judge Bnai Yisrael. Legal disputes and questions regarding the law were brought to Moshe for resolution according to the principles of the Torah. Moshe executed this responsibility without assistance. Yitro, Moshe's father-in-law, concluded that Moshe's method of judging the nation was not efficient. He suggested that Moshe establish a system of judges. These judges would resolve simpler issues. Only the most difficult problems would be brought to Moshe. This suggestion was accepted and Yitro's system was instituted.



Our pasuk describes the scene Yitro encountered and that led him to recommend this system. Before Yitro's intervention, Moshe would begin his task of listening to people's cases and then judging them every morning. The various petitioners would wait to consult with Moshe. The process would continue throughout the day and into the evening.

Rashi quotes the comments of the Talmud in Tractate Shabbat. The Talmud explains that our passage should not be understood literally. Moshe did not actually spend the entire day executing his responsibilities as judge. Instead, the pasuk is alluding to the importance of justice. The message of the passage is that a judge may only require an hour to decide a case. However, if he decides a case in accordance with the truth, the mitzvah he fulfills is equal to studying the Torah the entire day. Furthermore, this judge is acting as Hashem's partner in Creation.[3] The Talmud's comments need some interpretation. Why does this specific mitzvah – judging according to the truth – elevate the judge into partnership with Hashem?

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The Torah tells us that Hashem commanded Adam to conquer the earth.[4] In other words, Hashem did not create the earth as a finished product. Instead, He charged humanity with the responsibility of creating civilization. The establishment of civilization completes Hashem's creation of the earth. In order for humanity to discharge this task, its members must live together in peace. Peace only exists in a society governed by justice. Therefore, the judge's efforts are crucial to the survival of society and the realization of Hashem's plan in Creation.

The Talmud, in Tractate Baba Metzhiah, makes an amazing statement. The Talmud explains that Yerushalayim was destroyed because its judges decided the law according to a strict interpretation of the Torah law and did not attempt to go beyond the letter of the law.[5]

These comments are difficult to understand. In Tractate Shabbat, the Talmud praises the judge who decides the law according to the truth. Presumably, this requires the judge to make his decisions according to the laws of the Torah. Yet, the statement of the Talmud in Tractate Baba Metzhiah clearly indicates that merely deciding the law according to the precepts of the Torah is insufficient. The judge must seek a solution that goes beyond the letter of the law. He must search for a solution that is consistent with some greater truth. What is this greater truth – beyond the requirements of the law – that the judge must seek?

There is a related question that we must consider. According to the Torah, a dispute between two litigants can be resolved in two ways: The judge can decide the case on the basis of din (law). Alternatively, the judge can offer p'sharah – a mediated resolution. Which method is preferable? Our Sages teach us that a judge should always encourage the litigants to seek a p'sharah.[6] However, this raises a question: What is the basis upon which the judge constructs the p'sharah? If the din indicates a specific outcome, how can p'sharah produce a decision different than the law? Certainly, the law is perfectly just. How can p'sharah produce an outcome superior to din?

Rav Yitzchak Arama Zt"l, in his commentary Akeydat Yitzchak, explores this issue. Akeydat Yitzchak explains that a system of laws is designed to deal with general issues. Laws indicate the response that is generally appropriate. However, because laws deal with basic realities, they cannot assure an appropriate outcome in every circumstance. This is not because of a flaw

in the legal system. This outcome is a consequence of the very nature of any system of rules. Consider the Torah's prohibition against stealing. It punishes all stealing equally. It must be admitted that some theft is motivated by simple greed and other thefts are the result of extreme desperation. The person violating the law out of greed is more evil than the unfortunate person compelled to steal because of unbearable poverty. Yet, the law treats both of the violators in the same manner. Both receive the same punishment. The unfortunate, desperate thief does not receive any leniency from the law. This is not because the law is unjust. The law is a system of general rules; it does not recognize the specific details and facets of every case.

Based on this concept, Akeydat Yitzchak explains the comments of the Talmud. A judge can seek tzedek – justice – or chesed – righteousness. A judge seeking tzedek decides each case according to the laws of the Torah. If he applies the laws accurately, he can be assured of producing a just outcome. However, the judge's strict adherence to Torah law cannot assure that good and evil will receive their appropriate recompense. This is because the laws of the Torah are created to apply to offenses without regard to unusual circumstances, motivations or intentions. They do not take into account every possible circumstance relevant to the case. The judge cannot be sure that his decision is consistent with chesed. Chesed is achieved when the decision corresponds to the specific circumstances of the case. This requires going beyond the law.[7]

We can now understand the role of p'sharah. P'sharah does not ignore the law. P'sharah recognizes the limits of any legal system. Through p'sharah, the judge attempts to adapt the general principles of law to the specific circumstances of the case. In short, p'sharah goes beyond the letter of the law. Its goal is to secure an outcome that is both just and appropriate to the specific case. The objective of p'sharah is chesed.

This principle is not limited to monetary disputes between two litigants. When a judge is determining if a practice is permissible or prohibited – *issur ve'heter* – this principle applies. In other words, in resolving questions concerning kashrut, Shabbat, or any mitzvah, a rabbi (rav) can approach the issue from two perspectives. He can seek tzedek or chesed.

How do these two approaches differ? When applying tzedek, a rav, after hearing the question, can respond to the petitioner that the practice is either prohibited or permitted according to the

law. His decision will embody tzedek. However, it may not represent chesed. A chesed decision requires more of the rav. He must consider the specifics of the case. After considering these specifics, it may be appropriate to seek a solution rather than simply render a decision. A solution does not ignore the law. A solution seeks to resolve the issue strictly within the framework of halacha. However, a solution suggests a means by which the action can be performed in a permissible manner. In other words, chesed sometimes requires the rav to respond, "What you want to do is prohibited. But here is a permissible way you can achieve your objective."

We can now understand the comments of the Talmud in Baba Metzhiah. Moshe did not simply decide cases on the basis of tzedek. In every case, he strove to achieve truth. This is the solution of chesed. The Talmud condemns judges who do not seek chesed but merely tzedek. According to the Talmud, this behavior contributed to the destruction of Yerushalayim.[8]

Conviction in the Existence of Hashem – the Creator

I am Hashem, your God, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. (Shemot 20:2)

This week's parasha includes the Decalogue. The above passage is the first pasuk of the Decalogue. According to Sefer HaChinuch, this passage is the source of the commandment to accept that Hashem exists. He explains that this commandment requires that we respond to any inquiry regarding our convictions with the reply that we wholeheartedly accept the existence of Hashem. He adds that we are required to relinquish our lives for the sake of this conviction. In other words, we must affirm our conviction in the existence of Hashem and that there is no other G-d. We are even required to sacrifice our lives in affirmation of this conviction.

Sefer HaChinuch adds that we should strive to establish clear proof of Hashem's existence. If we succeed in establishing such proof, then we have fulfilled the mitzvah at its highest level.[9] This is a troubling statement. It is understandable that complete fulfillment of the commandment requires basing our conviction on objective evidence. However, the implication of this statement is that even if we do not base our conviction on any evidence, the commandment has been fulfilled at least at a minimal standard.

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Weekly Parsha

This implication presents two problems: First, Sefer HaChinuch acknowledges that one's conviction in the existence of G-d is the most fundamental element of Torah Judaism. All other elements of the Torah are based on this conviction.[10] If this conviction is not based upon evidence, then one's entire adherence to the Torah and observance of the commandments is based upon solely subjective belief. Among the Torah's commandments are various mitzvot that presume that the Torah is true and that other faiths are not valid. For example, the Torah includes many commandments directed against idolatry. These commandments include directives to execute idolaters. If our conviction in the Torah is based upon a completely subjective set of beliefs, then these beliefs are no more credible than those of the idolater. The Torah describes Hashem as a just G-d. How can a just G-d command us to execute those whose subjective beliefs – although different from our subjective beliefs – are every bit as credible?

Second, the implication that conviction in Hashem's existence based on subjective belief is adequate contradicts the position outlined by Sefer HaChinuch in his introduction to his work. There, the author explains that one of the unique elements of the Torah is the Sinai revelation described in this week's parasha. The Torah was revealed by Hashem to the entire nation. All of the people heard Hashem address the nation. The objective of mass revelation was to establish a firm basis for future generations' acceptance of the authenticity of the Torah as a G-d-given creed.

The details of Sefer HaChinuch's argument are beyond the scope of this discussion, but it is sufficient for our purposes to summarize his thinking. Mass revelation endows the giving of the Torah with the standing of an objective historical event. In other words, the Torah's account of revelation as a mass-witnessed event is so fantastic that the very acceptance of this claim indicates that it cannot be reasonably assumed to be a fabrication. No generation would have agreed to be the first to accept this fantastic claim were it not part of its established historical record.

According to Sefer HaChinuch, the objective of the Sinai revelation was to create a firm, objective basis for the authenticity of the Torah as a G-d-given truth. It is odd that, according to Sefer HaChinuch, Hashem gave the Torah through the Sinai revelation to provide an objective basis for our conviction in its authenticity – yet a subjective belief in Hashem's existence is acceptable!

Let us consider another issue. Conviction in the existence of G-d is, in itself, a meaningless

requirement. Such a requirement lacks any description of the specifics of the required conviction. In other words, what is meant by "G-d"? Without a response to this question, the requirement is too vague to be meaningful. Sefer HaChinuch delineates three elements to the mitzvah: 1) We are required to accept the existence of a G-d Who is the source of all that exists; 2) This G-d is eternal; 3) This G-d redeemed us from Egypt and gave us the Torah.[11] These elements provide the specific details that give meaning to the requirement to accept the existence of Hashem.

Generally, Sefer HaChinuch adopts the position of Maimonides. However, there seems to be a disagreement between these authorities regarding the specifics of the meaning of acceptance of Hashem. In his Sefer HaMitzvot, Maimonides defines the commandment to accept the existence of G-d as a requirement to acknowledge there is a G-d Who is the cause of all that exists. [12] He does not include within the mitzvah a requirement to acknowledge Hashem as the G-d Who redeemed us from Egypt and gave us the Torah.[13]

Rabbaynu Yehudah HaLeyve also deals with the requirement to accept that Hashem exists. His position is very different from that of

Maimonides. He explains that we are required to accept the existence of a G-d Who redeemed us from Egypt and gave us the Torah. He does not include within this basic requirement that we accept Hashem as the creator. He explains that while the Torah requires that we accept the existence of Hashem, this requirement does not include acknowledgement that He is the creator. There is a compelling reason for the requirement's exclusion of this element. Proof of a G-d Who is creator of the universe can only be attained through philosophical and scientific investigation and speculation. These investigations – and any proofs they provide of a creator – are subject to debate and criticism. According to Rabbaynu Yehudah HaLeyve, the Torah does not wish to base acceptance of Hashem upon speculations and investigations that can be debated and are not accessible to the average person. Instead, the Torah instructs us to base our acceptance of Hashem upon historically credible, public events such as the revelation at Sinai.[14]

It is important to note that Rabbaynu Yehudah HaLeyve does not intend to imply that acceptance of Hashem as creator is not a fundamental element of the Torah. This would be a rejection of the opening chapters of the Torah. The position of

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Rabbaynu Yehudah HaLeyve is explained by Rabbaynu Nissim Gerondi in his commentary on the Torah. He explains that acceptance of Hashem as the creator of the universe is an essential element of the Torah. However, this is a truth we know through revelation. The requirement to accept Hashem focuses on accepting Him as our redeemer from Egypt and the giver of the Torah. Once we accept the Torah as a revealed truth, it follows that we must accept the contents of this revealed truth. An essential element of this revealed doctrine is that Hashem is creator.[15]

Rabbaynu Yehudah HaLeyve seems to present a compelling argument for his position. Why does Maimonides insist that the essential element of the mitzvah to accept Hashem is the recognition that He is creator? In order to answer this question, we must address an astounding oddity in Maimonides' Mishne Torah. Maimonides' Mishne Torah is a codification of Torah law. However, the third and fourth chapters of this work can be described as a brief summary of physics and astrophysics. Why is this material included in this work of Torah law? Furthermore, as an introduction to each section of this work, Maimonides provides a list of the commandments that will be described and explained in the section. Presumably, the material in the section that follows is an elaboration of these listed commandments. The first section of the Mishne Torah is preceded by such an introduction explaining that the section will deal with ten mitzvot. The list of these mitzvot includes acceptance of His existence and His unity. None of the mitzvot in this list seem to provide an imperative for instruction in and knowledge of physics or astrophysics. Under which of these commandments does Maimonides subsume his discussion of physics and astrophysics?

Maimonides deals with this issue in the final passages of the fourth chapter. He explains that this discussion is relevant to those mitzvot that require we accept Hashem's existence and unity, and that we adore and hold Him in awe. How is Maimonides' discussion of scientific matters relevant to these mitzvot?

According to Maimonides, acceptance of the existence of Hashem, His unity, and our adoration and awe of Him must be predicated upon an understanding of our universe and His centrality to all existence. We must understand the universe and His role as the source of all existence. It is not adequate to merely accept this assertion as true. We are required to understand the nature of the relationship between Hashem and the universe.

An analogy will help us understand Maimonides' position. As I record these thoughts I am using my computer. I know that my computer

is composed of a motherboard and various other circuitries. I have no idea how all these elements operate and work together. Yet, I know that these elements exist. I do not understand them nor do I have any appreciation of their operations. My acceptance of their existence is absolute; yet, my understanding of their nature and operation is negligible. Maimonides maintains that the requirement that we accept Hashem's existence cannot be fulfilled simply through acknowledging the fact He exists. This acceptance cannot be akin to my acceptance of the existence of a motherboard and circuitries in my computer. Instead, my acceptance of Hashem must be akin to the engineer's more fundamental comprehension of the computer. It must include an understanding and an appreciation of the nature of the universe and Hashem's role and relationship with reality.

This is the essential difference in the perspectives of Maimonides and Rabbaynu Yehudah HaLeyve. According to Rabbaynu Yehudah HaLeyve, we are required to accept as a revealed truth that Hashem is creator and that He sustains the universe. We are not required to understand or appreciate the full meaning of this assertion. Maimonides rejects this perspective. According to Maimonides, the mitzvah to accept Hashem requires our appreciation of His relationship to the universe and an understanding of His centrality to its existence. In other words, this commandment addresses our overall understanding of reality. We are required to unmask the nature of the universe and the reality in which we exist.

We are now prepared to understand Sefer HaChinuch's position. Sefer HaChinuch adopts a position that is a compromise between these two perspectives. He agrees with Rabbaynu Yehudah HaLeyve that the mitzvah to accept Hashem requires that we accept Him as our redeemer from Egypt and the giver of the Torah. He adopts this position for the reasons that he outlines in the introduction to his work. The Torah must be based on objective evidence. It cannot be reduced to a set of subjective beliefs. Mass revelation and public miracles experienced by our ancestors provide us with the objective basis for our conviction in Hashem's existence. We do not need to resort to scientific proof and philosophical speculation in order to fulfill this most basic commandment.

However, Sefer HaChinuch is not willing to reject Maimonides' perspective. Our acceptance of Hashem is not complete without acknowledgement of His role as creator and sustainer of the universe. Our acceptance of Hashem must include this element to be meaningful. Nonetheless, Sefer HaChinuch does not completely agree with Maimonides' position. He asserts that although

we should strive to achieve the level of understanding described by Maimonides, it is not essential to the minimal fulfillment of the mitzvah. However, an understanding of G-d in the manner explained by Maimonides is the highest fulfillment of the mitzvah.[16] ■

[1] Mesechet Sanhedrin 106a.

[2] Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik, Chidushai HaGRIZ on T'NaCH and Aggadah, Parshat Yitro.

[3] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 18:13.

[4] Sefer Beresheit 1:28.

[5] Mesechet Baba Metziah 30b.

[6] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Sanhedrin 22:4.

[7] Rav Yitzchak Arama, Akeydat Yitzchak on Sefer Shemot, Parshat Yitro.

[8] Rav Yitzchak Arama, Akeydat Yitzchak on Sefer Shemot, Parshat Yitro.

[9] Rav Aharon HaLeyve, Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 25.

[10] Rav Aharon HaLeyve, Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 25.

[11] Rav Aharon HaLeyve, Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 25.

[12] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Aseh 1

[13] Maimonides also does not include in this description of the mitzvah acceptance of Hashem as eternal. However, in the first chapter of his Mishne Torah, Maimonides elaborates on this mitzvah. There he explains that we are required to accept that Hashem is the cause of all that exists and that His existence is unique. His existence is more "absolute". This is apparently a reference to the eternity of His existence. In other words, it appears that according to Maimonides, this commandment requires us to accept that only Hashem's existence is "absolute" or necessary existence. All other things exist as a consequence of His existence and will.

[14] Rabbaynu Yehudah HaLeyve, Kuzari, part I, sections 11-25.

[15] Rabbaynu Nissim ben Reuven Gerondi (Ran), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 1:1.

[16] It should be noted that none of these authorities ascribe to the position that acceptance of Hashem and the Torah can be founded upon blind faith. To my knowledge, this popular position has no basis or antecedents in the writings of the classical authorities. These authorities were unwilling to equate the Torah to other religions that are based upon personal belief and subjective conviction. Instead, the introduction of blind faith as a basis for acceptance of the Torah seems to be a relatively modern development. Perhaps, this more modern perspective is influenced by modern, conventional theology and existential philosophy.



*When one is isolated, his desire
to be around civilization causes
him to project onto reality –
he will think he sees someone.
But it is all an illusion to satisfy
his fear, his loneliness. Thus,
what the Rabbis are telling us
not to offer greetings to is in fact
our 'psychological fantasies'.
Greeting that which is a mirage,
is crossing the line
from fantasy to reality.*

There are a number of questions:

1) Can it be taken literally that there are demons running around the earth? Have any of us ever seen one?

2) Why are we not admonished from greeting our friends in the city? Why is the warning only in the fields, pits, night time, and mountain tops? Are shadim unable to enter cities? This is truly odd.

3) What is the warning about? Will they harm us? If so, what's the difference if we greet them or not? Can they not harm us equally whether or not we greet them?

4) In Gittin 66a, how does a shadow prove that it is not a shade?

I believe the answer to all these questions can be approached by first looking at one peculiar bit of information - that is, the location where we are warned not to greet friends. All the cases, pits, fields, mountain tops, night time, are cases where one is in a situation of isolation to some degree. Either geographical isolation (mountain tops, pits/caves, or fields) or psychological isolation: at night.

What does isolation do to a person?

Man, a social creature by definition, fears isolation more than anything. This is why solitary confinement is the worst type of imprisonment. Isolation is even recognized by the Prophets as one of the worst situations, and requires one to 'bench gomel', (praising G-d for being saved) as we read in Psalms, 107:4, "They wandered in the wilderness, in the desolation of the path, they found no inhabited city." Not finding inhabitants is utterly distressing, to the point that King David made mention of it here in Psalms.

When one is isolated, his desire to be around civilization causes him to project onto reality - he will think he sees someone. But it is all an illusion to satisfy his fear, his loneliness. Thus, what the Rabbis are telling us not to offer greetings to is in fact our 'psychological fantasies'. Greeting that which is a mirage, is crossing the line from fantasy to reality, one of man's worst crimes. The Rabbis, knowing that these shadim are truly daydreams or illusions, enjoined us not to 'talk to them'. Talking to a mirage elevates fantasy to reality. There are so many areas of the Torah which deter man from living an illusory life, that the Rabbis saw it fit here too, to remove us from this behavior. Talking to

a phantom of the mind gives credence to it. The Torah desires that man abandon all that is false, "midvar skeker tirschak", "from falsehoods, keep distant".

This now explains why the gemara in Gittin said that if there was a shadow, then it is a real person, and you can divorce the wife of this person in the pit, although you do not see him clearly. When a person creates these illusion to comfort himself, that people are in fact around, he only creates the minimal information needed to convince himself of this. That is, either a form of the person's face, his height, his hair color, or something else distinct to the person he desires to be around. But what is not needed, is not created, such as a shadow. This offers the person's psyche no comfort, and is therefore not created by the fantasy. Therefore, if one sees a shadow, it most probably is a real person. The gemara goes on to suggest that even shadim have shadows. This means that in some cases, one will create a more defined illusion. This is possible, so the gemara adds that when there's a "shadow of a shadow", then for certain, it is not a shade. This means that a completely detailed illusions do not exist, and hence, it must be a real person one is seeing, and greetings are then permitted, and divorced allowed.

It now makes sense that shadim don't enter cities. Deciphered, this mashal (allegory) means that images of friends are not created when they are in reality near to us, as is found when we are in cities. Here, no need exists in our psyches to create illusions. At night however, when we are psychologically alone, or in fields, we will create images to comfort us.

In summary, shadim, according to the Rabbis, are created to satisfy real concerns, but they are fantasies created in our minds. As the Rabbis warned us, we should not cross over the correct path of life by treating fantasy as reality, even when we 'see' it. How much more so when we don't.

I would also mention the Rashi in parshas Noach, that Noach took two of every species, "even shadim" in to the ark. I believe this fits in well with our theory. Noach was now embarking on a state of isolation aboard the ark. Perhaps Rashi is intimating this aspect of isolation by suggesting euphemistically that Noach entered shadim into the ark. ■

Letters



Letters

from our

READERS



Demons

In response to an internet posting discussing "shadim" (demons) I wrote the author the following:

Rabbi: Perhaps you should inform your audience as to how the Rabbis viewed "demons". Talmud Gittin 66a states that shadim are only found in caves, mountain tops, deserts and at night. The Talmud says one must not offer greetings to shadim. The Rabbis are suggesting that places of isolation cause man to believe he sees others, as a means of comforting him from his loneliness. We know solitary confinement is the worst punishment, as the psyche of man finds loneliness most torturous.

Shadim are not in fact real creatures like men or beasts, but they are psychologically generated illusions, like mirages. When we are in dire need of something, we often imagine we see it. Therefore, the Rabbis instructed us not to treat illusions as reality, by offering greetings. We must not view shadim as real beings.

Author: A nice contemporary attempt to explain what shadim are, but without any sources from Rishonim or even Achronim. This does not fly with the simple mesorah of my Rebbeim that shadim are real beings, which are not as prevalent today as they once were, but are still here.

Rabbi: What do your Rebbeim say about shadim? What are their sources? What is their explanation of these gemaras?

Author: They are real, not imaginary. Not prevalent today as they were in the time of the gemara, but still around. From time to time tzaddikim are involved with shadim even today. Very rare. The sources are not at my fingertips now, but that is my mesorah. That they are real.

Rabbi: You rejected what I sent you as you stated, "without any sources from Rishonim or even Achronim...does not fly with the simple mesorah of my Rebbeim". Yet, in your current response, you do not produce the very Rishonim or even Achronim you requested from me. You fail to be consistent in your reasoning.

Author: I know the Torah that I have learnt for the last 40 years and it is not what you presented to me. That is a new idea that I have never heard before. I do not reject it as being incorrect or unacceptable. Only as unknown to me, and unacceptable to me without a source. On the other hand, what I know as correct pshat in Shadim for 40 years does not require, for me, to have the sources used by my rabbeim at my fingertips. It is well known that the Rambam disagreed with most other Rishonim in pshat in all gemara's about Shadim. But most others held that the simple understanding is that there are beings in the world called shadim and that it is not imagination. There may be an acceptable source that says that the Rambam held that shadim is imaginative. I have just never heard that before. I do not discount it as being possible though.

Rabbi: I applaud your open-mindedness...it's actually refreshing. Most people will not consider that their opinions might be incorrect. I feel this is due to a view of their Rabbis as infallible. However, we know that all men err, even Moshe Rabbeinu. So we must not hold our Rabbi's teachings are infallible, especially when reason suggests otherwise.

Rabbi Bachaya – author of "Duties of the Heart" – teaches this important lesson, "Whoever has the intellectual capacity to verify what he receives from tradition [from the Rabbis], and yet is prevented from doing so by his own laziness, or because he takes lightly God's commandments and Torah, he will be punished for this and held accountable for negligence." (Feldheim, pg. 25)

Rabbi Bachaya says we must "verify" our Rabbi's teachings. That is to say that since our Rabbis can err, we must not rely on them as having correct ideas 100% of the time. But we must determine for ourselves. Only when we do so, are we truly using

our intelligence as God desires. Simple faith is not what God asks of us. Rather, God gave each person a critical faculty so we each might employ it to arrive at "convictions" in truths, not mere belief.

Now, you asked for a Rishonic source. See Leviticus 17:7 where Ibn Ezra says only fools see demons. He means they are not real, nor actually perceived by intelligent people. He further states that whoever believes in them, that beings other than God can perform good or bad...such a person "abandons God". This makes perfect sense. For if one believes any force (demons, etc.) to exist that can interfere with God's will by doing evil, then such a person has a flawed view of God. Such a person does not view God as the "exclusive" power in the universe. For this individual assumes that despite God's will that certain people should be unharmed, shadim exist and can harm them. If however shadim are under God's control, and cannot harm others without God's will...then of what use are shadim? God does what He knows is just "without" shadim! Either way, shadim are of no use and do not fit into a rational system of the universe.

I never came across any source that says forces exist outside of God. Such a notion is idolatrous. Nor does reason accept this notion, as I have explained.

Nonetheless, if you Rabbis say such a source exists that describes shadim as actual beings, please produce that source. But also consider that a source they might produce could very well be one of 1000s of Rabbinic metaphors, as King Solomon says the Rabbis write in riddles and metaphorically.

Please also consider this: you call shadim "real", and not imaginary. "Real" meaning, a real "what"? An animal?

An insect?

A ghost?

If we cannot substantiate what exactly we discuss, then accepting an unknown is equal to non-acceptance. For if I say a Xalamundot is "real" but I have no idea what a Xalamundot is, then my testimony of its reality is meaningless.

Finally, consider Ibn Ezra (Lev. 19:31): "...empty brained (people) state that were it not for the fact that conjurers and magic were actual truths, the Torah would not have prohibited it. But I say just the opposite of their words, for the Torah does not command against truth, only what is false, and the proof is the idols."

Ibn Ezra says that what Torah prohibits – including demons – must be false. God does not wish us to ignore truths, so when He wishes we avoid sacrificing to demons or assuming their existence as real beings, it is because they are false. Leviticus 17:7: "And you shall not continue anymore your sacrifices to seirim (demons) that you err after." ■

Letters

Demons Too?

Jessie: I was wondering if you can give me a rational explanation for this. Brachos 54b says that 3 need shmira (guarding): the sick person, the groom and the bride. The Braisa says a sick person, a woman who just gave birth, the groom, and the bride...and there are those who say even a mourner...and there are those who say even a talmid chochom, at night. (Rashi attributes the attacks to shadim)

I remember you explained the shadim as the internal forces or fears that a person has, and you explained that isolation or nighttime magnifies those psychological worries and causes a person to lose perspective. Does this idea apply here? And why the groom, and the bride (I believe Rashi says the shadim are jealous), and why a talmid chochom?

Thanks,
Jess

Rabbi: Yes, as reprinted in this issue, shadim are not actual beings, but demons of the mind. No one has ever seen shadim, let alone formed any description: are they black, white, tall, short, humanoid, animated, etc. Similar to UFO claims, no real McCoy has ever been seen. Furthermore, the claims are not that "I saw a shade, but that "I heard they are real" casting further doubt by this absence of any first-hand contact.

One type of shade or demon mentioned in the article are projections or illusions. Man needs company, and when alone for too long, he imagines others to be around him. These imaginary mirages are what the Rabbis term as "shadim". The Talmud you cite addresses another two types: demons in regards to 1) the sick, and 2) fortunate individuals (newlyweds and intellectuals).

Now, as the Talmud says these specific individuals require guarding, from what exactly must they be guarded? Rashi says these people need to be guarded from "mazikim", or "shadim". What are these "destroyers"? We can determine what these destroyers, or mazikim are, by examining the potential victims. Something in their specific makeup will offer us the answer.

Rashi says the sick person's "mazel" or natural course took a turn for the worse, as is true regarding the woman who gave birth, and also the mourner. In these cases, a destroyer is mentioned. Why? As sickness or grieving humbles and weakens man's confidence, he is apt to make poor choices and harm himself. In this case, the destroyer is the person himself. Thus, he or she requires guarding: since alone, such a person might self-inflict himself by poor choices and actions.

But the bride and groom require guarding...but for another reason: these individuals evoke

jealousy in others. In this case, the shadim in whom jealousy is evoked, refers to the public. This is the same idea as the "evil eye" where one is wise not to boast success, marriage or other fortunate happenings, lest he evoke jealousy in another and that other person consciously or subconsciously acts on it. Unconscious aggression is known, and takes on many forms, such as "accidentally" spilling a drink on someone we despise, or consciously speaking Lashon Hara, which can cause great harm.

We maintain our definition of a demon as a psychological phenomenon. In some cases, these phenomena are psychological forces in the victim himself, and at other times, demons refer to the psychological forces in others. Talmid Yoma 75a states that a demon can change into many colors (appearances). This is now easily explained as the ability for harmful emotions and psychological tendencies to take on many forms.

We can now go one step further and examine the structure of the Talmudic source you cited. The first individuals (newlyweds and the sick) embody both types of demons: demons in others (those singles jealous of newlyweds) and demons in ourselves (the sick). The Talmud cites additional victims: a new mother, a mourner and a Chocham at night. Why these additions?

We understand that due to illness, our fragility weakens our decisions. This is a passing "state" brought on by external causes, like disease. But we can also be thrust into states of mind where we are insecure and unfamiliar, like a new mother or a mourner, where our thoughts encounter uncharted areas, lose their footing, and our decisions are not well-calculated. These people have internal demons at work.

But the talmid chochom at night is a different type. His internal demon is the suppressed energies and fantasies which all men have. By day, the chochom suppresses and redirects his energies towards Torah, and he is safe. The depth of Torah taps all of his great energies. For it is the chocham who is so wise, due to the great energies he was gifted at birth, but channels properly as God commands. However, at night, removed from Torah...to where will all his energies flow? The answer is the instincts. He is at greater risk at night, than anyone else. For all others of lesser energies will not be confronted with such a change in psychological flow of energy. We learn that the greater the person, the greater are his errors. This means that as a great person only became great since he had the energies to follow through making him successful, those same energies can cause great sin since they are powerful and not as easy to control as a lesser person. So it is the chochom at night – and no one else – who requires guarding against his own natural and powerful energies. ■

Truth

Reader: How would you respond to my friend's following claim: "Not all knowledge comes from G-d, because then all knowledge would be objective. If someone has an opinion on something, that is a type of knowledge, and is obviously not objective. Because if all knowledge was objective, then there would be no arguments over it. The fact that people dispute these things shows that a person's knowledge can only be SUBJECTIVE!"

Rabbi: All "true" knowledge has God as its source...we simply "perceive" His truths. All false ideas (viz., idolatry) have man as its source. In this case, man fabricates notions. So I agree with your friend, but I would not say as he did, that "Not all knowledge comes from G-d". I would change the word "knowledge" in his statement to "notions". ■

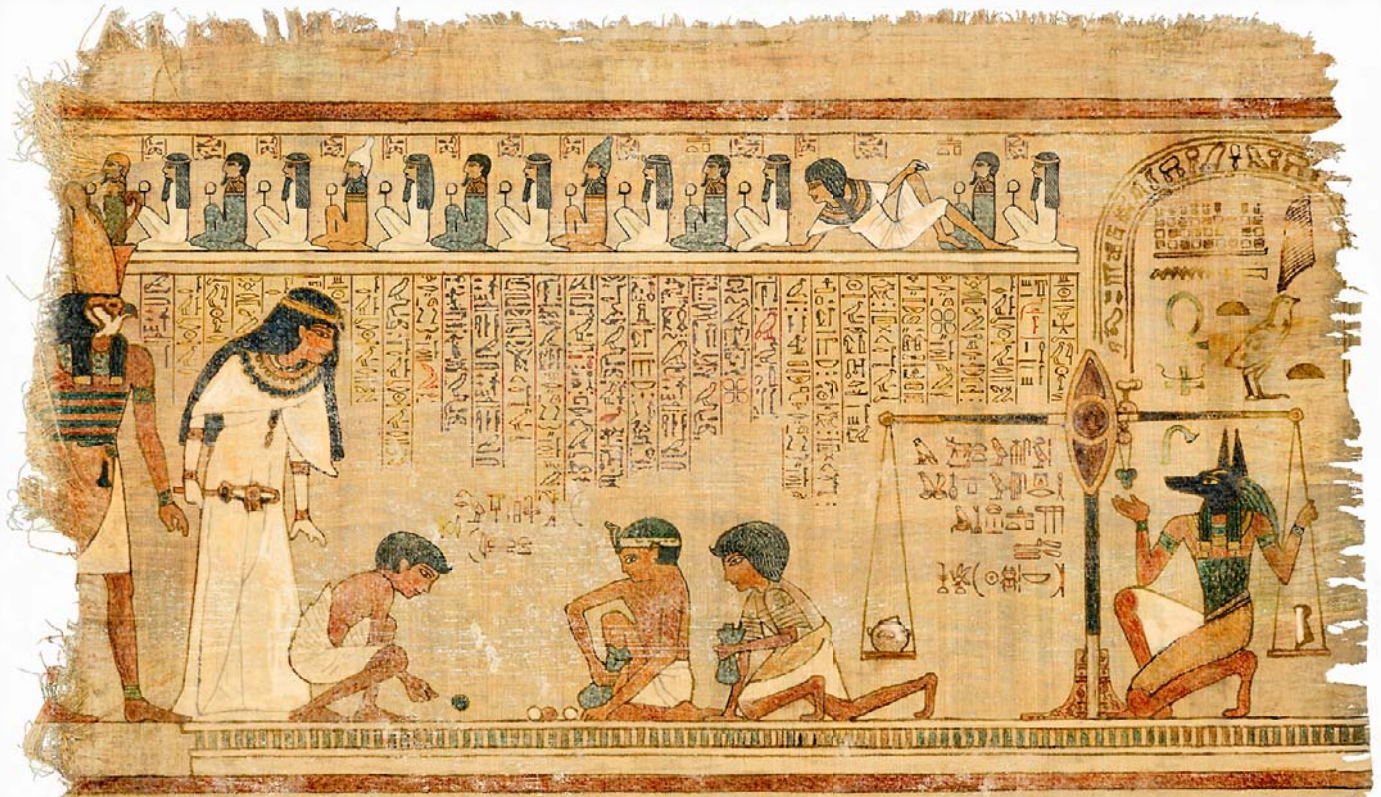
Hoax

Last week you ran a story lifted from the internet attempting to substantiate Pharaoh's chariots through photos. I wrote you that it was a hoax, and you did remove the story. I wish to allow others to appreciate that I said that Ron Wyatt's "discoveries" could never be confirmed nor peer reviewed in a proper manner. This was due for a number of reasons. Basically, there was nothing to verify. From the material that I managed to read, those experts that did look into the matter dismissed them as spurious and unsubstantiated.

One such case that he latched onto was the burial cave in which an ossuary was found purporting to be that of a brother of Jesus. Since then this case has been brought to court and dismissed as a clever forgery. The forgery was not by Wyatt but somebody else who has had a string of them laid at his door.

Additional reading: Almost all the material is available on the internet; both Wyatt's and his critics.

There are a good many people who over the years have made many outrageous claims and I suppose will continue to come to the Holy Land to do so for a variety of reasons. Most of them have an agenda of their own. Some are well-meaning but most are not. Almost all of these people do not have the proper training and experience nor do they have the approval of the Antiquities Authority to do such research on sites of their choosing. ■



Egyptian culture: built around death and demons. Believing Jews haven't abandoned its remnants.

All of God's commands are based on truth.

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Ibn Ezra says that what Torah prohibits – including demons – must be false. God does not wish us to ignore truths, so when He wishes we avoid sacrificing to demons or assuming their existence as real beings, it is because they are false. “And you shall not continue anymore your sacrifices to seirim (demons) that you err after.” (*Ibn Ezra: Leviticus 17:7*)

God says we “err” when believing in demons. Then let us all examine our other beliefs to determine where else we disobey God by following unproven matters.