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IN THIS ISSUE:

PRAYER	I, 2, 4
HAMAN'S INTOLERANCE	1
Q&A'S: PURPOSE OF EMOTIONS	1
GOD DESIRES WE USE OUR MINDS	3
JUDAISM VS OTHER RELIGIONS	3
FORTUNETELLERS	3, 4, 5
SHADIM: DEMONS	4
FALSE BELIEFS: "SUPERSTITION"	5
HATE AND LOVE	5

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Prayer

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

The preamble to prayer is "know before whom you stand." If one's ideas concerning the One he is praying to are corrupt his prayers must be equally corrupt. I think it should be made clear that one of the cardinal principles of our faith is that the Creator lacks nothing, needs nothing, and obtains nothing from his creatures. God gains nothing from our worship of Him. We recite this in our prayer of Neila on Yom Kippur "And even if he (man) is righteous what [benefit] does he give you?" This is based on a verse in Job (35:7). Nachmanides expands on this topic in Deuteronomy (22:6) and states, "our words [of praise] and remembrances of his wonders are considered as nothingness and emptiness to Him". He states unequivocally that all the mitzvos we do are only for our own benefit and

(continued on page 2)

Haman's Intolerance

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

In the Megillas Esther read on Purim, in chapter 3, verse 4, we learn that the other ministers had informed Haman that Mordechai was not following Haman's command to bow to him.

Why did these ministers in King Achashverosh's court need to inform Haman? Wouldn't Haman know this, seeing Mordechai perfectly erect?

Either Haman knew or didn't know about Mordechai's refusal. If Haman didn't know, then it makes sense in 3:5 that his anger flared upon hearing of Mordechai's deviation. As this is in line with Haman's nature. When he would first hear of something going against his egocentricity, Haman would be angered.

But perhaps Haman DID in fact know that Mordechai didn't bow to him. This is more plausible, as why should Haman alone be ignorant of Mordechai's behavior? This being the case, we must ask, "Why didn't make a big deal about Mordechai's refusal immediately upon his first encounter of Mordechai's disobedience?"

One possibility is that the very same ego which caused Haman to desire others to bow to him, would also cause him to avoid the reality of that one person disgracing him. This is intolerable to Haman, and perhaps why he didn't face it until it was brought out in the open in 3:4 (suggested by Eva Tavlin). Only now did Haman have to deal with it as he could no longer act for his own motives alone, i.e., suppressing this disturbing fact. Similarly, Pharaoh forgot Joseph after Joseph's death. A rabbi explained, Pharaoh could not tolerate the loss of Joseph. He was in great need of Joseph's insights as a security that he, Pharaoh, could successfully rule Egypt. Therefore, upon Joseph's death, Pharaoh feigned complete ignorance of the entire era of Joseph as a means to say, "I never needed him and I am a capable ruler independent of another's assistance". Such a denial allows Pharaoh to feel capable once again. Haman acted as Pharaoh, denying Mordechai's blatant opposition, but only to the point that the matter was no longer avoidable.

Reverting to the Megilla, the other ministers in the courtyard who brought this news to Haman did so as they didn't want to see Mordechai getting away with it. This is why the passage states "to see if Mordechai's position would stand". ■



ASK YOUR CHILDREN:

"How many stories within the Megilla happened because Haman was angry?"

Questions & Answers

E-mail us: questions@mesora.org

Reader: God gave us emotions for a purpose; however, if we are to approach His wisdom entirely from a rational standpoint, then what are the proper role of emotions and sentimentality in our lives and service of the Divine Will?

Mesora: The Talmud states that they once tied up the instincts - also referred to as the yetzer hara - and this resulted in chickens not laying eggs, and man not moving to accomplish anything. Emotions are needed to drive man. He needs the psychological design of an "energy source". This emotional energy drives man, motivates him, and is responsible in all its forms for man's accomplishments.

Emotions, or the yetzer hara, are comprised of feelings of hate, revenge, love, passion, rejection, anticipation, sensitivity, jealousy, dignity, and many others. God's plan is that man harness these instincts and use them in service of the Torah. Harnessing emotions for Torah's goals can be expressed positively as in loving your neighbor,

lending money to the poor, and negatively by speaking loshon hora. In some cases we must force ourselves to maintain more positive feelings, as in helping a friend.....at the same time, we must subjugate our "natural" feelings of resistance of helping your enemy when his burden is great to the Torah's loftier goals.

Why God created man "this way" with instincts, is an area of knowledge which we cannot obtain answers. However, man can examine creation and understand God's wisdom from the perspective of the observer, as this is how He designed our minds to operate.

Besides being the fuel of man's actions, the emotions contribute to numerous enjoyments, such as learning, family, friends and experiences. God designed man to live in this happy state. God also designed man with a natural curiosity which propels man to appreciate Torah. New insights in turn encourage man to seek further understanding of the Creator. ■

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Prayer

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

(continued from page 1)

give no benefit whatsoever to the Creator, "This is something that is agreed upon by all our Rabbis."

Similarly Maimonides in his Guide states clearly that no change or emotion can be predicated of God (Guide book 1, chap.55). He further states that the gravest of sins is to have a wrong opinion of God (ibid. chap.36). One must never think that they, through their prayers, can produce some kind of affect in the Creator of the Universe. Such an idea is not only absurd it is blasphemous. He who believes such an idea would, in the words of the Rambam, "unconsciously at least incur the guilt of profanity and blasphemy."

Rambam states in the Yad, Laws Concerning the Fundamentals of our Faith, Ch.1 Law 11, "and He does not change, for there is nothing that can cause change in Him. There does not exist in Him... anger or laughter, happiness or sadness..." It is patently clear from the Rambam and Ramban that we cannot say of the Creator that He is at one time sad, at another happy, at one time lonely, at another fulfilled. He, being perfect, does not change - ever. We cannot affect Him or change Him no matter what we do, whether we are righteous or evil, whether we pray or do not pray, whether we give charity or do not give charity, whether we repent or do not repent.

Two questions immediately come to mind: (1) If this is so, how can we pray to G-d and expect Him to change our destiny for the better, as Moses did when he prayed to G-d to forgive the Jews for the sin of the golden calf? (2) How do we understand certain verses in the prophets and certain statements from our Sages which seem to indicate the contrary? Before explaining the answers to the above questions I would like to state something very fundamental. When our Rishonim (early commentaries) teach us a principle of our faith we do not say that they did not know a particular statement of our Sages or verse of the Torah, but that they understood it differently than it appears to us at first sight. We say that they had the correct understanding of these statements and verses and that we are deficient in our own understanding of them. We do not derive our own principles from these statements or verses and reject the ideas of our Rishonim. This is what is known as "emunat chachomim," faith in our Torah scholars. If we abandon the above principle, we are destined to fail. One may ask as follows: "if G-d

does not need our prayers, see the Gemara Yoma 38a which states, 'everything which G-d created was only for His own honor and purpose (Proverbs 16:4).'" If one would hear of someone who had children for the sole purpose of having them praise him when they reached the age of four, what would one think of such a person? Would one not think he is doubly imperfect, because he is overcome by his desire and need for prayer, and because he is moved by the praise of a four year old? How can we ascribe to G-d, Heaven forbid, such imperfection?

Let us take the statement of our Sages "why did G-d make our Patriarchs and Matriarchs childless? Because G-d desires the prayers of the righteous (Yevamos 64a)". What would we think of someone who tormented another person so that they turn to him for help? Would we not regard him as self-seeking and even vicious? How then can we ascribe such an imperfection, Heaven forbid, to the Creator? Is it not obvious that these words of our Sages are not to be taken literally, but that they are metaphors that contain a hidden idea, a deeper meaning which we must search for?

It is for this reason the author of the Siddur Avodas Halev, states in his introduction, "the agadic statements according to their outward appearances without understanding their deep meaning are prone to cause the blind to go astray on the way and to lead them to darkness and not light (Otzar Hatefillos p.20)". In this way he explains Rabbi Joshua Ben Levi's statement in Masechet Sofrim, "Those who write agadic statements have no place in the world to come." (It should be understood that this was at a time when we were prohibited to write the Oral Law).

Why do we pray if we cannot change G-d or exercise any influence over Him? The answer is that the change that takes place through tefillah is not in G-d, but in ourselves. It is the same changeless G-d who treats the wicked one way and the righteous another way, the person who repents one way and the one who refuses to repent another way, the one who prays one way and the one who does not pray another way. Rambam gives an analogy. The same fire makes one thing black, another white, one thing hard, another soft. The change occurs not because the fire is different but because the objects that come in contact with it are different. Prayer changes man in three ways. First, the change that takes place in man when he realizes that he is standing before the Creator of the universe. This comes

under the term Amidah from the verse in Genesis 19:27 regarding Abraham's prayer. The second is the change that takes place in man when he thinks through and organizes his priorities in life. The word Tefillah comes from the word "peelale" which means to judge, as the above author in the Otzar Hatefillos says, "to clarify the thoughts that occur in the heart in a confused manner". This is derived from the second term for Tefillah "sichah" from Genesis 24:63 regarding Isaac's prayer. The third change takes place when man, through his free will and creativity, presents before G-d an alternative life style, a change in his or her plans, as Hannah did when she stated to G-d (Samuel 1:11) "If you will... give to your handmaid a man child then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life." This is derived from the third term for prayer, "pegiah" from Genesis 28:11 regarding Jacob's prayer. Tefillah is the great medium which G-d gave to man by means of which he can change himself. He can then establish a new destiny for himself in life and a new relationship with G-d. It is not the Creator that changes. Man does not influence the Creator as a defendant influences a human judge who has emotions and is subject to change. It is man himself who is changed. Once he has changed the same immutable Creator relates to him in a different way.

Anyone who thinks that through his prayer he effectuates a change in G-d denies the third principle of our faith which we recite every day, that G-d is not physical and does not have any physical attributes. This means He is in no way to be equated with any of His creation whether inanimate or animate. The idea that man can cause a change in the Creator is an attempt to project onto G-d human qualities. This is strictly forbidden. As Maimonides quotes in the third principle of faith, "And to whom can you liken Me sayeth the Holy One (Isaiah 40:18,25)". Far be it from G-d to be like His creatures who because of their imperfection are subject to change for better or for worse. Rambam makes it clear that all statements in the Torah that imply otherwise are metaphors used by the Torah to teach us some idea and are not to be taken literally (Yad ibid Law 12).

Now let us examine one of the statements of our Sages. "Why were our Patriarchs and Matriarchs childless? Because G-d desires the prayers of the righteous (Yevamos 64a)." Let us first examine the last half of this statement, "G-d desires the prayers of the righteous." Our Sages are teaching that the prayers of the

righteous are qualitatively differentiated from the prayers of the ordinary person; that the righteous, because their knowledge of G-d is different and their knowledge of prayer is different, in their act of praying fulfill the potential of man that G-d has given him through prayer. As Rambam says regarding the love of G-d, one's love of G-d cannot exceed his knowledge of G-d (Laws of Repentance, Ch. 10 Law 6). So too in prayer one's potential for prayer cannot be realized in excess of his knowledge and perfection. Thus only the righteous truly fulfill G-d's will concerning prayer. The Rabbis do not mean, Heaven forbid the notion, that G-d, the Creator of the universe, is in want or in a state of loneliness waiting for some kind of satisfaction that he will receive when His creatures praise Him or ask Him for something. How can we think that man could praise G-d in any manner that would be satisfactory to Him, when our teacher Moses, the greatest of our species, was unable to comprehend G-d Himself in any way, even through prophecy, as it is written "because man cannot see Me and live (Exodus 33:20)", and could understand no more than G-d's actions? Even the praise of a four year old of the greatest human being would be closer to reality than our praise of G-d since the four year old at least perceives something about the one he is praising. It is thus patently clear as Ramban states, that all our praise are as "nothingness and emptiness to Him."

The above statement of our Sages was not meant to indicate that G-d is seeking some satisfaction, only that G-d's will, as expressed in His creation is being fulfilled. Whether His creation is fulfilled or not gives no satisfaction or sadness to Him. Its purpose is to provide man with the opportunity to approach G-d. In giving man free will G-d made it possible for him to fulfill his potential, one of the methods being through the medium of prayer. This is accomplished on the highest level only by the righteous not the ordinary person whose ideas of G-d and prayer are distorted. Our Sages are teaching an important idea, that the ignoramus fails to realize his potential not only in Torah, but in prayer as well.

The first half of this statement of our Sages also teaches us an important concept. Our Sages wonder why our Patriarchs and Matriarchs were childless. Were they not righteous? The answer is that sometimes G-d puts man in a state of want not because he has sinned, but in order that he may have the opportunity to perfect himself. Our Patriarchs and Matriarchs were

(continued on page 4, col. 1)

Page 2

God Desires We Use Our Minds to Know Him

RABBI REUVEN MANN

In Parsha Vau-era, we read about the encounter between Moshe and Pharaoh. G-d instructed Moshe that when Pharaoh demanded proof that G-d had spoken to him, he should throw down his staff and it would turn into a snake. Moshe proceeded to do this before Pharaoh. Then something strange and unexpected occurred. Pharaoh summoned his magicians and they did the exact same thing. As might be expected, Pharaoh was unimpressed with what Moshe had done and obstinately refused to obey G-d. The episode concludes with the words, "And Pharaoh hardened his heart and did not listen to them as G-d had spoken."

The question arises: What was sinful about Pharaoh's behavior? He certainly had a right to demand proof that G-d had appeared to Moshe. Moreover, he was correct to ascertain that the deed was truly miraculous. Thus he summoned his magicians and they were able to achieve the same result. We must ask: Why did G-d give Moshe a sign which could be duplicated by others? Isn't a miracle by definition a supernatural phenomenon which is beyond the scope of human power and thus can only be attributed to Divine intervention?

If we study the text carefully, we can find the answer. Superficially, the act of Moshe and that of the magicians appear to be similar. However, they were different. The Torah says, "And the Egyptian magicians did this with their 'secret devices'". When a skilled magician performs a trick, he controls the environment in which it is executed. He sets up a stage, keeps the audience at a certain distance and manages all of the "props". It is very impressive but we know it is an illusion based on a very skillful sleight of hand. The miracle of Moshe was done in the open without any secret devices. A truly honest observer would recognize and acknowledge the difference. The Pasuk also points out that the staff of Moshe swallowed those of the magicians. Thus the act of Moshe was clearly superior to his opponents. If Pharaoh was genuinely interested in the truth, he would have investigated the matter carefully and recognized the difference between the genuine miracle of Moshe and the deceptive magic of the illusionists.

Yet we may ask: Why did G-d give Moshe a miracle which could be

somewhat duplicated? Why not give him something which could not be imitated at all? The answer is that G-d wants man to recognize Him through the use of his mind and exercise of his free will. He doesn't want us to be emotionally coerced into accepting Him. Great miracles impress the emotions but since they don't engage the mind, their effect soon dissipates. Real change is achieved only through genuine knowledge and understanding. G-d wants us to use our minds in searching for Him, discovering Him and serving Him. Pharaoh sensed the significant difference between the miracles of Moshe and the counterfeit displays of his servants. That is why the Pasuk says that "he hardened his heart and did not listen..." Had he not been stubborn, he would have seen the truth.

Judaism is unique in affirming the supreme value of knowledge in the service of our Creator. We must, therefore, strive to cultivate a love and appreciation for the Divine Wisdom contained in our Torah.

Our Parsha has great relevance to the contemporary situation. In every area of significance; religion, societal morality, rightful ownership of Israel, we are challenged by false philosophies which masquerade as truth and ensnare the unlearned. Like Pharaoh, we must choose between the authentic and the illusory. May we fulfill the ideal of the Havdala prayer. May we have the wisdom to discern between the true and the false, the holy and the profane, Israel and the nations. □

How Judaism Differs from Other Religions

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: Is it Jewish belief that separates Jews, or is it practice, and how?

Mesora: What separates the Jewish religion from all other religions is primarily it's proof of Divine origin as demonstrated through God's revelation of Himself to all the Jews at Mount Sinai. This was witnessed by approximately 3 million Jews as an intelligent voice speaking to them from the fiery mountain. No other religion makes such a claim because Divine revelation to the masses never happened to others, and as the Torah says, it will never happen again. (Deut. 4:32-34)

Judaism is the only religion whose claim is supported by world acceptance of the Old Testament, the Five Books of

Moses, the Torah. This acceptance is a 100% proof of God's revelation to the Jewish people. Had the event at Sinai never occurred, it would not have been believed by that generation, and certainly not the rest of the world and all future generations. The only way it became accepted is that it really happened. All witnesses then passed the story down to the following generations through today.

All other religions are founded on a single person's claim that God appeared to him. Something of this nature cannot be proven or disproven, is precisely why they formulated their religions with this creed as their central basis. These other religions therefore must resort to the requirement of blind acceptance, or faith.

Besides this miraculous proof, Judaism is founded on principles which are rational and comply with man's nature as a philosophical and psychological being. Not one law in all of Judaism goes against man's nature. Unlike Catholicism which frowns upon divorce, and praises celibacy, Judaism embraces the need at times for married couples to divorce if they will be happier that way, and Judaism also embraces man's need for sexual happiness and children. These are just two examples of how Judaism approaches life honestly, without preconceived notions on how man should live. Catholicism makes man into a mystical idea approaching their view of an angel, one who is above actual human drives and emotions. This opposes Judaism at its core. Judaism accepts that man's happiness must stem from his being in line with his nature.

Judaism realizes that besides man satisfying his psychological needs, he has a much higher part which must be addressed - his soul. By man ignoring this essential part of his nature, he will never reach his ultimate, Divine mission of attaching himself to God. Man achieves this mission and thereby - ultimate happiness - by his immersion in study of the creation and Torah, actualizing his true goal and purpose in an appreciation of the Creator. The Torah, Prophets and Writings, along with the Talmud, were written in a highly stylized format which takes years to master. Their style is such, that as one delves deeper and deeper, he finds more profound ideas. This analysis and search satisfies man in its very process, as well as through factual enlightenment. As God possesses infinite wisdom, man will always see new insights provided he has toiled under the tutelage of those before him trained in the method of Talmudic and Biblical exegesis, teamed with the essential modes of interpretations only

found in the Oral Law - also handed to Moses on Sinai.

The system of Jewish law - halacha - is also a major component of Judaism. It guides man's every action from waking and prayers, to blessings over food, ethical and moral conduct, business practices, social relationships, and Holidays. Areas of man's life are always placed in check as he judges each of his actions for Torah compliance prior to commencement. This process engages man's mind throughout his days when he is not involved in study - which must comprise the majority of his waking hours.

In truth, there is no comparison between the Divinely designed system of Judaism and other man made religions for this precise reason that there is no comparison between God and man.

This of course is a very small glimpse into Judaism. A more encompassing appreciation of God's wisdom is only possible through much more study. □

Fortunetellers

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: My friend called another friend on the phone, this friend was speaking to a rabbi known for his kaballah. this rabbi tells the lady "the lady who just clicked in to the phone call and started telling her things about her and she must come to him quick there is a great danger."

Now my friend who is a yemenite and not a pushover told me how this rabbi told him everything about him and hit it a direct bullseye. He told him to pick a letter out of an envelope and before he picked told him the letter, when my friend picked this letter the rabbi said check the envelope all letters are different. His rabbi was not only able to predict this persons past but told him if he does so and so 48 hours later so and so will happen by the way it did happen like that the rabbi gave my friend different types of amulets of different malachim to safeguard him. One night his daughter woke up and told her father she saw a malach sitting on her sisters bed watching her sister. (this girl had no idea the parents went to this rabbi)

I am thinking to go to this rabbi to see what this is all about what do you think? Is it against the torah to go or is it like the Ramban holds, a science. (By the way, people used to read clouds or listen to the birds to tell the future) Thank you. (Response on page 4, column 4)

Prayer

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

(continued from page 2)

answered through their prayers. In addition they achieved thereby a higher degree of perfection. This teaches us the great value of prayer since we usually only think of prayer as a means to obtain something we want and do not realize that the greatest benefit may result from the perfection we receive through the act of praying itself.

Now consider how in Tractate Yevamos, our Sages through the medium of a metaphor explained all this in the few short words, "The Holy One blessed be He, longs to hear the prayer of the righteous".

I of course cannot expound on every statement of our Sages in this article, nor do I claim to understand every one of their statements. I only wish to stress how important caution is when approaching a statement of our Sages, and how careful we must be not to grasp at the first idea which comes to our minds, especially where such an idea contradicts the basic premises of our faith.

In closing let me explain what is meant by Isaiah 43:7, "And everyone that is called by my name I have created for my Glory." The Radak comments: "Israel, who believes in Me, I have created for my Honor, so that they spread My Glory to all the people." Radak is saying that G-d's compassion and kindness is not limited to the nation of Israel, but includes all of mankind. It is incumbent upon Israel to be concerned about all of humanity as well as themselves, and to teach all of mankind the true ideas of Torah. This is stated in Isaiah 2:2,3 and elsewhere throughout the Prophets. It is G-d's will that all of mankind should have the opportunity to live according to the Torah way of life. This is what the verse is teaching, not that G-d, Heaven forbid the notion, is seeking His own glorification through human recognition.

We should understand Proverbs 16:4 mentioned above in a like manner. It is for our benefit that we recognize G-d's Glory, not for His.

May we live to see the day when the earth will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9). □

Shadim: "Demons"

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

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 kept.

If we look into the instances regarding shadim, we find that the Rabbis tell us not to give greetings to a friend 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 gemora on page 66a in Gittin states that if one hears a voice calling from a pit saying, "divorce my wife from me", 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 gemora indeed. But there must be an idea here.

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 we greet them or not? 4) In the gemora 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 or fields, or psychological isolation; 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 gomer', (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, or his loneliness. Thus, what the Rabbis are telling us not to offer greetings to is in fact our 'psychological fantasies'. Giving greetings to that which is a mirage, crosses the line from fantasy to reality, one of man's worst crimes. The Rabbis, knowing that these shadim are only daydreams or illusions, enjoined us not to 'talk to them'. This only causes one to allow fantasy to have the same level of truth as reality. There are so many areas of the Torah which deter man from living an illusory life, that the Rabbis saw it fit here 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, "m'dvar skeker tirschak", "from falsehoods, keep distant".

This now explains why the gemora in Gittin said that if one saw 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 gemora 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 gemora adds that when there's a shadow of a shadow, then for certain, it is not a shade. This means that completely detailed illusions do not exist, and hence, it must be a real person one is seeing, and greetings are then permitted.

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 minds 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. □

Fortunetellers

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

(continued from page 3)

Mesora Response: First rule, don't believe everything you hear. Many people tell stories over again and again, greatly distorting the original, which itself may be a fairy tale that was taken by a few as literal. These ridiculous stories are constantly repeated. Unfortunately, these stories replace truth and become the belief of many Jews.

This rabbi clearly violates Torah laws. I do not have to explain what he does. Although if you wish, see Saadia Gaon in Emunos v'Daos where he refutes magic, explaining the Egyptian "magicians" as using slight of hand. He says they had no powers.

If halacha and reason opposes this 'rabbi', he can claim to lift buildings, and I still wouldn't follow him.

We are bound not to seek satisfaction for our insecurities by these types of prohibited methods. Rather, the Torah teaches that these are all false, and against God's desire that man use his mind in all areas.

You must know, catering to the instinctual need for security hurts a person in the following ways:

1) It directly violates God's words, diluting the reverence owed to the Divinely given Torah.

2) He will be incapable of directing his life appropriately when the "false notion" no longer works.

3) It teaches an unfair view of God, as this position of relying on "mystics" implies that God selected only these few mystics to have a monopoly on how the remainder of mankind makes their life decisions.

4) It cripples him from using his mind, so in future scenarios, he will have no intelligent resources to help himself out of his problems.

(continued on page 5)

Page 4

False Notions: "Superstition"

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: My question is about luck? Can a person be born under a "lucky star"?

Someone, a religious person, recently commented about a common friend who is born September xth 19xx, that his birthdate is a lucky number. Is there any religious substance behind such a statement. Someone gave me your address today and I would be grateful for an answer.

Mesora: An intelligent person must ask themselves why these good luck charms exist. The answer is, that all imagined powerful objects have a person's insecurities as their origin. People are searching for a security blanket. Some are in the forms of rabbits feet, wishbones, penny fountains, etc. The reason being, people are insecure about what life holds for them, and seek to rid themselves of this security.

What is the Torah's approach? Judaism approaches all areas with the utmost rationality. We learn that there are many types of warlocks, palm readers and enchanters which are strictly forbidden by the Torah. There are many permutations of a crippled psyche develops. Some people want to know if they do a specific "action", whether they will be successful. Others are unsure what "time of year" is a good time for them. And some just want to be told things about themselves without asking any questions.

For each one of these questions, there are those who take advantage of the unenlightened, feigning the possession of such knowledge, and mislead people with false "answers". It is interesting why these psychics and fortune tellers still sit in small, decrepit rooms charging a few dollars. Can't they predict a simple lottery number?

This disease exists even within Jewish circles, in the forms of red bendels to ward off "evil eyes", and rabbis' blessings claiming to alter reality.

The Talmud deals with peoples' blessings, but it is not as most understand. In the Talmud, blessings took place where a knowledgeable and objective individual would look into a person's nature and describe what he specifically needed, or he would point out a flaw. But this is using rational objectivity - not clairvoyance. The Talmud actually states that two great rabbis both had their son's go to their students for a blessing. Not the reverse.

(See our site for an article discussing this topic.)

Returning to your question, there is no rational explanation for lucky charms. No one who you will ever speak to in your lifetime will be able to explain how these charms work. This is because they don't. It

is a mere projection of one's wishes onto an object, and this falsehood has somehow achieved popularity. Ask someone why only red, and not green bendels work. They have no answer. Ask how a penny thrown into a fountain, or by blowing out birthday candles makes wishes a reality, and again they have no answer. Ask about lucky stars, or how a person who is a created being can change nature, and again, no answer. Not even Moses had the ability to alter nature. All miracles performed were rendered by God alone. The Torah clearly says that Moses left Egypt and prayed to God to stop the plagues. The same applies to the other prophets.

Rational thinking is at the core of Judaism. If something makes no sense to us, we do not follow it. This applies as well to a written command in the Torah. Ibn Ezra, a Rishon, a foremost commentator says this in Exodus, 20:1. See our article. Ibn Ezra was a great mind, and extolled by others such as Maimonides. He teaches that if a certain command instructed us to do some action which did not comply with reason, we could not perform it. Certainly then, we should abandon that which is not only ridiculous, as lucky stars, but is commanded not to be followed.

Judaism is based on following the mind, through which method we penetrate falsehoods. The world at large may feel that certain objects contain fantastic powers. We should not be impressed with world opinion. We should determine if a claim stands the test of reason. Only then do we follow it.

I wonder why when it comes to physical health, or running their businesses, these people who wish on stars do not go to witch doctors. All of a sudden, health and wealth become matters in which a proven, rational approach is selected. But in areas of greater importance as one's philosophy, here, people readily run to palm readers. This tells you about what today's society values most. To them, the body and the wallet are more important than the soul.

This comparison is one way you can show someone that they truly value rational thinking over superstition, and hopefully get them back on the track to an intelligent life, abandoning the world of fantasy. □

Hate and Love

RIVKA OLENICK

"Do not hate your brother in your heart." (Leviticus 19:17.) "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Leviticus 19:18) If sentence 18 came first there would be no need for sentence 17, meaning if one is commanded to love, then obviously one is commanded not to hate. However, if one is commanded not to hate, does that mean one has to love? The Torah is profound and not within our limited grasp of logic. A clearer understanding of the relationship between

these two commandments is needed.

"Do not hate your brother in your heart." As Jews it is essential that we regard each other as brothers and sisters following the same path in life. That is, the path of God's will. Even those Jews who are not following "the path" should still be viewed as our Jewish brethren. And of course, converts are also God's children and are therefore, our brother and sisters. We should realize that together we have one goal. So if we see our brother or sister sinning in their speech or actions, or both - we have an obligation to correct their wrong doing at the time it occurs. Now this is an extremely difficult task that most of us would rather ignore, hoping that our obligation to rebuke will just "go away." We know that it won't "go away" and to ignore this obligation is actually a sin. We are obligated to confront and inform our fellow Jew without causing them any embarrassment. In a kind, and gentle manner let him/her know of their wrongdoing. Whatever complaint we may have against our brother or sister must be brought honestly out in the open. "We must talk it out patiently." With genuine concern for his/her well being, with tact and sensitivity we rebuke so that we do not sin. By remaining silent and not rebuking, we sin and we will harbor negative feelings and hatred. "Because I only think of myself, I am selfish, I will not rebuke I will take revenge and I will sin. You hurt me, I am threatened and because I feel that somehow you control my reality, I want revenge." The Rambam in Hilchot De'os Chapter 6, says: "Whoever has the possibility of rebuking sinners and fails to do so is considered responsible for that sin, for he had the opportunity to rebuke the sinner." This statement is quoted from Shabbat 54b, which relates that, after the destruction of the Temple, the righteous were also slain mercilessly. Why were they subjected to such punishment? Because they failed to rebuke the transgressors.

Even if nothing is resolved, no matter how frustrated we feel, no revenge may be taken. Frustration will cease when we do what is commanded of us - to rebuke. It is important to constantly remind oneself, of our universal brotherhood and our behavior must reflect this. It is absolutely necessary that we force ourselves to understand these ideas objectively and intelligently and implement them in our lives. As difficult as this is, it is true. We are all part of our "Father's House".

"Love your neighbor as yourself." The saying of Hillel is well known: "Do not do unto thy neighbor that which thou wouldst hate to have done to thee." This is the guiding principle of all of our deeds. This is turn changes selfishness and self-love into consideration and love of our neighbor. The strongest basic feeling towards God and Man is love. To love our neighbor as we

love ourselves is a realization that this person is also created by God, and shares our goal to love God. So, what we are speaking about here is not love of the person himself, meaning his personality - but everything that pertains to the person. Which means that we rejoice in his good fortune and grieve over his misfortune. Isn't it that we grieve over his good fortune and rejoice at his misfortune? Aren't we jealous of his accomplishments and wish they would crumble? But it is incumbent upon us all to assist our neighbors in everything that furthers their wellbeing and happiness. This is required of us even regarding someone whose personality irritates us. If he should fall we cannot look at this as an opportunity for us to rise - or to find great happiness in our own progress if it is at the expense of our neighbor's disadvantage. □

Fortunetellers

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

(continued from page 4)

I am certain you would not quit your job if this rabbi told you to do so. Even if he guessed the truth once or twice, you still would not place your sustenance at risk. Why? Because you wisely realize that this rabbi's tricks aren't following reason, and lack proof of duplication.

"Reason" is necessary in guiding one's life. Reason is consistent. Since you desire a consistent livelihood, you must follow a realistic path to obtain it. Hopefully, you would not quit your job at the behest of a rabbi. This proves to you the indispensable need for "reason" inherent in the human mind. Following "false notions" and "tricks" is a deadly path and destroys the mind.

For this reason, you would not quit your job, even at the behest of this rabbi. I feel this proves to even you, that reason is the only course the human mind can accept. Following tricks that cannot be repeated consistently is not something for which we are ready to place our lives on the line.

A girl seeing a "malach" is definitely a proof,...that the girl has imagination! Tell me, how does she know what a malach is that she can distinguish it? Should I also believe my friend's son if he says he saw a monster?

People believe what they wish, just as King Saul believed he heard Samuel talking to him from the dead. Saul felt it was true. If King Saul can make that mistake, we certainly can!

These tales attract our emotions. How does the Torah teach us to react? To study human nature, to understand our instincts, to see through fallacy, and to guide these drives away from beliefs in falsehood, towards realization of reality. □

Page 5