

God gave us senses and intelligence as He desires us to follow only what is perceivable and reasonable. It is vital that you examine God's creation of the human being and take a lesson for determining your beliefs. Surely, God's specific design of man is for a reason. And if we ignore the lesson of our design, we in fact deny God to that degree.

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Weekly Parsha

the
Fantasy
of
Immortality

RABBI DR. DARRELL GINSBERG

Parshas Chayei Sarah is book-ended by two very monumental events in Jewish history – the death of Sarah and the death of Avraham, signifying the first transition of yehadus from one generation to the next. Much of the beginning of the parsha deals with both the reaction of Avraham to Sarah's death, as well as the steps Avraham went through to secure her burial place, Maaras Hamachpela. At the end of the pasha, Avraham's death is recorded, but as compared to the description of the death of Sarah is quite subdued (Bereishis 25:7-8):

"These are the days of the years of Avraham which he

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Mysticism

A
DENIAL
OF
GOD

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

If you were given proof that mysticism is non-existent, and merely a belief like the false beliefs of other religions and cultures, would you accept the proof? The intelligent answer is "Yes." God designed mankind with intellect and a primary function of intelligence is to distinguish truth from falsehood. When we are presented with 100% proof for

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Jerusalem	4:21	Pittsburgh	4:43
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Los Angeles	4:30	Sydney	7:19
London	3:50	Tokyo	4:15
Miami	5:13	Toronto	4:33
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Weekly Parsha

Chayei Sarah

RABBI BERNIE FOX

The Meaning and Significance of a Vow

And Avraham said to his servant, the elder of his household, the one who had authority over all of his possessions: Place your hand

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under my thigh. And swear by Hashem, the G-d of the heavens and the G-d of the earth, that you will not take a woman for my son from the daughters of Cana'an that I dwell among. Rather to my land and the place of my birth you shall go and take a wife for my son – for Yitzchak. (Sefer Beresheit 24:2-4)

And the servant said to him: Perhaps the woman will not wish to accompany me to this Land. Shall I return your son to the Land from which you went forth? (Sefer Beresheit 24:5)

Hashem, the G-d of the heavens, Who took me from the household of my father and the land of my birth, Who spoke to me and swore saying, "To you descendants I will give this Land", He will send His angel before you. And you will take a wife for my son from there. (Sefer Beresheit 24:7)

Avraham's directive to Eliezer

The above passages introduce the Torah description of the process through which a wife is found and secured for Yitzchak. Avraham determines that the time has arrived for his son Yitzchak to marry. Avraham decides to identify and secure the appropriate woman for his son. He does not assign the responsibility of finding the proper wife to Yitzchak. Instead, he charges his loyal servant Eliezer with the responsibility. However, he does not give Eliezer unlimited authority in selecting a wife. Eliezer's selection must meet specific criteria. She may not be from the nation of Cana'an. Avraham directs Eliezer to return to Aram Naharayim – Avraham's birthplace. In this distant land, he must seek a wife for Yitzchak. In addition to the restrictions outlined in the above passages, Avraham places further limits on Eliezer's autonomy. He must persuade the woman he identifies as the appropriate wife for Yitzchak to leave her home and return with him to the Land of Cana'an. He may not take Yitzchak to Aram Naharayim to meet the perspective wife and her family. He asks Eliezer to accept the mission and to vow to him that he will faithfully fulfill his duty.

Eliezer's quandary and Avraham's response

Eliezer asks an obvious question. What are his directions in the event that the perspective wife refuses to return with him to the Land of Cana'an? Under these circumstances, may he take Yitzchak

to Aram Naharayim?

Avraham responds that he has complete confidence in the success of the mission he has assigned to his servant. Hashem has made a covenant with him that his descendants will possess the Land of Cana'an. The fulfillment of this covenant depends upon Yitzchak marrying and creating his own family. Eliezer's mission is essential to the fulfillment of Hashem's covenant with Avraham. Therefore, Avraham is confident that Hashem will guide and assist Eliezer in his mission.

In short, Avraham instructed Eliezer to find a wife for Yitzchak in Aram Naharayim and to bring her back to the Land of Cana'an. Eliezer foresaw the possibility that he may find the perfect wife but she will not consent to travel to far-away land to marry an unknown man. He asks Avraham whether he may take Yitzchak to Aram



Naharayim to complete the match. Avraham responds that Eliezer need not concern himself with this issue. He is certain that Hashem will guide him towards the successful completion of his mission and he will not need to take Yitzchak to Aram Naharayim. Now, however, something strange occurs.

And if the woman does not wish to return with you, then you are released from this vow you make to me. But do not return my son there. And the servant placed his land under the thigh of Avraham his master and he took an oath in regards to this matter. (Sefer Beresheit 24:8-9)

Avraham's apparent ambivalence

Avraham has assured Eliezer that Hashem vouchsafes the success of his mission. Yet, he now tells Eliezer that if he does not persuade the woman to return with him, then he is exempt from his vow to Avraham. Only at this point, does Eliezer accept the mission and communicates his complete commitment through an oath of obedience. In other words, after assuring Eliezer that his mission will be guided to its successful completion through the influence of Divine providence, Avraham then considers the possibility that Eliezer may fail. He tells Eliezer that under such circumstances, he is exempt from his oath. Only at this point, does Eliezer agree to the mission and the oath.

Avraham's message to Eliezer is very ambiguous. He tells him he is assured of success and

(continued on next page)

then, he immediately discusses the possibility of failure. He treats failure as a real possibility and tells Eliezer that he will not be guilty of violating his other if he fails to persuade the prospective wife to come of the Land of Canaan. Was Avraham indeed certain of Eliezer's success or not?

Eliezer's moral dilemma

Rabbaynu Yosef Bechor Shur makes an interesting comment on Avraham's final statement. He explains that Avraham told Eliezer that he is not requiring that he make a vow that he will complete his mission. He is asking him to promise that he will make every effort to fulfill the mission he has been assigned. Although these comments do not directly address the apparent contradiction in Avraham's dialogue with Eliezer, they provide an important insight into the underlying issues that were guiding the conversation.

Apparently, even after Avraham provided Eliezer with his assurance that Hashem would guide him to success, Eliezer was unwilling to take the vow that Avraham required. What was the source of his reluctance? Two factors were at-play. First, Avraham had asked Eliezer to undertake a mission that – on its surface – was preposterous. He had asked Eliezer to travel to a distant land and find there a wife for Yitzchak. He was to then persuade this perfect wife to abandon

her home and family, embark upon a long, arduous, and dangerous journey to an alien land. She should do this in order to marry an unknown stranger, who for some mysterious reason, could not come to her. Rabbaynu Yosef Bechor Shur is indicating Eliezer's attitude towards this mission. He had reservations.

Second, Eliezer understood Avraham to be demanding that he take an oath to complete the mission. He must swear by the Creator Who rules the heavens and earth that he will fulfill his assigned task. What is the meaning of such an oath? It means that the person taking the vow is making a commitment that is as absolute and true as the existence of the Creator. In short, Eliezer understood Avraham to demand an absolute commitment to succeed in accomplishing the absurd!

Avraham's response to Eliezer's dilemma

Avraham was not unaware of the paradoxical nature of his demand. However, he knew that all of the obstacles that Eliezer foresaw would be overcome through Divine providence. He was certain of this providence because he understood this mission as an essential step towards the realization of the covenant that Hashem had made with him. For Avraham, there was no paradox. The success of the mission that seemed preposterous to Eliezer was absolutely certain from Avraham's perspective.

Avraham had no doubt that Eliezer would succeed. However, he realized that Eliezer could not take the oath that he understood was required by Avraham. Eliezer appreciated Avraham's certainty. But unless he could embrace that self-same level of certainty that Avraham experienced, he could not morally take the vow. He could not vow to succeed unless he was certain of success. This dynamic created a deadlock. Avraham required a vow. However, Eliezer could not possibly provide the vow he understood to be required.

It was up to Avraham to resolve the deadlock. He told Eliezer that if he did not succeed, he would be exempt from the vow. In other words, he only required Eliezer's absolute, best effort. Avraham was not expressing any doubt or wavering of his own certainty. He was acknowledging that his personal certainty was not relevant to Eliezer's decision. He was acknowledging Eliezer's inadequate certainty. In effect, he said to Eliezer: I am certain that you will succeed. But I realize that my certainty is a product of my prophetic experiences and the covenant that I have witnessed between myself and Hashem. I acknowledge that you are not completely certain of your success and cannot morally take a vow to succeed. Therefore, I require only your vow that your effort will be absolute. ■

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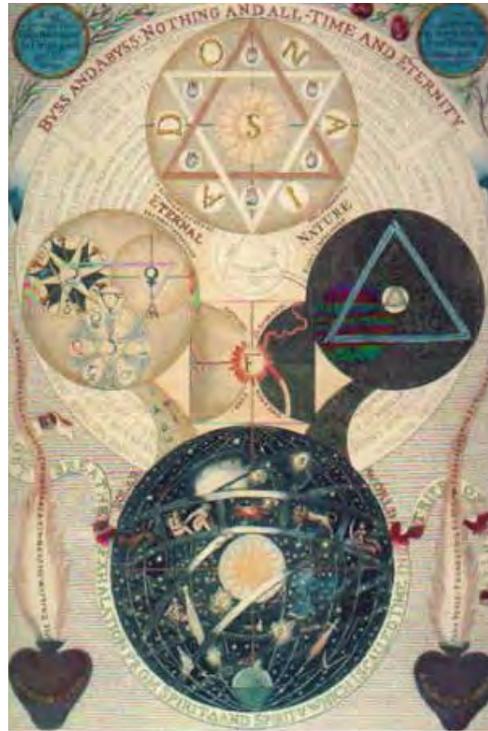
anything, we know that all opposing views must be false. We recognize proof alone as the sole determinant of what is real. And without proof, we have no basis to accept anything, and certainly not to base our lives on mere beliefs. If, however, we do accept beliefs without proof, we must realize we may be fooling ourselves.

As Maimonides teaches, we must accept as true only that which we perceive with any of our five senses. We also accept as true what our minds tells us must be so. For example, if we see a building, we know there were once construction workers executing the plans of an architect. We need not witness the plans being drawn or the crew constructing the building. And lastly, we accept as true that which is contained in the Torah, since Revelation at Sinai is incontrovertible, and Torah's leaders who remain true to the verses are reliable. Other than these three criteria, Maimonides teaches we must not accept something as true. Maimonides' teaching is quite reasonable, since he follows God's design of the human being. God gave us senses and reasoning, and no other faculty for determining truths. This is because these faculties 'alone' are to be used in our acceptance of truths.

The Torah has no cases of mysticism. When in need, the Jews approached Moses and asked for food and water or they fought for salvation from their enemies. Never did they assume they could obtain their needs through unproven methods, what we refer to as "mysticism." We define mysticism as belief without proof. None of the Prophets accepted mysticism. When hunted by his twin Esav, Jacob prepared for battle, he prepared a bribe, and he prayed. But he did not resort to imagined beliefs in powers or amulets. Even though his life and the lives of his family were at risk, he followed a plan based on reality. He could use either might, bribe his brother's heart, or God could assist. There were no other options for Jacob. This story is recorded for good reason. When Rachel asked Jacob to give her children, he became angry for God's honor and said, "Am I in God's place?" And the Prophets throughout the books of Prophets constantly accuse the Jews of their mystical beliefs.

Therefore, as mystical forces or beings were never witnessed, and we are in fact admonished against such beliefs, as they are incomprehensible, and as the Torah is bereft of such notions...the belief in mysticism has no basis in reality and violates Torah.

It is notable that proponents of mysticism do not live their lives based on such beliefs. They work to earn a living, as they realize money does not grow on trees, nor are there forces that make man prosperous.



The images conjured up by mystics reveals the incomprehension of their beliefs

So why do so many Jews accept mysticism?

One reason is desperation. When things go bad, a person's emotions are excited, and he or she will latch onto anything offering hope. But we must not take any lesson from people in such distorted states of mind. Writings are also extant in old books authored by Jews and even Rabbis that speak of mysticism. Jews feel what is in print, or authored by a "Rabbi" automatically renders the notion as a truth. But in any of these cases, if the idea was questioned on its own merit, it would be shown to be unsubstantiated, and even heretical. And other Jews accept mysticism simply because it has become popular in religious circles. They are afraid to disagree with the masses. Preservation of their social approval blinds them to the truth. One reader quoted the following from a book on Kabbala:

"Sefiros are filters or garments for Hashem's light. Partzufim (Abba, Ema, Zeer, etc.) have faces and beards (Dikna), they have sexual relations, they get pregnant, and are brother and sister."

"There seems to be a fine line between Judaism and idolatry...why is praying to God through these Names (Sefiros-Partzufim) not only permitted but is an essential part of the Kabbalistic system..."

The reader who is intelligent then asked,

"How can these 'Partzufim' not be considered some type of polytheism?"

The reader is correct. Such notions are heretical, as they attribute physical qualities to God. It makes no difference that these notions are found in Kabbala, or authored by a famous Rabbi. These notions contain two grave errors: 1) equating God with creation; 2) assuming knowledge about God. Two Torah verses teach otherwise: "Man cannot know Me while alive (Exod. 33:20)" told to Moses. God also told Isaiah, "To what can you equate Me, and I will be similar? (Isaiah 40:25)." In both cases, God teaches that man cannot know God, nor is anything equivalent to God, in any manner. Therefore, the Kabbalistic writings quoted above deny God's own words to Isaiah that He is not similar to anything, and His words to Moses, that He cannot be known. As we know the Torah is true, the Kabbalistic notions are false.

The intelligent person will dismiss mystical beliefs when it comes to his or her Judaism, just as one dismisses such beliefs when it comes to practical matters of earning a living. Regarding the latter, we rely on real considerations to assure us that we obtain a steady job from a reliable and trustworthy employer. We do not select a job based on horoscopes or astrology.

The point is, that just as we recognize reason and proofs to be the only considerations regarding practical matters, we must approach religious life identically. If we do not, then we live a lie, and not as God designed us. Remember, God gave us five senses and intelligence. This is because He desires us to live in line with what is perceivable and reasonable. Clearly, the Creator does not wish man to accept that which is baseless or imagined. Otherwise, these faculties would be of no use.

It is vital that you examine God's creation of the human being and take a lesson for determining your beliefs. Surely, God's specific design of man is for a reason. And if we ignore the lesson of our design, we in fact deny God to that degree.

As I have done time and again over the years, I once again urge teachers and Rabbis to include required classes on Jewish philosophy in your curriculum. The only method to correct the trend towards mysticism is to offer students our Prophets' and Rabbis' words on the truth of Jewish ideas. Please contact me and I will provide source material to assist you. ■

THE PATRIARCHS VS. THEIR CHILDREN

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Rashi's commentary on Gen, 24:42.

"Rabbi Acha said, 'More pleasant is the speech of the servants of the Patriarchs before God, than the Torah (commands) of their children, as we find Eliezer's account (describing his encounter with Rebecca) doubled in the Torah, while many of the central commands of the Torah are only given by way of hints.'"

This is a truly perplexing statement, as we are all of the opinion that that which is most central in the Torah are God's words. How then can a servant's words, even a servant of Abraham, be more precious to God? Was not the Torah given for the sake of the commands?

How do we approach such a question?

The first step is to note what is being compared, as the quote of Rabbi Acha is one of comparison. We find that "speech" is compared to "Torah", and "servant" is compared to "Patriarchs' children". In both comparisons, what generates our questions is that the latter appears obviously more important: speech does not outweigh Torah, and servants do not outweigh Israelites, (in the capacity that Israelites must keep the Torah as the world's teachers.)

Rabbi Acha is teaching a central lesson. He intends to draw our attention to God's estimation of personal character. He first teaches that what the Torah repeats, is done so for emphasis of its importance. Based on this rule, Eliezer's words must be more important than the Torah's commands. But how so?

I believe the one difference between the Patriarchs and ourselves, is that they followed God out of an internal realization of God's truth, with no externally imposed system. Even the speech of the Patriarchs is replete with wisdom, and their attachment to God included no coercion. The Midrash says, "At Sinai, God held that mountain over our heads commanding us in the Torah's observance, and if we refused this obligation, He

would drop the mountain on us, and there would be our graves." This Midrash is of course metaphorical. But it teaches that the event of Sinai carried such clear proof of God's existence that His commands were undeniably emanating from the Creator, one Who we would be foolish to ignore. Our acceptance of the yoke of Torah was in a manner, "coerced", as if a mountain was suspended over our heads in threat.

Not so the Patriarchs. They arrived at a knowledge and service of God on their own. This is much more precious to God. The Megilla reads, "They arose and accepted that which they already accepted." This is referring to the Jews' re-acceptance of the Torah out of love, as opposed to their Sinai acceptance out of fear. Again, we are pointed to the concept that adherence has levels. Greater than one who is commanded, is one who arrives at the truth using his mind. True, there is a statement of the Rabbis, "One commanded is greater than one who is not." But this does not mean 'greater' in every way. This latter Rabbinical statement, once explained by a Rabbi, means that once commanded, one must conquer an additional rebellious streak, and is therefore greater. He must fight the additional desire to rebel against "obligations". One with no obligations, but who observes Torah, is great. But such a person has not conquered his rebellious instincts. But here we discuss only the sphere of "conquering his instinct", a totally different question than our topic, "adherence to God".

"More pleasant is the speech of the servants of the Patriarchs before God, than the Torah of their children." This teaches that love supersedes fear. Our ultimate goal in life is not "fear" of God, but rather the "love" of God: the attachment to His knowledge through a true appreciation for the Source of all reality, an attachment to Him. This is love of God. ■




 A
 SACRED
Mission


RABBI REUVEN MANN

This week's Parsha, Chaye Sara, devotes a great deal of attention to the selection of a wife for Yitzchak. Avraham instructed his servant Eliezer to return to his homeland and choose an appropriate bride for his son. A major condition was that the girl would be willing to abandon her country and family and reside with Yitzchak in Canaan. Eliezer apparently realized how daunting a task this could be. Suppose, he asked, that he found the perfect match but she would be unwilling to travel to Canaan. In that case would it be alright to bring Yitzchak to her? Avraham was adamant in his response. Under no circumstance was Yitzchak to leave the land. If Eliezer could not prevail upon the chosen woman to leave he would be absolved from his oath.

At first glance the position of Eliezer seems more reasonable than that of Avraham. It was extremely vital for Yitzchak to marry a woman with the proper ideals and impeccable virtues which would qualify her to be a matriarch of the Jewish people. It was obvious then as it is now that people on that level of perfec-

tion are very rare and hard to find. Eliezer argued that if he should be fortunate to discover the ideal candidate but for whatever reason she could not leave her homeland, would it not make sense for Yitzchak to relocate in order to marry her? Avraham vehemently rejected the logic of this proposal. What was the reasoning behind his position?

In my opinion, Avraham was communicating a very significant teaching. Judaism believes very strongly in the sanctity of marriage. No institution is more consequential to the maintenance of society and the perpetuation of Torah. Our Parsha teaches that one must approach the selection of a spouse with wisdom and recognize that nothing is more important than their values and character. Eliezer believed that if he discovered a truly righteous woman it would make sense for Yitzchak to leave Canaan in order to marry her.

Avraham disagreed. He maintained that however important the proper shidduch may be it is not an end in itself. It cannot be acquired at the sacrifice of one's primary purpose which is Avodas Hashem (service of

G-d). Yitzchak's mission was to perpetuate and expand upon the religious doctrines and teachings of Avraham and continue to spread them in the land of Canaan. This was the essence of his life and he needed a suitable partner to work together with him to achieve this goal. Yitzchak's dedication to his spiritual mission took precedence over everything else and was the guiding principle of Avraham's instructions to Eliezer. "Be careful lest you return my son there," he said to his servant. Even the most precious relationship in life cannot be attained at the cost of one's primary mission of Avodas Hashem.

This story contains an important lesson for us. We must have our priorities in order and establish our lives on the proper foundation. If we recognize that Hashem created us for a purpose and dedicate ourselves to achieving it, we will be worthy of all His blessings and support.

Shabbat Shalom.

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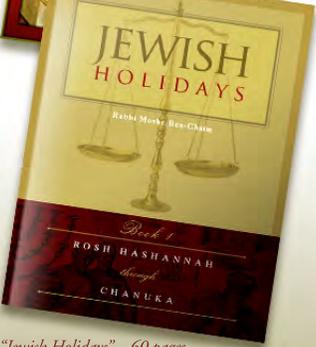
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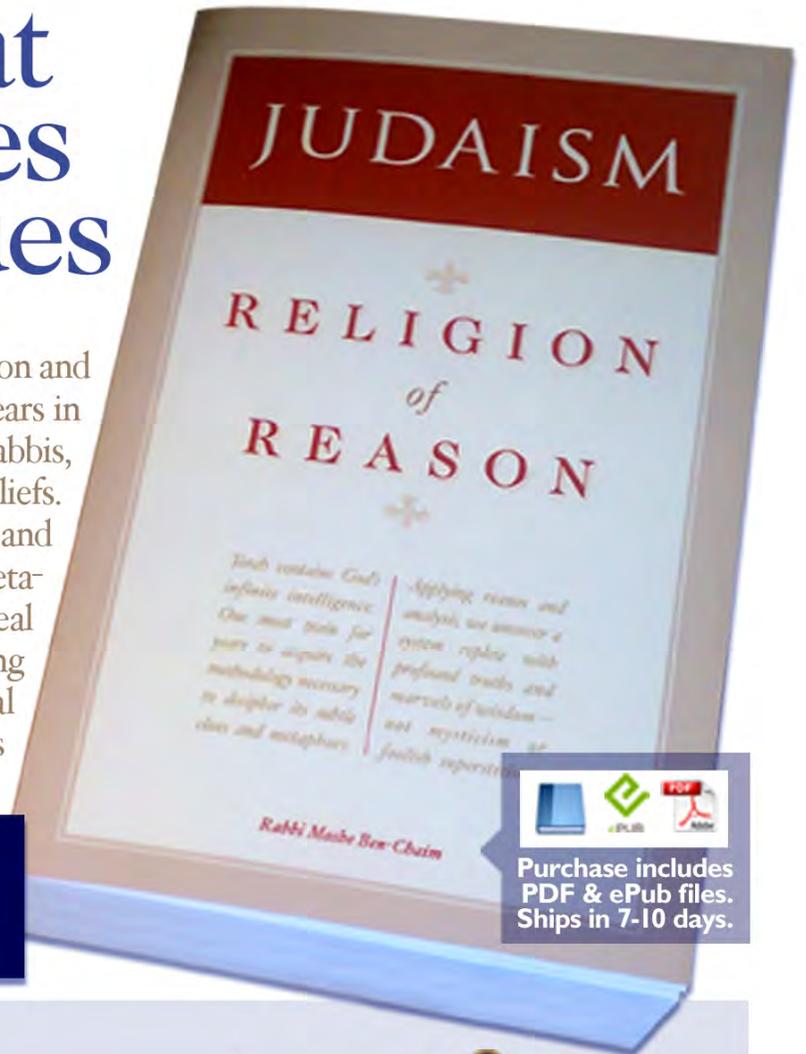
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(Immortality continued from page 1)

Weekly Parsha

lived, one hundred years, seventy years and five years. Avraham expired and died in a good old age, old and satisfied, and he was gathered to his people."

The juxtaposition of his being old and being satisfied is taken up by the Ramban:

"He witnessed the fulfillment of all the desires of his heart and was sated with all good things. In a similar sense is [the verse written in connection with Isaac's life], 'and full of days', which means that his soul was sated with days, and he had no desire that the future days should bring something new. This is as it is said of David: 'And he dies in a good old age, full of days, riches and honor'. This is a story of the chessed of the Eternal towards the righteous ones, and of their attribute of goodness by virtue of which they do not desire luxuries, just as it is said of them, 'You have given him his heart's desire', and not as it is said of other people, 'He that loves money shall not be satisfied with money', and as the Rabbis have commented thereon: 'No many leaves the world having amassed half of his desires. If he has a hundred, he desires two hundred, if he succeeds in acquiring two hundred, he desires to make of it four hundred...'"

At first glance, this seems to be a deserving praise of Avraham Avinu. But there are a few points made by the Ramban that require clarification. For one, the implication is that Avraham did not want to live longer, derived from the statement of "his soul was sated with days." Why not? It is senseless to imagine he had a fantasy of immortality. To live just another day would mean another opportunity to engage in yediyas Hashem, to possibly uncover a new idea, maybe effectuate an ideological change in someone's life. Why would Abraham not naturally desire this chance? And isn't this the idea of a future day bringing something new, something the Ramban seems to indicate Avraham rejected, a positive idea?

There is also the implication that it is an act of chessed by God to allow a tzadik to lack a desire for more than he has received. Yet one could ask, isn't this very attitude the product of the tzadik's internal choosing? Ultimately, he is making the decision to pursue and desire. What exactly is the chessed of God here? Finally, there is the question of the analogy between a person's death and the concept that one who loves money is never satisfied. This analogy needs to be understood in greater depth.

As mentioned above, one can safely assume that this explanation is introduced here to negate the thought that Avraham had a fantasy of immortality. However, there is one fundamental idea being brought to light in this piece. There are moments in life where we come face to face with our own mortality. More often than not, these reflections emerge from unforeseen events. A car accident, a diagnosis of illness, a close brush with death – all are unexpected, to say the least. Yet it would also seem that there is one moment, when a person has reached a much later age – zakein – where death seems not so far off anymore. And more often than not, at this stage, the fear of this unavoidable end kicks in. Faced with this fear, a person seeks to avoid death at all costs, and the emotion of immortality becomes prominent. The first idea we see from Avraham is that he did want to live longer – every new day would be another chance to study God. However, Avraham did not fear death, and therefore he had no fantasy of immortality.

This leads us to the second point being expressed by the Ramban. The analogy, explained by the Ramban, seems to link the desire for more days to the desire for money, which is insatiable. What the Ramban might be alluding to is an important idea. There are many reasons why a person feels the need, when faced with his fear of death, to be immortal. One of these is directly tied to the experiences of the physical world. The idea of money, or any physical pursuit, never being one that is completely satisfied is the very "trap" the world of the instinctual sets for its "prey". Indeed, for

the average person, it is never enough. So what does he do? What pulls him back in time and again? The fantasy that the next batch of money will bring ultimate satisfaction. Within this fallacy lies the link to immortality. One part of a person's fantasy of immortality is that a longer life would be another opportunity to finally fulfill those stubborn, elusive fantasies—complete the bucket list, so to speak. The very fantasy itself serves as a vehicle for more of the same. This helps explain the analogy. The Ramban is telling us that the desire to live forever exists on one level as a means of trying to fulfill the unattainable satisfaction from the physical world. However, we see quite the opposite with Avraham. It was not just that he did not fear death. Avraham died free of conflict between his psyche and his mind, his needs from the physical world fulfilled. He related to the physical world in the proper way, where the enjoyments exist not for their own sake, but to help him in his pursuit of yediyas Hashem. Therefore, there was no desire to live longer, as there was no fantasy to fulfill.

This leads us to the final point. When a person is on this derech, where he understands how the physical world can never provide ultimate satisfaction – the tzadik referred to here by the Ramban – he merits a certain type of hashgacha from God. Whereas the specifics cannot be known, one can assume that God will assist the individual through the world of cause and effect. This is the chessed spoken of by the Ramban, reserved for these unique individuals who are able to attain this exalted level of perfection. ■



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WHAT IS GOD?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Moses wished to know God's true nature. God responded, "For man cannot know me and live (Exod. 33:20)." However, we must be capable of knowing something concerning God, since the first of His Ten Commandments is to accept that He is our God (Exod. 20:2).

This command refers to knowing that God is the sole cause of the universe. It refers to knowing His 'role', not His incomprehensible essence. Man is naturally perplexed by the fact that God always existed. This perplexity must be understood before we approach an answer.

By nature, people assume there exists only that, which they can fully explain. Thus, if something is incomprehensible, it is viewed as impossible. This assumption is easily removed. For we know what color is. Yet a blind person cannot fathom it. We do not say that colors do not exist since the blind person cannot fathom this concept. Similarly, we must not assume God required a creator before Him, simply because we cannot grasp His not having a beginning. All existences except God are restricted in this manner: nothing can create itself, and therefore, everything requires creation. However, God's existence is not accidental. Creation does not warrant existence, until God decided to create. And even after its creation, the universe cannot endure without God's 'continued' will. This dependence upon God for creation and continued existence is what we mean by accidental existence. Nothing exists of its own. It continually requires God's external will.

In contrast, God's existence is essential. Meaning, His nature is such, that He always existed. God expressed this to Moses upon his request to identify God when relating his mission to the Jews in Egypt. God said My name is "I am that I am (Exod. 3:14)." A wise Rabbi explained this to mean "I am the One who exists by My very nature; I did not need to be created like all else". The Rabbi explained this would be evidence that Moses truly received prophecy from the Creator. For no man would arrive at such an idea of an eternal being based on the natural operation of the universe; nothing in creation indicates such an idea. Therefore, when Moses related this new concept; this explanation of God's nature and His "name", Moses was accepted as having truly received prophecy. The Jews confirmed he must have been taught this idea from a source outside of nature: by God Himself.

It is only due to our natures and based on all that we see, that we find it troublesome to accept that God had no beginning. Everything else does!

God addresses this: "I am the first and I am the last and aside from Me there is no other god (Isaiah 44:6)." Based on

Revelation at Sinai, we know the entire Torah including Prophets and Writings to be true. Thus, God did in fact precede all else: He has no beginning. But we can also answer this based on reason, not only God's authority.

If we assume God to have a creator, we must be consistent and believe that creator also required yet another, previous creator. We must then say God was created by "Z", and "Z" was created by "Y", and "Y" by "X", in an infinite series traveling back in time without a beginning. The problem is, we thereby suggest there never was a first cause. And without a first cause, the process never started. Stop and think about that.

It follows that nothing could exist. For if something never started, if we never arrive at a first...if there was never a "first cause" for all else, there would be absolute nothingness.

However, reason forces us to accept a First Cause, what we call God. Although a being without a beginning is incomprehensible, reality cannot be otherwise.

We cannot understand "what" God is, and therefore, we cannot understand "how" He exists. Nonetheless, we know that He must exist, and that He is the sole cause of all that we witness. We say a "sole" cause, because the concept of something being "first" is synonymous with exclusivity. This explains why our morning prayers refer to God as the Creator: "Baruch Sh'Amar", "Blessed [is the one] who spoke and the world came into existence." Understanding and accepting this truth, we fulfill the first of the Ten Commandments, to know that God – the Creator – exists.

And as He alone gave each creation existence and its various properties, we know that Revelation at Sinai was His act. Since nothing else controls the universe, nothing but God is responsible for that miraculous event. God is the Creator, and the author of the Torah.

What is God? He is the sole cause of the universe and the One who gave us the Torah. Knowing this, we will find complete harmony between the natural world and Torah ideas. It is for this reason that our greatest Rabbis taught us to use the universe as a means for accepting religious ideas. If something is not witnessed by our senses, or reasonable to our minds, then it cannot be part of Torah. This demands that we do not accept other religions' and many Jews' beliefs in powers and forces other than God; this being the second of the Ten Commandments, not to accept other powers and gods. We do not accept such beliefs precisely because the universe has no evidence of such powers. The Torah instructs man in this fashion, to view the natural world and Torah in harmony: "For God is the Governor of heaven above and the Earth below; there is nothing else (Deut. 4:39)." ■

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