

**GOD**

At the very core of Judaism, is the principle that God is one. But what does this mean, and do we know this with absolute clarity? False notions of the Creator constitute the most grave of crimes, as all of our knowledge, is only true knowledge, if we comprehend the true unity of God. "Hindu" in this issue discusses some of these ideas.

REFLECT UPON OUR PURPOSE - TORAH. REPENT FROM A LACK OF STUDY. IT IS FOR OUR GOOD.

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

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## The Bris of Abraham

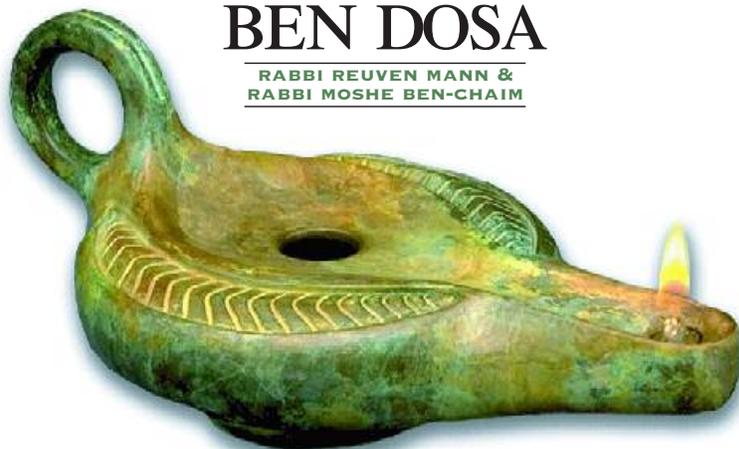
RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by student

The commandment of circumcision, or "bris", is an essential mitzvah which was transmitted by G-d to our forefather Abraham. Maimonides in his Mishna Torah in the laws of Circumcision the third chapter law 8 teaches us that this commandment is extremely important. The Rambam tells us that Abraham was not called "shalame", complete, or perfect, until he was circumcised. The Rambam quotes Genesis chapter 17 verse 1, which states, "...Walk before me and be perfect." We therefore can infer that prior to Abraham's circumcision he was in a state where he evidently was lacking perfection. The Rambam additionally states in law 9 that the commandment of a bris is extremely important because Abraham's bris is mentioned 13 times in the Torah, whereas the entire commandments of the Torah were only undertaken by three covenants.

## THE MIRACLES of RABBI CHANINA BEN DOSA

RABBI REUVEN MANN & RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



Certain "miraculous" events surrounding Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa are recorded in Talmud Taanis, pages 24b-25a.

Chanina's wife avoided confrontation and embarrassment, and escaped from that room. The neighbor upon entrance to her home saw that Rabbi Chanina's wife's oven was in fact full of challas (bread), and the kneading trough, full of kneaded loaves. This neighbor called to Rabbi Chanina's wife, "you, you, come with a shovel, as your loaves will be burnt." Rabbi Chanina's wife responded, "I went to get the shovel." (A Tanna recorded that she did, as she was accustomed to miracles.)

### The Miracle of the Bread

The first story recounts a miracle regarding his wife. As the story goes, she would, each Friday evening before Shabbos, place twigs into her oven, as she was embarrassed that she had nothing to cook, as all others did. These twigs when burning, gave the appearance that she too in fact had provisions, as they would generate smoke as do regular foodstuffs. One bad neighbor approached her home on a given Friday evening, at which, Rabbi

How are we to understand this story? Did an actual "miracle" occur for Rabbi Chanina's wife? And if so, why only on this Friday evening, at that?

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## Devarim

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"And it was in the fortieth year, in the twelfth month, on the first day of the month, Moshe spoke to Bnai Yisrael regarding all that Hashem had commanded him for them." (Devarim 1:3)

Moshe delivered the address contained in Sefer Devarim at the end of his life. Moshe's address

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# THE MIRACLES of RABBI CHANINA BEN DOSA

RABBI REUVEN MANN &  
RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

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A Rabbi once asked, "Why, when Joseph was sold to a caravan for slavery, did Divine Providence benefit Joseph, and orchestrate that this specific caravan carry pleasant fragrances, instead of the normal, putrid cargo?(Rashi). The Rabbi suggested that as Joseph was subject to many humiliating events; his siblings' oppressions, being cast into a pit, and sold by his very brothers, he would most assuredly approximate his breaking point sooner than later. God, Who knows man's frailties, saw that Joseph would break when being bought by a caravan and thrown into a cart full of putrid cargo. Therefore God devised that this specific caravan carry pleasant spices. This would prevent Joseph from the moment of breaking, and conversely, permeate him with a sense of reprieve, just enough for this Tzaddik to regroup, and return him to his senses. God knows each person's breaking point, and with Joseph, God desired that such a perfect soul should not succumb to his weaknesses, but be strengthened by something as simple, as these pleasant scents. This was a gracious act of God's mercy, that He watches sternly over his righteous ones.

We might apply this same rule in our case. God knows what a person can and cannot handle. He saw that Rabbi Chanina's wife could not face such humiliation - this was her breaking point. This explains why she escaped confrontation from a neighbor, who by reputation, was vicious. (Perhaps this is why this neighbor decided a visit at the very time she knew Rabbi Chanina's wife would be found empty handed - on Friday eve.) God, however, wishes that certain individuals worthy of His intervention, be saved from devastating experiences. God therefore orchestrated some plan that

bread would be found, and Rabbi Chanina's wife would save face.

"Miracle" in this case does not necessarily mean that bread was created from nought. "Harbeh shluchim l'Makom", "God has many messengers." We cannot say how the bread arrived, but we also should not say that this bread was created out of thin air. God created "matter from nothingness" only once. What can be said is that God watches out for certain people. Why? Because their righteous actions have demonstrated a desire to follow God. As such, God intervenes somehow, so they may retain a sense of self, enabling their continued existence suitable for His worship as they have expressed previously.

As a rule, we should always suggest the minimum deviation of natural laws - even if an account mentions "miracles". We must not jump excitedly at such stories and suggest "creation from nothingness" is implied, if a more plausible explanation presents itself.

Ours is a study of God's natural laws, as this is God's design of the world. God wishes we approach Him with intelligence, and this demands an analysis of all areas, especially emotionally driven accounts. Had the Rabbis writing these stories thought miracles here are to be taken literally, and in a "magical" sense, they would have simply written that "she threw twigs into her oven and they became bread." All the extra material, i.e., that it was Friday evening, that she had a bad neighbor, that she was embarrassed, etc., would be superfluous for a story about a genuine miracle. But as we see the Rabbis writing such a detailed account, there is much more they desire we investigate, as opposed to childlike wonderment, as if gasping at a magician.

## The Miracle of the Vinegar

A second story records a Friday eve before shabbos, where Rabbi Chanina asked his daughter why she appeared sad. She responded that she mixed her oil and vinegar canisters, and accidentally poured vinegar into to lamp, thereby extinguishing their only flame.(Rashi) Rabbi Chanina responded to her, "Why should this matter? The One who said oil should ignite, can say that vinegar should ignite." The Talmud records that in fact, the lamp did ignite, and remained lit through shabbos, until Saturday evening.

What are we to learn from this story? We know the rule, "Do not rely on miracles". No body did so here, but Rabbi Chanina suggested that the vinegar could in fact light, just as oil. What was he saying? In fact, we are supposed to act in just the opposite manner. We are to adhere to natural law. This is the system through which we learn of God's marvels in creation. By the study of natural law, we understand how God wishes the universe to operate. God designed nature and permeated it with His knowledge, "Milo kol haaretz k'vodo", "the entire Earth is filled with His Glory." Suspension of natural law - a miracle - prevents man from studying the very knowledge God instilled in the universe, for the purpose of being analyzed. Rabbi Chanina's response is questionable. What was he saying to his daughter?

Another story from Prophets elucidates the concept: When Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah were about to be cast into the furnace for not obeying Nevuchadnetzar's command of bowing to his idol, they said, "Our God can save us, and even if He does not, we will not obey you." These men were miraculously saved. But what was their position? It seems they straddled two possibilities.

Abraham was surprised God would alter nature to give him a son in his old age. Moses, the greatest man ever, was praised for his unsurpassed level of humility. "I have grown small from all your kindness", was stated by Jacob when in pursuit by his twin Esav. He prayed to God for salvation, and did not expect miracles. In all these cases, these great individuals embraced reality. These men did not

rely on miracles, as no great man assumes his own merit to be so worthy of a change in natural law by God. Far be it. But, simultaneously, and not a contradiction, these men knew that nature is not an absolute. God designed nature, He controls it, and He changes it at will. These men were not dependent upon miracles, nor of nature. However, on Earth, there is either nature, or the suspension of nature, i.e., miracles. So to which reality did they subscribe?

There is one other system that we can hold as truly absolute and unchanging; God's will. "I am God, I do not change".(Malachi) This is the correct philosophy. Both nature and Divine Intervention were equal realities, but man knows not which will occur. He does not place himself initially in danger, relying on a miracle, but when he finds himself subject to events, he knows either may occur. Both are equally tenable. Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah said this, and so did Rabbi Chanina. The latter expressed this sentiment to his daughter, that she should not be anguished over extinguishing the only flame in their home, unable to relight it as shabbos had approached. Rabbi Chanina was instructing his daughter that God's will is the only 'absolute' truth, and what you must keep focused on. He was not trying to placate her regarding the light. He detected immediately where her concern came from, she felt natural law was absolute. His response, "Why should this matter? The One who said oil should ignite, can say that vinegar should ignite". He meant to say, "Don't fret over that which is not the true will of God. You do not know whether he desires the vinegar to follow nature, or Divine Providence."

"The One Who said oil should ignite, can say that vinegar should ignite" means just this, that God's will is the one reality. "If He wishes, vinegar can ignite" means that "God's wishes" is what one must concern himself with. And this is clearly expressed in His Torah, which will never change.

What is true reality, nature or miracles? Neither is absolute. God's will alone is absolute reality. ■

# Devarim

RABBI BERNARD FOX

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contained a rebuke. Rashi asks why Moshe waited to deliver this rebuke. Would it not have been more appropriate to have chastised the nation earlier? Why delay encouraging the Bnai Yisrael to examine their behavior?

Rashi responds that Moshe based his decision on the actions of Yaakov. Yaakov waited until the end of his life before reprimanding Reuven for serious shortcomings. Moshe decided that he too should patiently await the end of his life before chastising the nation.

Rashi discusses Yaakov's motivation for delaying his reprimand. He explained that Yaakov feared that Reuven might abandon him and follow Esav. In order not to estrange Reuven, he did not deliver his rebuke until his death approached. Moshe also feared that he might alienate the nation. Therefore, he followed Yaakov's precedent and delayed his discussion of the nation's shortcomings.[1]

A number of questions present themselves. Let us begin with Yaakov's decision. First, why did Yaakov believe that Reuven might not accept his rebuke? This is a very serious criticism of Reuven's character. What is its basis? Second, how did Yaakov resolve this concern? Why did he feel that he could be more effective at the end of his life? Third, the laws concerning rebuke are very specific. Maimonides discusses the basic requirements of the law. He explains that when we encounter a person acting improperly we are to challenge the individual. If the behavior continues, we are to persist in correcting the person. [2] It does not seem that the law encourages postponement of this obligation. On what basis did Yaakov and Moshe delay fulfillment of their obligation to correct wrongdoers?

It seems that we must distinguish between two types of rebuke. One type is addressed towards a specific behavior. We might tell a person that he or she has indulged in gossip. A person may correct a friend for talking during prayers. Dealing dishonestly in a business transaction may occasion a reprimand. In all of these instances, the rebuke is directed at a specific action.

A second form of rebuke extends beyond any specific action. In this type of rebuke the censure is directed at the person's personality or being. Specific acts might be identified.

However, the objective is to identify a pattern of behavior. This pattern reflects a basic flaw in the very essence of the individual.

These two forms of criticism have different effects. This is a direct consequence of human nature. Every person has a self-image. We strive to see ourselves positively. Our reaction to criticism is influenced by this need to maintain a positive self-image.

The first form of rebuke is relatively benign. This is because it does not seriously threaten this self-image. It is directed against a specific action. We can accept this criticism without risking our overall view of ourselves. However, the second type of rebuke strikes directly against our self-image. We are being told that we have the flaw. We might become defensive and attempt to deny the flaw. If we are repeatedly challenged with the criticism, we may seek to flee. Flight sometimes seems preferable to admitting a basic fault.

Maimonides seems to discuss the first form of rebuke. It is relatively harmless. This is the form of reprimand that should be offered immediately and as often as necessary.

Yaakov was proffering the second form of rebuke. He carefully considered the best time to level his criticism. We can understand his fear. He intended to identify a basic flaw in Reuven. He knew that every individual is sensitive to such criticism.

Yaakov waited until the end of his life. How did this delay address his concerns? If Yaakov had offered his criticism earlier, he would force Reuven to choose between only two options. He could accept Yaakov's criticism. This would require a painful personal reassessment. Alternatively, he could choose to avoid this emotional anguish and flee. However, it would have been very difficult for Reuven to reject the truth of the rebuke and remain a member of the household. Every time he encountered his father, he would be reminded of Yaakov's assessment. Even if Yaakov never repeated his criticism, Reuven would know Yaakov's opinion. He would constantly be reminded of his father's disapproval. Flight would be the only way to avoid these reminders.

Yaakov waited. As the end of his life approached, he addressed his son. He hoped he would accept the criticism. But Yaakov also accepted the possibility that Reuven might reject his reprimand. By waiting until the approach of death, Yaakov provided Reuven an alternative to flight. He could simply deny the accuracy of the insight. Yaakov would soon die. Reuven could remain a member of the household. No one would remind Reuven of his shortcoming.

Moshe understood Yaakov's concerns and the wisdom of his solution. He applied Yaakov's insights to his own situation.

**“And I approved of the idea. And I selected from among you twelve men – one man from each tribe.”** (Devarim 1:23)

Seforno begins with Moshe's final admonishment of Bnai Yisrael. He reminds the people of their sins in the wilderness and the consequences of these misdeeds. He reviews the incident of the spies.

This incident occurred in the beginning of Bnai Yisrael's sojourn in the wilderness. The nation was poised to enter the land of Israel. The people suggested sending spies to scout the land. Moshe asked Hashem. Hashem told Moshe to approve the suggestion. However, Hashem amended the original plan. He did not allow the people to choose the spies. He insisted that Moshe make the selection himself.

Why did Hashem insist that Moshe personally select the spies? Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra explains that Hashem knew that this task required uncommonly brave individuals. He wanted Moshe to choose spies who had the necessary courage.[3]

Seforno expands upon this explanation. Seforno explains that the report of these scouts would influence the attitude of the people. A positive report would generate enthusiasm. A negative report would discourage the people. The scouts must be individuals that will appreciate the fertility and wealth of the land. They must be capable of reporting accurately. Moshe was commanded to choose individuals who had the ability to execute this duty.[4]

What was the impact of this selection criterion? The spies returned. They delivered a negative report. Bnai Yisrael was discouraged. They did not believe they could conquer the land. They refused to follow Moshe into the land of Israel.

It seems that Hashem's criterion did not affect the outcome of this affair. In fact, His insistence on choosing spies of courage and integrity may even have had a negative effect. These individual were above reproach. Spies of lesser stature could have been more easily opposed. Moshe could have denounced lesser individuals and challenged their credibility. Why did Hashem insist upon a selection criterion that had no impact and seems to have contributed to a disaster?

Seforno explains Hashem's insistence on sending these suitable individuals did have a positive affect. In order to identify the impact, we must begin by identifying the components of the spies' report. There were three elements to the report. They described the land. They assessed the likelihood of its conquest. They evaluated the suitability of the land for occupation. Let us consider each element of their report.

The spies claimed that the land could not be conquered. It was occupied by mighty

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# Devarim

RABBI BERNARD FOX

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nations. The people lived in strongly fortified cities. They reported that the land was not fit for occupation. They said the land consumed its inhabitants. However, they acknowledged the overwhelming richness and fertility of the land. They even demonstrated this extraordinary fertility. They placed before the people beautiful fruit that they had brought back. In fact, they asserted that only very robust individuals could thrive in such a rich environment.[5] In other words, the spies reported the facts accurately. They praised the richness of the land. They misled the nation in their interpretation of their observations and their judgments.

Next, we must review the consequences of the nation's sin. The Almighty decreed that the generation that had refused to enter the land would wander in the wilderness. The conquest of the land would be postponed until this generation died. The next generation would enter and conquer the land of Israel.

Upon learning of their punishment, Bnai Yisrael confessed their sin. They attempted to repent. They marched into the land of Israel. However, this was not true repentance. Real repentance required accepting the Almighty's decree. Through advancing into the land, Bnai Yisrael was denying this decree. Hashem did not assist this attempt to defy His will. Bnai Yisrael were attacked by the inhabitants and beaten back.

Bnai Yisrael then repented again. This time the repentance was performed with a contrite attitude. The nation cried to Hashem and begged His forgiveness. This repentance was sincere.

We can now appreciate the positive affect of Hashem's criterion. What caused Bnai Yisrael to repent? Clearly, they were moved by Hashem's decree. They would not enter the land of Israel. However, this does not completely explain the people's new attitude. Why did they view this as a punishment? They had refused to enter the land!

Seforno explains that the report of the spies was crucial in reshaping Bnai Yisrael's attitude. The spies had truthfully reported that the land was rich and fertile. The lushness of the land of Israel was never debated. Now, this generation realized that the opportunity to possess this land had been within its grasp. They had squandered the opportunity. This realization made contrition possible. In other words, without the accurate report of the spies, repentance would have been more difficult.[6] Hashem insured that this report would be delivered through His selection criterion. In short, this criterion did not prevent the nation from sinning. However, it did facilitate Bnai Yisrael's repentance.

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Devarim 1:3.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot De'ot 6:6-7.

[3] Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 13:2.

[4] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Devarim 1:22.

[5] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 13:32.

[6] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Devarim 1:22. ■

## Hindu, vs God's Unity

**Reader:** The response of the Hindu's position on the topic of multiple gods from our discussion yesterday. His definitions for his gods are different than what we had previously been defining God as: Their is no one all-powerful all-knowing divine being, but rather, many gods who all have different powers and capabilities, (god of wisdom, beauty, etc.) All are limited in some sense. All are more powerful than humans, but never complete. Their natures are the same in the sense that all are gods, like all natures of humans are human, but their capabilities and powers are unique, like the different talents and abilities of different humans. So the essence of their beings are similar, but they possess accidental features like humans, thereby making them unique, unlike God, who possess no accidental features whatsoever. This was the response to my questions of his belief. He also had a question: Why can't two metaphysical beings exist at the same time? (He wanted to prep the question by arguing that two completely different metaphysical beings do exist at the same time in a sense with the human soul existing after death. After death, the soul (a metaphysical being, the essence of a human) and the Divine metaphysical being both co-exist in a metaphysical reality.

**Mesora:** I address myself to your Hindu friend. Drawing incorrect notions and parallels, that man's soul exists "with" God after death, is not a proof that there are multiple gods. You make two errors; 1)That there can be "number" in the non-physical (metaphysical) world, 2)That any parallel may be drawn between man and God,

A man's soul existing after death "with God", does not mean that there are multiple, metaphysical things. 'Number' can only exist in the physical world, in connection with things which are subject to parts. For example, the idea of gravity cannot be 'cut in half' it has no weight, color, size, etc. Physical attributes are not applicable to non-physical things. Therefore, multiple gods is a false notion. Our concept of "God's Unity" is based on this vital principle.

Additional errors include the notion of multiple gods with mutually exclusive powers. Even in your own framework, this implies a limit on each god, as each maintains only "some" powers. If a god is limited, then what imposed this limit upon them? You are forced to say that something even greater exists which determines each god's capabilities and scope of power. You have contradicted the very point you wish to make, that a god is superior. This notion of multiple gods is not substantiated by reason, and is mere imagination. We do not live by any thought that a man imagines. Man's fantasies are numerous, but the truth is singular. We must determine what is true, then all other opinions will be rendered false.

Proof of Torah from Sinai teaches that there is one God. No mention exists in the Torah of any being but the God of creation, the God of Abraham. Once we have proof that God gave the Torah at Sinai, and that He alone is the sole cause for the existence of all things, and we know that He wrote the Torah, we arrived at a conclusive proof and the only conclusion: there is only one Cause for the universe.

It is incorrect thinking to suggest multiple gods, when no evidence of such a notion presents itself. The burden of proof is on this Hindu. As he has no proof, and defies reason, and as we do have proof, we do not subscribe to his view but we follow the rational principles which lead us to true monotheism, defined only by the Torah.

The argument that God may give of His own powers to anything besides Himself is also false. God's control of the universe - His wisdom and abilities - are synonymous with Him, for the reason already stated: there cannot be division in God. Separating some of His powers from Him is the flaw of ascribing division to God. Additionally, if it is God's wisdom that created the universe, this means that this is His unique ability to do so. One cannot be what God is, this is impossible. In such a case, the very definition of a God who created the universe alone would be flawed. But this suggestion is erroneous, as one assumes other beings to possess abilities identical to God. There cannot be two things which created the universe. This would mean that each god alone could not, thereby implying a limit on each god, a limit, which implies that another force imposed this limit on them. Then, there would be three gods at least; the two who created the world, and a third who imposes a limited scope of power on the first two. But then one would be saying that the imposer of these powers did not create the universe, yet can control the two gods who did! As you can see, such notions are foolish.

But think for a moment; if God is the One who created all the laws and matter found in the universe, then He alone controls all. He has no need for assistance, by witness of His very creation, by Himself. He also has no needs. "Need" itself is something which also resides only in physical things. Not only does God have no needs, but how would another thing control what God controls? This implies God's inability to prevent another being from doing what they wish. So it leads to yet another contradiction, that God controls things, and others also possess control. Well, which one controls the world? This is against reason.

A rational analysis will lead one to the conclusion that ,1)all matter and all laws cannot create themselves, 2)something external to all matter and all laws must have created them, a Creator, 3)this Creator itself has no need for a creator, 4)the Creator gave existence to all things, is all powerful and all knowing. God has no needs and runs the universe independently. ■



# The Bris of Abraham

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by student

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A review of this Rambam raises several important questions. What is so essential about the commandment of circumcision that the Torah seems to view it as a more significant covenant than the covenant respecting the entire Torah? Furthermore, in what way was Abraham lacking perfection prior to his bris and what does circumcision accomplish? We must attempt to understand the concept of a "tamim", completeness, especially in view of G-d's commandment to Abraham to have a bris and "walk before Me and be tamim", complete.

Upon examining some of the halachik aspects of the act of the mitzva, the positive action of circumcision, we can gain some insights. There are two blessings made when performing the act of circumcision. The first blessing is made right before the action and it is the blessing of *al hamilah*. This is the blessing of the action of circumcision and like all blessings on an action, the blessing precedes the action and qualifies it. However, there is a second blessing which the mohel makes. This is the blessing of "*lehachniso bivriso shel Avraham avinu*", "to enter the child into the covenant of Abraham our father". There is a question amongst the Rabbis as to the nature of this blessing. If it is a blessing on the action, then it must precede the circumcision, like the first blessing. If it is a blessing of *shevach*, of praise, then it follows the circumcision, which is the basis for our praising G-d. The Rabbeinu Tam in Tosafos in Pesachim 7a states that it is considered a blessing of praise and thus recited afterwards. He states that the blessing is a praise to G-d for granting us the commandment of circumcision. We must also

articulate that the circumcision is being done for the sake of G-d our creator and not for the sake of idolatry.

This Tosafos raises several problems. Why must we express that this commandment of circumcision is being done for G-d? Why is the commandment of circumcision the only Mitzvah that demands that we specifically mention that it is not done for idolatry? There is a law that the halachik action of slaughtering cannot be performed by a gentile because we are concerned that he will be performing the action for idolatry. It would seem that the blessing for slaughtering would be a more appropriate action for the pronouncement that it is not being done for idolatry. What is so unique about the commandment of circumcision?

To comprehend the significance of circumcision we must explain the concept of tamim. The Rambam in his Mishna Torah in the Laws of Idolatry, at the end of chapter 11 discusses the positive commandment in the Torah of "*tamim t'heeyeh im Hashem Elokecha*". The Rambam teaches us that sorcery; witchcraft and divination are all false and nonsensical practices. These are primitive practices whereby man predicates his daily actions based upon some irrelevant external events. They are usually superstitious practices which appeal to man's instinctual insecurities. Amongst these practices are the individuals who state that "since my stick fell out of my hand, I cannot travel in that direction". A different example of a prohibited action is if someone says that said date is a good day for performing certain actions. If a person consults a charlatan who pretends to speak to the dead or pretends to predict the

future, these are also forbidden practices. These practices appeal to the dark side of man's nature, the part that wishes to deny reality and satisfy instinctual urges by positing authenticity to these inane activities which are attractive to the instincts. They appeal to man's fantasy and create an illusion of great satisfaction. It would be foolish for modern man to deny the force of these emotions and posit that this type of behavior is only symptomatic of primitive man. One need only look at the appeal of horoscopes to dispel such a notion. A recent leader of the free world, the most powerful man in a supposedly sophisticated society, based his schedules on this nonsense. Maimonides advised us that all these activities are categorized as emptiness and vanity. The Rambam further admonishes against these practices and states that if anyone believes that these actions are true or contain wisdom, they are ignorant and lack knowledge. However, if someone has been fortunate to obtain wisdom he will know that these actions are false and are attractive only to foolish people whose minds are lacking intellectual clarity. The Rambam concludes that all these practices are contrary to the Torah's commandment of "*tamim t'heeyeh im Hashem Elokecha*", "Perfect shall you be with Hashem your God".

There are two parts to human nature. One part is the reality-based part of the human mind. It is man's crowning glory, his divine image, and the part of man that can perceive wisdom and knowledge. The other part of man's nature is the primitive part of the mind which appeals to man's fantasy. It demands suspension of the critical faculty. In Judaism there is no room for this part of man's nature

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# The Bris of Abraham

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by student

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to guide his actions. We are commanded to love G-d. This means, as we recite in the Shema, to teach our sons and to know Torah. The only part of man that can relate to G-d and learn Torah is the tzelem Elokim, man's intellect. The prophets repeatedly have counseled the children of Israel to have knowledge of G-d. This can only be accomplished by a long searching process which begins with the part of man that perceives G-d's knowledge.

Therefore the concept of tamim means that man should guide his life based upon the part of man which can perceive G-d's knowledge. This part of the human personality must always retain control and exercise its force on the person's actions. One can only be tamim, complete, when the soul of man is not affected by the instinctual part of his nature. The ruling part of his soul must be the part of man that can recognize G-d. The state of tamim is only achieved when there is only one ruling principle in the soul, namely the tzelem Elokim. Nothing else can affect the person who is tamim.

Maimonides in his Guide to the Perplexed states that an uncircumcised person is more perfect physically. Since he is born that way he is more physically perfect. G-d created man uncircumcised, which must be a physically more perfect state respecting his physical existence. Circumcision reduces man's instinctual drive. It makes us less perfect physically but demonstrates that we must perfect ourselves spiritually. Milah signifies man's conquest over the instinctual part of his nature. Circumcision represents an institution in man which demonstrates a reduction of his instinctual drive. The

instinctual part of man's nature is the source of his superstitious tendencies. Man's instinctual nature detracts from his being tamim. Therefore milah is the establishment of an institution in man, which installs in man the ruling element of his soul. This is the part of the soul which can recognize G-d. Therefore milah is the institution which signifies that man must guide his actions by chochma, wisdom, not the instinctual, and that one strives to be tamim, perfect.

Circumcision is mentioned thirteen times in the Torah, compared to the covenant of the very acceptance of the Torah, which is only mentioned three times. Circumcision is the institution which reflects that an individual's actions must be guided by the tzelem Elokim, intelligence. Acceptance of the Torah is only possible if there are individuals who are capable of dedicating their lives to its intellectual precepts. Therefore, milah is essential because it creates individuals who are tamim, complete and whose ruling part of their soul is the intellect. Only then is the system of Torah capable of being perpetuated.

The commandment of milah was given over specifically to Abraham. Abraham had the intellectual conviction to reject the primitive and pagan beliefs that pervaded his society. He had the intellectual courage to recognize G-d as the source of reality and deny the idolaters of his day. Therefore he was blessed with the institution of milah. The personality of Abraham was deserving of this institution. However, Abraham was not shalame, not complete, until he performed the Mitzvah of milah. He had to demonstrate through this commandment, that the ruling part of his soul was the intellectual. Through the performance

of this mitzvah he rendered himself an adam hashalame, complete. Abraham demonstrated that all parts of his personality were subdued except the part of his soul which recognized and related to the creator. He thus became tamim and was able to walk before G-d.

We can now appreciate the Rabbeinu Tam's concept of the second blessing made at the circumcision. It is a blessing of praise which uniquely articulates that its objective is for the sake of G-d. Circumcision is the only commandment which, by its very performance, subordinates the instinctual forces in man. The very essence of its objective is the demonstration that we aspire to guide our own lives based upon the part of man that can perceive reality and relate to G-d. Therefore, we express our intentions that we are performing this unique commandment for the sake of G-d and not for idolatry, which appeals to the lower part of man's nature.

The importance of milah is also attested to by the fact that if one does not perform the mitzvah, he receives the punishment of excision, Kares. Similarly, if one fails to partake of the korban Pesach he is similarly punished. These are the only two positive commandments that if one fails to perform, makes him subject to kares. Circumcision is essential because it signifies that the individual, is one who is capable of living a life of Torah. The korban Pesach was commemorative of the exodus of Egypt and the birth of a nation dedicated to the principles of the Torah. Thus, both these mitzvos are essential components for the Torah system, milah insofar as the individual is concerned, and korban Pesach with respect to the nation. ■

# To Fast and Mourn on the Ninth of Av

RIVKA OLENICK

We are now in the period of the nine days, which throughout generations remains as a significant mourning period. The purpose of the observance of this time has not changed. With this in mind our motivation to mourn the tragedies of our own people should be greater. Hopefully, the desire and willingness to reflect on our own misdeeds will be stronger.

Our First Temple was burnt down by Nebuzaradon and his legions, and again our Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans headed by Titus. These periods marked our history as the fall of Jerusalem and the fall of Zion. What caused this? We learn that the sins of Israel that caused the First Temple's destruction were brought about by idolatry, murder and immorality. These three sins, against God, against one's self and one's neighbor were predominant at that time. The second Temple's demise was due to baseless hatred of others, which also causes a person to sin against God, the self and others. I believe there is no difference. If God is not predominant in one's mind and life then every sin is possible as one sin leads to another sin. We were greatly influenced by other nations and idolatry permeated our lives. Our evil, corrupt ways made us turn against our brethren and our hatred toward each other stemmed from a preoccupation and worship of the self. Murder and immorality are a natural result of this self worship, our punishment was justified and we were forced into exile.

Today we still suffer in our dispersion, even though we deny it. We're despised and still hated by other nations. Although we've survived, we still haven't learned our lesson and still allow the false ideas of society to rule our lives. To cling to God and to the Torah as our real source of strength is what we haven't learned to do. We haven't learned to treat Torah as our most precious possession. As the world around us continues in endless self-pursuit and deification, power and riches, we have to pull ourselves out of this trap and cling to God. Our corrupt culture fosters endless possessions and pleasure as an end in itself, which is not the barometer for peace of mind and happiness in life. Morality and righteousness can't exist without God. The philosophy and worship of an "anything goes" mentality has seeped into Judaism. We've become lazy, we don't question this philosophy and we give in rather than think about how it has tainted our lives. When will we realize that only the will of God rules every aspect of life and we must turn to our Torah for insight and truth? This is the greatest investment we can make in life, to search for truth and uphold kindness. We can once again become a



great and holy people who govern the world. This is what being in exile should make us think about. Through the punishment of our Temples destruction and our being forced into exile we should realize what we are supposed to be. Our mission is to sanctify God's name throughout the world, while we show and declare our true purpose in life. Our love for one another should grow because we are one family and share a covenant and a purpose as the teachers of truth.

So we mourn not only the actual loss of the Temple, but more importantly that we strayed so far away from our true purpose. Today while we do have the land of Israel we are still so far removed from God's truth and Israel's actual intended purpose. There is no Temple, which is the center of divine service where the life of the Jewish people is firmly established. This is the one place designated to us in order to destroy idolatry but we disobeyed. "We denied the Lord and said He is not, you served idols", "burnt incense unto Baal, and walked after other gods whom ye know not." Jeremiah, Verse 12. The Rambam says: "only one Temple has been appointed" by God to stand in Israel, "in the place that the Lord shall choose" Deuteronomy 12:26. We have no King, no Sanhedrin or established government of Jewish law in the land. All of this is what is truly sad. Other nations still rule us and other disgraceful and corrupt ideologies still plague the land of Israel today. The spirit of Zion is based on our unity, communal life and love for one another as a Klal and is how we are to live in our own land. We think that life is good outside and

inside the land but we fool ourselves by thinking this, our status as a nation remains exiled. As a nation in exile or not, our lives should revolve around the sanctification of God's name in the world. When God redeemed us, He took us to Him as a nation and we declared ourselves as a people filled with the love of God and the wisdom of Torah. That is what God created us to be and is "what" our true purpose is.

When we fast next Thursday on the Ninth of Av, it should be taken very seriously. It is not a day to just abstain from food and self-gratification. It is a day of fasting together with mourning that should bring us to a realization of what the source of sin really is, the continuous search for pleasure. With this understanding, hopefully each of us will become more aware of our endless self-indulgent nature. As much as want to deny it we should force ourselves to recognize how big our ego really is and to further recognize our preoccupation to always want to satisfy it. As we realize the pathetic state we are in we can use this day as another opportunity to draw closer to God individually and as a Klal through repentance. This day is a means to return to and embrace what God has defined for us as our real purpose in life. Every day is a day for repentance according to the Rambam. To repent as a Klal is an additional gift.

We should truly mourn on the Ninth of Av, and weep pitifully for ourselves. We are lost and so far away from God's truth even though we were chosen and we were told: "I will be your God, and ye shall be my people" Leviticus 26:12. ■

# Repentance

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

The famous philosopher Spinoza states: "Repentance is not a virtue, or does not arise from reason; but he who repents of an action is doubly wretched or infirm." Spinoza explains his statement further, by saying, "For the man allows himself to be overcome, first, by evil desires, secondly, by pain." Spinoza, contrary to popular opinion, had a shallow understanding of Torah. Repentance, as seen by the Torah, is the most vital institution man has in attaining perfection. It is based on a profound understanding of human nature. Repentance was an act of conscience, for Spinoza, an outburst of guilt over some sin, or evil act. This is no doubt true for the man-made religions which admonish man to let his conscience be his guide. The man-made religions are based on man's need to restrict his desires. Although man is filled with instinctual desire he finds he is unhappy when he indulges himself in unrestricted fulfillment of these desires. He feels empty and worthless. He is thus caught between two needs, the need to satisfy his desires and the need to feel a sense of worthiness. Religion solves this dilemma by placing restrictions on his desires and even instilling pain at times. The Indian sun dance was a tortuous ceremony through which the dancer's flesh was torn away by skewers. The participant walked away with a feeling of being whole and cleansed. His conscience was satisfied. Modern man-made religions, although not as grotesque, are nevertheless based on this same struggle between man's desires and his conscience.

Torah, the religion given to us by God, is not based on these conflicting urges of the human soul. Indeed many of the sins of the Torah make one feel very comfortable and are even satisfying to conscience. Idolatry, the Torah's worst sin, in which man uses some physical object to instill in himself fear of the Creator, does not evoke any sense of guilt. On the contrary, it makes one feel pious and God fearing. Yet the Torah states: you shall not make with me, gods of silver or gods of gold ..." (Exodus 20:20). The words, "with me" clearly indicate that even if these images are used to evoke a sense of the reality of God's existence they are idolatrous. The sin of the golden calf is an illustration of this point. Here the Israelites, in seeking a sense of security due to the absence of their leader Moses, created a physical object to reassure them of God's presence (see Exodus 32:1). The idea that the idolater is not in conflict with his conscience, is stated in Deuteronomy 29:18, "and he will feel blessed in his heart saying peace will be with me..."

Similarly, having mercy on a loved one who has strayed from Torah and causes others to sin does not carry with it pangs of conscience and yet is considered a sin. "You shall not have compassion and you shall not cover for him, but you shall surely kill him... because he has sought to draw you away from the Lord your God..." (Deuteronomy 13:9,10,11). Complete abstinence from sexual intercourse does not seem abhorrent to conscience yet for the ben Israel is considered a most serious violation, a defiance of God's will. Ignorance and

a lack of interest in Torah knowledge does not strike us as such a terrible thing yet it is one of the most serious crimes, one that is punishable by God not listening to one's prayers, as it says, "He who turns away his ear from hearing Torah, even his prayer is abomination." (Proverbs 28:9).

God's system of Torah is not based on practices that are satisfying to the human conscience. They are based on God's infinite knowledge and a very precise system that leads man to perfection, Torah. Here, man cannot use his feelings to navigate toward his destiny. He must employ the full powers of his mind in the study of God's works before he can have any knowledge of what is good and what is evil. No emotional attitude, conscience or otherwise, can give man this knowledge.

In the religion of knowledge, Torah, repentance plays a major role. Although man may have gained sight of the good he has not yet attained perfection. Man must incorporate the good in his soul and express it through his actions. This is no simple matter. Man's instinctual life (and with instinctual we include conscience) is very powerful, "for the impulse of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Genesis 8:21). The Rabbis annotate that the instinctual life begins at birth and controls man fully until puberty when the good inclination, man's ability to live according to reason, starts to gain control. The instinctual life therefore has a head start, so to speak, and is forever lying in wait to distort man's judgements, as it says: "sin crouches at the door, and to you shall be its desire" (Genesis 4:7).

Given the dynamics of the human soul and the multifarious experiences of human life it is virtually impossible that man shall not at some time fall prey to some powerful emotion, distort his vision, and sin. The wise king, Solomon, expresses it in Ecclesiastes 7:20, "For there is not a just man upon earth that does good and sins not." When man sins he has not simply committed a violation. Man's nature demands that he have a good opinion of himself. He must thus distort the truth, change his value system and confuse evil for good in order to retain a sense of inner peace. Through sin man has become changed. He has abandoned a good and taken evil in its place. His ways are removed from God, the source of all truth. What is the remedy? Man has a remarkable ability: he can envision experiences in his mind without actually living through them. This ability can save him from his misfortune. Quietly, in the recesses of his mind, when the instinctual forces have abated, when experience, with its freshness and alluring qualities is gone, the individual can replay the scenes he has lived through. He can relive and re-examine situations, impulses, and decisions he has made in an impassioned state of mind. He can reconsider, alter change and improve on judgements and actions he has made at a previous time. Free from the distorting forces of emotion, he can study logically his deeds, and determine whether or not they are in error. If they are it is never too late to



change them. While it is true that we cannot always undo the effects we caused in the external world, we may have to suffer their consequences, as the wise king states, "that which is crooked cannot be made straight..." (Ecclesiastes 1:15), this limitation does not apply to the internal life of man. He can undo the harm his soul has suffered by distortion of truth. He need only see things clearly, recognize his error and understand why his action can only cause himself harm. His realization must be so complete that were he in the same situation he would not act as he did before. His repentance is complete when he reaches this point. Repentance has converted the sinner from a man removed from truth and the ways of God to one who is even closer than he was before he had sinned. Realization of error is so powerful that he is even further removed from evil than before. Repentance is not an act of conscience; but a profound learning experience. It is accomplished through understanding and analysis of one's deeds, through logical introspection, and a careful examination of good and evil. The Torah does not construe repentance as a simple antidote for sin to be done on the occasion of transgression. It is a process that is constantly ongoing in the life of the righteous individual. It is an integral part of the growth process of man. The Talmud states that if you have seen a righteous person commit a sin in the daytime you can be certain he repented by night. Repentance is a daily preoccupation of the righteous. Man must learn through experience but man cannot learn anything unless he can analyze his experiences. Sometimes we can analyze our actions before we act but at other times when we get too caught up, experience strikes at us too quickly and too forcefully. We are stunned and lose control of our abilities to think and judge properly. We give in to emotions of the moment and we fail. We can only do our analysis ex-post facto. But this does not stop us from engaging in a profound learning experience. On the contrary, if we muster up the courage to be honest with ourselves, to search for truth, we may make use of our failures and convert them into great successes. Repentance offers man fresh insights, goads him on to search out truths of Torah, and gives him a sense of worthiness that is not based on hollow emotions of conscience but on living in line with God's reality. By not identifying the sense of guilt with sin, the Torah has removed the stigma from repentance and has raised it to the level of a proud and vital institution, the very cornerstone of human perfection. ■