

# JewishTimes

VOL. XI NO. 24 — SEPTEMBER 14, 2012

ROSH HASHANNA 5773

# GOD VS THE MULTIVERSE: THE KING

Rosh Hashanna Prayers

## WHAT ENTITLES US TO

# LIFE?

Does GOD  
Hear Us?

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Zichronos

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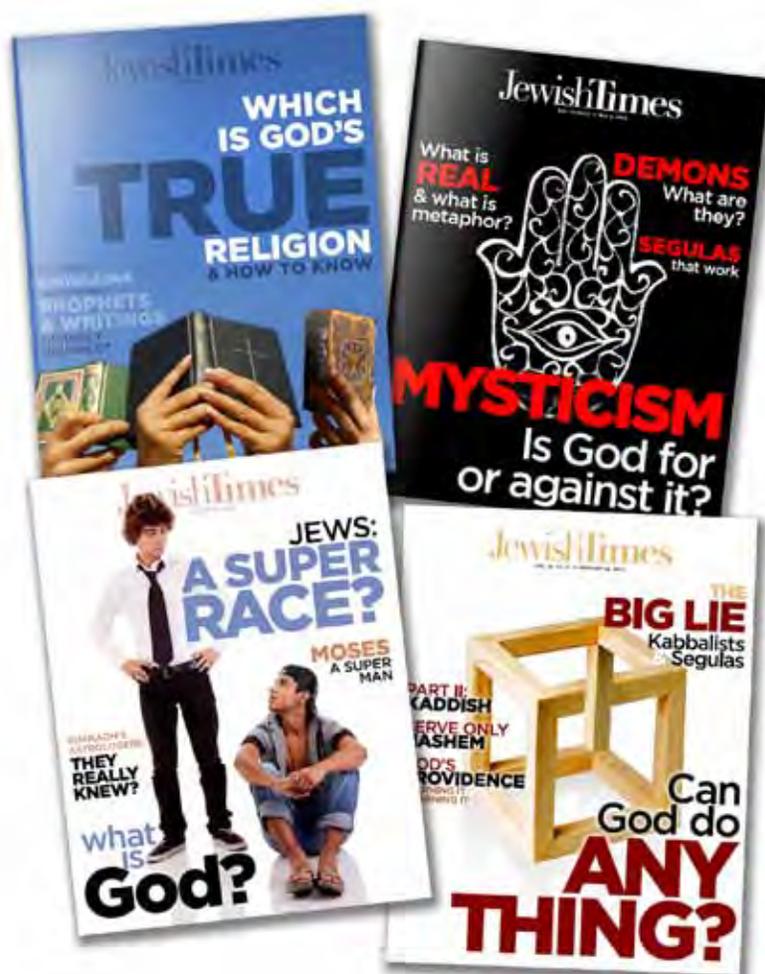
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# SEP. 14

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**Reader:** Is it ever allowed for one to enter a church for some reason? Let's say for example one is a wedding photographer and the couple that has engaged his services have a church service. Is he allowed to enter, or must he pass on that opportunity? If so, I assume sending someone else to cover for him in church is also prohibited?

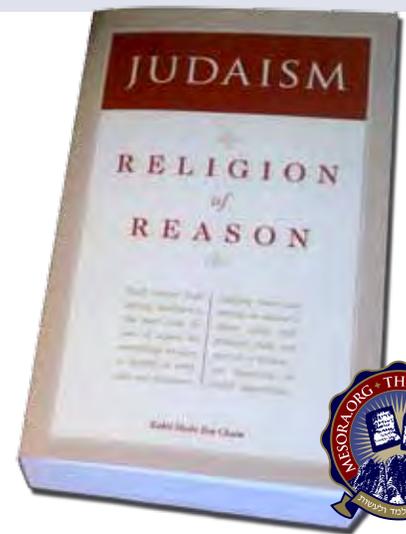
**Rabbi:** I would say this is prohibited, since we must not benefit in anyway from idolatry, and the photographer is benefitting from the Church's building. He also encourages Christian rites of marriage.

Agreed, asking someone else to cover for him is equally prohibited.

# Is Torah mystical... or rational, just like God's natural laws?

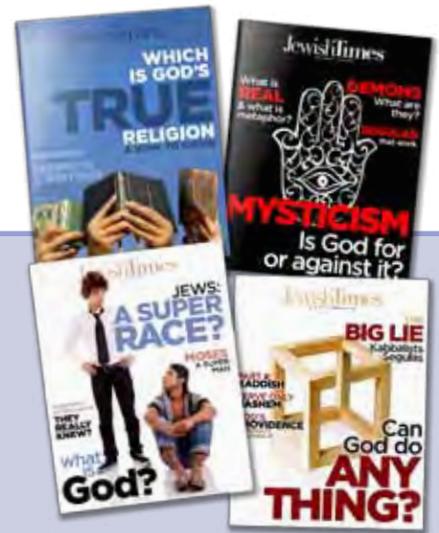
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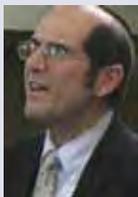


## RELIGION of REASON

by JewishTimes' publisher  
Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim



### REVIEWS



**RABBI REUVEN MANN** — *Rabbi, Y. Israel of Phoenix*

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim has written extensively on Jewish philosophy for many years. His ideas are rooted in a rational approach. He follows the great philosophers like Rambam and Saadia Gaon. He is opposed to all forms of "mysticism" and seeks to debunk all practices and beliefs which are rooted in superstition and contrary to reason. This work covers a wide variety of topics, of interest to contemporary; insightful analyses of Biblical narratives as well as the significance of many mitzvot. Rabbi Ben-Chaim demonstrates that Judaism can be harmonized with human reason. He is not afraid to ask the most penetrating and challenging questions as he is convinced that Torah is the Word of God and based on the highest form of wisdom. Jews who have a profound desire to make sense out of their religion will benefit greatly from reading this book.



**RABBI STEVEN WEIL** — *Executive Vice President, The Orthodox Union*

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim asks critical, crucial and defining questions that any thinking Jew needs to ask. His method enables the reader to explore and engage our theology in a meaningful and serious way. Following the Rishonim, he forces us to define, weigh and analyze each phrase of chazal, showing there is no contradiction between an investigation of Science and an investigation of Judaism. Rabbi Ben-Chaim has written a work that addresses the thinking person of all faiths. This work speaks to the scholar and lay person alike and will help you gain insight into how the great Rishonim define how we view the world. Rabbi Ben-Chaim's website, Mesora.org is a very serious tool and resource for thinking human beings who want to engage and explore the Almighty, the Almighty's universe and do so within the realm of wisdom, rationality and intellectual honesty.

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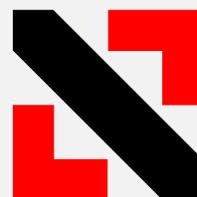
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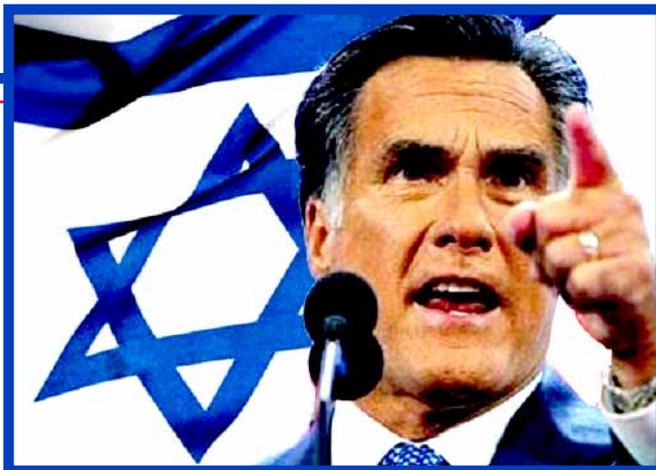
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Mr. Romney,

Rabbi Reuven Mann, spiritual leader of the Young Israel of Phoenix brought today's Wall Street Journal article to my attention:

<http://tinyurl.com/c9fwfbr>

Since December 2009, American development worker Alan Gross has been imprisoned by the Castro regime for trying to help Cuba's Jewish community connect to the Internet. For that Mr. Gross — who was in Cuba as a contractor for the U.S. Agency for International Development — was arrested, convicted in a sham trial and sentenced to 15 years.

Mr. Romney, won't you please speak out on this?  
Many Rabbis and Jews seek your support.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Ben-Chaim'.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim, Founder  
Mesora.org / The JewishTimes



# WHAT WE PRAY FOR

**RABBI  
REUVEN  
MANN**

Our Rosh Hashana prayers contain the most profound and noble concepts that are vitally relevant to the fulfillment of mankind's purpose. The prayers are based on certain premises: the world was created by God and is designed and destined to achieve a certain goal.

The "tikkun olam" or repair of the world can only come about if man attains "yediat Hashem", knowledge of God. All of the problems of the world are due to mankind's ignorance of God, for how can man serve God and fulfill His will if he does not know Him, or His will? Thus, the prayer on Rosh Hashana is a universal one: that all mankind will be "corrected." This is a significant point, one we must not gloss over. The prayers uncompromisingly demand that a correction of the "mistake" must take place. This is stated in the "Alainu" prayer, which forms an introduction to the "Malchiut" blessing. It is in the second paragraph, "Al Kayn Nekaveh Loch," "We hope that Hashem will uproot idolatry, unify the world under One God," and remove the false ideas that people have of God.

The problem is not so much mankind's ignorance of God, in the sense that man is blind to His existence and His will. Ignorance in itself would not be so bad. For then it would only be a matter of instruction and this is the mission of the Jewish people: to teach the nations the proper way of Divine

service. However, the problem is that the nations are not in the appropriate state to receive instruction. For they have not merely rejected God, they have also falsified the very concept of God and supplanted appropriate worship with human inventions. We therefore need Divine assistance to fix the problem. For the idolatrous religions are powerfully entrenched and religious people are the most stubborn and obstinate. They are fanatically attached to their theological falsehoods. The world is in a state of disrepair. And we pray for Divine assistance in "tikkun" of mankind.

The "correction" involves abandonment of false ideas of God and acknowledgement of the true concept of Hashem. We pray that God's name and fame will spread to all mankind. However, this alone is not enough for the objective is to follow through on the practical implications of that recognition. This must infuse a person with awe, and a desire to live a life which is in accordance with, and finds favor in the "Eyes of Hashem."

However, the question then arises: If I know Hashem, does this mean that I know His Will? Does correct action automatically stem from affirmation of His Existence? Judaism answers in the negative. The third of the middle blessings is called "Shofrot" (shofar blasts). This is a reference to the heavenly shofar blasts, which were part

of the Divine Revelation at Sinai. Judaism is founded on the notion that God has revealed His laws and the true "Derech Hachaim" (path of life) to mankind. Those who seek to serve Him must search out the authentic Revelation.

The path to proper Divine service is blocked by counterfeit religious systems, all of which have brazenly appropriated the claim of having been "revealed" religions, or Divinely given. Just as the righteous person must differentiate between the true God and the idolatrous notion, so too he must be wise and discern the true religion, i.e., the revealed religion, from the falsified ones, which have been invented by man and whose claim of Divinity is arrogant and unfounded.

Rosh Hashana is thus a challenge to the Jew as well as to the world. Indeed we must awaken from our slumber and activate our minds to confront the central truths of human existence. We must affirm that we are unique beings created in His Image with the task of emulating His ways and sanctifying His name in His World. We are charged with the responsibility of playing a leading role in the redemption and rectification of mankind. May we merit to fulfill it.

Shabbat Shalom and Ketiva Vachativa Tova ■

Rabbi Bernie Fox

# Does Hashem Hear Our Prayers?

*And My anger will be kindled against him (Bnai Yisrael) on that day and I will leave them and I will hide My face from them. He will be consumed and many evils and afflictions will find him. And he will say on that day that it is because my G-d is not in my midst that these evils have found me. And I will hide My face on that day because of all of the evil that he has done – that he has turned to other gods. (Sefer Devarim 31:17-18)*

1. Moshe is forewarned that Bnai Yisrael will reject Hashem

Hashem forewarns Moshe that after his death the nation will abandon Hashem, turn to foreign gods, and disregard their covenant to observe the Torah. In response, the nation will endure all of the terrible consequences described in the Torah. The above passages describe the reaction of the people to the troubles that will befall them. They will declare that Hashem is not among them. Hashem adds that He will hide His face from the nation because of its adoption of idolatry.

The commentators explain that the above two passages are difficult to understand. Ohr HaChayim explains the problem. The passages seem to be describing a series of events. In response to the nation's sins Hashem will hide His face. The people will

experience terrible suffering. Their reaction will be to attribute their suffering to Hashem's abandonment of the nation. Then Hashem will further hide His face.

It seems that the nation's realization that their troubles are a result of Hashem's abandonment of Bnai Yisrael is a positive step toward repentance. In fact, Maimonides explains that at a time of affliction it is essential for Bnai Yisrael to realize that its suffering is not merely a chance occurrence. The nation must realize and accept that its suffering is a consequence of its behaviors and represents Hashem's response to these behaviors. Maimonides explains that with this realization the nation embarks upon the road of repentance and secures the return of Hashem's favor. Yet, in the above passages the nation's recognition of Hashem's role in its sufferings only provokes Hashem to continue to hide His face from the nation and to ignore its suffering.

2. Hashem's relationship with Bnai Yisrael during times of suffering

Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno offers an important interpretation of these passages that responds to this question. His interpretation begins by addressing a strange aspect of the message in the passages. These passages use a number of different phrases and terms to describe the relationship between Hashem and Bnai Yisrael in times of

troubles and affliction. Hashem is described as "leaving" the nation. He is described as hiding His face. The people describe their situation by declaring that Hashem is not among them. Sforno asks: Are all of the phrases and terms synonymous or do they differ from one another?

Sforno explains that each of these terms and phrases has a unique meaning and message. The phrase "I will leave them" does not mean that Hashem will abandon His people. It means that He will deliver them into the hands of their oppressors. He will not rescue them. "I will hide My face" means that Hashem will not demonstrate compassion. He will conduct Himself as if He does not observe the people's suffering. The declaration that "Hashem is not in my midst" means that the nation will conclude that Hashem has abandoned it. Based on his interpretation of these terms and phrases, Sforno explains the meaning of the passages.

*Hear our voices Hashem our G-d. Have compassion and mercy upon us. Accept with favor and mercy our prayers. (Amidah)*

3. We ask Hashem to respond to our petitions with mercy

Before considering Sforno's explanation of the above passages, it will be helpful to consider the message in the above excerpt from the Amidah – the central prayer in our liturgy. We ask Hashem to accept our prayers with favor and mercy. This seems to be an odd phrasing of our request from Hashem. We are asking Hashem to hear our petitions and to respond with favor. It is self evident that Hashem's favorable response is an expression of His mercy. Yet, for some odd reason we ask Hashem to respond with mercy. Is not any response of Hashem to our petitions an expression of mercy? For what more are we asking when we specify that we seek a merciful response from Hashem?

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik Zt"l explains that although we ask Hashem for many things that we believe that we

*(continued on next page)*

need and must have, sometimes we are actually best served by not receiving the response that we seek. Sometimes the very thing for which we beseech Hashem will actually harm us and not benefit us.

A friend provided me with a wonderful example that beautifully illustrates Rav Soloveitchik's insight. He told me that when he was a young man he had been a very successful entrepreneur. He worked very hard and he became quite wealthy. He spent his wealth freely. His financial resources allowed him to buy whatever he needed without considering the cost.

My friend experienced a series of misfortunes and lost much of his wealth. His life changed. Suddenly, he needed to carefully consider each personal expenditure. The purchase of even a pair of sneakers required deliberation and often compromise. But he was young and confident. He set to work at regaining his fortune. It took many years for him to recover but finally he restored his wealth.

My friend told me that each and every day he prayed to Hashem – he begged Him – to help him regain his wealth. But for those long hard years Hashem did not respond. Only after many years and endless fervent prayer did he receive the response he sought. It seemed that Hashem was not listening.

However, during this long hard period of his life he was slowly and painfully learning important new lessons. He came to realize that in his drive to build his fortune he had neglected his wife and children. He had not shown them the love and attention that they deserved. He came to understand that he had made a poor bargain and that the wealth he had accumulated was not worth the personal family life he had squandered away. During the years that he was rebuilding his fortune, he also worked to rebuild his relationships with his family members. He also came to appreciate wealth as a blessing. He came to understand that he had deluded himself into thinking that he alone controlled his destiny. Now he understood that no one is in control of his own destiny and

that our successes are blessings that we must appreciate.

These are lessons that he learned during this difficult, prolonged period of rebuilding. He didn't learn them during the first year of his long journey or even the second. He didn't fully master these lessons and embrace them until he had endured many years of struggle. But with time he did master these lessons and he changed his life and his values. When finally he did receive the answer he sought from Hashem he had a profound sense of appreciation and he had created a strong loving family. My friend told me that he succeeded transforming himself and his values through the experience of losing the wealth that he had believed was the most important aspect of his life.

My friend ended his account with a final observation. If Hashem had answered his prayers one day earlier, he would not have truly learned and embraced these lessons. He would have been drawn back into his old life, habits, and attitudes.

My friend's account beautifully illustrates Rav Soloveitchik's insight. We pray for many things. We believe that we need these things. We must have them. But we ask Hashem to consider our petitions with mercy. We ask that in His wisdom He grant those requests that will enrich our lives but not those that are only our illusions. We ask that He hearken to all of our prayers but that He respond to our petitions with discretion and mercy.

4. Sometimes "No" is a compassionate answer

Implicit in Rav Soloveitchik's insight is an important observation regarding human nature. We tend to judge whether Hashem hears us by whether we receive a positive response. A child asks a parent for a new cell phone or laptop and the parent responds that the child's old phone or computer is fine. It's a natural response for a child to angrily conclude that his or her parent is not listening or – even worse – is just ignoring the request. It is very difficult for the child to consider that his or her parent may have other – even very valid – reasons

for not agreeing to the request. Adults also are not immune from this behavior. This attitude can easily undermine our relationship with Hashem. If this attitude dominates our thinking, then every unanswered prayer is evidence of Hashem's rejection of us and His abandonment of us.

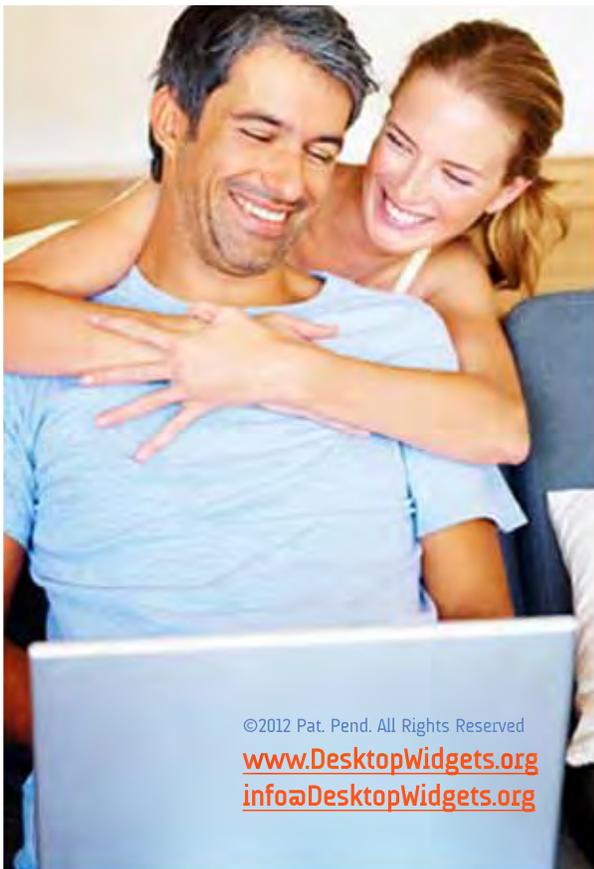
*For Hashem will not discard His nation and His portion. He will not abandon. (Sefer Tehellim 94:14)*

5. Hashem is always in our midst and awaits our call

Sforno explains the above passages based upon this behavior. He explains that Hashem tells Moshe that when the nation abandons Hashem, He will allow Bnai Yisrael's enemies to oppress them. The nation will suffer terribly at the hands of its oppressors. Hashem tells Moshe that the nation will not turn to Hashem. Instead, the people will look upon their suffering as evidence of Hashem's abandonment of His people. They will declare that He is no longer among them. In their anger at this rejection they will refuse to turn to Hashem and will instead intensify their rejection of Hashem. Hashem tells Moshe that He will never abandon His people. Even in our darkest hour He remains in our midst. We need only to call to Him and He will respond. He is hiding. He is suppressing His compassion. But He will never forsake His people!

According to Sforno, the passages are not describing a sequence of events. They describe the people's response and interpretation to their suffering. They will declare, "Hashem is not in our midst." The passages then explain that this angry interpretation of Hashem's silence is not correct. He will never abandon His people, He remains in their midst. He has hidden Himself. He has subdued His compassion as He awaits their return to Him.

May Hashem hearken to our prayers the entire year and during the approaching Yamim Nora'im and may He respond with discretion and mercy. ■



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Rosh Hashanna Prayers

## WHAT ENTITLES US TO

# LIFE?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

To benefit at all from our lives, we must understand our Creator's intent, starting with understanding His purpose in our very existence. As Rosh Hashanna is when God determines "who lives and who dies", we are now amidst an opportune season to examine Torah and the holiday prayers to gain insight into those criteria that directly impact God's Judgment Day, and our verdict.

Birth does not ensure continued existence. God must "constantly" will us to live each year.

What earns us this gift of continued life?

The prayers speak of God's "writing" and "sealing" of this judgment, which take place on Rosh Hashanna and Yom Kippur respectively. But the prayers also include certain fundamentals for us to consider. The great men who formulated these prayers intended to grant us life by carefully recording truths that will elevate our realization and understanding of God as far as humanly possible, and His will. As Rabbi Ruben Gober stated, this in turn entitles us to be "remembered" on Rosh Hashanna, the "Day of Remembrance." Realizing these fundamentals, and following them in action, we can use the Rosh Hashanna prayers to transform ourselves, worthy of life. Therefore, it is advisable to pray in the language you best understand, and review the prayers prior to this special day. It is also vital to pray with a minyan, so our worth in God's eyes is not solely dependent on our own deeds, but also as a member of the Jewish nation. Maimonides taught that he who prays with a minyan has his prayers heard regularly. Before analyzing the brief words of the New Year Shmoneh Esray prayer, and uncover its messages, let's review the context in which they are intentionally placed.

The Ata Kadosh prayer is recited three times daily throughout the year. Ata Kadosh means, "You (God) are distinct." "Holy" (kadosh) refers to that which is set aside and unique. We know nothing about what God is; only what He has performed. Even Moses did not know what God's true essence. We admit God's lofty and completely unknowable nature with the words "Ata Kadosh." A wise Rabbi taught that this admission is necessary, and is the culmination of the preceding two prayers where we first

*(continued on next page)*

refer to God as “God of our fathers” a familiar term. We then discuss His planned resurrection of the dead – no longer citing the familiar personalities of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but “mankind”, in general. This progression from the patriarchs to the resurrecting of man, is a step meant to mature us from relating to God as a “personal” God. We culminate in Ata Kadosh, admitting we know nothing about God. This progression moves man away from viewing God as “my personal God”, and viewing God objectively: for an objective view of God is more accurate, and prayer intends to perfect our ideas about God. While it is true that God helped the patriarchs, and us, specific beneficiaries do not define what God is. It is more accurate to say God helps others too (resurrection), and even more accurate to say He is removed from all we know, “Ata Kadosh.” Even without Creation and mankind, God reserves His unique position. His greatness is independent of Creation; His capacity precedes His acts, although we cannot speak of time regarding God. His goodness for man does not make Him better. Although it was and is an act of great kindness to create man, this does not define God, for He is far greater, with no words that could embody that greatness. So we must not end with praising God for assisting the patriarchs, or resurrection, but we must culminate in praise independent of those ideas. King David too ends his Psalms, calling on musical instruments to praise God, demonstrating that words cannot behold God’s true greatness. Mere sounds without words convey this amazing point, as the wise Rabbi above taught.

It is crucial that we grasp one more point: praise of God is for us alone, as we cannot affect God at all, as if He possessed human qualities and enjoyed hearing our praises. All we do is solely for us, and cannot be “for God.” God’s commands upon man are to benefit us; this is an act of great kindness. This applies equally to everything God commanded us in. By understanding that God gains nothing from mankind or his praises and prayers, we will agree that the brilliant men who formulated the prayers intended mankind to derive truths and increase our enjoyment in this life by adhering to truth and reality, and

abandoning fantasy, the root of many conflicts.

Now that we understand that the Ata Kadosh prayer addresses knowledge of God, this directs us to seek greater knowledge of God offered through the Rosh Hashanna additions: truths about God that we do not yet know, or that time and distractions have obscured over the past year. We now have context. Let’s now examine the New Year’s few but potent additions to Ata Kadosh and discover its penetrating messages.

**“AND SO TOO, HASHEM OUR GOD, PLACE YOUR FEAR ON ALL OF YOUR WORKS, AND DREAD ON ALL THAT YOU CREATED FROM NOTHINGNESS. AND ALL YOUR WORKS WILL FEAR YOU, AND ALL YOUR CREATIONS FROM NOTHINGNESS WILL BOW TO YOU. AND THEY WILL ALL BAND TOGETHER AS ONE GROUP TO FULFILL YOUR WILL WITH A COMPLETE HEART. AS WE KNOW, HASHEM OUR GOD, THAT DOMINION IS YOURS; MIGHT IS IN YOUR HAND AND STRENGTH IS IN YOUR RIGHT HAND AND YOUR AWESOME FAME IS ON ALL THAT YOU CREATED.”**

There is only one creation in which fear and dread of God exists; that is man. All other creations are bereft of intelligence, and thus, all things except man lack fear or dread of God. Nothing else “knows” God, so as to fear Him. This prayer, then, attempts to awaken man to the reality we find difficult to accept. Our egocentric predisposition wishes to deny dependence, and mortality. These Ata Kadosh additions play a primary role on Rosh Hashanna, the day of Remembrance. For as we said: if we are to be remembered before God, we must attain a level of existence where we live as the Creator intended. Otherwise, our lives are meaningless to Him. And our sole objective is to use our intelligence and arrive at an acute awareness and awe of the Creator, via Torah study and the study of nature. So the Sages who formulated this prayer highlighted this very need, that we become fully aware of what God means.

But they saw that man’s ego attachment makes it impossible to initiate an immediate and complete transition from egocentric life, to full subordination to

this reality, that we are created and dependent beings. Therefore, they designed this prayer in two steps: 1) that we, as God “works” first “fear” God; 2) that we, as “created from nothingness”, “dread” God. We can’t suddenly accept we were made from nothing; this is too drastic a change in our composure. The Sages realized this, and initially referred to us as God’s “works”, still maintaining some human dignity, but dependent in some measure. And they also only asked we “fear” God. Then, they said we should advance one more step, and identify ourselves truthfully, as “created from nothing.” Also, this must be accompanied by a “dread”. Dread refers to life, that is, we feel dreadful concerning our tenuous existence. This can occur only when we accept that we once did not exist, that we only exist now due to His continued will, and that God can take our life at any moment. If we see this as true, then we have arrived at the optimum state of truth, and we accept God as the King and ruler over all, including our very lives.

This idea is then followed by man’s responses: fearing and bowing to God, respective to those two stages we just mentioned. Man lives not theoretically, but if he accepts something as true, this is naturally expressed in action; i.e., fearing and bowing. This is required as a barometer of our true convictions. Similarly, one cannot be charitable in theory alone. He must give of his wealth to be considered truly charitable.

Next, we pray to “band together as one group to fulfill Your will with a complete heart.” This teaches that God’s will is for a society, not individuals. We become perfected only when we accept others as equals. This is fundamental: God’s will extends to all members of the human race, explaining why the word “all” is repeated many times, as in “place Your fear on all of Your works.” Living in groups, we are forced to accept God’s desire for people besides ourselves. This is part of the grand design, and a crucial element in our perfection. We now understand the term “fulfill Your will with a complete heart.” A “complete heart” is a necessary statement when there is a risk that we won’t be complete, but divisive. And this only occurs in a society, where I strive to maintain significance over others. This is most predomi-

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nant. Who doesn't sense some envy when a peer strikes it rich, drives the latest car, wears the latest fashion, receives some award, or builds the most grandiose home? So as we are to live in societies, we must be aware of divisiveness towards others, and work to eliminate it, "fulfilling Your will with a complete heart." We must treat others as we desire to be treated.

**"AS WE KNOW, HASHEM OUR GOD, THAT DOMINION IS YOURS..."**

The next lesson is to correct an error. When we discuss such truths, this might imply these truths are not so obvious, and this reflects poorly in our minds regarding God's fame. Rav Hai Gaon taught that the first statement in the Ten Commandments – "I am God" – could not be a command. For this would imply that God's existence is not obvious, and requires a command. Here too, we say "As we know, Hashem our God, that dominion is Yours." We state that this knowledge is known, and that "Your awesome fame is on all that You created." God's existence is an inescapable and undeniable truth. We cannot treat it as a newly found concept, for this degrades God's fame and wisdom that is most evident, as He planned, in order that man is constantly confronted with evidence of the Creator, so as to most readily arrive at a love of God.

**"AND SO ALSO, GOD, GIVE FAME TO THE JEWS..."**

But God is not concerned for the Jew alone who recites these prayers. He created all mankind. Therefore the following section of this prayer asks God to promote the fame of the Jew for the sake of all other people, that they too may come to learn these truths. We ask God to give us hope. This means that he fulfills His promises to those who follow Him. For this validates the Torah, and enables hope for all others. Eloquent speech is also sought, as speech is the vehicle to teach others. And we refer to the Messiah as this is God's validation of Torah to the highest degree, that He delivers His ultimate promise for mankind...an era where all nations will abandon their falsehoods and impostor gods, and will accept Torah.



**"AND SO ALSO, LET THE RIGHTEOUS PEOPLE SEE AND REJOICE...AND LET ALL EVIL VANISH LIKE SMOKE"**

Following this section, we describe the righteous people who will exult and sing. This is done, as man requires an example that human perfection is attainable. Talmud teaches, in Abraham's days, his peers doubted his perfection, as they required justification for their sins. "Abraham isn't so great" they said. "He might have followed God up to this point, but he would not sacrifice his son, if God asked." His peers degraded Abraham, for had Abraham been perfect in all areas; they would not be able to justify their own lust-filled lives. The Talmud scripts a discussion where God "pleads" with Abraham to fulfill one last test, to sacrifice Isaac. God doesn't plead, but pleading means it was essential to mankind that a perfected individual fully adhere to God's word. Such an example of devotion to God is required, to teach man that Torah is attainable. Thus, God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. We now understand why this Torah section is a theme of the awesome days.

The concept of the righteous people "singing" conveys their conviction. When one believes in the greatness of another person or group, and either one finds success, loyal followers cheer or sing, as an expression of their convictions becoming realized. For this reason, the Jews sang praises to God their savior upon the shores of the Reed Sea. This section concludes with the vanishing of sin, since we see righteous people living without sin, we hope and pray this empowers all others to follow their lead.

**"AND YOU GOD, REIGN ALONE...IN JERUSALEM"**

Next, we pray that God reigns alone. We ask this, as man's insecurities do not let up; he fabricates imagined powers and forces to protect and provide. Man is superstitious; his emotions overpower him, despite the absolute absence of any evidence for assumed powers. Those of you, who still believe in segulas, that the Western Wall assists your prayers, amulets, red bendels, or any assumed power other than God, must focus on these words: "God reigns alone." Although abstract and never seen, God is real, while assumed powers are false and prohibited. This prayer asks man to live intelligently and accept God alone as the sole source of power for Whom we have evidence and Torah's testimony, abandoning all other beliefs that offer no evidence.

In this prayer, why do we ask God to reign on the Temple Mount, on the land of Israel and in Jerusalem? First of all, this validates God's promise of Israel to Abraham, and thereby validates the Torah. Secondly, it denies all other religions as true, as God reigns only in Israel. All other assumed gods are thereby exposed as false. It is for this reason that this prayer concludes with the statement "there is no other God besides You". God and His unity are inextricably bound together. "God" means, the "One" Who made the entire universe. He made it alone. All else, by definition, are creations. There is but one Creator.

**"YOU ARE UNIQUE AND YOUR NAME IS AWESOME"**

Finally, we mention that God is one, by citing the verse, "Master of legions will be lofty in judgment." How does judgment convey God's exclusive reign as they only power in the universe?

Throughout history, there was only one God who responded to his people's cries. God's protects the righteous Jews. He performed miraculous victories over our enemies. Both testify to the only true living God. Egypt's idols were defenseless during the Plague of the Firstborn, where God destroyed their idols. Their stone gods could not protect them and all others from any plague. God's judgment teaches His omniscience and omnipotence. He knows who is righteous and

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who sins. He rewards and punishes each member of mankind. History attests to this, so much so, that Islam and Christianity could not deny the entire Torah. Therefore they cannibalized Judaism, and transformed it as it pleased their agendas.

God's judgment of every person on Rosh Hashanna forces us to accept the reality that He is the only God. A wise Rabbi taught that we always praise God's "name" alone, and never praise Him. This is because we cannot know what He truly is. All we know is His name. But this too, is our admission of how far above man is the Creator. We do not know what He is.

**SUMMARY**

We must appreciate the efforts of these Sages who drafted our prayers. This prayer alone reflects the tremendous wisdom and benefit they desired to share with all generations. They sought to offer each one of us the best lot in life. How many days and weeks they must have spent weighing each word, ensuring no important concept was overlooked. Realizing this, we might now approach all other prayers with the sense that great wisdom waits to be discovered.

I hope this analysis inspires you to treat all prayers with a renewed respect, and even an awe. And if we are awed by men, how much more must we be awed by God, in front of Whom we stand in dread as He inscribes our fate.

May we all use the brief hours in shul this Rosh Hashanna to arrive at a clear understanding of our status as created things, but primarily, God's position as Creator and the only power in the universe. With this realization, may God will us to enjoy another year of health, happiness and success in all areas.

A happy New Year to all. ■

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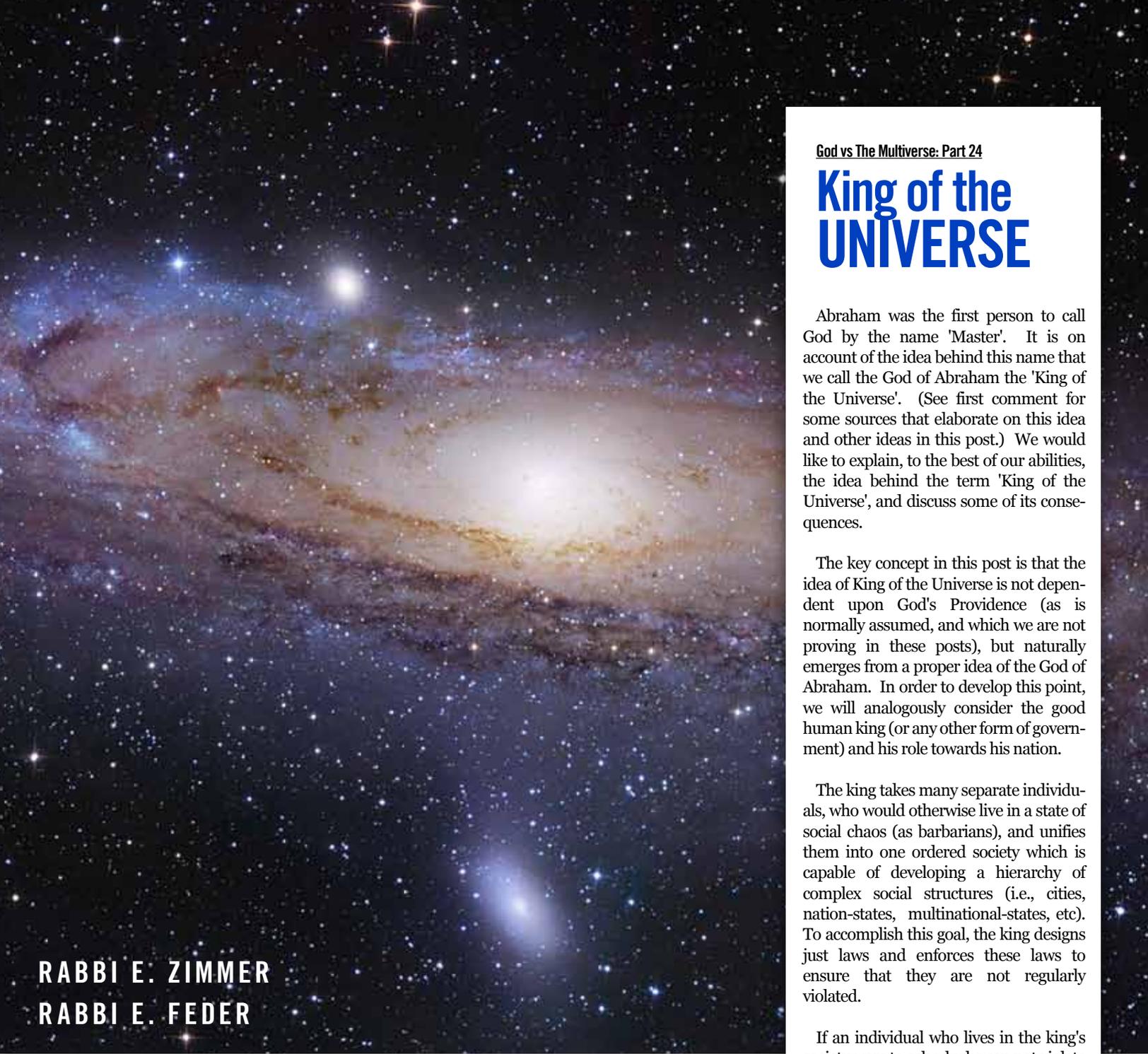
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# GOD VS THE MULTIVERSE: THE KING

God vs The Multiverse: Part 24

## King of the UNIVERSE

Abraham was the first person to call God by the name 'Master'. It is on account of the idea behind this name that we call the God of Abraham the 'King of the Universe'. (See first comment for some sources that elaborate on this idea and other ideas in this post.) We would like to explain, to the best of our abilities, the idea behind the term 'King of the Universe', and discuss some of its consequences.

The key concept in this post is that the idea of King of the Universe is not dependent upon God's Providence (as is normally assumed, and which we are not proving in these posts), but naturally emerges from a proper idea of the God of Abraham. In order to develop this point, we will analogously consider the good human king (or any other form of government) and his role towards his nation.

The king takes many separate individuals, who would otherwise live in a state of social chaos (as barbarians), and unifies them into one ordered society which is capable of developing a hierarchy of complex social structures (i.e., cities, nation-states, multinational-states, etc). To accomplish this goal, the king designs just laws and enforces these laws to ensure that they are not regularly violated.

If an individual who lives in the king's society were to ask why he can not violate these laws, we would tell him that the very fact that he has a good life in a safe society is because of the existence and force of these just laws. To violate the laws which are the basis of one's state of existence is a contradictory position, as it undermines the very premise of one's own existence.

In fact, in order for the society of individuals to continue to exist, the king must punish those individuals or groups who rebel against his just laws. When these acts of justice are properly executed (that of legislating just laws and enforcing

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them), they result in every individual obeying the king's laws, and thereby bring about the good for society as a whole. Hence, the king's acts of justice produce order and peace throughout his kingdom.

It is in this sense that we say that the God of Abraham is the King of the Universe. As we have seen in the previous posts, all that exists in the universe is contingent upon His Necessary Existence. He fine tuned the universe in a way which gives it complex structure and order, as opposed to chaos and disorder. His good laws of nature, which strictly govern all physical space-time events, are what produce the magnificent cosmic evolution of an ordered and stable universe.

Since this order and stability is based upon His actions alone, it is appropriate to describe Him as King of the Universe. We are not speaking about God's justice to human beings in particular, but are only drawing an analogy with regards to the general laws of nature and the universe as a whole. We analogously describe God's actions as just and harmonious because they result in an ordered and stable universe. It is only an analogy for the following reason: since nature has no free will, it perfectly obeys the laws and thereby produces perfect order and stability; on the other hand, a human king rules over human beings who have free will, and therefore the human king's acts of justice only result in imperfect order and harmony.

The King of the Universe provides order and structure to our universe through the good laws which He designed. Our existence is premised upon all of His creations acting in line with their nature within this design; electrons act as they were designed, stars act as they were designed, plants act as they were designed, etc. Of course, this is something we have always observed to be the case in the past, and we firmly believe will continue to be true in the future. Nature always obeys the King of the Universe's laws. The natural world appears to us to be a very faithful subject to the King.

Human beings have the internal subjective perception (which we accept as being true) of having free choice in how to live

our lives, and are therefore naturally presented with the question of "How should we live?" If we could know man's design (i.e., his place in God's design of the universe), then we should live in line with it. Why? Man's existence in this universe is dependent upon all the creations acting as designed by the King of the Universe. To rebel against the King of the Universe would undermine the very premise of one's own existence. Man has no rational justification for arbitrarily selecting himself out as the one special creature which does not obey its design.

The question then becomes if and how we can determine man's place in God's design and thereby decide how man should live. For starters, we must question the premise. Does man have any place in the design? Who said that man is important? Our answer for this is that we do not need to show that man is the essence of God's design. All we need to know is that man is at least a small part of God's design in the universe; that man is not entirely an accidental byproduct in God's plan to design an ordered, structured, complex universe.

Although we can not prove that this is definitely the case, it would seem to us that the burden of proof would be on someone claiming that man is a mere byproduct. Man is certainly a uniquely complex creation. As far as we are aware, he is the only intelligent being which is capable of perceiving, even on a small scale, the awesome intelligent design manifest throughout the universe. As far as we know, he is the only self-aware being capable of the abstract self-reflection that it is a creation of the God of the Universe.

It would therefore seem intuitively reasonable that man is at least a small part in God's grand design for the complex universe. This does not mean that man has special cosmic importance and significance. Far from it. Rather, it means that man is a small part of a significant whole, and as such, has no less significance than any other part of the universe that we currently know about. Each component of the universe must faithfully fulfill its part, in order for the grand design of the universe as a whole to emerge.

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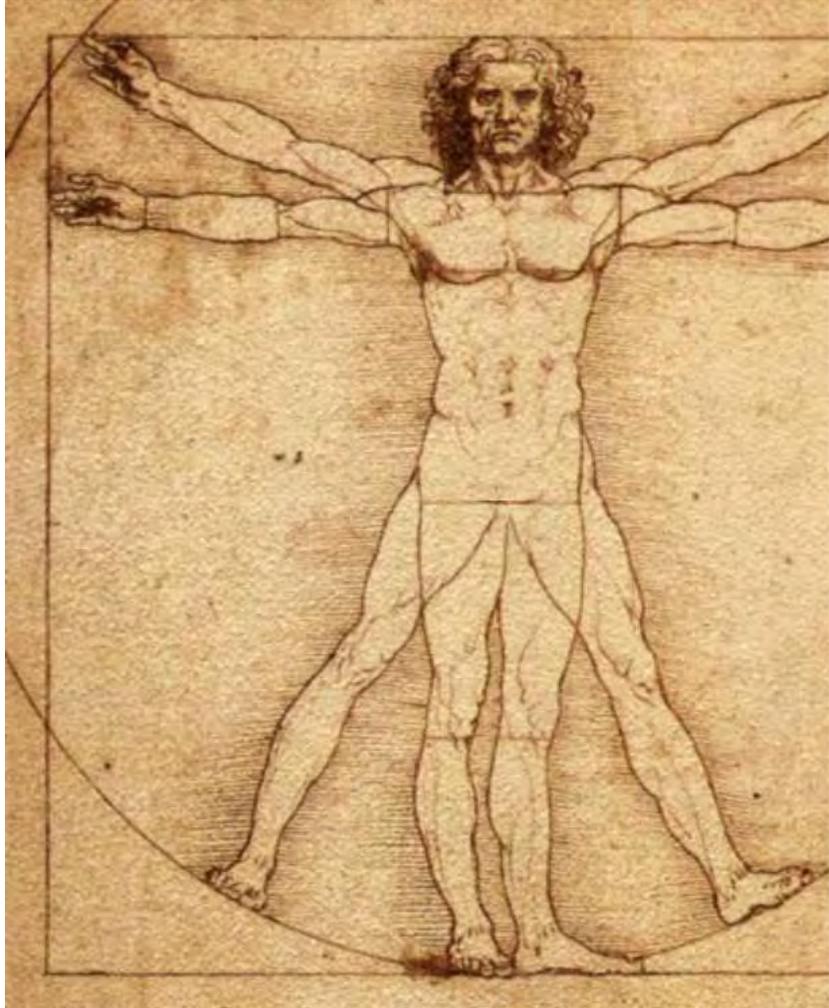
If so, how can we determine what man was designed for and thereby how man should live? It would seem that the basic approach to answering this question (short of God revealing it to us) is to study man's nature and define what a human being is. Upon a little reflection, it seems that a human being is an intelligent form of life. On the one hand, a human body's morphology is clearly part of the animal kingdom like all other animals on earth. On the other hand, man has a unique intelligence that enables him to perceive a rational world of abstract ideas and live according to them.

It would therefore seem that for man to live in line with the way he was designed, he should live an intelligent life. Although this does not immediately indicate any particular actions, it opens up the door for developing a well-grounded moral philosophy which is built upon a rational foundation.

Another related consequence of the recognition of the King of the Universe is that a rational person should accept upon himself God's authority to rule. What does this mean? It means that if God were to give him a command, he would follow it. Again, the basis for this is the argument given above. Man's very existence is only possible in the framework of God's cosmic design and order. To benefit from the order provided by God's laws of the universe, and then exclude one's self from following God's decrees is self-contradictory. It is the same logical problem as in the case of the rebel against the human king.

Even if a person is not currently aware whether God has or has not commanded anything, his attitude should be one of already accepting the authority of the King, if the King would give him a command. Additionally, it would seem to be a very worthwhile pursuit to seek out evidence related to the significant question of whether God has done so. This is the proper attitude for a subject whose existence is dependent upon the laws of the King.

A higher ordered, social consequence of all rational individuals accepting the reign of One King, stems from the realization that He is One King over the entire universe, and specifically over all humans. He is not merely the King over one particular group or nation. To relegate His sovereignty to one chosen



people is preposterous in the face of His reign over the entire universe.

It seems to us, that complete worldwide acknowledgement of the King of the Universe would be beneficial for all of humanity. In fact, the acceptance of the reign of the King of the Universe can be a uniting and harmonizing force for all of mankind. It is a force that can organize human society into higher levels of complex structures, through providing a common universal ideal and purpose. Just like a city only exists when there is a mayor (or any city government), and a state only exists when there is a king (or any state government), so too the nations of the world can only be justly and harmoniously united into a greater social entity when there is One King over them all.

It is not possible for us to fully work through all the implications of these deep philosophical concepts. We hope these ideas can serve as a starting point for each

reader to further develop the consequences that follow from the recognition of the King of the Universe. A person who has a love of humanity and a desire to share the good and truth with others, would naturally share his knowledge of the King of the Universe, insofar as he believes it will bring good to others. He would teach others this idea, much like Abraham spent his life doing, rather than live as if he has a special claim to the God of Abraham. The God of Abraham is the King over all humanity, and the recognition of the King is for the good of all mankind.

May there come a day when the One Simple Necessary Existence will be recognized by all people as the One King over the entire Earth. On that day, humanity will be truly united in peace and justice under the sovereignty of the King of the Universe.

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God vs The Multiverse: Part 25

## Fine Tuner

This post is predicated upon a person knowing and accepting the historical argument that God gave the Torah at Mount Sinai, or having some other foundation for accepting the event at Sinai. We have stated many times that we are not going to prove Divine Providence, and hence we are not going to prove Sinai. We have only included this post because we have many readers who do know and accept the veracity of the Torah, and they can thereby benefit from this post. If you do not accept the Torah as true, please skip this post, as it is not for you, and we are not trying to convince you about it. The proof of God that this series establishes is in no way contingent on this post.

The different names that God is called, teach important ideas about God. The names are not mystical lucky charms. They convey concepts about God that human beings can rationally understand. One of the names of God which is found in the Torah is Shadai. The Talmud in Chagiga 12a (written about 1600 years ago) explains that Shadai is a contraction of "Sha" (that) and "dai" (enough).

The Talmud expounds upon the introductory verse where God comes to Abraham to seal an eternal covenant that He will forever be identified to Abraham's offspring as the God of Abraham. In that verse, God identifies Himself to Abraham by saying "I am the God, Shadai". The Talmud explains that the concept of the name is "I am the One who said to the universe 'enough'." This is used to explain a particular aspect of God's creation of the world. Specifically, the sea covered the entire world until God told the sea to reduce itself to a precise lower level that would allow life to develop on land.

The Talmud sees the name Shadai as expressing that God is responsible for the specific quantities in nature, such as the sea level. The name Shadai is, of course, a reference to the One Existence

which sets the proper limit for all the quantities in the universe, not just the sea level. It refers to the One Simple Necessary Existence who fine tuned the exact numbers for the constants of nature. Shadai means Fine Tuner. God appeared to Abraham with the name Fine Tuner.

The great philosopher King David wrote:

**"WHEN I SEE YOUR HEAVENS, THE WORK OF YOUR FINGERS; THE MOON AND THE STARS THAT YOU GAVE STRUCTURE TO. (I SAY) WHAT IS MAN THAT YOU SHOULD REMEMBER HIM; A HUMAN THAT YOUR PROVIDENCE SHOULD RELATE TO HIM."**

Notice how David calls the universe the work of God's fingers, not His hands. Fine motor skills are performed by fingers, not hands. David's reaction to seeing the fine tuning in the works of Shadai is wonder and astonishment that the King of the Universe relates to man at all. David does not conclude that the universe was made only for man. Rather, he is amazed that a human even registers as something significant enough to be remembered before the King of the Universe.

Maimonides begins the first chapter of Laws of the Fundamentals of the Torah, by establishing the Reality of One Simple Necessary Existence. He begins the second chapter by defining the path to loving and fearing God:

What is the path to loving God and having an awe of Him? When a person contemplates God's great actions and wondrous creations, and sees from them God's incomparable and infinite intelligence, he immediately loves, praises, glorifies, and is passionately drawn to know the Great Name, as David said "My soul thirsts for the Living God".

Simultaneously, as he contemplates these very same great actions and wondrous creations, he is overcome with a sense of awe and fear at the recognition that he is a tiny lowly creature, standing with a puny little intelligence before a Perfect Intelligence. As David said "When I see the heavens, the work of Your finger; What is man that You should remember him?"

The true anthropic principle that the Torah advocates is awe and fear of God. While we are amazed by the awesome wisdom manifest throughout the creation, we should be even more astounded that God relates to us. Abraham said before the King of the Universe, "I am dust and ashes". Before the God of Modern Science we should say, "We are electrons and quarks".

It boggles the human mind that the King of the Universe, Shadai who fine tuned the universe with infinite intelligence, with great kindness gave the Torah at Mount Sinai to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Approximately 3300 years ago, amid the loud blasts of a shofar with millions of their offspring as eye witnesses, God spoke these words:

**"I, ONE SIMPLE NECESSARY EXISTENCE, AM YOUR GOD WHO TOOK YOU OUT OF EGYPT FROM THE HOUSE OF SLAVERY. YOU SHOULD NOT HAVE FAITH IN ANY OTHER GODS EXCEPT FOR ME."**

These two fundamental principles of the Torah, the recognition of One Real God and the denial of all false gods, are in fact two sides of one coin, and form the cornerstone of the entire Torah. The Wise Men of Israel encapsulated the essence of this concept when they said: "Anyone who attributes reality to false gods, denies the entire Torah and everything the prophets ever prophesied. And anyone who denies false gods, acknowledges the truth of the entire Torah."

When primitive man was still bowing down to idols, the Real God's prophets continuously reinforced this foundation of the Torah. They warned against making any physical form or image of God, as that ultimately leads man to incorrectly conceive of God as a complex existence. While even modern man has difficulty rejecting any complexity associated with God, the Torah has always insisted that man relate to the idea of God only as One Simple Necessary Existence. God's Torah is the book that He gave us which instructs man how to lead a true and real life. To this day, it is not only current, but remains far ahead of its time. ■

# The Challenge of Zichronos

Rabbi Dr. Darrell Ginsberg



We are all familiar with the three themes found within the musaf prayer on Rosh Hashanah: malchiyos, zichronos and shofros. Each presents a different idea about God along with a unique request. At the same time, together they give this important day its distinct character. When reciting each section, we are presented with a poetic yet confusing array of descriptions, praises that seem difficult to understand when first looked upon. Of these three different tefilos, the area of zichronos seems to be the most problematic. To talk of God “remembering” seems to be an absurd concept, more anthropomorphic than the norm. In this series of articles, we will take a look at the different concepts in the tefilah of zichronos, hoping to gain some insights into the writings of our chachamim.

When looking through the first section in the first paragraph of the tefilah of zichronos, several questions jump out:

“You remember (zocher) the deeds done in the universe and You recall (poked) all the creatures fashioned since the earliest times. Before you all hidden things are revealed and the multitude of mysteries since the beginning of Creation, for there is no forgetfulness before Your Throne of Honor and nothing is hidden from before Your eyes.”

The essential methodology here involves an attention to detail. One example is the use of “zocher” and “poked”, which seem to mean the same thing, “remembering” and “recalling”. In fact, throughout the entire tefilah of zichronos, we see a switch between one and the other occurring frequently. If they were truly synonymous, then just using zocher would be enough. Thus, we must ask what the difference between the two terms is.

On a deeper level, the whole notion of God remembering and recalling needs to be clarified. After all, it is quite obvious that the notion of memory as we understand it attached to the Creator is ludicrous. What idea is being evoked here?

Finally, this first part ends with how nothing is forgotten and nothing is hidden before God. This would seem quite obvious after reading over the first sentence of this tefilah. What new idea is being expressed?

One of the most difficult challenges for man is to be able to properly verbalize our praise of God. On the one hand, we are dependent creatures, and we must come to God, hat in hand so to speak, to recognize this state of being. We must also express the qualitative difference between us and Him. On the other hand, our words can never truly do justice, fail to ultimately identify, the greatness of God. To do so would imply a positive understanding of God, a concept that does not exist within man’s domain. The Rambam explains this very point in the Moreh Nevuchim, where Moshe requests from God the opportunity to understand His essence. God replies that no man can have any positive understanding of God; instead, it is only through negative knowledge that one can know Him. This delicate balance makes the very institution of tefilah that much more challenging. We therefore rely on the knowledge of Chazal, through their writings, to guide us in the appropriate way to verbalize these ideas.

This methodology is on full display in the composition of the tefilah. Before entering into the heart of zichronos, we must first establish the notion of God in the context of remembrance of our deeds. We notice something distinct about God at the outset – God remembers everyone and everything, at all times. Thus, when discussing God and memory, from our human conception of what remembering entails, we see God as remembering in a way like nothing else can remember. This concept is at the core of the discrepancy between zocher and poked. We see zocher being applied to deeds, while poked relates to the creatures themselves. One commentary found in Otzar Tefilos, based on Rashi, clarifies

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this a bit: *zocher* refers to actions, while *poked* refers to those who perform said actions. What, then, is the message here? There are two types of knowledge we are speaking of, based on Rashi's insight. One refers to God's knowledge of all actions, meaning a complete remembrance of every deed done. Such knowledge includes every cause and effect that led to said action, as well as the consequences from said action throughout time. Only God possesses such a "memory". There is another kind of recollection here, one that is not referring to the world external to man. It is the knowledge of the inner workings of man, a complete knowledge that man himself is limited in. This knowledge refers to all the details that led to the execution of the action. What was the person thinking? What were his drives? God is aware of it all, no matter when it occurred. The point here is not that there is a difference between recalling and memory – it is distinguishing between the world outside of man and his internal thoughts.

This brings us to the next part of the tefilah. After first establishing the fact that the notion of God remembering is distinct, we cannot leave it at that. The statement that there is "no forgetfulness" implies a very important concept, referencing the point made above. If there is no notion of God forgetting, then there really is no idea of memory in the realm of God. To remember something implies that there is something that lends itself to be forgotten. God does not actually "remember" in any real sense we can understand. Furthermore, "nothing is hidden" from God, again unquestionably establishing the fact that His knowledge is one that we cannot truly understand.

In summary, then, we see a progression in these first few sentences of the tefilah. We first establish that the notion of God remembering is of a different nature than human conception of memory. This is the praise we must give to God. And then we conclude by acknowledging that we cannot truly understand God's knowledge, and that in reality there is no idea of remembering attached to Him.

When we look back at the next part of the tefilah, we see what would seem to be a repetition of this theme:

"All is revealed and known before You, Hashem, our God, Who keeps watch and sees to the very end of all generations, when You bring about a decreed time of remembrance for every spirit and soul to be recalled, for abundant deeds and a multitude of creatures without limit to be remembered."

What new idea is emerging from this seeming restatement of God's remembrance being of a different nature altogether?

As we mentioned above, before engaging in any type of request from God regarding His "remembering", we first must ascertain what this idea of memory actually is when applied to God. We first describe it in an abstract way, acknowledging that God has knowledge beyond our comprehension. However, this is insufficient. We must acknowledge as well that God is not a Creator who remains distant and removed from the universe. There is an idea of *hashgacha*, a central point in recognizing the reality of Yom HaDin. God judges mankind, and everyone is subject to this judgment. We need to recognize the actuality of *hashgacha*, or else the concept of Yom HaDin ceases to exist. Thus, we emphasize the "time of remembrance for every spirit and soul to be recalled", unequivocally stating that God relates to mankind through judgment.

This leads us to the end of the first section:

"This day is the anniversary of the start of Your handiwork, a remembrance of the first day. For it is a decree for Israel, a judgment day for the God of Jacob"

What stands out most here is the reference to creation itself, how this Day of Judgment coincides with the time of the creation of the universe. Why is this significant? What does creation have to do with Yom HaDin?

This last concept helps wrap up the progression noted above. We recognize God and His distinct knowledge. We recognize there is an idea of *hashgacha*, relevant to mankind. And then we finalize with an important statement regarding justice. The very concept of *schar v'onesh* was created with the universe itself, built into its very fabric. We should not see God's justice as something applied at a later date, lending it a character of being haphazard. Part of the creation of the universe was the implementation of God's justice. When one views the natural world, and sees human beings either benefiting or suffering, one must include in any observation that this reflects God's justice in some way. Man is judged based on his actions, and this is part of the natural world, rather than something superimposed at some later date.

Next, we will continue our analysis of this important tefilah.

## Part II

We began investigating the tefilah of *zichronos*, found in the Musaf tefilah recited on Rosh Hashana. As a brief summary, we noted a significant progression in the composition of this tefilah. First, the idea of God's remembrance being of a different nature was established. Then we learned the fact that the whole notion of memory can never actually be applied to God. Finally, we saw how the tefilah relates this abstract concept to our experience of being subject to God's judgment, as well as how the idea of God's justice is tied into creation. We will now try to explain some additional concepts found in *zichronos*.

Each of the different tefilos of the Musaf – *malchiyos*, *zichronos* and *shofros* – share a similar structure in their composition. The Rav (Harei Kedem 1:46) discusses this outline in greater detail. All three start with *shevach*, praise of God. This makes sense in light of last week's article, as it is imperative we have an idea of the specific theme we are speaking of prior to any type of request. Once we complete the *shevach*, numerous verses from Tanach are introduced, functioning to buttress the validity of the praises enunciated. After this, we move into the request stage, asking God to express his kingship to the world, or to remember us in a favorable way, or to bring the exiled Jews of the world together. In summary, there is the praise, the proofs of the praise from Tanach, and the request.

When looking at the tefilah of *zichronos*, specifically some of the verses, we see some consistent themes emerging. We begin the verses with an introduction:

"Moreover, You lovingly remembered Noach and You recalled him with words of salvation and mercy..."

Soon after, the first verse is introduced (Bereishis 8:1):

"God (Elokim)remembered Noach and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark, and God causes a spirit to pass over the earth and the water subsided."

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As we know, when the Torah uses “Elokim” rather than “Hashem”, it connotes the attribute of justice, the midas hadin. Rashi (ibid), in his commentary on this verse, offers a strange explanation:

“This name represents the Divine Standard of Justice, which was converted to the Divine Standard of Mercy through the prayer of the righteous.”

What is Rashi telling us here?

The second verse listed is well known (Shemos 2:24), referring to God’s intervention to begin the process of redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt:

“God [Elokim] heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob.”

Once again, we see the use of the name of God in context of justice. Yet in this instance God is responding to the cries of the Jewish people, who are on the verge of obliteration – a clear demonstration of mercy. How do we understand this?

There are two common themes that persist throughout these verses from Tanach. One is the use of Elokim, rather than Hashem. The other is a focus on covenants, and God’s remembrance of them. In fact, the closing bracha of the tefilah is “zocher habris” (Who remembers the covenant)

On a basic level, the use of Elokim makes sense, as we are dealing with judgment. However, the use of bris is a bit more troubling. As we know, one of the essential ideas of this tefilah is the greatness of God. One would therefore assume that these verses would “back up” this claim. Is this indeed the case?

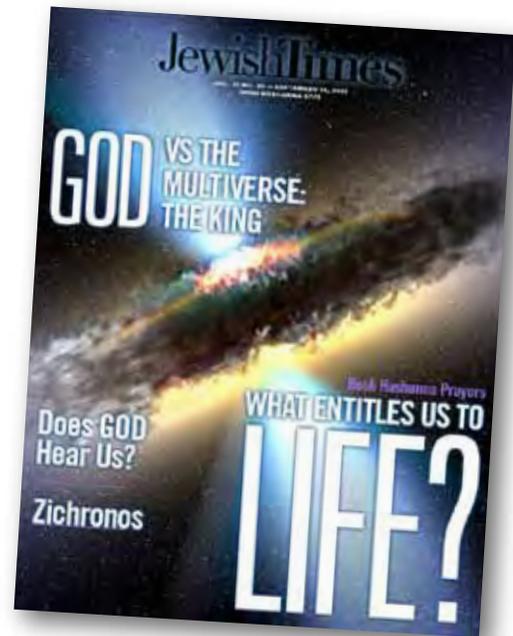
Let’s take the case of Noach. God commanded Noach to build the ark, to gather the different species and enter the ark, and ostensibly reside there until God decided it was time to bring him ashore. Many of the commentaries point out that this should be viewed as a covenant. Therefore, it is safe to assume that God would have kept up His end of the deal, so to speak. It is unclear how long Noach was originally intended to stay on the ark. However, as Rashi is indicating, God intervened to bring Noach back – “God remembered”. And, as Rashi points out, this seemed to be somewhat due to the tefilah of Noach. Noach, then, through recognizing his ultimate dependency on God and having a greater insight into man’s status vis a vie God (the essential ideas of tefilah), reached a higher level of perfection. If so, why is it such a big deal that God interrupted His promised covenant? Isn’t this what a benevolent king would do? Let’s say, for example, a man is sentenced to a long time in prison, with a defined end date. However, due to certain good deeds performed in prison, the higher ups decide to commute his sentence. Most of us would intuitively see this as a normal response to the change in the individual. Yet, when it comes to God, we are not to view His ways as a “normal response”. How do we understand these verses singling out His greatness within the context of “who remembers the covenant”?

The spotlight of Rosh Hashana shines primarily on God’s kingship, as we must internalize this reality prior to truly appreciate God as the Judge. When we then enter into the section on zichronos, we begin to see how God’s justice is applied to man. The paradigms used to display God’s judgment are these instances of God’s early intervention. Let’s look at the situation with the Jewish people and their enslavement by the Egyptians. No doubt, the Jews cried out to God. But this was more than crying out. Numerous commentaries point out that the righteous people of this generation were engaged in tefilah. What this is telling us is that the Jewish people were not just in a state of near physical and ideological annihilation. They realized there was no other salvation and thus turned to God. Similarly, we see Noach being engaged in tefilah, expressing clearly his complete dependence on God. God intervenes, as man has changed, has perfected himself in some way. Yet it is impor-

tant to note that this is not a causal necessity. It does not mean the moment Noach was engaged in tefilah that God “reacted”. How long Noach or the Jewish people were involved in their tefilos is not important. What we do see, though, is that God chooses to intervene. When God intervenes, He does so based on a complete knowledge, one we cannot understand. This means God is picking the ideal time, the perfect moment, to reveal Himself. In the case of the Jewish people, this was the moment to have the covenant enacted. It was the time for the Jewish people’s redemption to begin. It was the time for Noach to be saved, offering him the best opportunity to capitalize on his perfected state. These are not acts of inherent mercy. When God acts with midas rachamim, it implies a change in plan. Here, there was no change in plan, as God inevitably would have saved Noach and the Jews in Egypt – and thus the use of Elokim. But the fact that God intervenes when He does reflects on the perfection of His justice. His justice takes into account all the particulars, all the knowledge possible. It demonstrates the greatness of His justice.

This idea serves as the guide to God’s adjudication of justice to mankind. We are all subject to judgment. As such, God judges us according to our merits, good and bad. Yet man can change, he can perfect himself, he can truly understand how insignificant he is in relation to the Melech Elyon. His ability to change allows for a different execution of justice. And in turn, when God indeed judges man, He judges in a manner that is ideal for man. His justice is perfect. ■

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# the Shofar

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

**W**hat is the significance of the shofar, the ram's horn? Its primary focus is its blasts, blown during our prayers on Rosh Hashanna. We also have the custom to blow it each morning during the month of Elul. This month precedes the month of Tishrei - the first day of which is Rosh Hashanna. During this month of Elul, the shofar is to act as a "wake-up call". "Uru yshanim mi-shinasschem", "Awaken you slumberers from your sleep." At this crucial time, when we are soon to be judged for life, prosperity, and health, the shofar alerts us to our impending judgment. We are to arouse ourselves, waking up from our routine activities and backsliding during this past year. We are to examine ourselves, detecting our flaws, and responding with a renewed strengthening of Torah values and actions. But why use a shofar? What is its significance?

## PURPOSE OF THE BLASTS

We learn that the blasts of the shofar are meant to resemble the weeping and sobbing of Sisra's mother. This is why we have long and short blasts, as weeping takes on different types of cries. Sisra's mother awaited his return from battle. (Judges, Chap. 5) Sisra delayed in returning. Sisra's mother assumed he was dividing great booty, so this must have taken time. But later, her assumption of good, turned towards reality, and she realized he must have perished at war. Her sobbing was a response to recognizing reality. The shofar blasts are to make us associate to Sisra's mother's sobbings - her return to reality. We too must return to reality, that is, returning to a life of Torah. This is enforced by Rosh Hashanna, a day when we direct our attention to G-d's exclusive role as King, Who knows all our thoughts and actions, and Who rules the entire world. During our last prayer on Yom Kippur, "Neila", we say, "so that we may disengage from the oppression of our hands." Our daily activities of work, family and other pursuits distract us from what our true focus must be - the study and application of G-d's Torah system.

Talmud Rosh Hashanna 26b teaches that a shofar used for Rosh

Hashanna must be bent, not straight. This is to resemble man's "bent" state of mind - he is bent over in humility. This parallels a contrast: G-d is King, but we are His creations. Our undistorted recognition of G-d's role as our Creator and King, results in our sense of humility.

## THE SHOFAR AT MOUNT SINAI

We find the shofar associated with many events. The shofar waxed increasingly louder at Sinai when G-d gave us His Torah, "And it was that the sound of the shofar went and grew increasingly loud..." (Exod. 19:19) Why was shofar integral to Sinai? Sinai was also much earlier than Sisra. So does Sinai's shofar convey a different idea than sobbing? It would seem sobbing is unrelated to Sinai. What is Sinai's shofar to teach us? Rashi states that it is the custom of man that when he blows for a long period, the sound gets increasingly weaker and more faint. But here, at Sinai, the sound grew louder. Rashi clearly indicates the lesson of shofar is to teach that man did not orchestrate this event. Shofar is to reflect the Creator's presence. Why was this lesson required at Sinai? Perhaps the very act of accepting the Torah is synonymous with our recognition that this Torah is G-d's ideas. Only such an appreciation will drive our studies towards answers, which resonate with absolute truth. G-s knowledge is the only absolute truth. Truth is the purpose of Torah study. Torah was therefore given with the sound of the shofar, embodying this idea. Rashi also mentioned that the sound of the shofar on Sinai "breaks the ears". This means it carries great impact. Why was this quality of "sound" necessary? The miracles alone proved G-d's existence!

There is one difference between a sound and a visual: sound is perceived unavoidably. You cannot "hide" your ears. Turning away from a visual removes its cognizance, but this is inapplicable to sound, certainly a loud sound. It would appear that besides the grand spectacle of Sinai ablaze, when receiving the Torah, the Jews required uninterrupted attention. The shofar blast kept them attentive to the divine nature of this event.

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### ABRAHAM'S SACRIFICE OF ISAAC

Talmud Rosh Hashanna 16a: "Rabbi Abahu said, 'G-d says blow before Me with a ram's horn, so that I may recall for you the binding of Isaac, son of Abraham, and I will consider it upon you as if you bound yourselves before Me.'" Since the ram is what Abraham offered in place of Isaac, our blasts of the ram's horn are to recall this event before G-d. It is clear from this Talmudic statement that Rosh Hashanna demands a complete devotion to G-d - we must render ourselves as if bound on the altar, like Isaac. We accomplish this via our shofar blasts. This act attests to our commitment to Abraham's sacrifice. We gain life in G-d's eyes by confirming Abraham's perfection. We follow his ways. This merit grants us life. The lesson of Abraham is not to end when Rosh Hashanna ends. This holiday is to redirect our focus from the mundane, to a lasting cognizance of G-d's presence and role as Creator. He is to occupy our thoughts throughout the year. "Bichol diracheha, da-ayhu, vihu yiyashare orchosecha", "In all your ways, know Him, and he will make straight your paths." (Proverbs, 3:6)

But let us ask: why is the binding of Isaac central to the theme of Rosh Hashanna? There were many instances where great people sacrificed themselves in the name of G-d? Let us take a closer look at that event.

When Abraham was instructed to sacrifice his son Isaac, and was subsequently commanded not to do so, he found a ram caught in the bushes: (Gen. 22:13) "And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and behold, he saw a ram, after it was caught in the thicket by its horns, and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up as a completely burned sacrifice in place of his son." Why did Abraham feel he was to offer the ram "in place" of Isaac? This was not requested of him. Sforno suggests that Abraham understood the presence of the ram as an indication that it was to be sacrificed - a replacement for Isaac. It appears from Sforno, that G-d wished Abraham to "replace" his initial sacrifice of Isaac. It also appears from Sforno that Abraham wished to fulfill the perfect act of



sacrifice, although subsequently he had been instructed not to kill Isaac. Yet, Abraham wished to express the perfection of adherence to G-d's command. Therefore, G-d prepared this ram. Ethics of the Fathers 5:6 teaches that this ram was one of the ten miracles created at sunset on the sixth day of creation. This clearly teaches that G-d intended this ram to be offered. Why was it so essential that Abraham offer this ram?

My close friend Shaya Mann suggested the following, insightful answer: Abraham was not "relieved" when subsequently, he was commanded not to slaughter his precious Isaac. The sacrifice of the ram displays a subtle, yet important lesson about Abraham. Abraham did not remove his attention from G-d, once 'he had his son back'. Only someone on a lesser level of perfection would suddenly be overcome with joy that his son would remain alive with him, and then indulge that emotion with no attention to anything else. But Abraham's perfection didn't allow such a diversion from the entire purpose of the binding of Isaac. Although commanded not to kill Isaac, Abraham's attention and love was

still completely bound up with G-d. This is where Abraham's energies were before the sacrifice, and even afterwards, when his only son was spared. Offering the ram teaches us that Abraham never removed his thoughts from G-d, even at such a moment when others would certainly indulge in such joy. Abraham did not rejoice in Isaac's life, more than he rejoiced in obeying G-d. The ram teaches us this. Abraham remained steadfast with G-d. Abraham's perfection was twofold; 1) he was not reluctant to obey G-d, at any cost, and 2) nothing surpassed his attachment to G-d.

### MAIMONIDES: THE BINDING OF ISAAC

Maimonides discusses the significance of Abraham's binding of Isaac. I will record his first principle: "The account of Abraham our father binding his son, includes two great ideas or principles of our faith. First, it shows us the extent and limit of the fear of G-d. Abraham is commanded to perform a certain act, which is not equaled by any surrender of property or by any sacrifice of life, for it surpasses everything that can be done, and belongs to the class of actions, which are believed to be contrary to human feelings. He had been without child, and had been longing for a child; he had great riches, and was expecting that a nation should spring from his seed. After all hope of a son had already been given up, a son was born unto him. How great must have been his delight in the child! How intensely must he have loved him! And yet because he feared G-d, and loved to do what G-d commanded, he thought little of that beloved child, and set aside all his hopes concerning him, and consented to kill him after a journey of three days. If the act by which he showed his readiness to kill his son had taken place immediately when he received the commandment, it might have been the result of confusion and not of consideration. But the fact that he performed it three days after he had received the commandment proves the presence of thought, proper consideration, and careful examination of what is due to the Divine command and what is in accordance with the love and fear of

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G-d. There is no necessity to look for the presence of any other idea or of anything that might have affected his emotions. For Abraham did not hasten to kill Isaac out of fear that G-d might slay him or make him poor, but solely because it is man's duty to love and to fear G-d, even without hope of reward or fear of punishment. We have repeatedly explained this. The angel, therefore, says to him, "For now I know," etc. (ibid. ver. 12), that is, from this action, for which you deserve to be truly called a G-d-fearing man, all people shall learn how far we must go in the fear of G-d. This idea is confirmed in Scripture: it is distinctly stated that one sole thing, fear of G-d, is the object of the whole Law with its affirmative and negative precepts, its promises and its historical examples, for it is said, "If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this Law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, the Lord thy G-d," etc. (Deut. xxviii. 58). This is one of the two purposes of the 'akedah' (sacrifice or binding of Isaac)"

Maimonides teaches that the binding of Isaac, represented by the ram's horn, displays man's height of perfection, where he sacrifices what he loves most, his only son, for the

command of G-d. Shofar, the ram's horn, thereby conveys the idea of the most devoted relationship to G-d.

We see why Rosh Hashanna focuses on the shofar as a central command. It is on Rosh Hashanna that we focus not on G-d's miracles, salvation, or laws. Rather, we focus on G-d alone. This means, a true recognition of His place in our minds, as King. He is our Creator, Who gave us existence, the greatest gift. Abraham's sacrifice is the ultimate expression of man apprehending the idea of G-d, and loving G-d. Not the idea of G-d Who saves, heals, or performs miracles, but more primary, as Creator.

### SHOFAR AND THE JUBILEE

Another area requires shofar, the Jubilee year. This is the 50th year in the Hebrew calendar. After the shofar is blown, all slaves are set free, and all lands returns to their original inheritors apportioned by Joshua upon his initial conquest of Israel. What is the role of shofar here? Additionally, the shofar on Rosh Hashanna is derived from the Jubilee shofar. We are to use the same shofar on Rosh Hashanna as we use on the Jubilee. It would seem counter intuitive. Doesn't the day of Rosh Hashanna have more signifi-

cance than a day, which occurs only once every 50 years? Why is the shofar of Rosh Hashanna derived from some area, which on the surface seems less significant? Maimonides states that once the shofar is blown, there is a pause: until ten days later, Yom Kippur, although free, slaves remain in the domain of their masters. Why do they not go free immediately upon the shofar blast?

The Jubilee year teaches us yet another facet in recognizing G-d as Creator: man's "ownership" (slaves and land) is a mere fabrication. In truth, G-d owns everything. He created everything. Our ownership during our stay here is not absolute. We learn from the release of slaves and land, that ownership follows G-d's guidelines. It is a means by which we again come to the realization of G-d's role as our Master.

Perhaps Rosh Hashanna is derived from the Jubilee for good reason. The Jubilee attests to a more primary concept: G-d as Creator. Rosh Hashanna teaches us that G-d judges man, but this is based on the primary concept that G-d is Creator. Our recognition of G-d's judgment must be preceded by our knowledge of His role as Creator. Therefore, Rosh Hashanah's shofar is derived from the Jubilee's shofar.

Why don't slaves go free immediately upon the shofar blast? If slaves would be freed, their freedom during the entire ten-day period would eclipse their repentance. The law is perfect: masters cannot work these slaves anymore for fear of their preoccupation with ownership, and slaves cannot leave their masters homes, for fear that they would be self-absorbed in their new found freedom. Both, master and slave must focus on G-d's role as King during these ten Days of Repentance.

### SUMMARY

In all our cases, we learn that shofar has one common theme: the recognition of G-d as our Creator. This recognition was essential for the Jews' acceptance of Torah, for our acceptance of G-d as the true Judge, and for us to view G-d as the absolute "Owner". Abraham expressed the zenith of man's love of G-d, so this event of the binding of Isaac is remembered, and reenacted via our shofar blasts. As a Rabbi once said, G-d created everything, so there must be great knowledge in all we see - I refer to our command of Shofar.

Question to ponder: What is significant about the ram being caught in the thicket, "by its horns"? The Torah does not record superfluous information. ■

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