

"Anyone who enters the world that his spirit moves him, and he understands from his wisdom to separate himself, to stand before God, to minister to Him, to serve Him, to know God, and he leads an upright life as God created him and he removes from his neck the yoke of the masses' calculations that men seek out – this man is sanctified, as most holy and it will be that God is his portion forever and eternally and he will merit in this world a portion that will sustain him, as do the priests and the Levites. Behold, as King David said, peace be upon him, 'God, You are my portion and my cup, You support my lot.'" (Maimonides, Hilchos Shmita v'Yovale 13:13)



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5771
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Weekly Parsha

Yitro

RABBI BERNIE FOX

Notes on the first statement of the Decalogue

I am Hashem your G-d Who took you out from the Land of Egypt, from the house of slaves. (Exod 20:2)

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Weekly Parsha

the Reality of Mitzvos

RABBI DR. DARRELL GINSBERG

As Bnai Yisrael encamped near Har Sinai, preparing for the seminal event of the receiving of the Torah, God explains to Moshe how, through the acceptance of the covenant of the Torah, Bnai Yisrael would become the "Kingdom of priests and a holy nation". Moshe passes this along to the nation, resulting in the famous proclamation that whatever God says they will do. The Torah then tells us that Moshe returned (vayashev) to God with their response. The Torah (Shemos 19:9) continues:

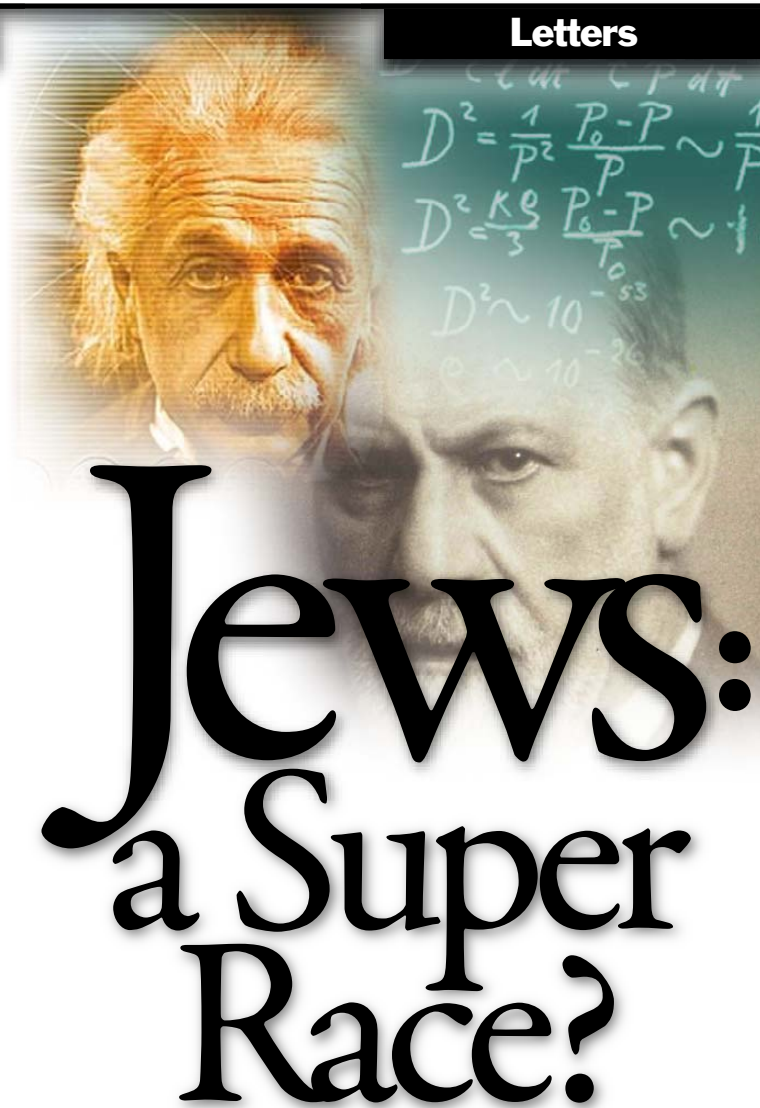
"God said to Moshe, 'Behold, I will come to you in a thick cloud, so that the people will hear when I speak to you, and they will also believe in you forever.' Moshe told God the words of the people."

What is strange about this pasuk is that Moshe does not seem to be conveying anything new!

The Talmud (Shabbos 87a) notes

(continued on page 4)

Letters



Jews: a Super Race?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Alberto: If you remember me, I run a Noahide study Group in Brazil. Learning together the Sefer Kuzari, we arrived at a critical point just in the first part of the book. Rabbi Judah Halevi presents the doctrine of Jewish superiority. He says that the born Jew receives the so called "overflow" of the Divine influence by simply being born Jew, and that comes by a choice

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(Yitro cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

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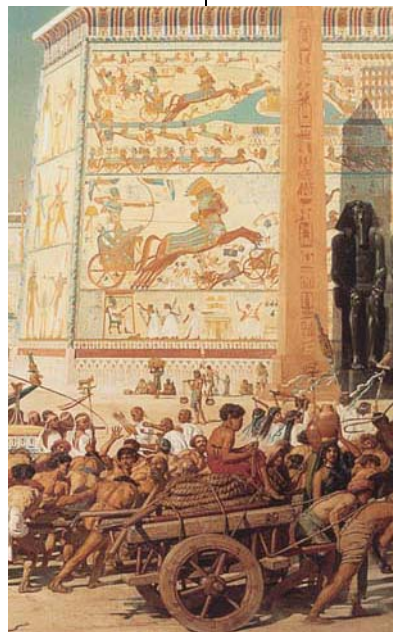
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1. The description of Hashem as Redeemer.

Parshat Yitro describes the communication of the Aseret HaDibrot – the Decalogue – to Bnai Yisrael. The first statement of Decalogue is contained in the above passage. In this statement, Hashem introduces Himself as the G-d Who redeemed the Bnai Yisrael from Egypt. Our Sages note that Hashem does not introduce Himself as Creator. Instead, He describes Himself as the redeemer of Bnai Yisrael. Why does He choose to refer to Himself in this manner? Rashi quotes the Midrash as explaining that Hashem was communicating that the redemption of the nation from Egypt was in-itself an adequate event to bind the nation in service to Hashem.[1] In other words, the message of the Hashem's statement is that because He redeemed the nation from Egypt, the nation owes its service to Him.

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik Zt"l explains that this first statement establishes the unique relationship between Hashem and Bnai Yisrael. This relationship was established or demonstrated through His rescue of the nation from oppression and the annihilation by the Egyptians. In this context – as a basis for the unique bond between Hashem and His nation – His role as Creator is not relevant. Acknowledgement and service to Hashem as Creator are responsibilities shared by all of humanity. He is the Creator of all human-kind. Redemption from Egypt provides a basis for service to Hashem that is unique to Bnai Yisrael.



2. The purpose of the first statement of the Decalogue.

Rav Soloveitchik's interpretation of the Midrash's comments provides an important insight into the purpose and objective of this first statement of the Decalogue. The objective of this statement is not to educate the nation regarding Hashem's nature or His relationship with the universe and reality. If this were the intention of the statement, then it would have indeed been appropriate for Hashem to introduce Himself as the Creator and Sovereign of the universe. This description provides a more fundamental under-

standing to Hashem's relationship to all that exists than reference to His redemption of Bnai Yisrael. Instead, the objective of this introduction is to establish a basis or to serve as a preamble to the commandments that will follow. Bnai Yisrael are poised to enter into an exclusive relationship with Hashem. This introduction explains the foundation, rational, and the ethical imperative that underlie this relationship. We are compelled to serve the One who redeemed us from certain annihilation in Egypt.[2]

3. Conflicting perceptions of Hashem.

Rashi continues his comments on the above passage. Again, drawing from the Midrash, he explains that there is an alternative explanation of

the passage. The nation had observed Hashem at the Reed Sea as a young warrior vanquishing His enemies. Now, at Sinai, they see Him as a compassionate elder. These vastly different perceptions seem irreconcilable and suggest that the nation has witnessed the acts of two different deities – that the deity that had ruthlessly destroyed the Egyptians could not possibly be the same as the deity of Sinai. Hashem addressed this notion by responding, "I am Hashem your G-d that took you out to Egypt..." One deity destroyed Egypt and now, presents Himself at Sinai.

Rashi's comments from the Midrash present two challenges. First, it is clear from the Midrash that Bnai Yisrael believed that one god could not be responsible for both the destruction of Egypt and the Revelation at Sinai. Wherein lies the contradiction in these two perceptions of Hashem? Second, the Midrash seems to attribute a message to the statement that is not readily evident from the statement. What evidence does the Midrash find in the passage to support its interpretation?

Rav Soloveitchik explains that the Midrash is noting that the perception of Hashem's nature that emerged from the destruction of the Egyptians at the Reed Sea was that He is a G-d of vengeance. He destroyed the idolatrous Egyptians who had persecuted His nation. He showed

(continued on next page)

no compassion for His enemies and granted them no mercy. The G-d revealed in the Decalogue was very different from this vengeful deity. He instructed His servant to treat each other with justice. He taught them to control their passions and not needlessly harm others. Hashem's servants must control their passions. They may not even covet another's possessions. These two perceptions seemed contradictory to Bnai Yisrael. It seemed that two different deities had revealed themselves – one a mighty god of wrath and vengeance, the other a god of love and compassion. At Sinai, Hashem responded: I am One. The G-d revealed at Sinai is the self-same G-d Who revealed Himself at the Reed Sea.

What evidence of this message did the Midrash find in the passage? Rav Soloveitchik explain that the Midrash is based upon the very first word of the passage. In the Hebrew language there are two words that can be used to communicate "I" – the first person. Most commonly the word *ani* is used. Occasionally, the word *anochi* is employed. What is the difference between these two words? Generally, the term *anochi* is used when the speaker wishes to emphasize himself as the subject. Often, he is identifying himself in distinction from others. *Anochi* means "I" in a specific sense and in distinction from anyone else. A few examples will illustrate one manner in which the Torah employs the word *anochi*:

- Hashem asked Kayin where his brother Hevel was. Kayin responded "Am I my brother's guardian?" Kayin was responding that Hevel's welfare was not his responsibility. He was saying, "Why ask me?" In this context the Torah uses the word *anochi*. Kayin was protesting his appointment as Hevel's guardian. He was protesting, "Why me more than someone else?"

- Sarah gave her servant Hagar to Avraham as a wife. Hagar conceived and began to act towards Sarah with condescension. Sarah protested to Avraham. She said, "I placed my servant at your chest. She saw that she had conceived and I became inconsequential in her eyes." Sarah was emphasizing the unjust irony of her situation. She was the one – no one else – who gave Hagar to Avraham and now, she was suffering from Hagar's attitude of superiority. Again, in this context the term *anochi* is appropriate.

- Yaakov appeared before his father Yitzchak disguised as his brother Esav. Yitzchak asked him to identify himself. He responded "I am Esav your first born." His was telling his father that he is the real Esav. In other words he was saying, "I – and I alone – am Esav. Again, the appropriate term is employed – *anochi*."



The Tablets were rectangular, sapphire bricks

In the first statement of the Decalogue, Hashem says, "I – *Anochi* – am Hashem your G-d Who brought you out of Egypt. The use of the word *anochi* indicates that Hashem is saying, "I Who speaks to you now at Sinai am the same G-d that appeared to you at the Reed Sea." Hashem is telling the nation that the G-d of Sinai is the self-same G-d that annihilated the Egyptians. Now, the Midrash's understanding of the passage is easily grasped. Hashem is telling the people that one G-d redeemed them from Egypt and now is delivering to them the gift of Torah. This statement must have been necessitated by the nation's confusion stemming from their varied perceptions of Hashem. Hashem responds that He is One even though He is perceived differently in different situations.[3] ■

Footnotes:

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 20:2.

[2] Maimonides explains in his Sefer HaMitzvot that this passage is one of the 613 commandments of the Torah. He describes the commandment as recognition of Hashem as Cause of all existence. Others disagree and do not regard this statement as a commandment. Nachmanides, in his glosses to Sefer HaMitzvot, explains that those who dispute Maimonides' position, regard the statement as introductory to the commandments. Hashem introduces Himself to the nation. Once the nation accepts Him as Sovereign, then He will legislate the commandments. This dispute between Maimonides and his opponents can be readily understood based upon the above discussion. Maimonides opponents regard the statement as a rational or the basis for a moral imperative to serve Hashem. We must serve Him because He saved us. Maimonides disagrees. He regards the statement as an intellectual lesson. Hashem is providing the nation with the most profound understanding of the universe that humanity can achieve. Hashem is its Cause. He gives the universe its existence every moment. Maimonides regards the acknowledgement of Hashem's relationship with the universe and His centrality to its existence as a commandment. It is not a preamble to commandments or a rational for them. Instead, the statement is a profound and fundamental teaching that shapes the Jew's perceptions of the universe that surrounds him.

Of course, Maimonides' position seems suspect. Why did Hashem not describe Himself as Creator? Why did He refer to Himself as the Redeemer of the nation if His intent was to impart the profound understanding of Hashem and the universe that Maimonides attributes to this statement? Nachamanides actually addresses this issue in his commentary on the Torah at the end of Parshat Bo. He explains that the redemption of Bnai Yisrael from Egypt through unprecedented miracles that contravened the laws of nature and the natural order demonstrated Hashem's omnipotence and sovereignty over the universe. This omnipotence can only be attributed to the Creator. In other words, it was impossible for the generation that stood at Sinai to have first-hand knowledge of creation – an event in antiquity. However, the miracles of Egypt provided first-hand proof – proof the generation witnessed – that Hashem was Creator. (Shemot 13:16).

[3] Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, Recorded Lecture on Aseret HaDibrot, part 1, 1969.

this problem, and then expands the question:

"And Moses reported the words of the people unto the Lord; and it is written, And Moses told the words of the people unto the Lord. Now, what did the Holy One, Blessed be He, say unto Moses, what did Moses say unto Israel, what did Israel say to Moses, and what did Moses report before the Omnipotent?"

The Talmud, after first offering the possibility of the mitzvah of hagbala being related, offers the following:

"Rebbe said: At first he explained the penalties [for non-observance], for it is written, 'And Moses reported [va-yashev]', [which implies] things which repel [meshabbebin] one's mind. But subsequently he explained its reward, for it is said, 'And Moses told [va-yagged]', [which means,] words which draw one's heart like an aggadah."

Clearly, what troubles the Talmud is the entire exchange between God, Moshe and Bnai Yisrael. Why was it important to relate this information to Bnai Yisrael at this point? What effect was it supposed to have on Bnai Yisrael? What were they to understand?

In order to understand the purpose of the information, it's important to recognize that at this point, Bnai Yisrael were not Jews, at least not in the way we think of a Jew. They did not have a Torah. The Divine system was not yet bestowed upon them. As such, they were no different from a ger, who must start at the very beginning.

The Rambam (Hilchos Issurei Biah, 14:2-3), in his review of the different halachos regarding the process of conversion, writes that after explaining the concept of Yichud Hashem to the aspiring Jew, and then reviewing a few of the different mitzvos, the ger is presented with the following:

"...and he is informed of the punishment for the mitzvos. How? They say to him 'Do you know that until you came to this religion if you ate forbidden fats, you would receive kares (spiritual excommunication)? If you violated Shabbos, would you receive the punishment of sekila (stoning)? And now that you are converting, if you eat forbidden fats, you will receive kares, and if you violate Shabbos, you will receive the ganav punishment of sekila'..."

In the following halacha, he explains that the ger must be informed of the reward of the mitzvos as well, and that the performance of the mitzvos entitles him to a chelek olam haba, the reward of the afterlife. Finally, he writes that a true tzadik is a chacham who performs the mitzvos and knows them.

Why is it necessary to relate the punishments and rewards to the ger? Why does the Rambam use the examples of chelev and Shabbos? Why would the ger presume he might be liable for eating chelev or violating Shabbos? And what does he mean about the definition of the tzadik?



Looking at the order the Rambam lists, one can see a progression taking place. First of all, the ger must understand philosophically what separates Judaism from all other religions- Yichud Hashem. The most fundamental core of our entire ideology is this one idea, and this must be understood first and foremost. Along with this comes the antithesis of this idea, that of idolatry. Once a person understands this, he is then introduced to a few of the mitzvos, so he sees that there is a system of laws that govern this religion. The ger is then told about the punishments and rewards associated with the mitzvos. After a person has learned a little about the mitzvos, he comprehends that being a Jew obviously involves following a set of guidelines. But this does not set Judaism apart--every religion and society has a set of rules to abide by. Civilizations revolve around social contracts, replete with rewards and punishments. A person naturally intuits the need for punishment for actions such as stealing and murder. Yet the Torah, the covenant being entered into by the ger, is different. If a person was told he would suffer complete religious excommunication for eating a piece of fat, or suffer death by stoning for burning an object on the seventh day of the week, he would be aghast at such a proposition. There is no empirical reality to these violations, and yet one suffers the ultimate spiritual and physical fate. The rewards are identical. Most people assume that the practice of religion should result in physical rewards -- wealth and success, for example. Yet in Judaism, the reward for the performance of a mitzva has nothing to do with the physical world. Both the punishment and reward are tied into the philosophical realm. These are more than rules. The mitzvos are a means to perfection, allowing man to live in line

with his tzelem elokim. In this context, the ger is taught that indeed one could lose his life for giving in to his instinctual desires, or die for violating the day set aside in the study of God. The ger must understand that the core of the Torah is redefining the physical world into a gateway to perfection. The Rambam chooses chelev and Shabbos precisely because they have no empirical expression in the physical world; they epitomize the category of abstract halacha. Therefore, to the Jew, it is no longer a piece of fat--it is chelev. And it is no longer another day--it is Shabbos. And the benefits? The performance of mitzvos enhances the mind and perfects the soul, allowing for a greater level of Yediya Hashem. The promise of olam haba, a "place" whose only benefit lies in the philosophical, sets Judaism apart. Finally, the Rambam explains that the ger must know that it is not the rudimentary action that brings the person to this level, but the comprehension and understanding of the idea that allows him to soar to new heights.

Bnai Yisrael were gerim as well, a nation ready to accept this new system of Torah. Up to this point, they understood the concept of Yichud Hashem (Shemos 3:14), and were already introduced to some of the mitzvos (by Marah). After God speaks to Moshe, and the information is relayed to them, they could easily conclude that the covenant being proposed was simply a guide, a set of laws to help advise them on how to act properly. God has Moshe explain that this religion is completely different. They first are taught that there are punishments tied into a philosophical state of mind, a revolutionary idea that counters a person's natural outlook on life. This is the "repelling of the mind" described by the Talmud, a complete intellectual upheaval, a concept completely foreign to one's being. To the merit of Bnai Yisrael, they accept this concept. Now, being in this state of mind, God has Moshe explain the rewards. Why does the Talmud use the example of that which "draws one's heart to an aggadah"? When one first approaches an aggada, he usually sees a strange, fantastical story or event that defies logic. Through careful analysis and thought, one can unravel the mystery behind the strange facade, possibly revealing a tremendous yesod. The benefit of this is purely abstract, the enjoyment tied into an intellectual satisfaction. There are no award ceremonies, no cash prizes--"just" an increase in knowledge and perfection. The aggada is a microcosm of the overall approach one must have to the reward of the mitzvos. Bnai Yisrael came to understand, and so too we must understand, that the reward for the proper performance of the mitzvos is tied into a philosophical good, and the enjoyment one gets in these actions lies in the ability to see the infinite chachma of God unfold. ■

of God before the person actually born. And this allows him to achieve elevated spiritual realms, like prophecy. But even if he does not behave accordingly, not receiving it, the "seed" of superiority is still in the Jew so any future descendant of him may become great, being his descendant, citing the case of Terach father of Abraham, in whom Terach this "seed" was hidden, but yet was transferred to Abraham.

Rabbi: This cannot be a correct view of prophecy, as Abraham, Hagar and other gentiles received prophecy. You also cite a theory of a Jewish "seed" that travels through a lineage. Perhaps God desires to ensure each generation has good leaders, and He does so through lineage, as this offers the descendants the identity with their perfected ancestors; an inspiration that although guided by God, still requires free will. It is difficult to discuss how God acts, unless He teaches us in His Torah. Rabbi Judah Halevi may have reasons for his theory we do not recognize, but you will see that this theory does not contradict reason, or God's true plan of human equality. Planting good leaders within a single family line is a gift to each generation, and in no way indicates that others cannot perfect themselves too.

Human perfection is not reserved for the Jew alone. The Jew's distinction – not superiority – is his "designation", not his human or spiritual design. This is what Rabbi Judah Halevi means. If it were otherwise, this would mean God dooms the gentile to a lesser existence than the Jew. And if this were so, how does God demand many times in the Torah, that the gentile who converts must observe the "same Torah" as the Jew? If a gentile is lesser, he cannot fulfill God's command. And that would be an injustice, which God does not perform. Therefore, the gentile must have the same potential for perfection as the Jew.

The "overflow" of God's providence towards the Jewish nation is precisely so the Jews might educate gentiles. God does not care less for gentiles. As He created us all, He is concerned for us all. In fact, the paragraphs of the Kuzari you cited explains that those who enjoyed God's providence, were gentiles! Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the twelve tribes...all gentiles. The Jew did not yet exist. And these gentile monotheists received prophecy, thereby rejecting the idea of a "superior" Jew. For what Jew today is a prophet? Thus, former gentiles have surpassed us.

God directed His providence over a the Jewish people, or rather, Abraham's descendants. He wished Abraham's monotheism to spread. Without a doubt, the Jewish "nation" is different than all others, as Rabbi Judah Halevi states. However, this does not mean that a sinful Jewish

"individual" retains such providence, or that a gentile can never share in the nation's good fortune. And even when Rabbi Judah Halevi says that a convert is not quite equal to a Jew, this is not in terms of his potential for perfection. This means that certain, few laws limit the convert's role in Jewish society, such as restrictions on leadership. But he can reach complete perfection, as Ruth and countless others demonstrated. And these leadership restrictions are no reflection on the gentile. Perhaps this indicates the inferiority of "people" (Jews) whose imperfect natures would be less accepting of a convert for a king. Certain laws are concessions, not God's preferences. These include the female captive.

God's specific providence over the Jewish nation alone is not a "favoritism" for the Jew. God established one nation to serve as a proof of the good man receives when obedient, and the severe punishment when we violate God's word. No other nation experienced our rises and falls. We are an example for the world. This means God cares about the entire world, using the Jew as the example. God set up Abraham as an "av hammon goyim", a leader of peoples, and direct all mankind towards God's ways. (Gen. 17:5) Thus, God desires the good for "all" people. God also asks we observe His laws, as the performance will be our "wisdom and understanding in the eyes of all people" who will respond, "What a wise, understanding great nation this is!" (Deut. 4:6) Why does God desire this response from other nations, unless due to His concern for their perfection? And this must mean that other nations can be imbued by Torah's perfecting laws, just like the Jew.

We all descend from one couple, Adam and Eve. Therefore, we all share the same design. There is no inherent difference between Jew and gentile. Ruth decided to convert. She had no Jewish ancestry. Yet she was superior to many Jews. Her superiority was based on her intelligence. Boaz preferred Ruth over a Jewish woman. Her descendants became our kings, beloved by God. And the Messiah too descends from Ruth – the convert.

Alberto: The non Jew does not have this opportunity, even if he or she behaves in righteous way. Rabbi Judah Halevi says in questions 31 to 43, as is established in nature, plants have a lesser soul than animals, and animals have lesser or inferior souls compared to humans. I wonder if this was the way of thinking of the Ramchal. Accordingly, the Jews should be a kind of super-human class, as is proved by the miracles that occurred to Moses (being without food for 40 days, walking in fire inside Sinai and others

miracles) and to the Israelites in the desert. This should be considered as example to the inherently spiritual superiority of all Jews. I wish to mention that I could re-interpret everything here on my own way looking for rational understanding of the text. But I think this is not fair to the author if he did not mean it.

Rabbi: Again, God offered miracles and prophecies for non-Jews, like Hagar. The point here is incorrect. It is not one's birth that determines his status, but death. We stated last week that Abraham was not a Jew, yet God loved him over all others. We learn that one's beginning is of no consequence, all that matters is what he/she makes of him or herself. "Better is the day of death than the day of birth". (Koheles 7:1) King Solomon says this since at birth, one has no merits. But at death, he or she has arrived at a life of perfection. This verse also applies to a Jew, thereby rejecting the notion that at birth, the Jew has any greater value. The Jew too must wait until death to have his soul assessed as being a value or not. And if he can ruin his soul, it is false to suggest his soul is "better".

Alberto: Latter on Rabbi Judah Halevi explains that God revealed His Torah to Israel and not to all humanity due to their inherent inferiority. He explains in questions 94, 95 and 102, 103 to mention just few examples, that this is established in Scripture since its very beginning, starting with Adam – the very work of God – who transmitted his superiority to Hevel something like genetically, and not to Cain, as proved by his behavior. After the assassination, we saw that Shet came into being and receiving from Adam the perfection at birth, and so on until Noah, Shem and Ever. From then the inherent perfection was transmitted to Abraham only. From him only to Itzchak and not Ishmael or others sons. And from Itzchak to Jacob only and not to Essav. Jacob was the first – according to Rabbi Judah Halevi – to transmit that inherent perfection to the 12 sons equally. That's why only the Children of Israel were chosen by God to receive the Torah. If a gentile chooses to join Israel, he or she will receive great reward for it, but still in an inferior state compared with the born Jew.

Rabbi: The fact that certain people like Cain did not perfect themselves rejects this concept of a superior "seed". And Talmud Avoda Zara opens with the medrash of God offering the Torah to other nations. Thus, they must have been equally capable of accepting it.

Alberto: My question then is obvious. Those works, called "Judaism's Classics" makes it clear

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(Super Race? continued from previous page)

Letters

that if it is so, then humanity is condemned to a lesser degree of spirituality, eternally trapped in this genetic, pre-condition, the very reason WHY they should keep ONLY the Seven Laws of Noah, because they can have no further perfection, the Goyim they are. What kind of Divine Justice is that?

Rabbi: But Maimonides teaches that any gentile wishing to follow additional laws may do so. The 7 Noahide laws are merely a minimum, not a limit. This teaches again that the gentile has the identical capacity as the Jew.

Alberto: I found that this doctrine is found not only in the Sefer Kuzari, but also other important works like those of the Ramchal (Sefer Derech Hashem – The Way of God – Chapter 4: paragraphs 03, 06, 07):

(3) God then scrutinized all mankind, perceiving the levels that should be made permanent in that generation, all possessing the qualities that were deemed appropriate to their root ancestor. The descendants of each of these individuals were thus divided into permanent groupings, each with its own characteristics and limitations. They were destined to father future generations who would inherit these characteristics, just as members of any particular species inherit the characteristics of their forebears.

According to the Highest Judgment, it turned out that none of them deserved to rise above the degraded level to which Adam and his children had fallen as a result of their sin. There was, however, one exception, and that was Abraham. He had succeeded in elevating himself, and as a result of his deeds was chosen by God. Abraham was therefore permanently made into a superior excellent tree, conforming to man's highest level. It was further provided that he would be able to produce branches possessing his characteristics. The world was then divided into seventy nations. All of them, however, remained on the level of man in his fallen state, while only Israel was in the elevated state.

(6) The decree, however, was not that the other nations should be destroyed. It only meant that they would have to remain on the lower level that we have discussed. These nations still have the human aspect, blemished though it may be, and God desired that they should at least have a counterpart of what actually appropriate for all mankind. He therefore granted them a Soul (neshama) somewhat like of the Jew, even though it is on a much lower level.

They were likewise given commandments through which they could attain both material and spiritual advantages appropriate to their nature. There are the seven commandments given to the children of Noah.

(7) In the World to come, however, there will be no nation other than Israel. The souls of righteous gentiles will be allowed to exist in the Future World, but only as an addition and attachment to Israel. They will therefore be secondary to the Jew, just as a garment is secondary to the one who wears it. All that they attain of the ultimate good will have to be attained in this manner, since by virtue of their nature they can receive no more.

It seems to me, Judaism preaches that only the Jews can have true relationship with God, because only they received via their ancestors the perfection needed for it, they are the sons of Abraham so only they can be recipient to God's "everything" (light, knowledge, wisdom, blessings, resurrection, etc). Non Jews can have only an ordinary relationship with God by means of an inferior "angel" who cares for them.

Explain for me please having such sources clearly speaking about Jewish inherent superiority above humanity, do we have any similar work of any sage that comes to teach just the opposite as clear as those works are? If we suppose they got it wrong, why their view were not corrected by anybody? I mean since the publisher to those Yeshivot or Batei Midrashot whom takes responsibility with the commentaries. Many Rabbis preach this idea in public in Israel (like Rabbi Amnon Yitzchak shlita) and no Beis Din, no Tribunal, rabbinic counsel or similar says that perhaps he is wrong on this regard or "is just his opinion". It seems more like this is always the faith of Israel as a People. Of course my reason rejects this idea. But does my reason have any other support than itself and these interpretations of the Tanach in the Jewish literature? I am forced to build my own, personal Judaism because the original is altered or maculated. Should I read only the Torah, choosing very carefully (according to what I think represents reason) those commentaries because many of them are not trustworthy as they should? And when they say something that appears to be "racism" or unfair, should I re-interpret it, closing my eye to the fact that in fact they said it? Because I see more and more hard to find works that corroborate with a rational approach of Judaism.

Quantity is not the issue here. But thinking about the Judaism throughout time, those thousand of communities and Synagogues around the World, and all their history, it surprises me that very few of them were not supremacists. And those supremacists are considered great authorities, among the Jewish People as a whole. Do you have a list of authors that you know for sure, that their works are free from such absurdities (if my judgment is right)?

Rabbi: Alberto, allow me to provide guidelines before addressing your last questions:

1) Rabbis are the first to admit that two opposing opinions cannot be correct. Either one, or both views are wrong. But both cannot be right. So when we hear opposing views on this subject of human equality, be ready to accept that one Rabbi is wrong. Do not allow reputations to blur your thinking; do not permit the silence on this issue throughout time to play any role. Be not impressed that certain books or writings exist. Such labors do not validate their content. Consider that your understanding of a given Rabbi might be flawed. And be prepared to accept that maybe this issue has already been addressed, not like you thought...but it was addressed in the prophets that you have not yet studied.

Finally, once you know a truth, do not allow any other consideration to compromise the golden rule: that which is true cannot change.

2) Understand that hierarchal order of importance of sources. Above all else and of 100% certainty are God's words. The verses located in Torah, Prophets and Writings alone are God's direct communications, which convey absolute truths, while works of men – even great Rabbis – can contain flaws. No man is perfect, not even Moses. He too made errors. Therefore, once an idea is proven as God's words, it is of no consequence that a great Rabbi might say the opposite. The Rabbi is wrong, and God is correct. This is so obvious, but in today's age, where deification of spiritual leaders and Rabbis runs rampant, we must reiterate this fundamental.

3) For Torah violations, God punishes Jew and gentile alike. Some violations meet with the loss of one's soul, like idolatry. Now, if we suggest that a Jew possesses a superior soul, of what practical difference is this, if he can sin to the point of losing his soul? The claim of a superior soul makes no practical difference. It is also a claim not found in Torah, but only in the imagination of those without knowledge, or those with arrogance.

4) God's Torah system possesses laws, ideals, principles, philosophies...and fundamentals that might permeate any of these categories. In God's system, it is a fundamental that man's action is what merits reward – not his birth status. If mere birth status is the reason for reward, God rewards the Jew for something he did not do! Meaning, his supposed "superior" nature is due to God's act of creation, not the Jew's decisions! And that which man does not do, cannot entitle him to reward.

If you can accept these fundamental guidelines as truths, you will find none of your questions

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(Super Race? continued from previous page)

Letters

remain. Using reason and God's Torah communications as the deciding factors and determinants of truth, we arrive at the clarity that God did not create Jew and gentile, but rather, one species of man. I repeat myself: God created one human pair: Adam and Eve. All others down to you and I descend from this couple. No one since Adam was created anew: no one possesses a different design or nature than any one else. No one is superior in design. Therefore, it is incorrect to suggest there exists different "types" of humans. Thus, Jew and gentile are identical in design. Where we differ is not in our biological, psychological or spiritual design, but in 1) our Torah obligations, and 2) God's providence over the Jewish nation. But we already explained this to be, since God wishes there to exist an example, "for all people". This must be clear to you: Jews were set apart as a means of educating humanity. To be set apart due to some "superiority" is impossible, since no Jew at birth has yet demonstrated any perfection or superiority.

Yes, Abraham was a unique individual, perhaps created that way at that moment, as God has mercy on every generation, and in his day, Abraham was gifted to mankind to act as a beacon. It is no coincidence that Moses too was created in his time. And the Messiah too will arrive at the proper time.

Torah sources disagree with Ramchal's implications that "other nations would have to remain on the lower level", (unless he means as suggested herein). That implication is an injustice, that God would prevent human perfection of any person.

The sources disagree with Rabbi Amnon Yitzchak, if he means that a gentile is inherently limited. Let the Torah sources alone defend Torah's true position. Follow guideline #2 above, that there is an order to what determines truth. Follow God's words as revealed through the prophets. One who is not a prophet is on a far lesser level. You must agree.

"In the World to come, however, there will be no nation other than Israel." This means that all other religions will be abandoned, as God will show Torah truths to all peoples on that day, as the Prophets forecast.

You write, "only the Jews can have true relationship with God, because only they received via their ancestors the perfection needed for it." I believe we have shown this as false, via the example of Ruth.

You asked, "Do we have any similar work of any sage that comes to teach just the opposite?" Yes, Maimonides teaches in a number of places the equality of all people. In addition to Hilchos

Melachim 10:10, see Laws of Shemita and Yovale 13:13. There, he states that any person of any gender who comes to the world; if he/she separates him/herself to worship God as he created them, that person becomes "Holy of Holies" and receives God's providence. He does not distinguish Jew from gentile, but in fact equates them by saying "any human".

You asked, "But does my reason have any other support than itself?" I feel you now see through the Torah's principles and many verses that equality exists for all people. Additionally, I have included in this week's JewishTimes issue an article on the fast-day Haftorah reading in Isaiah 55:6-56:8. I feel you will find here, additional proof.

Again, be not dismayed at the silence on this issue by any generation. If you question God's view, then study His words alone for the answer. All other considerations are of no concern. ■

Retraction

Rabbi: Last week I stated that the Hertz translation below was incorrect:

"20. And Jacob vowed a vow, saying: 'If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, 21. so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God, 22. and this stone which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee'." (Gen. 28:20 by Rabbi J.H.Hertz)

My intent was to reject the understanding that Jacob was striking a deal with God, as if Jacob will only accept God once the conditions are met. For this suggests that Jacob did not view God's promises of these very matters, as absolute truth. This reading is obviously false. However, my friend Yaakov suggested that Hertz's translation actually represents Ramban's commentary below:

"It is not a condition as in accord with Rashi's words, rather it is an oath. And its understanding is as follows: If I am returned to my father's house I will serve the One God in the selected land in the place of this stone that shall be God's house, and there I will give tithes." Meaning, once all conditions are met, God will be rendered a "God" to me, as I will now be able to worship Him.

Radak too explains Jacob's words as an oath to devote himself exclusively to God upon his safe return. ■

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Human Equality

All MEN are CREATED EQUAL

Part I

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

God created one human pair: Adam and Eve. Noah and all others down to you and I descend from this couple. No one since Noah was created anew: no one possesses a different design or nature than any one else. Therefore, it is incorrect to suggest there exists different types of humans. Thus, Jew and gentile are identical in design. Where we differ is not in our design or potential, but in our Torah obligations.

The Haftorah read on public fasts is Isaiah 55:6-56:8. My close friend Doug repeated a question that he heard concerning this portion: "Isaiah appears to suggest that a gentile must observe the Sabbath. While we know Sabbath observance is prohibited for gentiles, how do we understand this?" I would add that this portion indicates that without Sabbath observance and following all of Torah, the gentile will not share in the future good to be granted to the Jew. Is this so? And if it is, why isn't the gentile obligated in all of Torah? Is God playing favorites with the Jew, purposely excluding gentile from living the greatest possible life?

We discussed this one Sunday in class, but I subsequently reviewed this portion and observed additional points. Let's review the text, and then offer an explanation:

Chap. 55

"6. Seek God when He can be found; call Him when He is near. 7. Let the wicked person forsake his path and the man of sin [forsake] his thoughts and return to God and He will have mercy on him, [return] unto our God for He is abundant in forgiveness. 8. 'For My thoughts are not like your thoughts

and your ways are not like My ways', says God. 9. As the heaven as are higher than the land, so are My ways higher than yours and My thoughts from your thoughts. 10. For as the rain and snow descend from the heavens and to there [heaven] they do not return; rather they moisten the land giving birth and sprouting, giving seed to the planter and food to eat. 11. So will be the word that leaves My mouth, it will no return to Me empty: for it will do that which I desire, and it will be successful where I sent it. 12. For in joy you will go out and in peace you will arrive; the mountains and valleys will break forth before you in song and the trees of the field will clap hands. 13. In the place of the thorn bush a cypress will rise; and in the place of the nettle a myrtle will rise and this will be a monument to God, an eternal sign never to cease.

Chap. 56

1. Thus says God; observe justice and perform righteousness for My salvation is soon to come and My righteousness to be revealed. 2. Happy is the human who does this, and the son of Adam who seizes it; observing the Sabbath rather than profaning it and guarding his hand from doing all evil. 3. And let not the son of the stranger who attached himself to God say, 'God will surely separate me from His people and let not the barren one say 'Behold, I am a dry tree'. 4. For so says God to the barren who guard My Sabbaths and select which I desire and seize My covenant. 5. And I will give them a place and fame within My house and within My walls, better than sons and daughters and an eternal name I will give them that will never cease. 6. And the son of the stranger that attaches to God to serve Him and to love the name of God and to be to Him servants; all who observe the Sabbath instead of profaning it and seize My covenant. 7. And I will bring them to My holy mountain and I will gladden them in My house of prayer; their elevation offerings and peace offerings will find favor on My altar for My house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples. 8. The word of God, Who gathers the dispersed of Israel; 'I shall gather to him even more than those gathered to him'."

Our interest is to answer the questions above. Radak and others who understand the "son of the stranger" (56:3) to be Israelites, do not address here the distinction between Jew and Noahide. Rashi and Metsudas David understand "son of the stranger" to be the gentile. Following these two Rabbis let us proceed to understand these verses.

Isaiah's Message

We are first told to seek God when He is near and can be found. This is a call to Jews sinning in action and in thought, to return to God...to reestablish a relationship with Him. Repentance is thereby defined as not simply ceasing from sin, but reconnecting with God. The Rabbis teach that God is "found" only when we are earnest in our desire to draw close and do not practice Torah in a rote fashion. Alternatively, He is "found" during our judgment (Rosh Hashanna or before death). For in these times reality hits us most, and we are genuine. God is also found (He responds) and we can repent, only during life, for we are taught that after life we cannot repent.

But man has a hurdle: he feels that perhaps his sins are not worthy of forgiveness. Therefore God tells us that His ways are different than man's ways. For man will at times guard his hatred for others and never forgive. We project this onto God, but wrongly. God assures us that He is far above our ways and He fully forgives, recalling nothing of our sins, if we are sincere. His promise is secure: as the rains and snow never return upwards, but successfully descend and water the Earth. So too, God's word is fulfilled, assuring us success in our repentance. Not only success, but also God says we become "an eternal sign never to cease".

Isaiah then addresses gentiles. For they too have a chance at the same life as the Jew. A new address is made, "Thus says God..." (56:1) indicating the audience is now shifted from the previous Jews. God invites all to enjoy His "salvation" referring to the redemption. God clearly identifies this new audience of "humans" and "sons of Adam" to include all mankind. God teaches that true happiness is only achieved through the adherence to His entire system of 613 commands, termed as Sabbath and covenant.

So we answer the question above that while it is true that a Noahide is not permitted to observe the Sabbath, at the same time, his happiness and ultimate perfection relies on fulfilling all 613 commands. All will agree: with increased Torah observance comes increase perfection.

Jew and gentile are equal. Just as the wicked Jew must return, forsaking sinful acts and thoughts, and adhere to the 613 to enjoy "an eternal sign never to cease", so too a gentile is taught here to observe Sabbath and the covenant (i.e., all of Torah) if he too wishes the identical "an eternal name I will give them that will never cease". (56:5)

All Men are Created Equal

Of significance is the parallel: Isaiah exposes the same concern in the gentile as in the Jew: "God will surely separate me from His people". Meaning, as

(continued on next page)

Rashi states, the gentile feels he will not enjoy the reward of the Jew, "So why should I convert?" the gentile feels. (Rashi) Therefore God corrects the gentiles' false assumption as He corrected the Jews, promising the identical reward! "And I will give them a place and fame within My house and within My walls, better than sons and daughters and an eternal name I will give them that will never cease."

God concludes, "their [the gentile's] elevation offerings and peace offerings will find favor on My altar for My house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples. The word of God, Who gathers the dispersed of Israel; 'I shall gather to him even more than those gathered to him'". God refers to His house as a house of "all people", and further, He says he will gather to Him peoples, in addition to the Jews.

God created all members of mankind with the same potential. The only difference is that the Jew was not given the choice to observe the 613 commands, while the gentile has this option. As the gentiles' Noahide system is not a system of perfection, but an entitlement to his right to life, he must abide by a bare minimum of laws. But the 613 is a system that enables any man and woman to achieve complete perfection.

The gentile has the opportunity that equals that of the Jew. Both Jew and gentile require actions to ensure their identical reward; the Jew must forsake sin and follow his obligation of 613 commands, and the gentile too can select this life. These are the two addresses in this portion.

As a final thought, why is the Sabbath singled out, if the entire 613 commands must be followed? This is because Sabbath recalls Creation, and it is Creation that bestowed equality on all men and women, who God created as descendants of a single couple. Isaiah's words underscore a theme of human equality throughout all of these verses.

As this portion is read on public fasts, its intent is to assist in repentance, so we learn of God's appreciation of the hurdles blocking man's repentance, and how He assists our return to Him by assuaging our concerns: the same concerns shared by Jew and gentile, and assuring our success.

God's "equation" here of the Jew and the gentile is evidenced not only in the identical rewards enjoyed by both, but also in the identical concerns for the hurdles to repentance we both share, seeking to reestablish our relationship with God. ■

All MEN are CREATED EQUAL Part II

Reader: Ritual binds people together and gives cohesiveness. I have read many times that the rituals and prayers that every Jew is instructed in has bound them together for thousands of years. But Noahides are instructed to not create any rituals, and we don't have any. In my opinion, among the many reasons that Christianity has been successful is that it has a document (New Testament) that whether right or wrong, instructs them on who they are, what they should be doing, and how to do it. But the Noahides have nothing of this. Oh, sure, they may join in on the Jewish holidays, but there are no instructions to do so – it's just an option. Where is our instruction book for gentiles? To what has God held all people responsible for in times past when they could not read the Torah or did not have the Jewish people to tell them what the Oral Torah had to say?

When I as a gentile read the Torah, there are no instructions to me. Instead, I am left trying to figure out vague references and comments made to other gentiles in times past and am left wondering if that was an instruction to them, or just something they did because they chose to do it. Then I get to the section where God reveals and tells the people of Israel, sometimes in detail, what He wants them to be doing and how. But for the gentile – not much. There are no scriptures that direct the Noahide in what to do. I understand that the Torah is for all people (parts of it), but there is nothing that is for "us" – the Gentile God-fearers.

As a Christian, I had the New Testament which gave me instructions and something to hang on to. It gave me identity, ritual and a feeling of connection not only to God, but to the people around me that bore the same name. What opened my eyes was questioning the authority of the NT. Now that I do not recognize it as an authority and guide to my

life – what do I replace it with? The Torah? But it does not instruct me directly, only in a vague manner. There is a quote from the book "The Hobbit" in which the main character (Bilbo) is lost in a mountain and states in a moment of despair, "I have lost my dwarves, my wizard, and my way" – that is how I feel. I have lost my guides, what I viewed as authority in my life, and my way. I find myself now with no real anchor and nothing to hang on to. No instruction book that I can say is for me and my people (gentiles). Not even a book in the bible that I can point to and say, "that is instruction for us and how we are to do things".

I have even read recently that there are those that believe Noahism should be a political movement and not a religion...great!!! Now I've got no religion as well. How do I have a relationship or follow what God wants me to do? Read the Torah? But there are no direct instructions to me or my people. No synagogues close by me; and even if there were, there would be little guarantee that there would be a Rabbi that would be willing to help...or knowledgeable enough! There have been times recently when I wish I had never questioned a thing, but stayed in my world of Christianity – at least I had something to hold on to, something I could read that was "to me" and gave me instructions and guidance.

Any advice??? Yes this may seem like rambling, but this is very important to me. I have read "The Rainbow Covenant" and "The Noahide Code", and though very helpful, I cannot consider them scripture. What can I as a gentile read that tells me what to do and how to meet with others and what we should be about? Is Noahism a religion or a political movement? When there are precious few Rabbis around, what do I use to guide my family – what do I instruct my children in, what do I give them as instructions, how do I tell them to have a relationship with God with no rituals, no direct instructions, no structure and nothing to call their own? —Thank you

Rabbi: I empathize with you fully. But in a few moments, I feel you will find what you have been searching for. I say this with such conviction, since this past year, a number of Noahides and myself have been studying the various Noahide laws, as well as the philosophy behind the entire Noahide status, and God's relationship to both Noahide and Jew. But allow me to first address a number of your points.

Binding Rituality

I appreciate you need to have some anchor, or identity, we all do. This will come. But do not seek it in falsehoods. The false category of a "religion" is not proper to admire, as you do. You still value the cohesiveness of the Christians, as if that is a good in

Human Equality

itself. It is not. The reason being, that all other religions are false. And admiring anything about a false notion, must itself be false.

The correct path is not to admire religions, as if they all possess some good. But you must change that view to "admiring a mankind that follows God". Don't subcategorize people into false groupings, based on fabricated religions. This gives those religions credence in your mind. In truth, there is only one group: "mankind". God desires all mankind to follow His one religion. And the prophets describe this as a future event. If you clearly realize the fallacy of other religions, your admiration of their cohesiveness will lose its grip on you.

Pre-Torah Responsibility

You asked, "To what has God held all people responsible for in times past?" You are aware of the Noahide Laws. In the beginning of time, God gave man very few laws, since He equipped us with intellect. It was God's plan that man receive a law or two to express the relationship between God and man...that being "Master" and "servant". Once this relationship was expressed by God giving us His laws, we were to then use our intellects and continuously ponder the universe for the remainder of our lives and discover new truths based on creation, and God's interaction with man. God held (and holds) man accountable – not only for observing those few laws – but for following his and her intellect. But man's corruption created a need to change this plan, and a Flood was necessary, as were many new laws. Much of the Torah aims to remove man's idolatrous beliefs and tendencies. It was only due to these sins that Torah law addresses them. Had Egyptian and Canaanite man not become idolatrous and superstitious, no Torah law could say, "In their statutes [those idolaters] do not follow".

Torah Portions for Gentiles?

The means of "anchoring" yourself must be through interacting with like minded people – be they Noahide or Jew is of no consequence. The strongest bond a person can have with others, is created when people share lives led by truths, Torah study, and Torah morality. The Rabbis teach that the love of King David and Jonathan was the greatest love. It doesn't apply to these two individuals alone, but to any two or more people who live as they did, where Torah and truth is the greatest passion and value. You do not need to be part of a large group to gain a feeling of "being part" of something. Rather, seek to be part of "truth", not large groups of people. You will eventually find the greatest anchor with just a few people who share a love for God, truth and Torah. The intellect is more

powerful than the emotions. It gives man his deepest sense of what is real. And when he reaches this level, where his sense of reality is dictated by reality, he then has no need for groups of people who do not share his passion. This is identical for any two human beings.

It is the human insecurity that we all have, which we must overcome. Yes, people need people, but not at the cost of abandoning truth. However, many people seek the company of many fools, assuming masses to always possess true beliefs. But we know this is false based on world religions where masses follow baseless stories. So instead of assuming falsely that there's truth in numbers of believers, we must stay true to what our minds tell us is true. It should also bother the intelligent person, if his beliefs don't rhyme with reason. But when our beliefs are proven, we will find that sensibility to be the greatest anchor, as this will please our minds, offering us the greatest sense of stability.

The portion for the Gentile is the same portion as the Jew. Rabbi Israel Chait recently lectured on Moses' murder of the Egyptian who had beaten the Jew. (Exod. 2:12) Jonathan ben Uzziel states, "Moses looked to see whether this Egyptian's offspring might convert to Judaism, or repent" before he killed him. Rabbi Chait stated a marvelous point. The fact is that a Noahide isn't required to convert. Nonetheless, before killing him, Moses prophetically sought to learn if any offspring would convert from this Egyptian. Why would Moses seek this knowledge, if Gentiles need not convert?

Rabbi Chait explained this teaches that Judaism is truly the preferred state for every Noahide...for everyone. Noahides are not required to convert. Yet, possessing a soul literally equal to a Jew and any other person, we must say one who forfeits conversion, thereby forfeits a perfected life. So as a Jew, I am required to make Torah available to you. It is my obligation to concern myself with the welfare of every other human being. And if the tables were turned and I was a Noahide, you would be required to make Torah available to me. In truth, the Jew is in service of the Noahide, just like he is in service of a fellow Jew.

This week's Torah reading describes the event of Revelation at Sinai. Why did the Jews merit to receive the Torah? It was based on the merit of their Noahide patriarchs and matriarchs. Before Torah was given, these few, perfected Noahides, namely Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, earned God's attention, love, and Divine providence. They surpassed the level of their millions of "Jewish" children. And as all humankind stems from Adam and Eve, all humankind is equal. It is the

ignorant and egotistical Jew who feels otherwise. In a past article, we addressed this point fully, completely dismissing all foolish claims that Jews possess superior souls. Search Mesora.org for our article "Perfection: Human Accomplishment – Not a Jewish Birthright". Talmud Avodah Zara (2b) teaches that God offered the Torah to all nations, thereby teaching that all nations have the capacity to observe Torah just like the Jew. All men are created equal.

If you study the Talmudic portions addressing Noahides, you will be busy for years. You will also learn that there is much more than 7 Noahide laws. And each additional area, like witchcraft prohibitions, contain many beautiful lessons. You will find that if you remain a Noahide, God talks to you through the Torah, Prophets, Writings and Talmud. You are far from a shepherdless flock. Noahide life is formally structured. You simply need to consult the correct sources. There is a wealth of knowledge in Avoda Zara and in Talmud Sanhedrin. Rabbi Chait spent years lecturing and recording a series of audible classes available under our Audio link. And we have recorded dozens of classes on Noahide law and philosophy this past year and a half, including many articles also under the Noahide Philosophy headings in our Philosophy and Audio links. This will greatly help you if you remain in your locale without personal contact with teachers. And your continued communication with us is welcomed. For even more study, Doug Taylor and Rabbi Morton Moskowitz offer weekly classes. And all of this is free. There is nothing preventing you from immersing yourself. Be in touch, and I will provide you, and any other person with more information.

In conclusion, Noahism is not a political movement. It is also not a religion, as if something separate from Judaism. Noahism may be defined as the minimum amount of Judaism necessary for any person to retain a right to life. For when man abandoned these few laws, God abandoned man, and flooded the Earth. But it is also not a system of perfection, as Rabbi Chait explained. We are all equal. We cannot explain why one person is born into a Jewish household, while another is born into a Gentile household...nor does it matter. Neither child is any better off in life simply based on who his parents are. Many Jewish children abandon or never receive Jewish education, while many Gentiles become the world's greatest leaders, as we see in Jewish history. Our greatest kings descended from Ruth the convert, as will the Messiah. God has no favorites. Whom does He favor? It is he or she who lives by His word, His one word given for all mankind. ■

Jewish Leaders



Long Island to Phoenix

It's Closer Than You Think

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Judaism demands that we empathize with the sorrow of all people regardless of where they happen to be. Thus we read that Noach and his sons entered the Ark separately from their wives to teach that they abstained from marital relations so as not to be self-indulgent while mankind suffered. For the same reason, the Torah makes a point of telling us that Menashe and Ephraim were born to Yosef prior to the onset of the famine. We may never turn our backs or be indifferent to plight of mankind. However, the Torah recognizes that we are limited in the amount of sympathy we are capable of feeling for others. This can be seen in the Halacha that the poor of your city take precedence over outsiders. The factor of identification is crucial to our level of concern and desire to help. An earthquake in California is more upsetting to a New Yorker than the massive flooding in Queensland, Australia and every American was in a state of shock and disbelief on 9/11. The closer the disaster is to home the more it gets our attention.

Thus, for the people of Arizona the horrific rampage in Tucson which took place on Saturday, January 8, 2011 had a greater impact than for those in other states. In my shul, as in many others, we said special Tefilot for the well being of the victims and I dedicated the Shabbat D'var Torah to finding some meaning in the tragic event. On Sunday, I spoke at a meeting of the Republican Jewish Coalition, a designation which many New Yorkers may regard as an oxymoron. Phoenix, Arizona is politically, the diametric opposite of Plainview, Long Island, from where I recently emigrated. This was an audience of fervently conservative, anti-Obama Jews. Yet, in spite of the fact that Gabrielle Giffords, the congresswoman who had been shot is a Democrat, there was great sympathy and support for her well-being. The chairman of the event asked me to begin my discus-

sion with a prayer for the victims of the massacre and, of course, I was happy to comply, choosing selections from one of my favorite Shabbat prayers which bless "all those who faithfully attend to Tzorehei Tzibbur..." Gabby Giffords is an extremely popular figure who is respected by her congressional colleagues. The Jews here take pride in her Jewish roots. The fact that her Halachic status is unclear does not seem to matter. All we know is that her mother was Christian and her father Jewish. She has distinguished European rabbis on her father's side. After a visit to Israel in 2001, Gabby chose to become Jewish. She is very proud of her Jewishness, openly professes it and actively touts it in her campaigns claiming that Jewish women have a special way of getting things done when all avenues seem to be closed. Gabrielle Giffords is admired by people of all backgrounds in Arizona. She is regarded as someone with great talent and potential and we all hope and pray for her complete and speedy recovery.

At first there was some speculation about the possibility of anti-Semitic motives in the assassination attempt. However, little proof has emerged to substantiate that suspicion and for the moment the shooter, Jared Loughner, is regarded as someone with a severe mental illness.

On a personal note, I am about to complete my first year as Rabbi of the Young Israel of Phoenix. Until I moved last year, I had lived my entire life in New York. I served as the Menahel of Yeshiva B'nei Torah which I co-founded with the Rosh Yeshiva Rabbi Israel Chait in 1971. I was also the Rabbi of the Jewish Community Center of Inwood, Long Island for twenty-five years and of Congregation Rinat Yisrael of Plainview, New York for the last ten years. In addition, I served as the Dean of Masoret: Institute of Advanced Judaic Studies for Women which I founded in 1993.

The most difficult aspect of moving was to explain to people why I would leave so much behind and move to Phoenix at this point in my life. My wife Linda and I were very interested in Phoenix for a number of reasons. Our eldest son and daughter in law and our three grandsons have lived here for the past eight years and this was, of course, a great attraction. Whenever we visited our children in Phoenix, I was asked to speak at the various shuls and was positively impressed by the character of the Orthodox community. The fantastic Phoenix weather also played a role in our decision. As an avid jogger and sun lover who doesn't even mind the extreme summer heat here in Phoenix, I was happy to leave behind the cold and snowy New York winters. However, you may ask: how could I give up the intense learning, Shiurim, and the wonderful students that I taught every day? The answer is that due to modern technology I did not have to. Both through conference calls and the internet I maintain the full schedule of Shiurim that I had in New York as well as personal contact with Talmidim and Chaverim. My

weekly Tuesday night Chumash class that I give at the Young Israel is streamed live on the internet with people viewing it in different parts of the country. Due to the miracles of modern technology I am able to have my cake and eat it too!

I enjoy the atmosphere at the Young Israel of Phoenix and the pace of life here is not as hectic and frantic as in New York. We have a very warm, friendly and welcoming congregation. What I find refreshing is a remarkable lack of interest in "status" and materialistic display and there are no social barriers based on age, wealth, profession, etc. Thus, there are no cliques as everyone is friendly with everyone else and there is a complete absence of the usual social divisions one encounters at many shuls in New York.

I was also surprised by the amount of people interested in conversion. Some are products of intermarriage, but not all. I am frequently contacted by gentiles who are searching for religious meaning and want an opportunity to learn more about Judaism. In this past year I have attracted a number of new people to the shul many of them from conservative or reform backgrounds. I always strove to elucidate a rational, philosophic Hashkafa of Yahadut which while scrupulously faithful to the Masorah transcends "denominational divides" and is appealing to all Jews. I am gratified by what, with Hashem's help, appears to be a measure of success in this endeavor.

When I lived in New York, crime was something I read about in the newspaper and it rarely involved me in a personal way. In Phoenix, it seems to be different, as people feel a sense of connection to the Tucson victims and keenly follow Gabby's day to day progress. A few months ago, a sefer Torah was stolen from my shul and all of the newspapers and television stations interviewed me and gave the story extensive coverage. I received many expressions of support from ordinary people on the street and even non Jewish clergy expressed their concern. The Torah was returned, B'H, in perfect condition only a few days later and it was gratifying to experience the expressions of relief and happiness that were fully publicized by the media.

I have moved nearly three thousand miles, and my life has changed in many ways. However, beneath the surface, the basic values which inspire Jews as individuals and a community are the same in Phoenix as in New York. In New York I grieved with everyone else on 9/11 and was extremely proud of the brave Hatzalah volunteers who rushed to the scene. Last year our community, together with Jews around the world, was extremely proud of the Israeli medical teams and members of Zaka who made a Kiddush Hashem in Haiti.

The Torah teachings of Chain, Chesed and Rachamim are alive and well in Phoenix as they are in New York and around the world. May our sense of concern for Jews and for the welfare of all people have opportunity to express itself on happy occasions as well. ■

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