

Deuteronomy, 5:19: "These matters (the Ten Commandments) God spoke to your entire assembly from amidst flames, cloud, and thick darkness, a great voice not to be repeated, and He wrote them on two tables of stone and gave them to me." God teaches that He will never repeat His revelation. He gave one religion to all of mankind for all generations. All other religions are discredited by God's own words. God's wish that Pharaoh be impressed by His miracles is additional proof that God desires all mankind recognize the Creator - not just the Jewish people.

ESTD
1997

JewishTimes

Dedicated to Scriptural and Rabbinic Verification
of Authentic Jewish Beliefs and Practices

Volume II, No. 14...Jan. 3, 2003

WWW.MESORA.ORG/JEWISHTIMES.PDF

Download and Print Free

IN THIS ISSUE:

PARSHAS VA-ERA	1,2,3
PLAGUE OF HAIL	1,4
IMPRISONED	4,5
GOD DESIRES WE USE OUR MINDS	5
THOUGHTS ON ISRAEL	5
WHY BE OBSERVANT?	6

SUGGESTED READINGS:

SEE THESE AND OTHER ARTICLES AT OUR SITE

Maimonides' 13 PRINCIPLES

THE BASIC FOUNDATIONS WHICH ALL JEWS
MUST KNOW AS TRUE. WE URGE YOU TO READ THEM:
www.mesora.org/13principles.html

God's Existence: Belief or Proof?

www.mesora.org/belieforproof.html

God's Land Without God?

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY:
www.mesora.org/openletter/openletter2.html

Parshas Va-Era

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"And Hashem spoke to Moshe and Ahron and He commanded them regarding Bnai Yisrael and Paroh the king of the Egyptians that they should take Bnai Yisrael out of Egypt." (Shemot 6:13)

This passage introduces a seemingly odd discussion. After this passage, the Chumash initiates a discussion of the families of Bnai Yisrael. The Torah enumerates the families of the tribe of Reuven. Then, the Torah lists the families of the tribe of Leyve.

(continued on next page)

The Plague of Hail

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

In Parshas Vau-Ayra, at the end of the ninth chapter, we find Moshe (Moses) not only responding to Pharaoh's plea to halt the plague of hail, but also giving Pharaoh rebuke: Exod. 9:30, "And you and your servants, I know that you have yet to fear God." Why during the plague of hail, unlike other plagues, does Moshe suddenly rebuke Pharaoh? Is there something we may derive from this story that may explain Moshe's behavior?

It doesn't appear that God instructed Moshe to rebuke Pharaoh, so Moshe's words here could be his own. What then did Moshe see in this plague, and what was his purpose in this dialogue?

We must understand that the plagues were not simply haphazard acts, but each was carefully designed by God. Each one contained some unique idea. Moshe understood better than any man the depth which can be discovered by studying God's

creations, including these plagues. I am certain Moshe pondered each plague, but saw something unique in hail.

After Moshe says "And you and your servants, I know that you have yet to fear God", these two verses follow, "The flax and the barley were struck, for the barley was ripe and the flax was in its stalk. And the wheat and the spelt were not struck for they ripen later." There is a question as to who said these two verses. Ramban says these words are spoken by Moshe. I agree, and would like to pose my own interpretation based on Ramban. *(continued on page 4)*





Parshas Va-Era

RABBI BERNARD FOX

Once the Torah reaches Moshe and Ahron, this discussion ends. In order to understand these passages, we must consider a related issue. Maimonides, in his Mishne Torah, describes the appropriate qualities for a judge of a major court. Among these qualities is lineage. There is a standard for the evaluation of this lineage. This standard is the ability to marry into a family of Kohanim. A candidate permitted to marry into a family of Kohanim, may be appointed as a judge of a major court. A person not permitted to marry into a family of Kohanim, is not appointed as a judge. What is the source for this requirement? Maimonides quotes a passage from Sefer BeMidbar. There, seventy Elders are appointed to serve with Moshe. Hashem tells Moshe that these Elders, "will stand there with you." Maimonides explains that the phrase, "with you" implies that the Elders must be "with" Moshe in certain fundamental qualities. Lineage is one of these qualities. Future judges of major courts are also required to meet this standard. Maimonides derives his comments directly from the Talmud in Tractate Sanhedrin. Nonetheless, this law and its derivation are difficult to understand. Moshe possessed various personal characteristics. These were physical qualities and spiritual perfections. The Torah tells us that all judges must possess some of Moshe's qualities. The Talmud concludes that

one of the characteristics is lineage. However, the reason that lineage is chosen is unclear. Of all of Moshe's personal qualities, why is lineage so fundamental? Tosefot ask a similar question on the Talmud. Another quality required in a judge of a major court is physical perfection. Certain physical blemishes render the judge unfit to serve. This requirement is derived from a specific passage. Tosefot note that according to the Talmud, Moshe was free of all blemishes. The Talmud maintains that there is an equation between Moshe and judges of major courts. This equation should be adequate to disqualify a person afflicted with a physical blemish. Why is a separate passage needed to disqualify candidates with such blemishes? Tosefot offer a rather enigmatic answer. They respond that the passage's equation is not adequate to disqualify a person with a blemish. Although it is difficult to understand Tosefot's answer, the general message is clear. The equation between Moshe and other judges is not total. The equation only extends to certain specific characteristics. Other characteristics of Moshe cannot be extended to all judges through this equation. Apparently, Tosefot maintain the physical perfection is one of the characteristics that cannot be implied through this equation. Therefore, this requirement must be established through a separate passage.

We must understand the limits of this equation. What characteristics are suggested by the equation? Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik suggests that the answer to this question is found in our passage. The Torah states the Hashem commanded Moshe regarding Bnai Yisrael. Sforno explains that the passage is not telling us that Hashem provided Moshe and Ahron with specific instructions. The pasuk records the appointing of Moshe and Ahron, by Hashem, as the leaders of Bnai Yisrael. The following passages describe the families of Bnai Yisrael. However, the account suddenly stops once Moshe and Ahron are introduced. Rashi comments that these passages are a description of Moshe and Ahron's lineage. In short, the Torah describes Moshe and Ahron's lineage in the context of their appointment as leaders. This answers all of our questions. All judges of major courts are equated to Moshe. They must share his perfect lineage. Why is lineage selected as a characteristic of Moshe that other judges must share? The answer is now obvious! This is the very quality the Torah immediately discusses following the appointment of Moshe and Ahron. Tosefot's comments are also easily understood. We cannot extend the equation between Moshe and other judges to include physical perfection. This quality is not discussed in reference to Moshe's appointment. Therefore, it is not included in the equation.

"And the river will swarm with frogs. And they will emerge and go into your house and bedroom and bed. And they will enter the houses of your servants and people and into your ovens and kneading bowls." (Shemot 7:28)

Hashem instructs Moshe to threaten Paroh with the plague of frogs. Moshe is to describe the extent of the plague. The frogs will infest the entire land. They will overrun the homes of the Egyptians. They will even invade their beds and ovens. These instructions stress the impact of the plague upon the Egyptians. This raises a question. Would Bnai Yisrael also suffer from this plague? Would Bnai Yisrael somehow be spared from this affliction? Our Sages differ on this issue.

Maimonides presents his view in his commentary on Tractate Avot. The mishne in Tractate Avot states that our ancestors experienced ten miracles in Egypt. What were these ten miracles? Maimonides asserts that the plagues only affected the Egyptians. The frogs did not invade the homes of Bnai Yisrael. Why were Bnai Yisrael spared from these ten plagues? The most obvious answer is that this was an expression of Hashem's kindness to the Jewish people. This interpretation is implied by the mishne in Avot. The mishne states that

(continued on next page)

Parshas Va-Era

RABBI BERNARD FOX

(continued from page 2)

Hashem performed ten miracles for Bnai Yisrael in Egypt. The exclusion of the Jewish people from the affliction of the plagues is described as a miracle done on their behalf. This supports the thesis that the Almighty spared Bnai Yisrael as an expression of love.

Rav Yisrael Lipschitz in his commentary on the Mishne – Teferet Yisrael – supports this interpretation of the Mishne. He adds that this kindness was an expression of the Almighty's love for the forefathers. Maimonides offers a different interpretation of Bnai Yisrael's exclusion from the plagues. He explains that there are two types of miracles. Some miracles are apparent aberrations from nature. The splitting of the Reed Sea is an example of this class of miracle. Other miracles are not inconsistent with the natural order of the universe. Nonetheless, these events qualify as wonders. Of course, this raises a question. Events that seemingly contradict natural law are obviously miraculous. However, the second class of miracles is not inconsistent with the natural order. Then, what is miraculous about these events? Maimonides explains that three characteristics can elevate an event from the commonplace to the wondrous. The first characteristic is timing. The event occurs at the exact moment predicted by the prophet. For example, a prophet predicts that the home of an evil person will be immediately struck by lightning. We would not normally view a destructive lightning bolt as an act of G-d. However, lightning striking immediately upon the pronouncement of the prophet deserves to be regarded as a wonder. The second quality is the extent of the phenomenon or the presence of an element of discrimination. Rain is not a miracle. However, the Deluge was a wondrous event by virtue of the magnitude of the phenomenon. According to Maimonides, the ten plagues were all wondrous events because they exclusively affected the Egyptians. The selective exclusion of Bnai Yisrael from the suffering endowed these events with a miraculous aspect. Third, the presence of a consistent pattern can render an

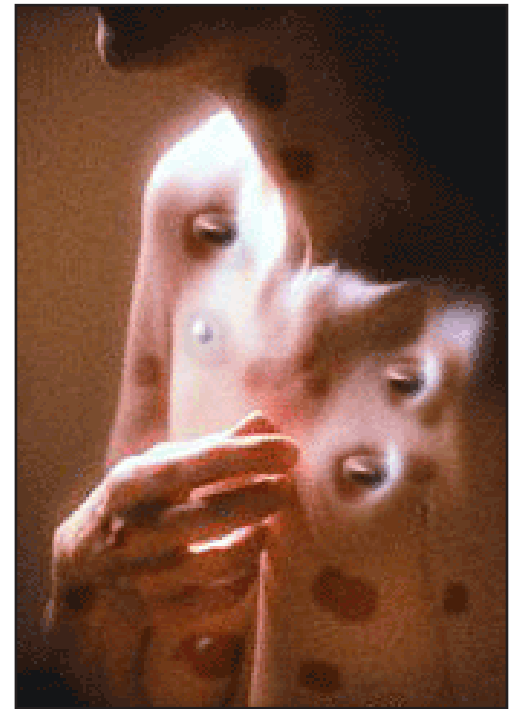
event into a miracle. The blessings in the Torah are examples of this third characteristic. Abundant crops or famine are not miraculous occurrences. However, a consistent relationship between behavior and material well-being over an extended period is a wondrous phenomenon!

Maimonides' comments provide another perspective on Bnai Yisrael's exclusion from the plagues. Any of the above characteristics can render a commonplace event into a wonder. Certainly, the convergence of all three characteristics is convincing evidence of the wondrous nature of an event or series of events. It seems that every characteristic identified by Maimonides was present in the plagues. Generally, Moshe predicted the onset and termination of each plague. On one occasion, he even allowed Paroh to chose the moment of cessation. The plagues involved sudden massive catastrophes. At the same time, these calamities did not affect the Jewish people. Finally, the plagues corresponded with Paroh's behavior. His refusal to release Bnai Yisrael was followed by suffering. His repentance, inevitably lead to a cessation of the plague. This consistent pattern continued throughout the ten plagues.

In short, according to Maimonides the exclusion of Bnai Yisrael from the plagues was not necessarily a manifestation of Hashem's love. Instead, this discrimination was needed to endow these events with a wondrous aspect.

"And the magicians could not stand before Moshe because of the boils, for the boils had attacked the magicians and all the Egyptians." (Shemot 9:11)

The Torah explains that the plague of Boils represented a turning point in the punishment of the Egyptians. The magicians of Egypt were rendered helpless. This is difficult to understand. The magicians had not been spared the previous plagues. They had not been exempt from the suffering of their countrymen. Why was this plague more devastating for the magicians? Rabbaynu Avraham ben HaRambam addresses



this question. The magicians had attempted to duplicate each of Moshe's miracles. They had some success. This allowed them to boast that their power was comparable to Moshe's. Perhaps, Moshe was a better magician and more knowledgeable. However, they claimed that the difference was quantitative. They and Moshe used similar means. This plague completely undermined their claim. Moshe overpowered the magicians. The boils debilitated them. They could not even appear before Moshe to challenge his miracles. They were humiliated. They could no longer compare their power to Moshe's. Moshe had demonstrated that he was not working through the same means as the Egyptians. He was acting as the agent of some greater power.

Sefer BeMidbar 11:16.

Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides)

Mishne Torah, Hilchot Sanhedrin 2:1.

Tosefot, Mesechet Sanhedrin 36b.

Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Shemot 6:13.

Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 6:13.

Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik, Chidushai MaRan RIZ HaLeyve on the Torah, Parshat VaEra.

Mesechet Avot 5:4.

Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Commentary on the Mishne, Mesechet Avot 5:4.

Rav Yisrael Lipshitz, Teferet Yisrael Commentary on the Mishne, Mesechet Avot 5:4.

Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Ma'amar Techiyat HaMaitim, chapter 10.

Sefer Shemot 8:5.

Rabbaynu Avraham ben HaRambam, Commentary on Sefer Shemot 9:11.

The Plague of Hail

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

(continued from page 1)

God intended to awaken the Egyptians and Pharaoh to His unique distinction as the Creator of heaven and Earth, Exod 9:16, (God instructing Moses what to tell Pharaoh) "However because of this have I sustained you, on account that I shall show you My strength, and that you shall declare My name throughout the land." God desired not only to show His might, but to counter obstacles in this society's corrupt nature so they may arrive at the truth.

What obstacle did Pharaoh have? Moshe said, "You and your servants have yet to fear God". Pharaoh's obstacle was obstinacy. Moshe was first telling Pharaoh what his exact flaw was in recognizing God. Moshe then viewed the hail, and pondered the different affects it had on various crops. Moshe saw that stiff plants broke, while flexible ones survived. He then thought to himself why God created a plague which didn't destroy all crops. Perhaps Moshe gained insight into this specific plague and into God's approach in reprimanding the Egyptians. God created each plague, but I wonder whether these specific plagues were pre-designed from the outset, or did God design each plague in line with what was needed at each juncture, depending on Pharaoh's current response. Pharaoh was now being obstinate, as Moshe pointed out to him "you have yet to fear God". Obstinacy had to be pointed out to Pharaoh if he was to understand Moshe's next statement which was in direct response to his character. Stripping Pharaoh of his defenses would be the best method for him to finally recognize God. Perhaps God included other messages in the plagues for Moshe to derive through his own keen analysis of their unique properties. Moshe therefore intimated to Pharaoh his character flaw via a parallel: "The flax and the barley were struck, for the barley was ripe and the flax was in its stalk." Meaning, "you Pharaoh are going to be broken" as you are stiff like the flax and barley. "And

the wheat and the spelt were not struck for they ripen later." Again a parallel, "you Pharaoh would be spared if you were flexible", as are the wheat and spelt.

Moshe was saying to Pharaoh, "this current plague was designed as a parallel to you". The goal being that you repent and follow God, as God wishes this for all mankind, "For I do not desire the death of the dead (the wicked) says God, but (in his) repentance and in his living."

This taught Pharaoh an essential lesson about God, that He recognizes man's thoughts and actions. How else could God design a plague to address a single man's (Pharaoh) specific nature? This is a great lesson. I believe the Egyptians would be surprised if an idol talked to them although they desired the idols to recognize and respond to their actions. Now however, Pharaoh was being taught by Moshe that there is in fact a God Who does know all man's thoughts. "God know's all your thoughts Pharaoh. He sees your obstinacy". Hopefully Pharaoh would be so impressed and acknowledge the Creator.

We see a clear proof against those self-righteous Jews who falsely assume they have more purpose than gentiles. If this were so, God would not be so concerned with Pharaoh's and the Egyptian's knowledge of God. God told Moshe at the very outset that Pharaoh will not hearken to him. Yet, God instructs Moshe to perform the plagues, "on account that I shall show you My strength, and that you shall declare My name throughout the land." God is concerned that other nations recognize the truth of His existence.

Why did Moshe tell Pharaoh this through metaphor and not directly? Perhaps in general, when someone is faced with a principle which completely counters his current philosophy he will push it away with both hands in defense. No one likes feeling the carpet is pulled out from under them. So to leave Pharaoh with some room to digest the ideas, Moshe used a metaphor which can, after time, appeal to the person more casually, thereby avoiding a direct onslaught of Pharaoh's position. Such a direct approach would only result in Pharaoh's reluctance to hear God's message, and the loss of any good for Pharaoh. □

Imprisoned

RIVKA OLENICK

Chazal say: "A person who is imprisoned cannot obtain his own release." Chazal could have simply said: "One imprisoned cannot escape." "A person who is imprisoned" is someone who cannot escape the defects of his/her own character faults and is imprisoned by those faults. Although a person may be well aware of one's character faults, it's much easier to ignore and at worse, deny these faults and hope "they'll just go away." This way of thinking is immature and silly. Denial doesn't work, and ignoring our faults will not make them go away. Since these faults do not go away, the person does become imprisoned by them.

Sometimes a person may recognize their own faults but tries to correct these faults themselves, without asking for the appropriate guidance. Chazal say that this course of action is doomed to failure. Very often a person will make the mistake by thinking that they "know better" when it concerns their own personality. So, one instantly rationalizes these faults and immediately legitimizes them by saying: "After all, this is who I am. This is part of my personality and my nature!" This faulty way of thinking prevents a person from being objective and from being truly reflective. The person misses the opportunity for deep insight into their own personality and misses the opportunity for growth. So the person sets this trap for themselves by setting it themselves. Even at this point a person will not seek an outside authority because the trap of denial has become so strong and the person thinks: "Better to keep going than to face any kind of pain even if it is for my own good. I'm too old, that kind of pain is for teenagers, not me, I'm mature." How sad when the years go by and their life is at a standstill.

So much can still be done to change this situation so that a person can live life b'simcha, with joy, pursuing true perfection by living more in line with the will of the Creator. The Rambam says: "A person who purposely does not seek a wise and trustworthy authority is itself, a moral fault or flaw." In this context "purposely" means free choice. In my opinion free choice in this situation is guided by insight and honesty, emes. Many people misunderstand free choice by thinking that everything in life is "beshert" or meant to be, even when the results are disastrous, a person will say: "Well, that was bashert!" Of course, when it comes to a business or consumer "deal" the person figures out every which way until they get the best deal! And then with a big smile on their face they'll say: "It was bashert!" This is a tremendous mistake and is itself a moral fault as well. If a person thinks that everything is "beshert" than why bother to think things through. Why would a person want to leave their psychological state and their opportunity for growth and perfection to chance rather than to use their mind intelligently or seek advice in that area from an intelligent person, a chuchum?

"Cannot obtain one's own release" is one who does not seek. He/she cannot obtain release due to his/her choice not to obtain release. Judaism says that one does have free choice and can utilize it. However, if one chooses not to utilize it, one cannot possibly obtain one's own release. Therefore, the person remains imprisoned. In Proverbs 1:7, King Solomon said: "Fools scorn (despise) wisdom and correction." Rashi adds that before one acquires wisdom, one must have the fear of God. Otherwise one will have no desire to acquire wisdom, for fools who do not fear God despise wisdom. So, if a person were to have fear of God they would want to be as free as possible from their faults in order to serve God. In the Shemoneh Perakim, Chapter 8 the Rambam says: "A man should not say that his faults and shortcomings are already ingrained in his character and cannot be removed. For in every situation a person has the choice of changing from good to bad, and from bad to good. The choice is in his hands. This is the basis of all our statements with regard to the fulfillment of God's will or the rebellion against it. It

(continued on next page)

Imprisoned

RIVKA OLENICK

(continued from page 4)

is proper that one eagerly seek to acquire virtues, for there is no external force that will arouse one to them." In this context "eagerly seek" means to look into oneself and use one's own free choice.

"Cannot obtain one's own release" is one who does not eagerly seek to look into and uproot one's flaws. The lesson communicated by the teaching of Hillel states: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?" Hillel also says that a person should say: "If I will not be the one who rouses me to virtue, who else will arouse me?" As the Rambam said before: "one should eagerly" seek to acquire virtues as there are no outside motivators – only the person him/herself who is motivated to serve God appropriately and as free as possible from destructive flaws. People find it very easy to judge other people's character flaws Right? However, we are all obligated to first look into ourself and work on ourself. Every person must look carefully at their own character, see what is faulty and ask for help to determine how damaging are these flaws and then to move forward to change them. By doing this we are involved in our own perfection, which begins when a person recognizes their flaws and wants to begin to make the small changes in their personality. Wouldn't a person want to break free from being imprisoned by his/her character faults? "Oh, I can't change – I've been this way all my life." Not according to the Rambam. "A man should not say his shortcomings and flaws are already ingrained in his personality" Wouldn't any person want to use the greatest asset given to a human being? – free choice – to begin to make the right changes in their personality. And be truly involved in perfection and service of God.

God created us for the purpose of doing His will, with all our heart, all our soul and all our might. "All" meaning with freed emotions, intelligence and physical capabilities, not entrapped and imprisoned by denial. □

God Desires We Use Our Minds

RABBI REUVEN MANN

In this week's Parsha Vau-era, we read about the encounter between Moshe and Pharaoh. G-d instructed Moshe that when Pharaoh demanded proof that G-d

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

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

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

Yet we may ask: Why did G-d give Moshe a miracle which could be somewhat duplicated? Why not give him something which could not be imitated at all? The answer is that G-d wants man to recognize Him through the use of his mind and exercise of his free will. He doesn't want us to be emotionally coerced into accepting Him. Great miracles impress the emotions but since they don't engage the mind, their effect soon dissipates. Real change is achieved only through genuine knowledge and understanding. G-d wants us to use our minds in searching for Him, discovering

Him and serving Him. Pharaoh sensed the significant difference between the miracles of Moshe and the counterfeit displays of his servants. That is why the Pasuk says that "he hardened his heart and did not listen..." Had he not been stubborn, he would have seen the truth.

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

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

Thoughts on Israel

ED KOCH

"We are now going through the most virulent anti-Semitic period since Hitler and Stalin. Nearly 60 years after the end of World War II almost every country on the European continent, including England, France, Germany, Holland, Belgium and the Scandinavian countries, has seen major outbreaks of physical violence against their Jewish citizens, and against Jewish institutions, including synagogues and cemeteries. At the same time, open hostility toward the State of Israel is at a all-time high.

Only in the United States have we seen a full acceptance of Jews as citizens and the Jewish state treated as a friend and ally by an overwhelming number of fellow citizens. In the U.S., Jews have been permitted to rise and fall based on their individual talents, virtues and faults. In one elite bastion after another, Jews have been selected to head institutions heretofore seen as beyond their reach. Today the presidents of Harvard and Yale Universities are Jews, as are recent former presidents of Columbia and Princeton. Having been elected three times as mayor of the City of New York, I have been the beneficiary of this country's generosity and freedom from bigotry, and I will be eternally grateful.

Americans traditionally make New

Year's resolutions. Before I list my own resolutions, I want to thank President George W. Bush and his advisers, Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of State Colin Powell and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice for their support of the State of Israel. They could easily have jettisoned Israel as a liability in their efforts to forge an international coalition against worldwide terrorism. I will be forever grateful to them, and I hope that many other supporters of the State of Israel will recognize and appreciate what they have done.

In the religious sector, I am grateful to the Reverends Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, both of whom have stood up time and again in support and defense of the Jewish nation. Regrettably, there have been many clergy who have unfairly attacked Israel for attempting to defend itself against near-daily terrorist acts against its citizens. We were made privy to the true thoughts of Rev. Billy Graham caught on tape telling President Nixon his real feelings about Jews and Israel. He has since apologized, but what is an apology without contrition and efforts to right the wrong done? Worthless.

Now to my personal New Year's resolutions. I will avoid France as a place to vacation. France leads those countries in the Security Council who are the enemies of the State of Israel. So too is Mexico, joining as a consistent supporter of resolutions unfairly denouncing Israel at the U.N. Security Council.

I will not support National Public Radio in any way. NPR's reporters and management delight in unfairly attacking Israel.

I will no longer lend financial support to New York's Channel Thirteen public television station. That station recently showed a documentary that was blatantly biased against Israel and has refused to acknowledge the bias or to try to correct it.

I will not watch ABC's World News Tonight anchored by Peter Jennings. For many years, Jennings has specialized in vicious and unfair portrayals of Israel intended to injure the Jewish state and lionize Palestinians.

BBC News is horrifically anti-Israel and I will shun it completely.

Susan Sontag will occupy the Ninth Circle of Hell for her outrageous assaults on Israel. I will no longer read her works.

I must close now to get ready for my Chanukah and Christmas shopping. I enjoy celebrating those holidays with Jewish and Christian friends whose goodwill and affection I will always cherish." □

Why be Observant?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Following is a fictional dialogue between an inquirer "John" and Mesora.

Based on actual discussions with many individuals inquiring on the benefits and reasons for becoming observant.

PART I

PROOF THAT GOD GAVE THE TORAH TO THE JEWS ON MOUNT SINAI

John: OK, let's start with the basics, there are many religions, why should I follow Judaism, or even any religion. What's wrong with me starting my own religion, or even better, why don't I just live a life without God?

Mesora: It's not a matter of right or wrong, it's a matter of true or false. You should follow what makes sense, as in all other areas of your life. I'm sure you selected your career and your children's teachers and school very carefully. Why not use the same reasoning when selecting a philosophy?

John: True, I should engage the same level of rational thinking I use in other areas when I approach decisions in philosophy. First, prove to me God exists. Forget the veracity of specific religions for now, just prove there is a God.

Mesora: The world accepts the fact that there was an event, at which over 2 million Jews witnessed supernatural feats, and at which an Intelligence delivered a system of ideas to them. This intelligence spoke from amidst a fiery mountain, communicated laws, and claimed responsibility for the 10 plagues visited upon the Egyptians, the exodus therefrom, and many miracles which none present then denied their miraculous nature. The very same people, the Israelites, who saw these miraculous plagues in Egypt and who were spared the suffering of those miraculous plagues, now attested to a miraculous event at Mt. Sinai. They all admitted to hearing a voice delivering commands, a voice which they felt if listened to would kill them. They admitted to seeing the mountain burning with fire, a feat not capable of being duplicated by man. They admitted to hearing this voice emanate from the fire, an impossibility for any biological creature to perform - an Intelligence unaffected by the laws of nature.

The Jews and Moses attested to the fact that they received wisdom from He who his the controller of the laws of nature, the same being which performed the Egyptian exodus. No one then denied what they claimed their own eyes saw.

Today, the Jews, and many other nations admit that from this event we have demonstrative proof of an Intelligence which controls the laws of the world. We call this Intelligence God. Even

scientists have come to the realization from the careful study of heavenly phenomena and laws, that there is a wise Designer of the universe. The heavens and all created matter did not create itself, hence, something external to the physical, created world caused our world's existence, and with such perfectly designed laws which govern it and actually sustain its integrity.

John: Well maybe they made up the story, or didn't grasp what really happened, and misconstrued the whole event.....

Mesora: Bottom line,....if any historically accepted account has as part of that story masses witnessing intelligible phenomena, the story must be true. You couldn't get them to lie unanimously, that's just not human nature for all the people there to have a common motive. You also won't have misinterpretation of what they saw and heard, provided it was understandable to an average intelligence. With this precise reasoning you would attest that Caesar was emperor of Rome. I'm sure you don't deny that, right?

John: Of course Caesar was the Roman emperor. Who could deny that? That's in all our history books, everyone knows that!

Mesora: Then the event at Sinai, where over 2,000,000 Jews witnessed God giving the Torah must also be true, based on your own reasoning. It's in all the bibles of the world. Even non Jews attest to its validity. The reason you might have a problem accepting Sinai, but no problem accepting Caesar, is that Sinai will obligate you in following the Torah's numerous commands. Believing in Caesar has no affect on your daily life.

John: Yeah, maybe. But why can't the story be made up by Moses then?

Mesora: If it was, don't you think the Jews back at his time would have said he was falsifying history? They wouldn't have accepted him. I mean, Moses would have to had convinced millions of people that they were all at an event which never occurred! There's no way the people would have accepted him, made him a leader, and unanimously followed him. That would be similar to me saying I was on the George Washington Bridge at rush hour, and the traffic was stopped, and said some spaceship descended and gave me some scroll in front of millions of spectators. Do you think one person would believe me if I couldn't produce those eyewitnesses? Even if I could get 10 or 12 people to go along with my story, I'd still go an unbeliever, since my story said there were millions present.

John: So if any story is unanimously accepted it must be true? What about Jesus walking on water, or healing the sick? Millions of Christians believe that to be true!?

Mesora: You must distinguish between Sinai and all historical events, and from belief. Christianity does not proclaim that there were masses witnessing Jesus walking on water, healing the sick, or any other claim. They state that you

must believe. So you either believe or not. But masses believing something is no proof to that belief. Masses also believe in UFOs. Sinai however is based on historical evidence, not belief. It is based on the exact same principles of proof which any historical account uses. It is impossible that a false story would be accepted unless it is bereft of witnesses and claims simple belief. If however a story is in our possession claiming mass witnesses, it must be true, and certainly if it claimed miracles as a component of that story.

John: OK, so Sinai was true. It happened. But I'm not clear on the others, what about all those other religions, I mean, they have millions more followers than the Jews?

Mesora: Yes. But their story does not claim masses of witnesses. They purport there were some witnesses, but conspiracy is possible with small numbers. Keep in mind, they have millions of followers, but not millions of witnesses. They don't even have dozens of witnesses!

John: So again, tell me how do they have millions of followers....

Mesora: Because of two factors, 1) they offer people who follow their notions a feeling of emotional satisfaction. Some absolve you of all sin if you believe, a very strong attraction, and some offer eternal bliss if you believe. Secondly, they base their religions on belief. No proof is required. Belief is something anyone can have, even a fool. So masses of unlearned people can flock to following these religions. None offer proof of their religion's validity, it's all based on faith.

So those religions have two factors, 1) An open door for any person to partake, since no proof is required, and 2) a motive for everyone to follow, as they offer grand 'rewards' for believers.

John: But you're saying Judaism doesn't require faith?

Mesora: That is correct.

Now that we have proved that the event at Sinai could not have been fabricated, we apply this very same scientific argument to the rest of the Torah. Had the people denied witnessing anything, Sinai would not have been circulated as truth, and it would not have been passed down through the generations as historically accurate. However, we find in the Torah many passages where Moses urged the people to remember what their eyes saw (Exodus 19:4, Deuteronomy 4:3,9,34,35, and 36). Had they not seen the event, Moses's story would not have survived the scrutiny of that generation, and the story would have died there and then. But this didn't happen, teaching us with certain proof that they all agreed that what Moses said was what they actually witnessed. The story teaches us that Judaism is built on proof alone. The only role faith plays in Judaism is that God will fulfill His words written therein. But in terms of acknowledging God's existence, and the veracity of the event of Sinai, we have demonstrated by proof that it is historically true. ■