

Humility: No Barrier to Knowledge

Although Maimonides admits that G-d's knowledge is unfathomable, nonetheless, he sought to understand what he could from G-d's allowance of Christianity to pervade so many cultures. In doing so, he offers insight into what might be G-d's plan.



ESTD 1997

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

JewishTimes

Volume III, No. 7...Dec. 6, 2003

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Crusades were massive military expeditions by Christians to the Middle East, killing those who opposed them

MAIMONIDES CHRISTIANITY and the TRUE MESSIAH

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: Dear Mesora, I have now accessed the text I mentioned by Maimonides:

Laws of Kings, Laws 11:10-12 (Capach Edition): “[10] ...Can there be a greater stumbling block than this (Christianity)? That all the prophets spoke that the Messiah will redeem Israel and save them, and gather their dispersed and strengthen their Mitzvot, and this (one, i.e., Jesus) caused the Jews to be destroyed by the sword, and scattered their remnants and humbled them, and exchanged the Torah, and caused the majority of the world to err to serve a god other than the Lord. [11] Nevertheless, the thoughts of the Creator of the world are not within the power of man to reach them, ‘for our ways are not His ways, nor are our thoughts His thoughts.’ And all these matters of Jesus of Nazareth and that of the Ishmaelite who arose after him are only to straighten the way of the king Messiah and to fix the entire world, to serve God as one, as it is stated (Zephaniah 3:9), “For then I will turn to the peoples (into) clear speech, to all call in the name of G-d and serve Him unanimously. [12] How (will this come about)? The entire world has already become filled with the mention of the Messiah, with words of Torah and words of mitzvos and these matters have spread to the furthestmost isles, to many nations of uncircumcised hearts, and they discuss these matters and the mitzvot of the Torah. Some say: “These mitzvot are true, but were already nullified in the present age and are not applicable for all time.” Others say: “Hidden matters are in them (mitzvos) and they are not to be taken literally, and the messiah has already come and revealed their hidden (meanings). And when the true Messiah stands, and he is successful and is raised and exalted, immediately they all will retract and will know that fallacy they inherited from their fathers, and that their prophets and fathers caused them to err.”

Vayetze

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“And Yaakov went forth from Beer-Shava, and he went to Haran.” (Beresheit 28:10)

The Chumash is divided into section – parsheyot. Generally, a blank space in the Torah separates parsheyot. The various parsheyot are separated by a blank space. In most cases, the blank space is created by beginning a parasha on a

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M A I M O N I D E S CHRISTIANITY *and the* TRUE MESSIAH

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

With respect, the point is, I think, that although Christianity and Islam are not true, they have played a part in the Divine scheme for the redemption of the whole of humanity by spreading some sort of ethical monotheism involving an albeit incorrect idea of Messiah, Torah and Mitzvot. Although Islam and Christianity are part of the overall process leading to the redemption their imperfect ethical monotheism will be rectified through the adoption of the seven laws.

Mesora: We cannot suggest that G-d desired Christianity to arise. G-d desires no other religion than Judaism. G-d knew the future, and foresaw all future religions, that would arise. Nonetheless, He publicly instructed man in only one religion – Judaism.

Maimonides does not indicate that G-d desired Christianity's existence. This is clearly in direct opposition to G-d's Torah. All Maimonides says is that G-d's plan will not be altered by the rise of other religions. The fact that Christianity spread the Mitzvos, is not equivalent to saying G-d desires Christianity from the outset. The spread of Christianity may have brought about awareness, but a false one at that, and one that all nations will ultimately see as false, as the quote says, "...immediately they all will retract and will know that fallacy they inherited from their fathers, and that their prophets and fathers

caused them to err." Look at Maimonides' opening words: "...Can there be a greater stumbling block than this (Christianity)? Also, "and this (one, i.e., Jesus) caused the Jews to be destroyed by the sword, and scattered their remnants and humbled them, and exchanged the Torah, and caused the majority of the world to err to serve a god other than the Lord. Christianity was pure evil.

What is preferable; that Christianity would never had existed, or actual history? G-d's will is the former, and your quote states this openly.

However, now that Christianity exists, Maimonides indicates it cannot compromise G-d's plan: "Nevertheless, the thoughts of the Creator of the world are not within the power of man to reach them, 'for our ways are not His ways, nor are our thoughts His thoughts.'" We cannot fathom G-d's plan. Maimonides admits he fails to comprehend a positive goal in the spread of Christianity, but it can in no way compromise G-d's ultimate plan, as these events were not thwarted by G-d. A negative may be utilized for a positive. But Christianity remains a negative.

To say that "Christianity contributes" to G-d's plan, is much different than saying it "does not compromise" G-d's plan. The former suggest it is an inherent good, while the latter retains its true status as one of the worst evils

in world history. Maimonides does not say it contributes to G-d's plan. He writes: "And all these matters of Jesus of Nazareth and that of the Ishmaelite who arose after him are only to straighten the way of the king Messiah and to fix the entire world, to serve God as one." After he openly states that Christianity is the "greatest stumbling block", Maimonides cannot turn 180°, suggesting in the same breath that it is a good. Keep all of the author's words in front of your eyes.

So let us understand Maimonides words: "How (will this come about)? The entire world has already become filled with the mention of the Messiah, with words of Torah and words of mitzvos and these matters have spread to the furthestmost isles, to many nations of uncircumcised hearts, and they discuss these matters and the mitzvot of the Torah. Some say: "These mitzvot are true, but were already nullified in the present age and are not applicable for all time." Others say: "Hidden matters are in them (mitzvos) and they are not to be taken literally, and the messiah has already come and revealed their hidden (meanings). And when the true Messiah stands, and he is successful and is raised and exalted, immediately they all will retract and will know that fallacy they inherited from their fathers, and that their

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M A I M O N I D E S

CHRISTIANITY *and the* TRUE MESSIAH

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

prophets and fathers caused them to err." Maimonides suggests that G-d's allowance of man's free will, expressed in the rise of corrupt religions, has a benefit. Not a benefit in their ideas, but in another manner. I will explain.

Again, "immediately they all will retract and will know that fallacy they inherited from their fathers, and that their prophets and fathers caused them to err." I believe Maimonides wished to convey the following lesson: a prior fallacy serves to validate a subsequent truth. This is the core idea of the entire quote. Let me explain.

If one errs, believing a fallacy as truth, and subsequently learns the truth, he then dismisses his previous error. Conversely, if the true Messiah arrives, and teaches Torah, others might then develop new, false religions, as was so during the rise of Christianity and all other religions, post Moses. Through their false interpretations of true Torah, Jesus and other false prophets deceived themselves and others, that they correctly interpreted new events as G-d's fulfillment of His promise of redemption. But, as G-d plans, if their error in determining the Messiah is subsequently met with the arrival of the true Messiah, and they are then shown false by the true interpretation of Torah, then all previous errors are recognized as fallacy, "immediately they all will retract and will know that fallacy they inherited from their fathers, and that their prophets and fathers caused them to err." This precise scenario prevents any future distortions of Torah and the Messiah, which would not be the case if there were no previous, false religions. The very existence of false religions, subsequently met with the arrival of the true Messiah, will eternally discount all religions, except for Judaism. In

this manner, Judaism will forever remain as the true word of G-d.

I will give another example of this method of G-d instructing man, where a prior fallacy serves to validate a subsequent truth: Rashi (Num. 13:2) quotes this Rabbinic statement, "(G-d said) by their lives, I will give them an opportunity to err with the words of the spies so they don't inherit the land of Israel". This would seem like a vindictive statement, but as G-d is devoid of emotion, how do we understand it? I believe the meaning is this: Had G-d not permitted the spies to spy out Israel, they would have been harboring an incorrect notion in relation to G-d. That is, their desire to 'send spies' displayed their disbelief in G-d's promise that they will successfully conquer Israel. If this disbelief was not brought into the open, they would remain with this false notion, and this is not tolerable by G-d. What is meant by "G-d gave them an opportunity to err"? It means that G-d gave them an opportunity to act out this notion in reality so it can be dealt with. G-d's goal was not their loss of Israel. Giving them "a chance not to inherit Israel" is G-d offering those Jews a generous chance to realize their emotional conflict: they were not desirous of inheriting Israel and denied G-d's promise. In this manner, the Jews are enabled by G-d to face their mistake, and perhaps correct it. I believe this is also the case with G-d allowing false religions to rise prior to His delivering the true Messiah. G-d certainly prefers that the false religions never existed, but He allows man free will, and history to run a course where the truth will ultimately be unopposed. Allowing false religions to rise prior to the Messiah, G-d secures man a future where all arguments against Torah have been addressed.

It is my belief that the Torah institution of a

Messiah serves a primary goal: to unite all peoples in G-d's worship. G-d knew how history would unfold, that Judaism would be fragmented into numerous branches, and deviations in levels of observance would arise. A cure to this problem was necessary. I believe that the Messiah is this cure. Upon his arrival, which is accepted by the many factions within Judaism other than authentic orthodoxy, Judaism will thereby be unified, and be followed in its original form. Since all members of Judaism accept the coming of Messiah, in contrast to all other laws, which are so compromised, the institution of the Messiah is the one institution that all Jews accept. All Jews will follow Messiah's teachings. Judaism will return to its pure, original form, hopefully soon, to be taught by the Messiah, G-d's true messenger.

This is not only true regarding various Jewish factions, but also on the world scale of all religions. Messiah has become the center of religious difference. Upon his arrival, not only will all Jews unite in one practice, but all other religions will also abandon their fallacies, accepting Judaism as the one, true word of G-d.

The institution of the Messiah serves to unite all Jews and all nations to serve G-d in one practice. All other religions will be dismissed as complete falsehoods. Such a dismissal of prior fallacy insures that no future deviation from G-d's word will occur.

G-d preferred that man never deviated from Torah, be he Jew or Gentile. And even though man has deviated by creating false religions, his actions cannot compromise G-d's plan, but G-d uses man's error for an ultimate good. Better that man does not err, but thankful are we that G-d utilizes our errors and implements corrective measures for all humanity. ■

IN MEMORY OF WARREN ROTHSTEIN
BY HIS DEAR FRIEND RICHARD N. GOLDING

When a Tzaddik is Obligated to Get Angry

RABBI REUVEN MANN

A careful and honest study of the Torah makes it absolutely clear that Judaism categorically rejects the possibility of "miracle workers". In order to have a proper relationship with G-d, we must scrupulously avoid any attribution of "supernatural" power to mortals.

A fascinating episode in a recently read sedra (Vayetze) clearly illustrates this point. Rachel, who was childless, and envious of her sister Leah, pleaded with her husband to "give" her children or else she would die. Most of the commentators are puzzled with Jacob's angry dismissal of his wife's request. His lack of compassion and sensitivity to Rachel's emotional distress seems incomprehensible. Very surprising, as well, is his display of anger which is an emotion which the righteous must always avoid except in matters pertaining to heaven.

We must pay attention to the words of Jacob for they go to the heart of the matter at issue. The pasuk says "Jacob's anger flared up at Rachel and he said 'Am I in the place of G-d who has withheld from you fruit of the womb?'" The commentary of the Sforno is most illuminating. He says, "Jacob's anger flared up for saying 'Give me children', implying that he had the power to do so. In his zeal for the honor of G-d, he disregarded his love for her." Rabbi Raphael Pelcovitz in the notes appended to his translation of the Sforno explains, "Jacob was angry with Rachel for saying 'Give me' not 'Pray for me'". The latter request would have been proper, the former was not since it implied that Jacob had the power to grant that which only G-d can give....His great zeal for G-d's honor, however, caused him to set aside his feelings of love for Rachel, for his love for G-d was greater."

Jacob who ranks among the

greatest of men displayed anger at any implication that he had the power to change the natural order of events. This type of overestimation of man violates the honor that is due exclusively to the Creator. The true tzaddik is the one, who like Yaakov Avinu, reacts with anger to even the slightest suggestion that he has transcended the bounds of human limitations and shares a power which is exclusively that of the Creator. □

RACHEL'S DISGRACE

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

My friend asked, in Genesis 30:23, upon her birth of her first son after being barren, Rachel our matriarch said, "G-d has gathered in (removed) my disgrace". Rachel said this as she was relieved, finally having a child. The simple explanation is that her disgrace was her being barren, and now it was finally removed. However, Rashi states a Midrashic interpretation, "All the time a woman has no son, there is no other person upon whom her guilt may be placed. Once she has a son, it is cast upon him; as in, 'who broke that vessel, your son', 'who ate those dates, your son.'"

This Midrash sounds quite accusative. Who would ever think that a mother would feel relieved once she has a son, and cruelly view him as a vehicle through whom she may divert her blame? The question is certainly strengthened when the woman at hand is Rachel, the mother of the Twelve Tribes.

How does one approach interpreting such a Midrash? The first step is to review the facts and note inconsistencies. My first question is WHO is the one casting blame on the mother? Is it the neighbors, a friend, a relative? And

what is meant that there is now "another who may be blamed"? I believe the answer to the first question opens up the whole area.

The one who would blame the mother would be the husband. If a neighbor's property was damaged, they would take measures to be recompensed, blame is not the recourse for this objective. I suggest the one casting blame is the one person who has no recourse for compensation - as the damage took place by his own dependents. It is the husband.

Now we may view the mother's sentiment. Having someone "to take the fall", the mother is not happy to shift blame. This is not what is meant. The focus is not on the child, but rather, on her. I mean that she is relieved that she is no longer the focus of blame. She doesn't willfully lie stating the child broke objects - if she in fact did. The person casting blame is the father. He says to his wife upon seeing a broken object, "Who broke it, your son?" It is the father's assumption, that the son broke it. The mother is not malicious - certainly not one such as Rachel. This we see from a careful reading of the text: It does not say, "she has no one else to blame", but it says, "there is none other." The mother is passive. Nonetheless, the mother is relieved that she was not the target of her husband's fury. Since there is another person in the house now, she no longer feels the brunt of his disappointments. She doesn't choose her husband to accuse the child, but she does enjoy not being scolded.

This must now be examined. Why is there "relief"? To answer this question, we may first note that whenever we see a reaction in people, such as relief, it is indicative of the person's overall personality. We can deduce something about the person by their very reactions. When, for example, we see children mocking a fellow student, we deduce that a prior event was committed by the one mocked, not to the approval of his peers. Again, if we see someone sad when it starts raining, we deduce he had plans for outdoors. In our case, we see Rachel relieved

when she has a child. We can ask, "what need is being filled when blame is not cast upon a wife?" It would seem clear that she desires the husbands praise and favor. Rashi is not teaching that the mother desires the son to be blamed, but rather, this response indicates she desires her husband's approval. This is the lesson of Rashi.

When Rashi came upon this passage, he saw the plain meaning of "...G-d has gathered in my disgrace". This is clear; a mother feels relief when after years she bears children, as childbearing gives a woman her sense of worth. Her self image is greatly marred if she cannot fill her vital role in family life. But Rashi desired to teach us that this is not the only focus of a mother. She equally desires another thing - her husband's approval. His love is also something which she cannot bear to be without. These are the two great desires which form a woman's central focus, and give her happiness. They are both essential for a peaceful and productive home. In connection with a wife's need for husbandry, the Torah teaches, "v'el ishaych tishukasayche", "and unto your husband will your cleave". The simple meaning teaches that a woman has a yearning for her husband. The same idea is taught in the Talmud where it teaches that an unmarried woman has it more difficult than an unmarried man.

We see that Rachel's "removal of disgrace" can be understood to refer to one of two central desires in woman. We also see how if taken superficially, a Midrash can be inexplicable. We learn to appreciate the depth of knowledge possessed by our Rabbis, the Midrashic authors. Even more, we are awed that there is a Divine Source to all this knowledge which is so pleasant and reasonable to our minds.

As a Rabbi once taught, we must eventuate in a deeper love of G-d whenever we see new knowledge. We should reflect and appreciate G-d's kindness in creating us, and doing so in a manner where we have an intellect through which we can perceive His wisdom. □

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Parashas Vayetze

RABBI BERNARD FOX

new line. However, in a few cases, a blank space is inserted in the middle of a line. In other words, in such instances, one parasha ends, there is a blank space, and the new parasha begins on the same line. This less-common model is used to separate Parshat VaYaetzai from the preceding Parshat Toldot.

Rabbaynu Yosef ibn Kaspi explains the significance of these two different methods of separating parsheyot. Parsheyot are designed as sections of roughly equal length. Ideally, each parasha should be delineated by a change in subject matter. When a new parasha begins, with a change in the topic, the objective of creating sections of roughly equal length is achieved in the ideal manner. In these instances, the new parasha begins on a new line of the Torah. In some cases, it is impossible to adhere to the ideal. To avoid an overly long parasha, a break must be inserted within a single topic. In this less-common case, the new parasha begins on the same line as the previous parasha. The topic of Parshat VaYaetzai is directly related to the end of Parshat Toldot. For this reason, the new parasha begins and Parshat Toldot ends on the same line.[1]

“And he also married Rachel and he loved Rachel more than Leya. He worked with him for another seven years. Hashem saw that Leya was despised. He made her fertile and Rachel was barren.” (Beresheit 29:30-31)

These passages introduce the rivalry between Rachel and Leya. Each sought to be the mother of Yaakov's children. These passages are difficult to understand. First, the passages seem to be contradictory. Initially, the Torah tells us that Yaakov preferred Rachel over Leya. Later, the Torah states that

Yaakov despised Leya. Second, why did Yaakov dislike Leya? Third, why did the Almighty intervene of Leya's behalf and cause her to conceive? Finally, how did Leya's fertility earn her Yaakov's love and appreciation?

Rabbaynu Yonatan ben Uziel offers a simple answer to the first question. He explains that the Torah does not intend to indicate that Yaakov despised Leya. The term used in the Torah to describe Leya is s'nuah. This term can be translated as “despised”. However, it can also indicate a preference. In this instance, the term s'nuah describes a preference. In other words, the Torah is not telling us that Yaakov hated Leya. It is saying that he favored Rachel over Leya. Nachmanides points out another instance in which the term s'nuah is used in this fashion. The Torah describes a man with two wives. One is loved the second is a s'nuah. The s'nuah has a son and then the beloved wife has a son. The son of the s'nuah is the firstborn and is entitled to inherit a double portion of the father's possessions. The father may not transfer this right to the son of the preferred wife.[2] Nachmanides points out that in this context the Torah is clearly describing a relative preference. One is favored over the other. The term s'nuah refers to the less favored wife. The term does not seem to indicate a despised wife.[3] This supports Rabbaynu Yonatan ben Uziel's interpretation of our pasuk.

This interpretation answers the first question. However, it does not answer our other questions. Nachmanides offers another approach to these passages. This approach provides a more comprehensive explanation. He begins with the first question. He



comments that Yaakov favored Rachel over Leya. This preference existed even prior to their marriage. However, beyond this innocent partiality, Yaakov actually had negative feelings towards Leya. Lavan had secretly substituted her for Rachel. This deception had required Leya's complicity. Yaakov felt that Leya had acted dishonestly towards him.

Nachmanides explains that Yaakov was wrong in his assessment of Leya. She recognized Yaakov's righteousness. She wanted to marry this tzadik. This was her sole motivation for participating in Lavan's deception. This explains the Almighty's response to Leya's plight. Hashem knows the inner motivations of every human being. He recognized that Leya was judged harshly and her sincerity was not appreciated. Hashem responded by granting Leya children and refusing Rachel.

Sforno offers the most comprehensive explanation of the pesukim. He begins with the same approach as Nachmanides. But he explains that Yaakov had a specific theory that explained Leya's complicity in Lavan's deception.

Yaakov observed that his marriage to Leya was not followed by her conceiving. He suspected that Leya was barren. This would account for her cooperation with Lavan. She was afraid that her barren condition might be discovered. She was desperate to marry before this occurred. Therefore, she followed Lavan's directions and deceived Yaakov.

Of course, this was not the case. Leya did not marry Yaakov in order to capture a husband. She recognized Yaakov's unique righteousness. Hashem responded to Leya's predicament. She had been misjudged. He granted Leya a son. This proved that she had not been barren. Yaakov's suspicions were disproved. The cause for his negative feelings was removed.[4]

“And he placed a distance of three days between himself and between Yaakov. And Yaakov shepherded remaining sheep of Lavan.” (Beresheit 30:36)

Yaakov works for Lavan as a shepherd. He decides that the time has come to leave Lavan. Lavan realizes that his flocks have flourished under Yaakov's care. He

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Parashas Vayetze

RABBI BERNARD FOX

asks Yaakov to remain as his shepherd. Yaakov can specify his own wage. Yaakov asks Lavan to enter into an unusual arrangement. He will tend Lavan's flocks in exchange for ownership of all spotted or marked lambs and goats born from this day onward. All other sheep and goats will remain Lavan's. He further tells Lavan to remove from the flock any sheep or goats which have these markings. This will assure that any marked members of the flock were born subsequent to the agreement and are clearly Yaakov's.

Yaakov's deal seems odd. He was left with only solid colored sheep and goats. It was likely that they would produce similarly solid colored offspring. How did Yaakov expect this flock to produce the marked offspring that would be his compensation?

It is true that Yaakov initiated a remarkable program that did result in the flock producing marked lambs and goats. However, Yaakov later explained, to his wives, that this plan only succeeded through Hashem's intervention.[5] It seems unlikely that Yaakov was relying on this intervention when he entered into the agreement with Lavan!

Gershonides explains that our pasuk provides the answer. Yaakov told Lavan to remove the marked animals from the flock. Yaakov wanted to be certain that Lavan would not claim that marked animals born into the flock were not Yaakov's. Yaakov expected that Lavan would separate these animals from the flock. Lavan might count them and turn them over to the care of his own sons. The two flocks would still graze in the same general area. They would mingle at times. They would breed together. This process would cause solid colored goats and sheep to give birth to spotted offspring. Yaakov would have his compensation.

Lavan did remove the marked

animals and handed them over to his sons. However, Lavan then took a further step. He sent these animals to a new location three-days from the main flock. Yaakov had not suggested or anticipated this step. This forced Yaakov to devise his unusual program designed to cause solid animals to produce marked offspring. Yaakov had not originally assumed he would need to resort to extraordinary means to secure his compensation. Lavan's subterfuge forced Yaakov to devise this plan.[6]

"I never brought you an animal that had been attacked. I took the blame myself. You made me responsible whether it was stolen in the day or by night." (Berseheit 31:39)

Yaakov confronts Lavan over his dishonesty. He contrasts Lavan's ethics with his own. Yaakov served Lavan as a shepherd. He fulfilled his duties diligently. In contrast, Lavan arbitrarily changed Yaakov's compensation. He also held Yaakov responsible for all losses. This included losses that were beyond the responsibility of a shepherd.

Rabbaynu Avraham ben HaRambam explains that Lavan demanded that Yaakov repay him for animals attacked and killed by wild beasts. This is not a reasonable responsibility. A shepherd can justly be held responsible for protecting his flock from smaller animals. However, in some cases the shepherd cannot be expected to drive off the marauding attackers. Lavan did not distinguish.

Second, the shepherd can be held accountable for an animal stolen during the day. However, he cannot reasonably be expected to prevent theft during the night. Lavan demanded that Yaakov make restitution for all stolen animals.[7]

Yaakov clearly maintained that Lavan had required an inappropriate



level of accountability from his shepherd. How did Yaakov determine the appropriate standard for a shepherd's liability? True, the Torah deals with this issue and establishes clear rules for the conduct and responsibility of the shepherd. But the Torah had not yet been revealed. Furthermore, even if Yaakov was aware of the Torah standards, through prophecy, this would not bind Lavan.

Rabbaynu Avraham ben HaRambam deals with this issue. He explains that the standards for a shepherd's responsibilities pre-existed the Torah. These standards were generally accepted. Yaakov referred to these standards in critiquing Lavan's ethics. The Torah did not create these standards. Instead, the Torah provided strict legal definition and codification of the existing standards.

Rabbaynu Avraham explains that this is not the only instance in which the Torah codified an existing practice or custom. The practice of yibum also predates the Torah. This practice applies to a married woman, whose husband died without male offspring. The

prevalent practice was to require the wife to marry the brother of the deceased. Any children, resulting from the new union, would be regarded as offspring of the deceased. This practice was incorporated into the Torah as a mitzvah. [8]

This thesis explains another incident in the Torah. Yehudah's oldest son married Tamar. He died, without children. Yehudah arranged for Onan, his next to eldest son, to marry Tamar. This is yibum.[9] According to Rabbaynu Avraham it is not necessary to assume that Yehudah was aware of the Torah requirement. Instead, he was following the practice that already existed. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Yosef ibn Kaspi, Mishne Kesef, Part 2, Parshat VaYaetzai.

[2] Sefer Devarim 21:16-17.

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 29:30.

[4] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 29:31.

[5] Sefer Beresheit 31:4-12.

[6] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1994), p 187.

[7] Rabbaynu Avraham ben HaRambam, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 31:39.

[8] Rabbaynu Avraham ben HaRambam, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 31:39

[9] Sefer Beresheit 38:6-8.

Cham's Sons - Sexual Deviation

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: My reason for writing is to seek your insight into a matter that came to my attention last year, and for which I have been trying to find answers. The following passage was presented to me:

"Three copulated in the ark, and they were all punished - the dog, the raven, and Cham. The dog was doomed to be tied, the raven expectorates, and Cham was smitten in his skin." Rashi states that as a punishment to Cham's skin, Cush came from him. (Talmud Sanhedrin, 108b)

My questions: Since the written Torah records (Gen. 9:25) C'naan was cursed, not Cham, why does the above passage reference Cush? What is the connection? I have asked several respected Orthodox Rabbis, and have searched the Internet for information, all without success. It is going on one year now and no Orthodox Rabbi will so much as acknowledge my inquiry after the initial invitation to provide the question. I finally went to a Reform Rabbi who was kind enough to respond and dialogue with me. She stated that the passage is not literal, but teaches "measure for measure." If this is just to make a point, it sure did manage to insult an entire race of people to make that point.

I am disheartened that no Orthodox authority will be up front with me, thus leaving me to draw my own less-than-flattering conclusions as to what Judaism really thinks of Black people. I am not asking to be told what I might want to hear, although it would be nice to hear that the cited passage is being misrepresented. I want to understand: Is the passage literal? If so, how do we stand against racism when our own tradition appears to impose inferior status upon a group? If not literal, is there any understanding of why such an "example" would be used to make a point?

Can you shed any light on this for me? It would be most appreciated.

Mesora: Let us first remove the misconceptions before approaching the authentic texts, in order to learn the Torah's opinion: 1) Your lack of a response from any number of orthodox Rabbis plays no role in what are the true, orthodox tenets and virtues. It is an error to judge the authentic Torah by its adherents. Rather, one must be true to G-d's Torah and judge it solely on G-d's words. 2) Unless impossible to understand literally, we understand the

texts of the Torah, Prophets, and Writings as literal. A Rabbi once said that if we give license to metaphorize any Torah content, what stops one from explaining Adam and Eve as metaphors, or even G-d as a metaphor? With such 'approaches', we cannot determine what is fact, and what is metaphor. You see, metaphorizing the Torah destroys the factual truths contained therein. Your Reformed "Rabbi" has 'reformed' so much, that she offers no analysis of G-d's potent, Torah passages, and simply offers an ignorant usage of "measure for measure". 3) I fail to see what racism has to do with the passage quoted. If Cush was smitten in his skin, this is G-d's punishment to Cush and his father Cham, and in no way sanctions racism. The Jews are to be a light unto all nations. This excludes no race except Amalek. We welcome the proselyte and treat him equal to ourselves. These are all G-d's words. Let us adhere to G-d's words, and not man's.

However, your main error is in confusing two separate individuals, and their respective sins and punishments: Cham was one of Noah's three sons: Shem, Cham, and Yaphes. Cham had four sons: Cush, Mitzrayim, Put, and Canaan. Both Canaan and Cush were punished due to actions of Cham. What you did was to confuse the Talmud's account of Cush's punishment, with the Torah's account of Canaan's punishment. Cush was smitten in his skin due to his father's copulation in the ark, while Canaan was punished due to his involvement in Cham's sodomization of Noah, after their exit from the ark. There were two events and two crimes, both involving Cham. But Cush's sin was separate from Canaan's. Let us examine both crimes in proper sequence.

The Talmud in Sanhedrin 108b cites the punishment of Cham's Ark-based copulation, as his son Cush being smitten in his skin. What type of smite did Cush receive? What was the problem with copulating aboard the Ark, that Cham was punished? Why was Cham punished through his son, and not directly?

Rabbi Yochanan (ibid) says that based on the following verse, we learn that copulation was prohibited aboard the Ark: (Ben. 8:15,16) "And G-d spoke to Noah saying: Exit the Ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your son's wives with you." In this verse, men and women are mentioned separately. Thereby, Rabbi Yochanan derives the lesson that there

was a separation in the sexual aboard the Ark. Why then was copulation prohibited? And how could the raven and the dog be punished? They have no free will! And what of the other animals? Why did they not copulate? They were all aboard the Ark for a year! Rashi states (Gen. 7:7) that copulation was prohibited, as the world, was steeped in the pain of extermination. Hence, it is immoral that one should indulge the self, i.e., copulation, while Earth's population is being exterminated. Similarly, G-d reprimanded the angels for desiring to sing praises while the Egyptians were drowned in the Red Sea.

We now understand why copulation was not proper during the Flood. But why punish animals? It would appear that G-d must have made some change in animal behavior so they did not copulate during this time. Certainly, it was not for the animals, but for Noah and his family. How so? Perhaps seeing animals copulate would have some negative effect on the state of mind of Noah and his family during this sensitive time. (A Rabbi once taught that Noah's subsequent imbibing of wine displays how depressed Noah was, due to all society being destroyed. He drank to escape.) But if G-d did make some change in the animals, which affected their sexual drives, how could the raven and the dog copulate? How could they deviate from G-d's decree?

We must say that although G-d did make a change in the sexual drives of animals, it was of a general nature, in which certain species' natures were immune. The raven and dog evidenced an extreme quantity of the sexual urge, unaffected by G-d's general change. This was now apparent during the Ark's journey, although always present from the creation of these two animals. Prior to the Flood, their extreme sexual urges were of no consequence. However, post Flood, G-d's wisdom decreed that there be some lesson derived from the raven's and the dog's deviation and their subsequent correction. When we learn that they were ultimately smitten for this deviation, we are taught that if a species has a deviation, then G-d corrects this deviation. Why was their deviation corrected only after the Flood? Perhaps in order to insure no deviations exist to deter man in the new, post-Flood era, G-d constrained these two species in some way.

What about Cham's sin of copulation? Why was it met with an affliction of skin, and why in his son Cush's skin? We may suggest, that as his sin was one of flesh, the flesh was appropriately smitten for this lesson. But why not smite Cham's own skin? Additionally, we may ask, if a son was the proper vehicle for the punishment, why this son? A possibility occurred to me: Perhaps G-d afflicted Cham by punishing his son, to teach that Cham's own sin of sexual deviation was carried through his descendants; corruption in this matter does not end with the perpetrator. (G-d does not punish one who does not sin - Cush must have continued in his father's path.) We said earlier that Canaan sinned with his father in sodomizing Noah. Canaan shared his father's deviation. To teach that this deviation did not end with Cham, and not with his son Canaan, but was equally passed to Cush, Cush is afflicted. His skin is marked to teach that Cham's original sin of copulation aboard the Ark was transmitted to two of his sons, Cham and Cush. The immorality was never corrected, and Cush was rightfully afflicted.

This also explains why Cham is always referred to in the Torah as "Avi Canaan", the "father of Canaan." With such an appellation, we learn two ideas: 1) that Canaan shared his father's sin, but more primary, 2) that Cham was the source of this inherited immorality, and that this specific crime is one which is inherited. Here, I must reiterate what I feel is the main point: The very fact that G-d punished Cush - instead of Cham - indicates that the scope of this sin - in specific - is not limited to the perpetrator. Here, there is a basic difference in the very nature of the sin; descendants are affected. This idea is made clear by a second, latter case of Canaan, where he too was affected by his father's sin. Two incidents corroborate this theory.

I would suggest a reason why in this area - sexual deviations - do we find a phenomenon of "inheritance". Perhaps, regarding sexual energies, which are quite strong, one's disposition always leans towards relenting to one's own sexual drives. It is only due to accepted norms that one restrains oneself in this area. But one's natural disposition is to seek sexual gratification, as it is most pleasurable. And if one sees an authority figure deviating, that is all one needs to

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Cham's Sons - Sexual Deviation

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

justify his own sexual deviations. In a sense, one "inherits" his parent's behaviors. It is not necessarily genetic, but behavioral. But in other areas, where there is not such a strong urge, although one sees a parent deviating, he may not follow suit. He has no strong pull towards other acts, even upon seeing others violate Torah law. But the sexual carries with it a continuous urge that at any instant may act itself out.

We now come to Canaan's sin in his union with Cham, in sodomizing Noah. (Rashi states that Canaan saw his grandfather Noah revealed, and told his father, and due to Cham's sin, Canaan was deranged. Ibn Ezra states that Cham and his son Canaan were both evil.) Upon Noah's sobering from his drunkenness, and realizing what Cham did, he curses Canaan, (Gen. 9:25) "And (Noah) said, "cursed is Canaan, a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers." Why is this specific curse appropriate? The Rabbis say that Cham desired no other siblings be born to dilute his Earthly inheritance, and therefore caused his father Noah to have no fourth child. In turn, Noah cursed Cham's fourth son, Canaan, that he be subjugated to his own brothers. A just punishment fits the crime of Cham.

From two incidents of immoral behavior seen in Cham, we appreciate

how this unchecked sexual energy not only corrupted him, but also his sons. Cham's sons witnessed Cham's sexual deviations, and thereby, their sense of morality was compromised, justifying their own corruptions. That which one sees his parents perform, becomes one's barometer of accepted behavior. This would appear to be the significant lesson that both Cush and Canaan became deviant; that the sexual energies, when gone awry, will affect others.

Unfortunately, this crime did not end with Cham and his sons. Today, there are many accounts of individuals, who as children, who were instructed and even forced by a parent to perform sexual acts. These children accept this as normal behavior, and consent for years, throughout adult life. Tragedy meets with these children as they become aware at some point that they were immoral, and deviant. Reflecting on their acts as a child, they experience a disgust at themselves. They feel unworthy of love, as they cannot love themselves, and become suicidal. Living with such "disgust" for oneself is the most unbearable existence, as you cannot escape your own self. Of course, the children are not to blame, and with help, can extricate themselves from their self-imposed doom, and become healthy individuals. What is most disturbing is the vicious nature of such

parents who have no regard for how their immorality will affect another human being – their own child at that. On this point, I will veer from my response, and for good cause: I urge any person who partakes of such immorality to recognize their crime and how it affects others, and immediately seek help. If anyone knows of such acts - and they exist in many communities - you must do what you can to bring this to an end. One cannot be silent because you feel discussing sexual deviations is an embarrassing topic, or because it disgusts you. Concern for any person's well being must be at the forefront of our community activities. "Love your neighbor as yourself" is a Torah injunction, which sees no boundaries, and must start with the care for children - those who are most defenseless. Each Rabbi, teacher, parent, community, school, and yeshiva, must not cower for fear of shame, but rather, must take this matter more seriously than any other concern. It must be addressed publicly. If you do not seek to address this issue, you become a partner in the crime.

In summary, if you seek answers on issues contained in the Torah, follow this advice: 1) Do not seek answers from those who 'reform' G-d's words. G-d knows better than those who mangle our precious, perfect Torah. Seek answers from those trained for decades in the authentic study of Talmud, and the Written Law. Only those who have been trained in the correct and exclusive methodology of Torah thought are fit to offer explanations. All others, by

definition, must fail gravely at this task. 2) Don't decry the system because you are dissatisfied with the response, or lack thereof, from orthodox Jews. Be mindful that G-d wrote the Torah through Moses, and therefore it contains very deep, profound and absolutely true ideas, only arrived at through diligent study, and toil. You are correct to pursue your investigation, and for so long. For this, I give you credit, as you appear to seek logical answers to all of your questions. And the Torah is built only on logic. G-d provides vehicles of knowledge for those who honestly desire answers. You said you are disappointed at orthodox Rabbis who do not reply to your questions, after they invited your question. You are justified, and they have wronged you. One who accepts the position of a Torah teacher must assist those seeking answers, such as you. If they have no answer, they should at least reply stating they do not know.

Regarding your issue on racism, I hope it is now clear that G-d's punishment of changing Cush's skin has nothing to do with wrongful racism, which the Torah does not suggest anywhere. If G-d created a new role for Canaanites as slaves, then we must not jump to emancipate his seed out of "equal rights" emotions, but conversely, we must study G-d's justice of such a penalty.

To arrive at the knowledge of reality, we must abandon our subjective morality and false notions, only adhering to, and supporting G-d's absolute reality. □

Responding to Children's Questions on G-d's Justice

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: My son asked me, "Why doesn't G-d doesn't listen to me when I ask Him to stop the rain, so I can play outside?" How would you answer such a question, from a 6 year old boy?

Mesora: Evidently, your child feels persecuted (not in the severe sense) in that his prayer to G-d went unanswered. "Why doesn't G-d answer me?" expresses his feeling of being ignored or unimportant. This also carries with it a feeling of persecution, as he feels 'he alone' is unanswered. He knows of no other person whose request went unanswered, so he feels persecuted.

I would respond to him as follows: "Even adults ask G-d for things, and G-d does not give it to them. (This helps to remove the persecution emotion.) This is not because G-d is not listening - He always is, but He knows whether what we ask for, is really "good" for us. For example, I may ask a doctor for one medicine that tastes good, but he doesn't give it to me. This is because he knows that even though I want it, the doctor knows it is not good for me. Just like a smart doctor, G-d also knows if what we ask for is good. So even if we want it, it may not be the best thing. And sometimes, even if something is good for us, it may not be good for others, so G-d has to make a decision if what we ask, is going to hurt someone else. Rain makes everything grow, so we need it so the trees will give us food to eat. If the rain stops, it may be good for me so I can play outside, but it is not good for other people who are hungry. We have to know that G-d always

hears us. He made each one of us, so He knows everything. And even if He doesn't give us what we want, it is not because He doesn't love us. G-d loves everybody. So G-d wants everybody to be happy. We all need food to be happy, so G-d may not stop the rain, so this way, other people can eat. Soon it will stop anyway, so you can play outside. But if G-d makes the rain continue, other people will also be happy. So we should be happy that other people eat, even if it means we have to wait to play. So we should remember:

1) G-d hears everyone's prayers. 2) G-d sometimes doesn't even give adults what they ask for if it is not good for them. 3) When G-d doesn't give us what we ask for, it is for a good reason, and we have to think what that good reason is. We have to ask how it will be bad if we have this thing. 4) By not getting what we ask from G-d, is the way that G-d teaches us that we are not asking for something that is best. This is how G-d works. 5) We have to think about why G-d feels what we want, is not the best thing. This means, G-d wants us to use our mind and think about a better thing to ask for. 6) When we figure out why what we want is not so good, the next time we ask for something, we will ask a better thing. G-d wants us to get smarter, so we ask for what is best for us. We learn from this that G-d wants us all to think, and always try to learn how to make our wishes into better wishes. This way, we become better, by learning what G-d wants for us, not what we want." □