

Ask any SCIENTIST: "Have *Blind Faith* in your theories." He will respond, "That is not an intelligent suggestion since reason and proof are achievable, and these alone validate what is 'true.'"

THIS APPLIES EQUALLY TO RELIGION.

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Detroit	8:50	Philadelphia	8:11
Houston	8:06	Phoenix	7:21
Jerusalem	7:28	Pittsburgh	8:32
Johannesburg	5:15	Seattle	8:46
Los Angeles	7:47	Sydney	4:49
London	8:54	Tokyo	6:40
Miami	7:57	Toronto	8:40
Montreal	8:23	Washington DC	8:16

Weekly Parsha

Pinchas

RABBI BERNIE FOX

"And the sons of Eliav were Datan and Aviram. These are the same Datan and Aviram that were leaders of the congregation and that strove with Moshe and Aharon among the congregation of Korach, in their strife against Hashem." (BeMidbar 26:9)

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Weekly Parsha

POSSIBLE Change in Plan

RABBI DR. DARRELL GINSBERG

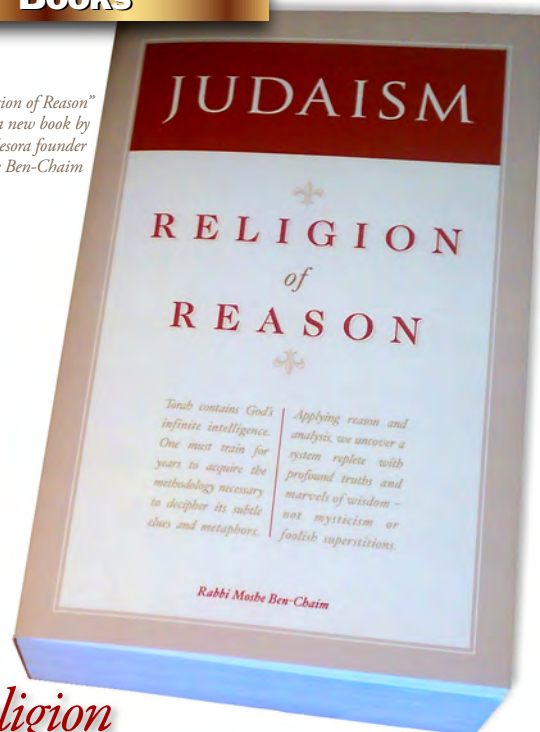
A few weeks ago, in Parshas Chukas, we read of the incident involving Moshe's striking of the rock to draw out water, and the subsequent directive by God that due to this error, Moshe would not enter into Eretz Yisrael. This was a pivotal moment in the history of Bnai Yisrael, and marked a premature end to the leadership of the greatest human to walk the planet. It is in Parshas Pinchas when we first face the ramifications of Moshe's punishment. As we will soon see, the possibility of Moshe continuing in his role in Eretz Yisrael, contrary to God's decree, was not that far-fetched.

Following the issue involving the daughters of Tzelofchod, God directs Moshe as follows (Bamidbar 27:12-14):

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Books

"Religion of Reason"
a new book by
Mesora founder
Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim



"Religion of Reason" Introduction

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The purpose of this book is to demonstrate that intelligence is the sole faculty that can bring about an appreciation for the Written and Oral Torahs. Ultimately, the objective is to assist you in your conviction in the truth of Judaism, a love for it, and a love of God.

God created the universe and the Torah: they equally reflect His wisdom. It is due only to misunderstanding and alien influences that many within our nation no longer approach Judaism with the same demand for reasoning that they demand from God's natural sciences, and instead accept belief, what is popular, and fantasy. This book aims to illustrate that Torah can be discovered only through an intellectual approach. To achieve that, explanations will be given for Torah and Talmudic portions, metaphors and their disguised messages will be discussed, corrections for false beliefs will be

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(Pinchas cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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In our parasha, Hashem directs Moshe and Elazar to take a census of the nation. The Torah recounts the details of this census. In discussing the Shevet of Reuven, the Torah tells us that Phalu that son of Reuven had one son – Eliav. Eliav, in turn had three sons – Nemuel, Datan and Aviram. The Torah then tells us the Datan and Aviram were involved in Korach's conflict with Moshe and Aharon. They were punished for this rebellion. The earth opened and swallowed Datan, Aviram and Korach. The Torah then adds that Korach's children were not killed in this punishment.

It is interesting that the Torah seems to assign a prominent leadership role to Datan and Aviram in this rebellion. This does not seem to accord with Rashi's opinion. Rashi implies that Korach was the true leader of the rebellion and he influenced Datan and Aviram to join his insurgency.[1] Rashi's contention is supported by the opening of Parshat Korach that describes Korach as the ringleader of the rebellion.

However, Gershonides rejects Rashi's position based upon the passages in our parasha that seem to attribute the leadership role in the rebellions to Datan and Aviram. Gershonides points to another element of our parasha's account of the rebellion that seems to support his position.

A brief introduction is needed in order to understand Gershonides' position. As we have noted, the account in our parasha ends by telling us that Korach was killed by Hashem for his actions but his children were spared. The earth opened and swallowed Korach. It is likely that Korach and his children were situated in proximity of each other. But nonetheless, the children were not swallowed. Rashi is bothered by a problem. The Torah tells us that the children to Korach were spared. This implies that we would presume that they died like their father. The Torah is compelled to correct us and reveal that our presumption is wrong. Korach was killed but his children were spared. Why would we presume that Korach's children should have been punished?

Rashi explains that Korach's children were deeply involved in the rebellion. Korach's children were among the first to join him. In the formative stage of the rebellion, they offered their

father support and advice. However, they subsequently recognized the impact of their actions and reconsidered. They repented their mistake and were spared from death.[2] According to Rashi, the apparent intention of the passage is that although they too had been deeply involved in the rebellion, Korach's children were saved by their repentance. In other words, the pasuk intends to demonstrate the efficacy of teshuva – repentance.

Gershonides points out that Rashi does offer an explanation for the Torah's statement that the children of Korach did not die. But there is another problem that Rashi's interpretation does not address. This section of the parasha is describing the census taken by Moshe and Elazar. Specifically, it is providing details regarding the population of Shevet Reuven. Korach was a Leyve. We can understand that he is mentioned as

an associate of Datan and Aviram. The Torah is explaining why Datan and Aviram died and tells us that they were involved in the rebellion of Korach. But this is an odd juncture to mention that the sons of Korach were spared. Why mention this point in the midst of an account of the census of Shevet Reuven?



Based on this consideration, Gershonides suggests that the simple message of the passages suggest and alternative to Rashi's interpretation. Gershonides begins by emphasizing that these passages are an account of the fate of Datan, Aviram, and their children. Korach is only mentioned in passing to explain the reason

for the death of Datan, Aviram, and their children. The Torah tells us that the children of Korach did not die. The apparent purpose of this comment – given the context – is to establish a contrast. Datan and Aviram's role in the rebellion was so substantial that their punishment extended to their children. Not only were Datan and Aviram punished, their children were also killed. In contrast, Korach's role was apparently less significant. So, although Korach was killed, his children were spared. This interpretation supports Gershonides' contention that Datan and Aviram were the instigators of the rebellion. Korach played a lesser, supporting role.[3]

Before proceeding, let us summarize the positions of Rashi and Gershonides. Rashi maintains that Korach was the initial instigator and

(continued on next page)

leader of the rebellion. His children were among his initial followers and advisors. However, they repented and were spared death. Gershonides argues that Datan and Aviram were the initial instigators. Korach was a supporter of their rebellion. As a result of their role in the rebellion, Datan and Aviram were punished with death and this punishment extended to their children. Korach played a lesser role. Therefore, although he was killed, his children were spared.

Of course, there is one obvious problem with Gershonides' position. The Torah in Parshat Korach describes the rebellion in detail. There, the Torah mentions Korach before mentioning Datan and Aviram.[4] The obvious implication is that Korach was the leader and Datan and Aviram were junior partners.

Gershonides does not ignore this problem. He explains that Korach is given prominence in this initial account because of his greater stature – he was a more important person.[5]

This is a difficult statement to understand. Why does Korach's greater stature dictate that he should be given prominence in the initial account? It seems that Gershonides maintains that although Datan and Aviram were the initial instigators, the rebellion would not have gained its tremendous momentum and popular support without the involvement of a leader of stature. Korach's participation lent credibility to the rebellion. As a result of his public support and leadership, the rebellion took hold among the people.

We can now understand the contrast between the two accounts of the rebellion. In the initial account – in Parshat Korach, the Torah's objective is to recount the incident of the rebellion and its impact on Bnai Yisrael. From the perspective of this impact, it is irrelevant who the initial instigator was. Korach's involvement in a leadership role was the crucial factor in converting a personal grievance into a popular cause. Therefore, in discussing the rebellion from the perspective of the impact on Bnai Yisrael, Korach is given prominence.

In contrast, the objective of the Torah in our parasha is not to recount the rebellion and its impact on the nation. Here, the intention is to explain the fate of Datan and Aviram. The Torah is telling us why they and their children died. In this context, it is important for the Torah to note that Datan and Aviram were the instigators. It is this role that explains their deaths and the deaths of their children.

Let us contrast the position of Rashi with that of Gershonides. According to Rashi, there is little distinction between leader and follower. Datan and Aviram were killed with their children. Korach and his children were also destined to die. However, Korach's children were spared because they repented. Gershonides disagrees. He argues that the responsibility of the instigator is greater than that of the follower – even a prominent, key follower. Therefore, Datan and Aviram's children were killed but Korach's were spared.

Perhaps, it is possible to extend our understanding of this debate between Gershonides and Rashi one step further. Gershonides argues that Datan and Aviram were the instigators. Korach – because of a flaw in his personality – was drawn into their insurgency. He would not have initiated this rebellion. But once underway, he became involved and assumed a leadership role. It seems that Gershonides maintains that the subsequent punishment corresponded with the internal wickedness of the parties involved. Datan and Aviram were the self-motivated in their involvement. They were more corrupt than Korach. Korach was drawn into an insurgency he would not have initiated. His wickedness was less than that of Datan and Aviram. As a result his punishment – although severe – was less than that of Datan and Aviram.

Rashi maintains that the punishment does not correspond to the internal wickedness of the parties. He maintains that Korach was the leader and Datan and Aviram were his followers. Nonetheless, they all deserved the same fate. Korach's children were only spared because of their repentance. It seems that according to Rashi, there is little or no distinction between leader and follower. The punishment corresponds with the outcome. All three of these individuals openly confronted and challenged Moshe's authority. Irregardless of their roles as leader and followers, they all engaged in identical behavior towards Moshe. This behavior dictated the punishment. All were condemned to a death that included not only themselves but also their children. ■

[1] Rashi Sefer BeMidbar 16:1

[2] Rashi Sefer BeMidbar 26:11

[3] Gershonides, Sefer BeMidbar, p 143.

[4] Sefer BeMidbar 16:1.

[5] Gershonides Sefer BeMidbar p 143.

Pinchas

RABBI BERNIE FOX

"Because he was zealous for his G-d and he atoned for Bnai Yisrael, he and his descendants after him will have a permanent covenant of priesthood." (BeMidbar 25:13)

Parshat Balak ends with an account of Moav's attempt to corrupt Bnai Yisrael. The nation of Moav recruits the young women of the nation. They are sent into the camp of Bnai Yisrael with orders to seduce the men. Once the seduction is accomplished, the women entice the men to participate in idolatry.

This plan almost succeeds. The young women are successful in seducing some of the men. A princess of Midyan – Kazbi, the daughter of Tzur – actually succeeds in seducing one of the leaders of the shevet of Shimon – Zimri, the son of Salu.

Pinchas, the grandson of Ahron, intervenes. He executes Zimri and Kazbi while they are in the act of fornication.

Our parasha begins with an account of the rewards received by Pinchas. Among these rewards, Hashem promises Pinchas a permanent covenant of priesthood. What is the meaning of this blessing?

Superficially, it seems that this covenant endowed Pinchas and his descendants with the priesthood. They were made Kohanim. However, Pinchas was that grandson of Ahron. The descendants of Ahron were already chosen to serve as the Kohanim! What is Hashem giving to Pinchas that he does not already possess?

In fact, it is not at all clear that Pinchas and his descendants were already appointed as Kohanim. How is this possible? The Talmud in Tractate Zevachim discusses this issue. The Talmud explains that there are two opinions regarding the identity of the original Kohanim. The opinions differ on a simple question. Who were the original Kohanim? Were the only first Kohanim the sons of Ahron? Alternatively, did this group include all of Ahron's descendants alive at that time? What is the difference between these two possibilities? Pinchas was a grandson of Ahron. He was Ahron's descendant. However, he was not Ahron's son. According to the first opinion, only the sons of Ahron were the original Kohanim. Their descendants who were born subsequently also became Kohanim. However, descendants

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already born were not included in the Kehunah – the Priesthood. This means that Pinchas was not one of the original Kohanim. Neither could his descendants serve as Kohanim. He was not a son of Ahron. His descendants could not claim descent from a Kohen.

According to the second opinion, all the descendants of Ahron were included in the original group of Kohanim. Pinchas was a grandson of Ahron. He was a descendant. Therefore, he and his children were already included in the Kehunah.[1]

Rashi adopts the first opinion. He indicates that Pinchas was not one of the original Kohanim.[2] Maimonides sides with the second opinion. He maintains that Pinchas was included among the original Kohanim.[3]

Our pasuk must be interpreted according to each of these opinions. According to the first opinion, our passage is easily understood. Pinchas and his children were not originally included in the Kehunah. At this point, he and his descendants are granted Kehunah. This was part of his reward for acting zealously on behalf of Hashem. In our pasuk, the Almighty creates a permanent change in the status of Pinchas and his descendants. They will now be Kohanim and have the same status as Ahron's sons and their progeny.[4]

However, according to the second opinion, our pasuk is not as easily understood. According to this opinion, Pinchas and his descendants already possessed the status of Kehunah. What new office is given to Pinchas in our passage?

Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra proposes an answer to this question. He explains that the passage does not represent a promise of Kehunah. Pinchas and his descendants already had this status. Instead, in our pasuk, Hashem awards Pinchas the office Kohen Gadol. Pinchas and his descendants will hold this office.[5]

Gershonides observes that most of those who held the office of Kohen Gadol were descendants of Pinchas. However, there were exceptions. Some of those who served as Kohen Gadol were descendants of Itamar. How can these exceptions be reconciled with Ibn Ezra's interpretation of the pasuk?

Gershonides responds that Hashem did not tell Pinchas that every Kohen Gadol would be one of his descendants. Instead, Hashem promised that this office would always be associated with the descendants of Pinchas. The office would never be transferred to a different family. At times, there would not be a fitting descendant of Pinchas to hold the office. Under such circumstances, the Kohen Gadol would come from the family of Itamar. Nonetheless, this interruption will only be temporary. The office will always return to the descendants of Pinchas.

Geshonides maintains that this is an example of a general principle. Hashem's blessings often

involve some element of permanency. For example, kingship is awarded to the shevet of Yehudah. This does not mean that there will never be a king who is not from the shevet of Yehudah. Geshonides points out that such an interpretation is untenable. At times, there may not be an appropriate candidate for kingship from the shevet. Alternatively, sometimes the shevet will deserve to be punished. Under these circumstances, the kingship must temporarily be transferred to another shevet. This is not an abrogation of the blessing. This kingship always returns to Yehudah. Any interruption is temporary. The blessing does not promise that there will never be an interruption. It promises that the kingship will never be permanently removed from the shevet.[6]

"Be an enemy unto the people of Midyan and strike them. For they acted as enemies towards you through their plotting. They plotted against you in the matter of Peor and in the matter of Kazbi the daughter of Tzur their sister who was killed on the day of the plague for the matter of Peor." (BeMidbar 25:17-18)

Hashem commands Moshe to treat the people of Midyan as enemies. Bnai Yisrael are commanded to make war with them. This is because Midyan allied with Moav. They joined in the plot to corrupt Bnai Yisrael.

The pasuk explains that Midyan shared responsibility for the "matter of Peor." This phrase is not difficult to interpret. The women of Midyan and Moav attempted to induce the men of Bnai Yisrael to engage in idolatry. The idolatrous entity they introduced to Bnai Yisrael was Peor. The pasuk admonishes the people to strike Midyan in response to this nation's efforts to introduce the worship of Peor among Bnai Yisrael. However, the pasuk adds that the people of Midyan should also be treated as enemies because of the "matter of Kazbi the daughter of Tzur."

This phrase is difficult to understand. Kazbi was one of the women recruited to participate in the seduction of the men of Bnai Yisrael. She was one of the specific women who were involved in the matter of Peor. It seems that the "matter of Peor" and the "matter of Kazbi" are two references to the same incident and evil. Why does the pasuk refer to the incident with both of these descriptions? Why is the incident described as the matter of Peor and as the matter of Kazbi?

The commentaries offer various answers to this question. According to Rashi, the pasuk is not only an admonishment to strike against Midyan. The pasuk is also a warning. Hashem commands Bnai Yisrael to wage war with Midyan and explains the urgency of this mission. Midyan is a dangerous adversary. This nation is completely

committed to the destruction of Bnai Yisrael. What is the indication of this commitment? The nation sent Kazbi, the daughter of Tzur, into the camp of Bnai Yisrael. They assigned her the role of seductress and harlot. This is remarkable! Kazbi was the daughter of Tzur. Tzur was one of the kings of Midyan. The people of Midyan were willing to defile a princess in order to destroy Bnai Yisrael. This is indicative of extreme, self-destructive hatred.[7] Bnai Yisrael must protect itself from this desperate enemy.

Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra offers a different explanation of the passage. He explains that the pasuk is providing an enumeration of reasons for the war Bnai Yisrael is to wage. The first reason is that Bnai Yisrael must respond to the actions already taken by Midyan. Midyan plotted against Bnai Yisrael. Midyan attempted to corrupt Bnai Yisrael. Second, Bnai Yisrael should be mindful of the future. Pinchas had killed Kazbi, the daughter of Tzur. Tzur was a king. His daughter was a princess. Surely, the people of Midyan would wish to avenge the death of their princess! In short, Midyan had attempted to destroy Bnai Yisrael without provocation. Now, Midyan had an additional motivation – the death of their princess.[8] Bnai Yisrael must protect themselves from Midyan. They must strike their enemy before Midyan can again plot against them. ■

[1] Mesechet Zevachim 101b.

[2] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 25:13.

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Bi'at HaMikdash 5:12.

[4] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 25:13.

[5] Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 25:13.

[6] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1998), p 141.

[7] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 25:18.

[8] Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 25:18.

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PARSHA

the

Sin of Tolerance



RABBI REUVEN MANN

In recent years the danger of terrorism by religious fanatics has emerged as the greatest threat to international peace. Fanaticism of either the ideological or religious kind is now regarded as a dangerous manifestation of a deranged mind. Civilized nations condemn the zealots who live by a code of hatred for the "infidels" and revenge for those who are perceived to be hostile to their cause.

At first glance Judaism seems to be very opposed to the notion of retribution. The Torah prohibits us from "hating our brother in our heart." If someone offends us we are not permitted to nurture anger or bear a grudge. Not that we are expected to simply forgive anyone who abuses us and overlook all insults that are hurled our way. Such a course would not be realistic for most people. The Torah recognizes that we have feelings and do not take kindly to unjustified assaults on our dignity. However, it demands that we confront the offender in a controlled manner and voice our complaint in a calm and intelligent fashion. The hope is that the offending party will accept rebuke and apologize for his noxious behavior. If he should have the decency to admit his fault and express regret we should then forgive him and regard the matter as settled.

This week's parsha, Pinchas, seems to convey a different message. Pinchas the grandson of Aharon rose up from the congregation and slew the prince of the tribe of Shimon while he was engaged in promiscuous behavior with a Midianite princess. He acted on the principle of "Kana'im Pog'im Bo" ("zealots may dispose of him") which grants permission to religious "fanatics" to summarily execute criminals while engaged in certain heinous crimes, without benefit of any judicial proceedings. The deed of Pinchas was of such merit that it brought to a halt the plague which Hashem had unleashed on the Jews because of their immoral behavior. Pinchas was rewarded by Hashem who praised him saying that he "withdrew my anger at Bnai Yisrael when he zealously avenged my vengeance among them... and thereby atoned for the children of Israel."

At first glance this parsha poses a problem. If anger and revenge are evil character traits why is Pinchas extolled precisely because of his zeal and unforgiving attitude toward Zimri, the prince of the tribe of Shimon? This shows us that the matter under discussion is not so simple. Zeal, vengefulness and fanaticism are not evil, per se. It all depends on the motivation. If it is rooted in man's ego, however masqueraded under religious pretenses than it is a sign of moral derangement. We have become familiar with certain

types of criminals who have no social conscience and are unable to empathize with the suffering of others. Even worse are those who do have a conscience but allow it to be distorted with perverse religious ideals. These people commit the worst atrocities with the belief that they have served their "deity" and will receive a great reward.

Pinchas was unique. He was the son of Elazar, the son of Aharon, who "loved peace and pursued peace." His intentions were not for personal glory but to remove the defamation of Hashem which had been unleashed by the blasphemous deed of Zimri and which had placed the Jewish people in grave jeopardy. He acted immediately and courageously purely for the sake of Hashem with no thought of personal concerns. He was zealous for Hashem, not for himself. We should constantly strive to cultivate a love of Hashem and an authentic appreciation of the true good. The more we do so the more we will develop a genuine distaste for evil and a desire to eradicate it. The verse in Tehillim (Psalms 97) says "Those who love Hashem hate evil". This is a lesson which must be constantly remembered in this era of immorality where tolerance for anything and everything, no matter how vile, is touted as the highest ideal.

Shabbat Shalom ■

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"Jewish Holidays" – 60 pages

offered, and a number of widespread Torah violations will be addressed. I know many of you will be reluctant to accept ideas presented here, as they will conflict with your cherished beliefs and your desire not to oppose others. However, I hope after reading many chapters, you too will arrive at the conclusion that Torah is synonymous with intelligence, design, and great depth – as much as the natural laws that continuously guide God's remarkable universe. If your mind is open to truth, you will naturally find a reasoned approach to Torah as God's true will, which will instill in you the conviction to follow those truths, even if this requires change, and deviation from the masses.

God distinguished man above all creations by granting intelligence to him alone. Man's obligation, purpose and fulfillment is realized when he engages this faculty. God desires man to probe His created universe, which is permeated with His wisdom. Everywhere we witness marvels: from the subatomic world to the furthest galaxies and everything in between. But to realize the immense wisdom in creation, we must investigate, analyze, deduce, induce, theorize, test our theories...and only then do we discover the numerous, intricate, precise and harmonious natural laws. On the surface, we view beautiful, natural forms. To grow in our appreciation of God's wisdom, we transcend physical form and investigate the universe on an operational level. Much time must be invested, and intelligent thought must be applied. It is absurd to suggest one should simply "believe" in nature, as if this were of any merit; as if "belief" imbues man with an appreciation of the design and synchronism of this "giant clock." Belief is inapplicable since nature refers to an intricate system guided by laws, while belief is a blind emotional acceptance – not the intellectual and analytical tool vital for acquiring wisdom. Belief is as unrelated to wisdom as blindness is unrelated to color. Only intelligence detects and reveals truths. And the truths we find amaze us, as is God's plan: to offer man rich experiences that fully satisfy him and fill him with an awe of the Creator.

Similarly, God's wisdom fills His Torah system...a system that cannot be seen on the surface through simple reading. Even greater analysis is required here, in this tapestry of laws, morals, metaphysics and principles, which compared to tangible nature, are invisible and highly abstract. Torah requires a refined mind to discover its messages. Here too, belief plays no role. Only with many years of training in Torah and Talmudic study, can one arrive at the brilliance that astonished the wisest of people, from Moses, Miriam, Aaron, Joshua, Ruth, King David, King Solomon...to Saadia Gaon, Ibn Ezra, Maimonides, Nachmanides, Sforno, and Rashi.

Both areas – the universe and Torah – reveal God's wisdom, but only after years of dedicated study under one who himself was trained by others, back to Moses. The process is a great joy to all who have mastered the method of deciphering God's sublime communications. Like Torah, the Rabbis authored the Talmud in a style that trains the mind in tremendous skills, enabling each Talmudic student to study independently, and make continuous discoveries.

Torah wisdom has a design. It is also a creation like the universe. But in neither – the universe nor Torah – is the wisdom "created." What is created about the universe is the 'formation' of physical objects and laws that had never existed. But the wisdom revealed in this universe, viz. God's might, kindness or justice, is eternal. God is eternal, and therefore He and His wisdom, which are one, are eternal. The Torah as well is a formalized, created structure. But the wisdom contained reflects God. So although God created a new universe and a new entity of Torah, the wisdom reflecting God in both is eternal.

Since both worlds are discrete – they have fixed properties such as size and weight in the universe, and Torah contains a limited number of verses – man might think ideas are also limited, reflecting the limited design of both worlds. Not so. For man to detect and marvel at God's infinite, eternal wisdom, God structured the Torah in "branching" fashion: one main stem or idea branches out and multiplies exponentially. This branching design reveals endless wisdom. Just as a tree branch starts out as a single stem, and breaks off into 2, 4, 8, 20, then innumerable branches...one Torah truth opens up doors to even greater vaults of wisdom. And each new idea offers greater insights onto our existing knowledge, while also advancing us to newer truths, yielding endless wisdom, in contrast to human creations where the knowledge contained is quite limited. The structure of knowledge too, follows this branching design, as seen in categories.

To decipher God's Torah, man requires reason and analysis. The goal is to appreciate the marvels of God's systems, and ultimately God Himself, as far as man can. Reason can unlock truths, belief cannot.

God's very act of Revelation at Sinai teaches that God desires us to accept as fact only that which is witnessed and proven. Otherwise, we cannot blame other religionists for accepting and teaching their miraculous claims. In the end, Judaism's entire basis for claiming its status as the only true religion is Revelation at Sinai. Following God's lesson to accept only that which is provable (in this case, performed in front of masses), we reject all other religions asking simple faith without proof.

"Rabbi Judah said, 'Adam the First was commanded on idolatry alone' (Sanhedrin 56b)."

Adam understood this command was intended exclusively for man's benefit, as God needs nothing and is unaffected by His creations. The supreme intellect he was, from this single mandate alone, Adam would derive additional truths. He would deduce not to take God's name in vain, not to curse Him, to pray and sacrifice to Him alone and other attitudes and actions demanded by this relationship. It was unnecessary for God to itemize all that Adam should believe and perform, since he was equipped with intelligence, precisely so he would arrive at new truths throughout his life. He did not require a Torah.

However, man was also equipped with instincts and imagination. Over time, Adam's descendants fabricated beliefs in multiple sub-deities and formalized religious rites concerning them. Abraham arose, and although following idolatrous beliefs in his youth, his excellent mind discovered the truth of a single Creator. Engaging reason and proofs, Abraham taught monotheism, attracting thousands of followers, exposing the fallacy of other religions and beliefs. Yet, idolatry continued. Even his offspring suffered in Egypt due to their idolatrous sins (Ezek. 20:8).

2448 years after Adam's creation, due to man's deviations, a Divine system was required. God gave 613 commands called Torah to the newly-formed Jewish nation. To all others – the Noahides – God maintained the seven laws previously commanded to Noah. Noahides wishing to take on more than the seven and join the Jewish nation are welcome, but not obligated. However, once they accept the Torah of 613 laws, they equal the Jew. Torah is not to benefit Jew alone. God is concerned for all of His creations. The reason the Jew was selected was due to Abraham's commitment to monotheism. Thus, he and his descendants were most suitable to promulgate truth, safeguarding it for the entire world. The Jews' unique role is to act as a beacon to others, thereby requiring preparation in the form of numerous commands and Torah study. Due to idolatrous beliefs that arose, the Torah included responses in the form of negative commands. Torah prohibits following the Canaanites, Egyptians, witches, astrology, mysticism, superstitions, demon belief and consulting the dead, to name a few. These beliefs are not based on evidence, but

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on man's weak psyche and imagination. All have their root in the same disease as idolatry: human insecurity. God, who is the source of kindness and mercy, saw a need to respond to alien influences, for man's good. This was Abraham's intent too.

Fantasy and idolatrous notions exist now as they always have, and have crept into the Jewish mindset. Under the guise of "Judaism," idolatrous beliefs and practices have become commonplace; they are even endorsed by leaders and Rabbis. Understanding man's temptation to cave to his over-religious and idolatrous tendencies and adopt new practices, God commanded man to not add to the Torah (Deut. 4:2), but this has been violated all too often. At times, the impetus for this violation is to obtain some false psychological security, as is the case with amulets. Other times one desires to feel "more religious" than others, attempting to do so by differentiating one's appearance and dress, despite Tzafania's critique of such Jews (Radak 1:8). Here, ego is to blame, in connection with the lack of respect for God's supreme wisdom, and His commandments.

The failure to accept that God alone provides for man drives Jews to seek an imagined security by wearing red strings, checking Mezuzahs, carrying Jewish books for protection, praying to the dead, incanting Jewish texts, dressing a certain way, paying for human blessings, and performing acts on certain times and with certain objects. Jews violate these idolatrous prohibitions, despite the Torah's clear warnings. Ibn Ezra teaches the reason why God prohibits these acts: "they do nothing (Lev. 19:31)." The barometer for "Jewish" practice has become peer approval, not what God says.

*"Midvar shekker tirschak:
From a false matter distance
yourself (Exod. 23:7)."*

Truth must guide our very thought, word, and action, if we are to adhere to God's will and His Torah. And the truth is that our Patriarchs and Matriarchs never accepted omens, astrology, or witchcraft. Nor did they reject God as the sole cause of Reward and Punishment by using amulets. (Reward and Punishment being a fundamental and required to receive the afterlife as taught by Maimonides in his 13 Principles, reprinted herein.) Foolish individuals attempt to sidestep this Torah fundamental, which teaches

that our free will acts alone are what cause the good and evil in life, not inanimate trinkets or bizarre practices. Such items cannot avert God's will. This is so clear it is a wonder that Jews prefer amulets and superstitions over God.

When in need, our perfected ancestors used their intelligence to accomplish what is humanly possible: they prayed to God, and they introspected and repented (Eicha 3:40). They performed no other acts, for there exists no other means to attain any goal. Man's successes and failures are due to natural laws, or to God. But today, people ignore these lessons, and deify Rebbes. Unfortunately, Rebbes don't protest, making it all the more crucial for responsible leaders to speak out.

This new mystical, impostor Judaism does not rely on Torah sources, but feeds on the insecurities of men and women. Despite the numerous prohibitions, Jews violate these laws. This is attributed not only to insecurity, but to the failure to rigorously adhere to the Torah's words. Our great Rabbis attempted to educate man, but the Jews misunderstood their riddles and metaphors as literal statements. So when we are told about metaphoric "demons" (shadim) to illustrate deep, psychological principles, Jews do not take the time to study the Sages' words. Instead, they disregard the Prophets and Sages who taught that the Rabbis speak in riddles. Today's Jews understand metaphors as fact, despite the lack of evidence and inherent problems in such literal readings. In contrast, King Solomon wrote Proverbs (literally "Metaphors") to train us in thought, and to appreciate that the Rabbis speak in non-literal terms so as to sharpen our minds. Maimonides, Radak and our great Sages endorsed this truth, that the Rabbis spoke in metaphor. But the masses reject this, in favor of believing in non-existing powers. The brilliance of our Rabbis and Sages has been eclipsed by infantile notions.

It is vital that today's true Jewish leaders sense the obligation to correct those following the mystical lifestyle, helping to uncover their errors and redirecting them towards truth. Many Jews believe mystical beliefs are a viable version of Judaism. However, they underestimate the gravity of such corrupt thinking. For with the acceptance of mystical, idolatrous and baseless beliefs, one's view of God is distorted, to the point that one's life might be useless, thereby forfeiting the Afterlife. If God is not viewed as the only source of our fortune, and Jews accept imaginary powers or forces, such people have the wrong understanding of God. Their prayers are not directed to the true Creator, and therefore they cannot be answered. Reward and Punishment – a Fundamental – is not accepted by them. Jews

believe in "other" means through which they might achieve success and health. The Jew need not comply with Torah, since he feels amulets, practices, and human blessings might also work. He does not read the Torah's clear words on this subject. Instead, he prefers to follow the blind masses, gaining their approval over God's. His entire life is based on falsehood, and in some cases, his mitzvahs and knowledge are worthless.

The primary problem with mysticism and idolatrous beliefs is that they are false. A wise Rabbi defined mysticism and idolatry as "assuming a causal relationship when it does not exist." For example, assuming that wearing a red thread will ward off harm, or that a note thrown into a Rebbe's grave will be answered, are both "idolatrous" or mystical, since there is no causal relationship between these acts and the desired result. Therefore, both are Torah prohibitions. But taking medication is called scientific, since certain, ingested substances directly correlate to better health. Of one who follows a life where we reject our senses and believe unproven notions, King Solomon said, "a fool believes everything (Prov. 14:15)."

Fortunately, the Jew is not beyond repair, as he does not seek a Tzaddik or a Rebbe's blessing to regrow amputated limbs, or resurrect loved ones. He has boundaries. Using those boundaries, we might use reason to extrapolate to other cases, and bring him to his senses, saying, "If human blessings, amulets or reciting Tehillim cannot regrow a limb, it cannot do anything else. Change occurs only through God, or nature." There is no correlation between these practices and success. Therefore, these beliefs are akin to idolatry, which also offers no correlation.

In contrast, it is rewarding that when we show people the marvelous insights, and the unique approach to Torah wisdom based on proof and reason, many are filled with delight and deep thanks. The emptiness they tolerated as they endured their previous belief system – which could never be validated – is happily abandoned and replaced with the pleasure of following ideas that jive with their minds. This occurs since God created man to find the greatest joy in a life of wisdom, and to find reason more preferable than unproven beliefs. Man knows once he sees something proven, that it is unshakable, thereby offering stability in eternal truths. Man yearns to know what is absolute truth, so he might not delude himself. However, belief cannot offer a firm basis justifying any man to follow them. No sane argument for a blind faith can be constructed in its defense. God granted humans intelligence, so we might engage it in the greatest mitzvah of Torah study. King Solomon taught that nothing compares to it (Prov. 8:11).

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So we have two tasks at hand: 1) to correct the Jewish idolatrous trend; and 2) to share Torah's brilliance.

We currently live in an era where Jews believe in falsehoods and mysticism, when they wish to impress their peers more than God, deviating from Torah commands. A primary purpose of this compilation is to place the focus back on Torah's very words. Popular practices and beliefs will be discussed, false notions will be exposed, and Torah truths and the method used to unravel metaphors will be shared. This will offer you great satisfaction, and an appreciation for the Torah's wisdom and ultimately, for the Creator. After you are exposed to a number of examples of the Torah's reasoning and methods, I hope you will apply this approach to all other cases you encounter.

Torah is about truth. If we wish truth and not to delude ourselves, we must accept only that which we find stated in the Torah, Prophets or Writings. If some notion is not found in these books, it does not form part of Judaism. Certainly, if the Torah rejects certain practices, we too must reject them. As Maimonides teaches, we are to accept as truth only those matters that are: 1) proven by reason, 2) experienced by our senses, 3) or Torah transmissions. I have included his Letter on Astrology (Letter to Marseilles) at the end of this book where he states this.

I have included chapters on fundamentals, methodology, human nature, falsehoods, mitzvahs, God's justice, and human perfection. In this manner, you might appreciate how Torah wisdom is applied to many areas of our lives. Throughout, I cite examples of metaphors and suggest interpretations, demonstrating the great insights of the Rabbis. I intend to share how non-literal interpretations offer deep insights, while literal readings force us to accept fantasy. At the end, I have included important sources so you might have easy access to them.

May you rise above the need for human approval, to the Torah's goal of loving God, and being loved by Him. May you conquer all emotional bias and live by reason alone. May you discover your errors in character and in deed, and abandon them. May wisdom and truth become your reality and joy, and may you increase in both. May you share your newly learned truths with many others. ■

*"Religion of Reason" is now available.
See ad on next page.*



RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

After quoting a Rabbi who taught through scientific proof that the universe must truly be billions of years old, I received the following letter:

"While I do not necessarily disagree with your hypothesis on the age of the universe, I do not believe the proof you attributed to the other Rabbi to be bullet proof. You said, 'For light to reach Earth from a star 10,000,000 light years away, the universe must have existed that long, in order that the light traveled this distance.' Who said the light in fact traveled that distance? Perhaps God created the star together with a '10,000,000 light year long light stream' thereby allowing it to be immediately visible; despite the fact that nowhere nearly enough time had elapsed to allow the light to travel that distance on its own. I do not posit this as to what actually happened, only to only to suggest that this particular proof is not 'irrefutable.'"

My response: You posit that God could have created the light stream "already in travel and reaching Earth." According to you, even the wisest of men like Einstein viewing this star's light and using reasoning, will miscalculate its distance, and thus its age. God is really fooling us about the age of the universe, according to you. Your theory imputes a deception to God. That's problem number one. But as we know, fabrication is of human origin, and cannot be ascribed to a perfect Creator, whose Torah says "From a falsehood, distance yourself."

Furthermore, you contradict yourself. On the one hand, you accept that the star is in fact 10,000,000 miles away, since you say its beam reaches us only by way of God's unnatural manipulation. Thus, you trust your senses regarding the star's location, but not for its "age", as a calculation based on your accepted location would date it at 10,000,000 years old.

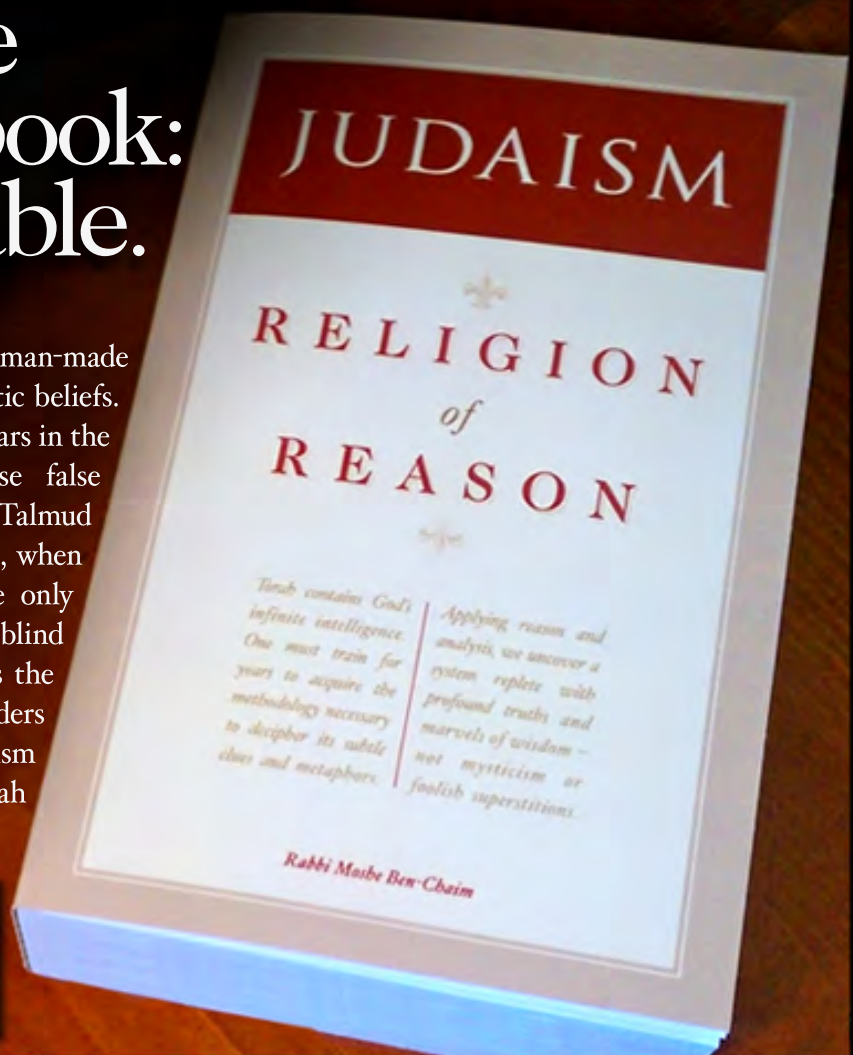
Following the verse that God despises fallacy, we accept that He is not fooling us: the stars we see prove that the universe is billions of years old. And this does not mean Adam didn't live 5771 years ago. We mean to date the beginning of the universe, not Adam, thereby following the theory that the first 5.x "days" refer not to 24-hour periods, but epochs of billions of years. However, once Adam was created on day 6, until today, we count 5771 years. ■

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"God said to Moshe: 'Go up this Avarim Mountain and look at the land that I have given to Bnei Yisroel. [After] you have seen it, you too will be gathered to your people, just as your brother Aharon was gathered. Because you disobeyed My words in the wilderness of Tzin, when the community quarreled, [you were] to sanctify Me through the water, before their eyes. Those were the waters of dispute at Kadeish, in the wilderness of Tzin.'"

Rashi offers two extremely puzzling expansions of what was taking place here (ibid 12):

"Why is this placed here? When the Holy One, Blessed is He, said [to Moshe], 'give them...', he said, 'God commanded me to give them the hereditary property. Perhaps the decree was abrogated, and I may enter the land.' The Holy One, Blessed is He, said to him, 'My decree remains in place.' Another interpretation: When Moshe entered the inheritance given to the sons of Gad and Reuven, he rejoiced, and said, 'It seems that the vow regarding me was abrogated.' This is comparable to a king who decreed that his son could not enter the doorway to his palace. He [the King] entered the gateway, and he [the son] followed, [he entered] the courtyard, and he followed, [he entered] the anteroom, and he followed. When he was about to enter the chamber, he [the king] said to him, 'My son, from here and onward, you are forbidden to enter.'"

Both explanations imply that Moshe believed God might have changed His mind, so to speak, regarding Moshe's fate. In the first explanation, it is implied in Moshe's personal involvement in the distribution of land in Eretz Yisrael – "...you shall give his hereditary property..." (ibid 11). In the second, it is the fact that Moshe was able to enter the lands (eventually) designated for the tribes of Reuven and Gad. Was this truly a possibility? God had made it pretty evident when informing Moshe about his error and the resultant punishment that he was not going to enter Eretz Yisrael. Moshe clearly entertained the possibility, though, that there had been a change in plan. Was this possible? And if so, why does God reject it outright?

One additional important question involves understanding the difference between the two explanations. In the first instance, Moshe's thinking is clearly rejected, and the decree stands. Yet in the second reasoning, we see Moshe, in a very technical manner, seemingly avoiding the punishment as detailed by God. While he did not cross the Yarden, he did enter into the halachic Eretz Yisrael. The analogy of the king and his son, as introduced by Rashi, indicates that Moshe was in the palace, yet barred from the innermost chamber. This

indicates that being in the lands of Reuven and Gad meant some access to the Land of Israel. Would this then truly mean that "the vow regarding me was abrogated?"

The answer to these questions lies in one important premise, one that may seem obvious, but is not often applied to Moshe. God clearly states in Parshas Chukas (ibid 20:12) that "Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me in the presence of Bnei Yisroel; therefore, you will not bring this congregation into the land that I have given them." This is a manifest expression of God's middas hadin, the attribute of justice. Yet we have seen instances in the past where God initially expressed this middah, and yet through tefila and teshuva, the gezar din was reversed, and the middas harachamim is expressed. No doubt, this is an inherent principle in the arena of *schar v'onesh*, where an individual, through the use of tefilah and teshuva, could bring about a change in the Divine decree. It is the fundamental idea found in Yom Kippur. The Rambam (Hilchos Teshuva 7:6-7) emphasizes this concept, how the state of sin removes the individual from God, but through teshuva can bring the person closer, to the point where he is "mudvak beshechina." There is no reason whatsoever why Moshe should be excluded from this principle, and we can assume he completed his process of teshuva and tefilah as a result of his error. Therefore, when Moshe saw indicators that the plan may have been altered, whether it was through his involvement with apportioning the land or through his travel through the lands of Reuven and Gad, he rightly posited that a change could have occurred.

With this in mind, then, we must turn to God's responses to Moshe's assumptions. There were two primary features in Moshe's error at the incident involving the rock. The first was his own error, when he hit the rock rather than speaking to it. The other was the profound negative effect it had on Bnei Yisrael – "...you did not sanctify Me within Bnei Yisrael" (Devarim 32:51). This second aspect to Moshe's action was a defect in leadership, and this could not be repaired. In Rashi's first explanation, God explains that the decree would not be reversed. While Moshe may have done teshuva for his own personal error, he could no longer continue as leader of Bnei Yisrael once they crossed the Yarden. His role as leader had been permanently compromised as a result of his action, and the decree would not be reversed, no matter the extent of teshuva done. The second explanation of Rashi offers a different possibility. Moshe's ability to enter the lands of Reuven and Gad implied to him that he would be able to continue to Eretz Yisrael.



However, it could be that Rashi is telling us that Moshe felt he would not enter as Moshe Rabbeinu, the leader of Bnei Yisrael, rather as Moshe, member of the nation. In other words, with Yehoshua taking over as leader, Moshe would give up the role of leader for good, a well-deserved retirement. Yet such a role was not possible for Moshe, as the nation could never separate who he was as an individual from his role as leader. Therefore, he would never enter into the land. If so, what was the benefit in allowing him to pass through the lands of Reuven and Gad? While he may have not entered into Eretz Yisrael proper, he did have the opportunity to benefit somewhat from what the land had to offer. His previous error did not prevent him from gaining, on a lesser level, from the perfection offered from Eretz Yisrael. Therefore, Moshe, and not Moshe the leader, was granted this opportunity to be positively affected by Eretz Yisrael. ■

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SAN MATEO, CA – April 27, 2011 (PRNewswire)



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