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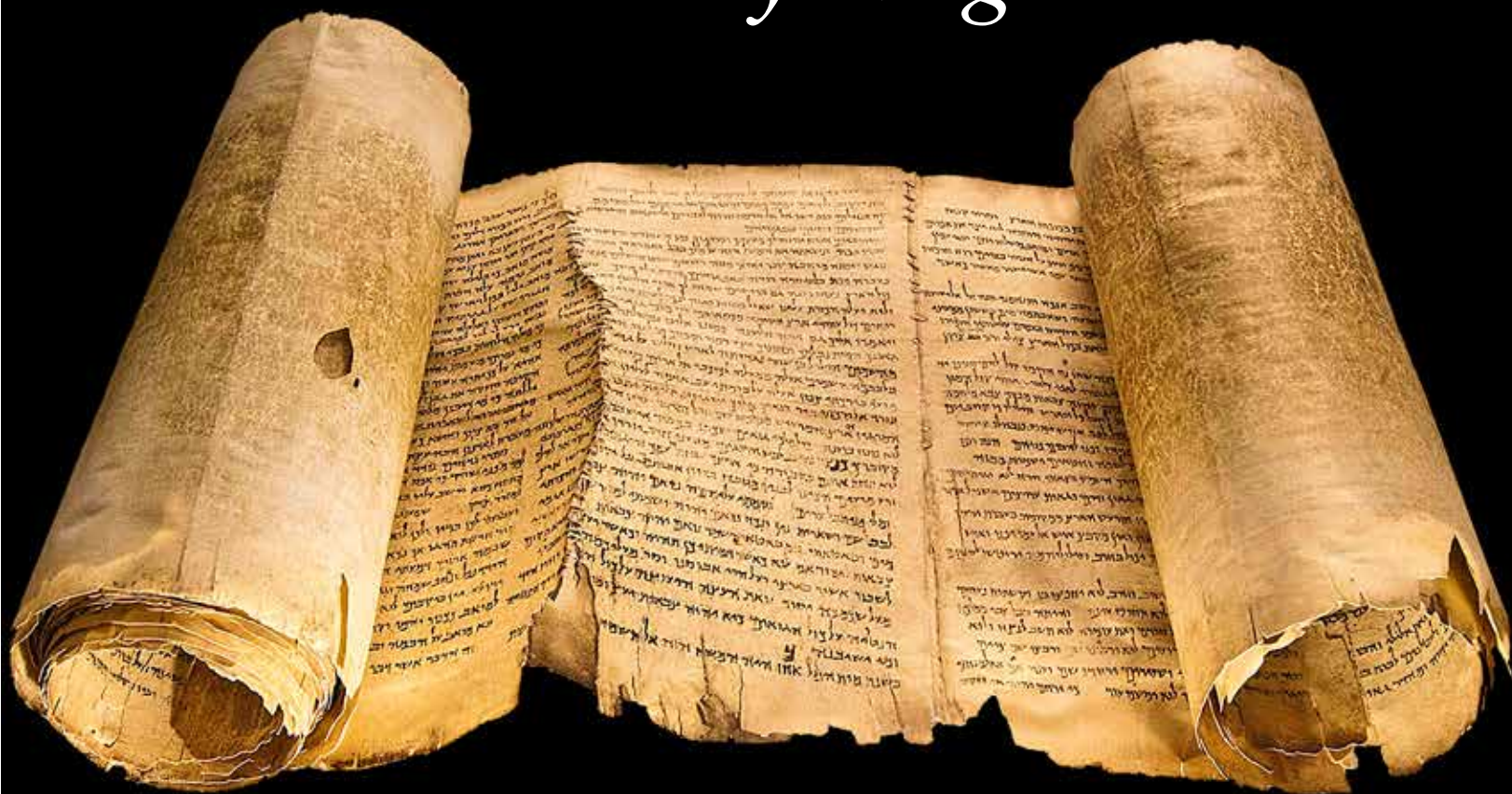
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the

BIBLE

God's Only Religion



LETTERS

*Religious Loyalty vs.
Intellectual Honesty*

PARSHA

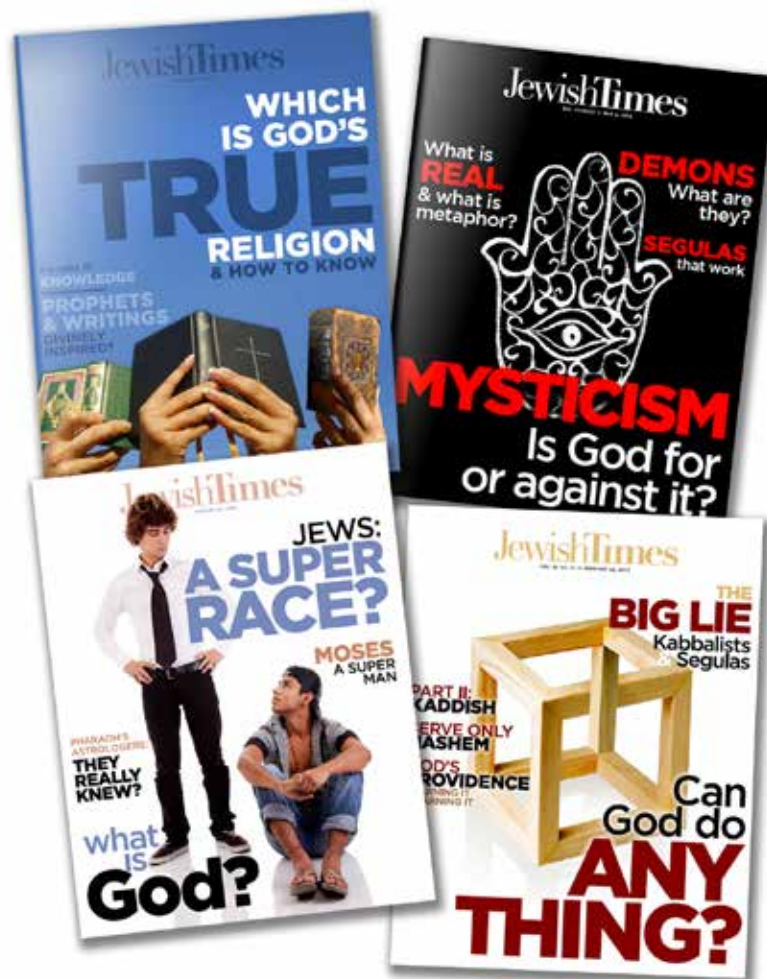
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LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Religious Loyalty vs. Intellectual Honesty

Reader: I have enjoyed many of your articles and your outlook. But, recently I start to see a trend. Time is short, so just to name a small sample: your post about fingernails in the previous JewishTimes issue. It seems like you sometimes engage in such mental gymnastics to avoid anything that might be construed as 'superstitious' that you become totally irrational yourself. For example, when you write things like "...to come in contact with one's disposed nail trimmings can be disturbing to delicate personality types and cause miscarriages." Are you listening to what you are writing? It seems intellectually dishonest...No?

Rabbi: Please elaborate on "trend", also on what is difficult to grasp about the explanation given, and how a superstitious approach is more agreeable to you. Thank you. (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

Reader: The trend I was referring to was on my end, the articles that I have been reading, as opposed to the articles that you've been writing lately.

Rabbi: This indicates you are searching in particular for content that is more closely related to superstitious themes than not. Then you can't call this Mesora's trend, but your own.

Reader: I'm not saying that the 'superstitious' approach is a more agreeable explanation. Rather, I am questioning why you don't just say that the sages were 'superstitious' in some of their beliefs. Instead, you come up with a innovative (did you see this anywhere?), yet far fetched, non realistic, even silly, explanation of why seeing a fingernail would cause a miscarriage.

Rabbi: A scientist does not explain the universe based on inexplicable superstitions. He experiments, theorizes, and uses evidence alone to determine how reality functions. The Rabbis too follow the Torah laws to avoid superstitions, such as Rambam's list (chap. 11 of Hilchos Avodah Zara) regarding superstitions, omens, luck, etc. The Rabbis too follow evidence, and do not accept superstitions, as they accept God gave man senses for the primary purpose of determining what we sense, and what we do not. We accept the former, and reject the latter.

Reader: Now you got me curious about some of your hashkafos (philosophy). So a couple of questions...1) Are you saying that the scientific method was used by the sages 1500 years before it was invented? In other words, do you really think that they systematically observed and tested pregnant ladies stepping on fingernails (as opposed to other substances; maybe even in a double-blind fashion)?

2) Also, if they had one, why didn't they give us a reason?

Rabbi: I'm saying the Sages (Chazal) were masters of Torah, which, by definition, includes mastery of psychology, since numerous Torah laws and ideals address the human psyche. Chazal wrote sparingly, and many times, used

clues alone to drive man to use his mind. Similarly, Shlomo Hamelech wrote Mishley and did not write the idea openly. Analyzing meshalim, Shlomo Hamelech understood would benefit us by sharpening our minds. See what he writes in the first chapter.

Reader: Why wouldn't you just say that the chachamim, based themselves on the science of the time, and they were wrong? Similar to what Nathan Slifkin might say. Why come up with an answer that defies common experience and intellect?

Rabbi: It doesn't defy the intellect, but is right on target.

Reader: Isn't the concept of a Mesora versus what you are proposing about the sages being scientists...opposites?

Rabbi: Mesora means transmission. Chazal were geniuses, not superstitious fools. We must analyze their clues to arrive at their hidden meanings, just as we analyze a medrash that too is not written literally. Like Mishley, it is a riddle.

Reader: A Mesora could obviate a scientific evaluation and vice versa. Fingernails are not good for pregnant ladies, period. If they didn't give a reason, it's because it is a mesora. If we understand it logically or not. Just because we don't, doesn't mean we dismiss it...after all, it is halachah. And, it doesn't mean we assume that there is a logical explanation when the sages themselves didn't give one.

Rabbi: Suggesting the sages veered from logic is like saying a scientist follows superstitions.

Reader: Another example that I thought of is on Shabbos 67 where the halachah is established that medicine and medical methods can be illogical and even come directly out of pagan practices if used for the sake of healing. The Rambam (Hilchos Shabbos 19:13), himself says that you can wear a fox tooth as a sleeping remedy, even though it makes no sense at all and is Darkei Emori.

Rabbi: Some remedies can work psychologically. Meaning, if one believes in something enough, it can have psychosomatic results. This is reasonable, and unlike your view that "it makes no sense at all."

Reader: Is your answer found anywhere in our Mesora? Or, did you come up with it on your own (which means it's not part of the Mesora; which is fine, too)? I did see various answers - none of which match yours; many of these were having to do with witchcraft and Kabbalistic answers.

Rabbi: This is my explanation following Rambam (Letter to Marseilles) that man is to accept as truth only one of 3 matters: 1) what he detects with his senses, 2) what his mind dictates by reason, and 3) Torah. Whatever does not fall into these 3 categories must be rejected, such as mysticism and today's Kabbalistic thought. It is a quite sad state of affairs that Jews today reject many Torah prohibitions and accept witchcraft, and reject minds like Rambam. They prefer committing violations and following infantile minds that favor mystical (unproven) notions, and accept whatever is stated under the name of "Kabbalah", as if this is on par with God's words, i.e. Torah.

Like scientists, Chazal understood how the world operates. Like Rambam and Moshe Rabbeinu, they rejected mysticism; what is accepted today under the heading of Kabbalah. The rational mind will find that by following evidence, reason and Torah, the natural world will not be in conflict with his beliefs. But the person who believes that spells, witchcraft and Kabbala are the preferred remedy to misfortunes or illness, will suffer and die.

Reader: Two questions then: 1) under which one of the three does believing that fingernails can cause miscarriages fall? Because, (a) I'm sure you've never seen a miscarriage from nails with your senses or anyone else's; (b) with reason alone, this cause and effect can't be supported, no matter how you stretch it; (c) if you say that this is Torah, just because Chazal said it in the Gemara, then you force yourself to believe as true everything they say. Which it

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sounds like this might make you uncomfortable. Especially, some of their ideas about the science of the natural world as well as the power of irrational causes. Or else, you are forced to pick and choose which concepts of chazal fit, conveniently, into your pre-held thesis. (I am seeing this in some of your articles and answers to questions, ignoring blatant chazal that don't fit.)

Second question: do you feel comfortable saying that gedolim like the Vilna Gaon were fools and, essentially, apikorsim because they held by "Kabbalah"? Who else in the frum world holds like this. (There are mishnayos that discuss maaseh merkava/bereishis. Are some of the tannaim fools and destined to suffer and die, too?)

Rabbi: 1) Science and facts have long ago proven the connection between psychological health and bodily health.

2) Not all Kabbalistic ideas are false. Each idea must be judged individually.

Reader: It sounds like you are putting science ahead of Torah, as if, God forbid, we depend on science to validate which parts of Torah we are allowed to believe as real. Science changes constantly, in every field, at least our understanding of it. Torah doesn't change. The precedence of the intellect is similar to what some of ancient Greek philosophers held, later by Descartes. Apart from the Rambam, I would challenge you to find any "prove-it-to-me scientifically" mentality from any gadol in our Mesora. There is nothing Jewish about this. And, even the Rambam's opinion was most likely borrowed from Greek philosophers (not my words, I believe the Gaon's). Doesn't the Rambam call Aristotle "the Chacham"? It's the reverse, Torah proves science. As many (Hirsch, Gaon and others) have metaphorically used the menorah saying that the six branches of worldly wisdom shine subservient it toward light, which is Torah.

You're obfuscating a bit. The vilna Gaon accepted Kabbalah, wholly, and wrote more commentaries on the Zohar than all of the early Hasidic rebbes combined. Are you calling him a fool and destined to suffer? (It's fine if you are...I am just trying to figure out where you hold.

Since obviously you spent a lot of time and thought on your website and articles. This I appreciate.)

Rabbi: Along with Rambam, Radak and Ibn Ezra follow this approach. Regarding the Gaon on Kabbala, I'm sure he'd reject today's Kabbalistic notions. Whatever the Gaon followed as Kabbala, had to be chochma (wisdom), so please share if you see he subscribed to any hocus-pocus nonsense. I'm sure he did not.

Reader: Hmmm...in my very humble opinion, please don't take offense, but it seems like you have ignored most of Judaism and focused only in on those few commentators who support your science-first view (seems very close to science worship, if there is such a thing). For example, all of our sages held by the reality of astrology (perhaps, not today's, but some form of mazal). And there is just too many pages of Gemara dedicated to it to ignore. Ibn Ezra, you mention, wrote books on medical astrology...it sounds like you are also confusing the prohibition of seeking soothsayers and astrologers with not believing that they had some sort of irrational power; think about so many of the discussions of the Gemara. You can't write them all off as some allegory for us to crack.

Rabbi: What reasoning could defend such an opinion that "the minority are wrong"? Are we not to follow what is reasonable, regardless of numbers? This is not speaking where we rule after a majority; that is halacha, while this is philosophy, hashkafa, where there is no "ruling." As a wise rabbi stated, the Torah cannot legislate what we "believe," for it is impossible that a man will believe X to be true, based on coercion. Torah legislation is relegated exclusively to actions.

By the way, Rambam rejected astrology in his Letter to Marseilles.

Astrology either is or isn't true. Until proven, one should not accept it, or any view, without a reasonable argument.

Reader: So "if one should not accept it", why did every sage (except a few) hold by it?

Rabbi: Can you explain astrology, that you

defend it so much?

Reader: Nope. However, are you ready to not accept everything in Judaism that you can't explain? They might have believed things that we don't hold by anymore (bloodletting, for instance). But, to declare war on anything outside of our limited, graspable, rational thoughts, I truly believe that this is not Judaism, but rather a post-cartesian hybrid.

Rabbi: This is also not an area of psak (ruling), so there is no obligation to accept any opinion, regardless of the number of Rabbis who accepted it back then.

Reader: Regarding Vilna Gaon's Kabbalah being chachma...have you read any Kabbalah at all?!? The concepts there are not scientifically discernible whatsoever. And he engages fully in them (and astrology). So again, are you really comfortable saying that they were all fools, suffering and dying? If you were to find out that Judaism did have elements in the Mesora that ran counter to science would you abandon your Judaism? I don't believe you would because we are "maaminim bnei maaminim; believers the descendants of believers." There is something within the Jew.

Rabbi: Read the Ibn Ezra below which disagrees with your view:

"...The second category (of commandments) are commands which are hidden, and there is not explained why they were commanded. And God forbid, God forbid that there should be any one of these commands which goes against human intelligence. Rather, we are obligated to perform all that God commands, be it revealed to us the underlying Sode (principle), be it hidden from us. And if we find any of them which contradict human intelligence, it isn't proper that we should understand it as implied. But we should consult the books of the wise men of blessed memory, to determine if such a command is a metaphor. And if we find nothing written (by them) we (must) search out and seek with all our ability, perhaps we can fix it (determine the command). If we can't, then we abandon that mitzvah as it is, and admit we are ignorant of it (Exod. 20.1)."

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LETTERS

Thus, Ibn Ezra says opposite your view...we do in fact reject what conflicts with reason. His example was "and you shall circumcise the foreskin of your heart (Deut. 10:16)." He says we are not to be barbaric and literally cut out our hearts. Rather, this verse is metaphoric for controlling our desires. Had we not come to the latter understanding, we would not follow the command literally. Unlike your view, reason will trump an unintelligible Torah command.

Be mindful that the Torah in many areas prohibits witchcraft, magic, soothsaying, warlocks, omens, etc. So The Vilna Gaon could not possibly agree with these ideas as is found in Kabbalah today.

Reader: It seems like the main problem with a reliance on one's intellect is that many wise men had conclusions that were not in line with Torah. What would you say about them?

Rabbi: God gave man the greatest gift, the intellect. It matters none that a wise Rabbi from the middle ages ends up wrong based on today's science. What matters is that he used his intelligence to his best abilities. God could ask from him nothing more. And such a man lived on the highest level possible. We can only make decisions with the knowledge at hand. If we ignore what is known, that is foolish. Today we know the views of astrology are false. We do not accept them as true just because many Rabbis accepted it back then. What if Rabbis back then accepted the view of a flat world, would you reject your eyes that have seen photos of Earth from space? Or would you say the Rabbis were correct? ■



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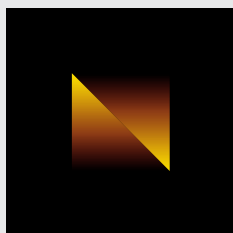
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PARSHA

The Bible: God's Only Religion

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

How do we validate if a religion is truly God's word, or deceptive fabrication?

Moses said to the Jews: "And observe do the commands for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, that, when they hear all these statutes, they shall say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people' (Deut. 4:6)."

Moses tells the Jews that any nation, upon learning of Biblical (Torah) laws through the Jews' upholding and publicizing of these laws, will recognize the Jews as wise...in contrast to their own religions' lack of wisdom. This means that any person will view Bible law as unparalleled intelligence, and this makes sense. For the Bible is God's only religion, while all other religions are man-made and thereby saturated with human error and fantasy.

Moses makes this very point:

"For inquire now of all previous history, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and from the one end of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath there been heard like it... Did ever a people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst

of the fire, as you hast heard, and live? Or hath God miraculously come and taken Him a nation from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, and by wonders, and by war, and by a mighty hand, and by an outstretched arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before thine eyes?

Unto you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord, He is God; there is none else beside Him. Out of heaven He made you to hear His voice, that He might instruct you; and upon earth He made you to see His great fire; and you didst hear His words out of the midst of the fire (Deut. 4:32-36)."

How Religion is Proved True

Any claim of God giving a religion or intervening is validated only when undeniable miracles were present. For without miracles, there is no validation of God's involvement. Moses attests to the Jews that such an event never occurred in all history, such as that which occurred to the Jews at Mount Sinai. And since then, no such event has occurred. Thus, all other religions claiming Divine origin are absolutely without validation. And as the Bible is the only validated word of God, one must seriously question adherence to any other religion. For he

dedicates his life to that which is unproven. Through Revelation at Sinai where 2.5 million Jews witnessed an intelligent voice emanating from a fiery mountain, we learn that God can prove — without doubt — when He has intervened in human history. The miraculous giving of His Bible is His clear message that this is the only religion. He created one mankind; one religion is perfectly sensible.

"Out of heaven He made you to hear His voice, that He might instruct you; and upon earth He made you to see His great fire; and you didst hear His words out of the midst of the fire." In other words, that which controls heaven and earth — all creation — gave the Bible to the Jews. Moses also says, "there is none else beside Him," lest man think there exists God, plus another deity. Thereby, Moses clarifies that there is only one power in the universe. And God gave mankind one religion in an event never reproduced. This singular event, this unique one-time in history spectacle must impress all intelligent persons that the Bible is God's sole religion for mankind.

What then propelled the fabrication of false religions? How did these religions gain traction?

Deuteronomy 4:16-19 is Moses' warning to the Jews not to create idols. Man possesses a nature that seeks emotional gratification. Amazing...even amidst the receipt of the Bible and the Ten Commandments at Sinai, many people created a Gold Calf. Man's inability to relate to the abstract metaphysical true God drives man to create tangible and emotionally satisfying gods (idols). Similarly, even with the clear proof of God's only revelation being His gifting Moses and the Jews His Bible upon Sinai, other nations could not relate to God as He deemed appropriate. They concocted lies about men named Jesus and Mohammed, fabricating stories about them, in an effort to deify these humans. Perhaps out of a jealousy of the Jews' selection as God's emissary to mankind, other peoples caved to their sibling rivalry. But eventually, history caught up with those lies. One can easily research "Council of Nicea" to learn that Christian doctrine was voted, not Divinely given...and 100s of years after Jesus. Had Jesus

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performed miracles in front of masses, it would be known from that moment and forward, not 100s of years later. Additionally, the Gospels would not be in conflict as they are. In contrast, Revelation at Sinai contains no confusion as to the account, and it was not first told to people hundreds of years later. But people at that moment were addressed by Moses, saying:

"Lest you forget what your eyes saw, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life; but make them known unto thy children and thy children's children; the day that you stood before the Lord thy God in Horeb [Sinai], when the Lord said unto me, 'Assemble Me the people, and I will make them hear My words that they may learn to fear Me all the days that they live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children.' And you came near and stood under the mountain; and the mountain burned with fire unto the heart of heaven, with darkness, cloud, and thick darkness. And the Lord spoke unto you out of the midst of the fire; you heard the voice of words, but you saw no form; only a voice. And He declared unto you His covenant, which He commanded you to perform, even the Ten Matters; and He wrote them upon two tables of stone (Deut. 4:9-13)."

Proving Revelation at Sinai

Imagine...you and a large group of your people are suddenly approached by a man today, the summer of 2016. He addresses you saying, "And you came near and stood under this mountain, and the mountain burned with fire unto the heart of heaven, with darkness, cloud, and thick darkness. And the Lord spoke unto you out of the midst of the fire; you heard the voice of words, but you saw no form; only a voice. And God declared unto you His covenant, which He commanded you to perform." Now...would you, or any one of your people believe what you didn't witness? Could you accept such blatant fabrication? Would you all pass that story on as your history, in place of what you know you did that day? Would such an outlandish story become the sole history of your people — completely replacing the truth — even lasting 3000 years later? Would

such a lie then get adopted by all major religions over time as historically true? Of course not. But as this is the history of the Jewish nation, and as this is adopted by the world as history, like any history, we are forced to say that Revelation on Sinai occurred. Had it not occurred, just as you would reject being told what you did not see, those 2.5 million Jews back then too would have rejected Moses' claims. And today, 3300 years later, there would be no Jewish religion, nor would Christianity and Islam affirm it as they do today.

Why then did Christianity and Islam get adopted, and even in greater numbers than Jews accepting the Bible? This is not because these religions accept the purported stories were witnessed by masses. Such stories could not gain acceptance without witnesses, as explained above. Rather, Christianity and Islam are "beliefs," not historically witnessed accounts. You must appreciate the vast difference between believing in a story, versus possessing mass witnesses attesting to an event. As Moses said:

"...inquire now of all previous history, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and from the one end of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath there been heard like it... Did ever a people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you hast heard, and live? Or hath God miraculously come and taken Him a nation from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, and by wonders, and by war..."

This did not occur for any other peoples. Why not? It is because God did not author Christianity or Islam, or any other religion. All religions aside from Judaism are man-made. Furthermore, God would not contradict Himself by giving one mankind a set of conflicting religions. God prohibited the Jews to deify or pray to man, and not so He would then turn 180° and endorse the worship of Jesus. God command the Jews in mercy, not to then endorse barbarism and Islamic jihad. Judaism alone possesses the only validation of Divine origin.



Jew Hatred

It is then quite easy to understand the jealousy of other nations, and why hatred exists of the Jew, and no other. Anti-Semitism is not a response to the Jew's wrongdoings, for the Jew did not provoke others with any action to cause anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism is a response to Revelation at Sinai. It is when one lacks proof, that he resorts to the horrors of ISIS and crusades to win converts. But the Jew never engaged in such evil, primarily because knowledge of the truth secures the Jew in following the Bible. The only tool man requires to realize God's will for man, is the intellect. If man can arrive at the realization of God's one religion intelligently, nothing else is required. If he can't, nothing else can help. The Jew recognizes this. The Jew also respects human free will as God's creation, and His will that each man and woman arrive at their choices with no coercion.

Deviation of Other Religions

Other religions add to the Bible, in an attempt to "clarify" God's message. However, God knew this would occur. The New Testament is a clear violation of God's prohibition "You shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish from it...(Deut. 4:2)" Christianity's and Islam's new religious rites are additions to what God instructed Moses, and furthermore, they are without the validation of miracles. God knew exactly what to write in His Bible, and where to end His words. This is why He prohibited any alteration to His Bible. Other religions further violate the Bible and God's word by their blatant rejection of so many Biblical commands including kosher, sabbath, fringes (tzitzis), phylacteries (tefillin) and the list goes on.

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The Jew Must Teach Truth

There are some rabbis today, who, in an attempt to gain favor from other religions, validate those other religions. But nothing could be worse for both the gentile and the Jew. Through such validation, both are lied to, and Biblical truth is thereby obscured. As proved above, God's will is the Bible alone; He rejects all who reject His words. This too is clear in the Bible.

The Jew's obligation is to make clear God's will for mankind. This cannot come about by giving the impression that other religions are valid. The Jew must first gain the conviction through his reasoning, that God opposes other religions. The Jew must then be fair to all mankind and make Biblical knowledge available. The Jew must speak politely, but without veering from the truth an iota. He must not fear the protest and rejection of others for speaking truth. In fact, when he does speak the truth, no argument will be found that can oppose it. Eventually, Jeremiah's prophecy will come true: "Nations will come from the corners of the land and say, 'In truth, our fathers gave us an inheritance of lies' (Jer. 16:19)."

Again, there is only one mankind. Our external differences, languages and cultures do not remove our identical psyches and minds. Black or white, we all desire truth and detest being lied to. Asian or European, we all seek love, peace, happiness, success, and health. Indian or Nordic, our desires are identical, since we all are identical. Israeli or Arab, our happiness in great measure comes from living in line with reason, and grasping our purpose in our brief stay on Earth. It therefore makes sense that God gave only one religion to the one mankind He designed.

God provided each of us with a mind. We each must use our reason to determine God's will for mankind. We must seek truth, if we are to find it. ■

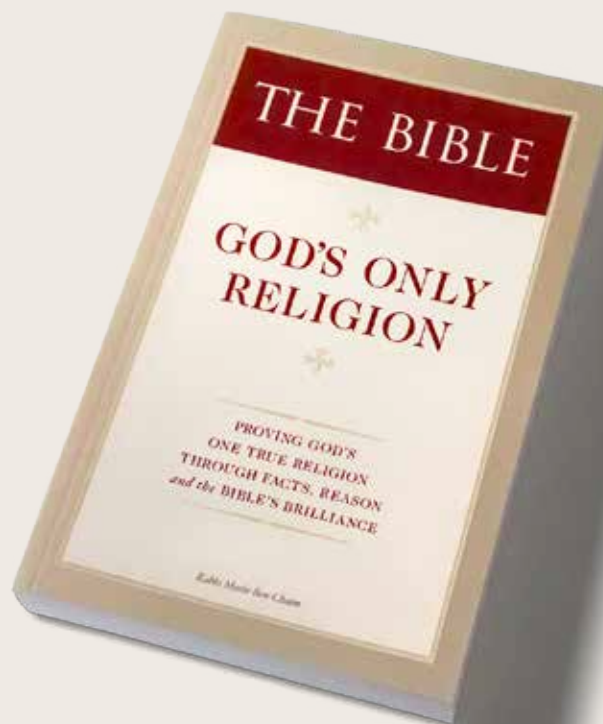


Religions conflict; they all can't be God's word. How do we choose which is God's true religion?

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Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim



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WE ARE STILL HERE

*God's
Chosen
People*

RABBI REUVEN MANN



On Tisha B'Av, which we have just observed, we recounted all the historical sufferings of the Jewish people. To those of us who were born and raised in America, all of this is foreign to our experience.

In the long history of the Exile, no Jewish community has had it as good as we have. America is a noble country that absolutely respects and preserves the right of all its citizens, regardless of race or religion, to live in peace and security. We should never forget or cease being grateful for this.

However, the Kinnot (lamentations) we recited should be a reminder that anti-Semitism is not a superficial or ephemeral phenomenon. It is deeply ingrained in the human psyche. The Rabbis say that the hatred of Esav for Yaakov is a "halacha," that is, a part of the natural order.

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Virtually all of the civilizations with whom we have interacted became an enemy, at some point. One need look no further than the Jews of Germany. At one time, they were fully integrated and assimilated into the culture and society. We know where that story ended.

This invariably leads to the question: Can it happen here? It doesn't seem or feel like it can, but our historical experience rules out the feasibility of confidently maintaining that it cannot.

In considering our history, we get the impression that we have always been a small and weak people in comparison with the mighty nations that oppressed us. However, we should ask, Where are they now? All the great empires that arose to destroy us have been relegated to the dustbins of history.

And we, the despised people, who were dispersed to the ends of the earth and in a state of abject defenselessness, are still here. Not only that, but we are a vibrant nation with achievements in science, medicine, and technology way out of proportion to our numbers.

Our enemies have misinterpreted the real significance of Jewish suffering. Rabbi Soloveitchik (the Rav) teaches that a major theme of the Kinnot is Christianity's theological gloating about the plight of the Jewish people. They have always said that we suffer because we have been displaced (by them) as G-d's chosen people.

This idea is expressed in a number of places, particularly in Kinna 20. There we read, "Incline your ear, my G-d, to the disparagement and ridicule, 'Where is your hope? Your Temple will never be rebuilt!' Incline your ear, my G-d, to those who claim that the

Temple is abandoned, forgotten and cast aside, forever will it be desolate."

According to the great Rav, this refers to the Christian claim that G-d broke His Covenant with the Jews and permanently exiled them from the land of Israel. Therefore, they say, the Jews will never be able to return and rebuild Israel and the Temple.

Much of Christianity posits the doctrine of "supersession," which asserts that Hashem broke His ties with the Jews and made a "new" covenant with the Christians. This idea was central to the historical dispute between the two religions.

We have always maintained that we are, eternally, Hashem's Chosen People. We have always asserted that our exile is temporary and that we would, ultimately, be restored to our Holy Land.

Most theological debates are of the kind that cannot be resolved by empirical evidence. This one proved to be the exception. The dream of the Return has become a reality. The Jews have rebuilt the land of Israel

into a vibrant and thriving society.

The Church took its time and was very reluctant to recognize the state of Israel. Israel's existence constitutes a theological challenge for which it has no answers. Israel is a thorn in the side and an absolute refutation of the claims of those who taunted, "Where is your hope? Your Temple will never be rebuilt!"

Therefore, as we emerge from the day in which we recounted the manifold tragedies of Jewish history, we should not lose sight of this amazing fact: the people who suffered these fatal blows, which would have brought down any other nation, are still here, alive and well.

Why is that? The answer is in this week's parsha, Va'etchanan. In it, Moshe refers to the Jews as a "great" nation. He says, "For who is a great nation to whom Hashem is close, in all of our calling out to Him? And who is a great nation that has laws and statutes that are righteous and just, as this entire Torah that I place before you this day?"

We are an eternal People

because Hashem has associated His Name with us. Only with us did He entrust His Torah of truth so we would implement and preserve it. Only the nation that fulfills the Divine revelation, according to the written and oral law, can lay claim to being His Chosen People. It is exclusively because of Hashem's closeness to us that we have survived and outlived all our oppressors, who sensed our strange uniqueness and sought to destroy it.

In this season of Nachamu (consolation), we should be grateful for the Divine Providence that has enabled us to initiate the process of redemption by granting us a foothold in the Land of Israel. May we be inspired to grow in the ways of Divine wisdom and, thereby, merit to witness the time when the nations, upon recognizing our enlightened and inspired way of life, will proclaim, "What a wise and discerning nation is this great people."

Shabbat shalom. ■



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