

JUDAISM



RELIGION
of
REASON



Torah reflects God's intelligence. One must study for years to acquire the methods necessary to decipher its subtle clues and numerous metaphors.

Applying thought and analysis, we uncover a brilliant system that uses reason and proof to demonstrate ideas that must be true, and notions that cannot be.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

JUDAISM

RELI G I O N
of
R E A S O N

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim



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God designed man with intelligence, for it is this faculty alone that perceives truth. Intelligence distinguishes between sense perception and imagination; between what exists and what does not; between what is possible and what is impossible. It tells us which events occurred, and those that are fabrications.

*When man grasps what is real and what is in accord with natural law, he can successfully manipulate his environment to provide his material needs. He is then physically happy.
But God equally wishes man's religious happiness.*

Intelligence alone will distinguish between the Creator and false gods. Intelligence identifies what God has commanded and what He has prohibited.

*Torah, Prophets, Writings and the Oral Law:
the only texts that God inspired...a system of deep wisdom,
are uncovered only through reason.*

*If we engage intelligence, we can uncover the Torah's lessons.
We will live in reality, and be happy religiously.*

*If we ignore God's gifted intelligence, following mystical
and superstitious beliefs, we violate God's prohibitions.
We will be confused and unhappy. The choice is ours.*

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this book is to demonstrate that intelligence is the sole faculty that can enable an appreciation for the Written and Oral Torahs. Ultimately, the objective is to assist a person in his or her conviction in the truth of Judaism, a love for it, and a love of God.

God created the universe and the Torah: they equally reflect His wisdom. It is due only to misunderstandings and alien influences that many within our nation no longer approach Judaism with the same demand for reasoning as they demand from God's natural sciences. Instead, many accept belief, what is popular, and fantasy. To illustrate that Torah can be discovered only through an intellectual approach, explanations will be given for Torah and Talmudic portions, metaphors and their disguised messages will be discussed, corrections for false beliefs will be offered, and a number of widespread Torah violations will be addressed. I know many of you will be reluctant to accept ideas presented herein, as they will conflict with your cherished beliefs and your desire not to oppose others. However, I hope after reading many chapters, you too will arrive at the conclusion that Torah is synonymous with intelligence, design, and great depth – as much as the natural laws that continuously guide God's remarkable universe. If your mind is open to truth, you will naturally find a reasoned approach to Torah as God's true will, which will instill in you the conviction to follow those truths, even if this requires that you change and no longer follow the masses.

God distinguished man above all creations by granting intelligence to him alone. Man's obligation, purpose and fulfillment is realized when he engages this faculty. God desires man to probe His created universe, permeated with His wisdom. Everywhere we witness marvels: from the subatomic world to the furthest galaxies and everything in between. But to realize the immense wisdom in creation, we must investigate, analyze, deduce, induce, theorize, test our theories...and only then do we discover the numerous, intricate, precise and harmonious natural laws. On the surface, we view beautiful, natural forms. To grow in our appreciation of God's wisdom, we transcend physical form and investigate the universe on an operational level. Much time must be invested, and intelligent thought must be applied. It is absurd to suggest one should simply "believe" in nature, as if this were of any merit; as if "belief" imbues man with an appreciation of the design and synchronism of this "giant clock." Belief is inapplicable since nature refers to an intricate system guided by laws, while belief is a blind emotional acceptance – not the intellectual and analytical tool vital for acquiring wisdom. Belief is as unrelated to

wisdom as blindness is unrelated to color. Only intelligence detects and reveals truths. And the truths we find amaze us, as is God's plan: to offer Man rich experiences that fully satisfy him and fill him with an awe of the Creator.

Similarly, God's wisdom fills His Torah system...a system that cannot be seen on the surface through simple reading. Even greater analysis is required here, in this tapestry of laws, morals, metaphysics and principles, that compared to tangible nature, are invisible and highly abstract. Torah requires a refined mind to discover its messages. Here too, belief plays no role. Only with many years of training in Torah and Talmudic study, can one arrive at the brilliance that astonished the wisest of people, from Moses, Miriam, Aaron, Joshua, Ruth, King David, King Solomon...to Saadia Gaon, Ibn Ezra, Maimonides, Nachmanides, Sforno, and Rashi.

Both areas – the universe and Torah – reveal God's wisdom, but only after years of dedicated study under one who himself was trained by others, back to Moses. The process is a great joy to all who have mastered the method of deciphering God's sublime communications. Like Torah, the Rabbis authored the Talmud in a style that trains the mind in tremendous skills, enabling each Talmudic student to study independently, and make continuous discoveries.

Torah wisdom has a design. It is also a creation like the universe. But in neither – the universe nor Torah – is the wisdom “created.” What is created about the universe is the ‘formation’ of physical objects and laws that had never existed. But the wisdom revealed in this universe, viz. God's might, kindness or justice, is eternal. God is eternal, and therefore He and His wisdom, which are one, are eternal. The Torah as well is a formalized, created structure. But the wisdom contained reflects God. So although God created a new universe and a new entity of Torah, the wisdom reflecting God in both is eternal.

Since both worlds are discrete, possessing fixed properties such as size and weight in the universe, and a limited number of verses in the Torah – man might think ideas are also limited, reflecting the limited design of both worlds. Not so. For man to detect and marvel at God's infinite, eternal wisdom, God structured the Torah in a “branching” fashion: one main stem or idea branches out and multiplies exponentially. This branching design reveals endless wisdom. Just as a tree starts out as a single trunk, and breaks off into 2, 4, 8, 20, then innumerable branches...one Torah truth opens up doors to even greater vaults of wisdom. And each new idea offers greater insights onto our existing knowledge, while also advancing us to newer truths, yielding endless wisdom, in contrast to human creations where the knowledge contained is quite limited. The structure of scientific

knowledge too follows this branching design, as seen in categories.

To decipher God's Torah, man requires reason and analysis. The goal is to appreciate the marvels of God's systems, and ultimately God Himself, as far as man can. Reason can unlock truths, belief cannot.

*Rabbi Judah said, "Adam the first was commanded on idolatry alone."
(Sanhedrin 56b)*

Man was created to follow the Creator's will. Adam understood this command was intended exclusively for man's benefit, as God needs nothing and is unaffected by His creations. With his supreme intellect, from this single mandate, Adam would derive additional truths. He would deduce not to take God's name in vain, not to curse Him, to pray and sacrifice to Him alone and other attitudes and actions demanded by this relationship. It was unnecessary for God to itemize all that man should believe and perform, since Adam was equipped with intelligence, precisely so he would arrive at new truths throughout his life. He did not require a Torah.

However, man was also equipped with instincts and imagination. Over time, Adam's descendants fabricated beliefs in multiple sub-deities and formalized religious rites concerning them. Abraham arose, and although following idolatrous beliefs in his youth, his excellent mind discovered the truth of a single Creator. Engaging reason and proofs, Abraham taught monotheism, attracting thousands of followers, exposing the fallacy of other religions and beliefs. Yet, idolatry continued. Even his offspring suffered in Egypt due to their idolatrous sins (*Ezek. 20:8*).

2448 years after Adam's creation, due to man's deviations, a Divine system was required. God gave 613 commands called Torah to the newly-formed Jewish nation. To all others – the Noahides – God maintained the seven laws previously commanded to Noah. Noahides wishing to take on more than the seven and join the Jewish nation, are welcome, but not obligated. However, once they accept the Torah of 613 laws, they would equal the Jew. Torah is not to benefit Jew alone. God is concerned for all of His creations. The reason the Jew was selected was due to Abraham's commitment to monotheism. Thus, he and his descendants were most suitable to promulgate truth, safeguarding it for the entire world. The Jews' unique role was to act as a beacon to others, thereby requiring preparation in the form of numerous commands, and Torah study. Due to idolatrous beliefs that arose, the Torah includes responses in the form of negative commands. Torah prohibits following the Canaanites, Egyptians, witches, astrology, mysticism, superstitions, demon belief (*Lev. 17:7*) and consulting the dead, to name a few. These beliefs are not based

on evidence, but on man's weak psyche and imagination. All have their root in the same disease as idolatry: human insecurity. God, who is the source of kindness and mercy, saw a need to respond to alien influences, for man's good. This was Abraham's intent too, as was Maimonides.' In his work, the *Guide for the Perplexed*, Maimonides addresses the Sabeans and other peoples following idolatrous views. Below is an example of this disease of which Maimonides wrote, still expressed in today's culture:

You must beware of sharing the error of those who write amulets (kameot). Whatever you hear from them, or read in their works, especially in reference to [God's] names which they form by combination, is utterly senseless; they call these combinations shemot (names) and believe that their pronunciation demands sanctification and purification, and that by using them they are enabled to work miracles. Rational persons ought not to listen to such men, nor in any way believe their assertions. (Guide for the Perplexed, Book I, Chap. LXI)

Fantasy and idolatrous notions exist as they always have, and have crept into the Jewish mindset. Under the guise of "Judaism," idolatrous beliefs and practices have become commonplace; they are even endorsed by leaders and Rabbis. Understanding Man's temptation to cave to his over-religious and idolatrous tendencies and adopt new practices, God commanded man to not add to the Torah (*Deut. 4:2*), but this has been violated all too often. At times, the impetus for this violation is to obtain some false psychological security, as is the case with amulets. Other times one desires to feel "more religious" than others, attempting to do so by differentiating one's appearance and dress, despite Tzafania's critique of such Jews. (*Radak 1:8*) Here, ego is to blame, in connection with the lack of respect for God's supreme wisdom and His commandments.

The failure to accept that God alone provides for man drives Jews to seek an imagined security by wearing red strings, checking Mezuzahs, carrying Jewish books for protection, praying to the dead, incanting Jewish texts, dressing a certain way, paying for human blessings, and performing acts at certain times and with certain objects. Jews violate these idolatrous prohibitions, despite the Torah's clear warnings. Ibn Ezra teaches the reason why God prohibits these acts: "*they do nothing (Lev. 19:31).*"

The barometer for "Jewish" practice has become peer approval, not what God says. Man has taken such prominence, that over the centuries, many communities have developed a new view of an infallible

“Rebbe” or Tzaddik – an assumed perfectly righteous man. Jews believe he can do no wrong, that he possesses “powers;” they follow him blindly in all matters, many not subject to Rabbinic jurisdiction. This deification of man is despite Torah’s honest depiction of the sins of many great individuals, including Moses. Somehow, the Rebbe has surpassed Moses in this respect. King Solomon’s teaching that *all men sin (Kobehes 7:20)* seems no match for the psychological satisfaction gained by imagining a Rebbe or Tzaddik to be a “saint” – a notion clearly alien to Torah. The simple rejection of such Rebbes and Tzaddikim is the complete lack of eyewitnesses to their purported miracles: these stories are always second-hand claims. Even the prophets did nothing, as it was God who rendered all miracles (*Saadia Gaon, Emunos v'Dayos*). This is reasonable, since Man arrived on Earth after God already created natural law. Thus, God determines nature and miracles, not Man.

God’s true miracles were never left open to doubt, as is so regarding the numerous claims of today’s Rebbes. God either forecasted miracles, or performed His miracles in front of masses, or both... indispensable for validating true miracles. God’s very act of Revelation at Sinai teaches that God desires us to accept as fact only that which is witnessed and proven. Otherwise, we cannot blame other religionists for accepting and teaching their miraculous claims. In the end, Judaism’s entire basis for claiming its status as the only true religion is Revelation at Sinai. Following God’s lesson to accept only that which is provable, i.e. performed in front of masses, we reject all other religions asking simple faith without proof, and we reject fables of Rebbes and Tzaddikim performing miracles. But those who wish to believe in Rebbes’ and Tzaddikim’s miracles without proof, must equally endorse their children’s belief in Jesus: neither claim is less viable, in their measure.

Furthermore, the Talmud teaches that prophecy has ceased. Thus, no man knows when God will work a miracle. So anyone, who for any reason forecasts an event outside of nature, like saying a brain tumor will suddenly vanish, or a woman barren all her life will suddenly become pregnant, is akin to a false prophet. A severe violation. Additionally, any man offering his “brachas” (blessings) claiming it will change natural law, is a liar. All any man can do, and should do, is follow natural law, and pray. A blessing itself is not causative. Today, those who claim man’s blessings alter reality, cruelly mislead others, inflating their hopes and lead them to despair when nothing changes. Regarding “miracles” recorded in Talmud, one may review Maimonides’ introduction to his Guide discussing the use of metaphor. Following, is a wise Rabbi’s response to a question on how to understand “miraculous” accounts in Talmud, “Aggadah”:

To paraphrase Shmuel Hanagid(1), the value of Aggadab is found only in the gems of wisdom one derives from it. If one derives nonsense, it has no value. Very few people are capable of diving into the deep water and coming up with pearls [Ramban metaphor]. Other individuals have no business delving into Aggadab. They would do better refraining from trying to interpret that which is beyond them. “Bmufrosh mimcha al tidrosh.” Such people cannot discern between something literal or metaphorical.

(1) “Mavo HaTalmud” (Intro to the Talmud) found at the end of Tractate Brachos

Midvar shekker tircbak: From a false matter distance yourself (Exod. 23:7).

Truth must guide our very thought, word, and action, if we are to adhere to God’s will and His Torah. And the truth is that our Patriarchs and Matriarchs never accepted omens, astrology, or witchcraft. Nor did they reject God as the sole cause of *Reward and Punishment* by using amulets. (*Reward and Punishment* being a fundamental and required to receive the afterlife as taught by Maimonides in his 13 *Principles*, reprinted herein.) Foolish individuals attempt to sidestep this Torah fundamental, which teaches that our free will acts alone are what cause the good and evil in life, not inanimate trinkets or bizarre practices. Such items cannot avert God’s will. This is so clear, it is a wonder that Jews prefer amulets and superstitions over God.

When in need, our perfected ancestors used their intelligence to accomplish what is humanly possible: they prayed to God, and they introspected and repented (*Eicha 3:40*). They performed no other acts, for there exists no other means to attain any goal. Man’s successes and failures are due to natural laws, or to God. On rare occasions when God’s blessings were given, it was just that: they were “given” – not sought out. And only Divine blessings were causative, not those originating in man, like Jacob’s blessings that were merely instructional. The Jews never sought blessings from Moses. They understood that man must beseech God alone. When Rachel erred asking Jacob to give her children, Jacob was angered for God’s honor and said, “*Am I in God’s stead? (Gen. 30:2).*” And the Talmud’s treatment of man’s blessings views them as simple “advice” based on one’s personality – nothing causative (*Moade Katan 9a*). But today, people ignore these lessons, and deify Rebbes. Unfortunately, Rebbes don’t protest, making it all the more crucial for responsible leaders to speak out.

This new mystical, impostor Judaism does not rely on Torah sources, but feeds on the insecurities of men and women. Despite the numerous prohibitions, Jews violate these laws. This is attributed not only to insecurity, but to the failure to rigorously adhere to the Torah's words. Our great Rabbis attempted to educate man, but the Jews misunderstood their riddles and metaphors as literal statements. So when we are told about metaphoric "demons" (*shadim*) to illustrate deep, psychological principles, Jews do not take the time to study the Sages' words. Instead, they disregard the Prophets and Sages who taught that the Rabbis speak in riddles. Today's Jews understand metaphors as fact, despite the lack of evidence and inherent problems in such literal readings. In contrast, King Solomon wrote *Proverbs* (literally "*Metaphors*") to train us in thought, and to appreciate that the Rabbis speak in non-literal terms so as to sharpen our minds. Maimonides, Radak and our great Sages endorsed this truth, that the Rabbis spoke in metaphor. But the masses reject this in favor of believing in non-existing powers. The brilliance of our Rabbis and Sages has been eclipsed by infantile notions.

It is vital that today's true Jewish leaders sense the obligation to correct those following the mystical lifestyle, helping to uncover their errors and redirecting them towards truth. Many Jews believe mystical beliefs are a viable version of Judaism. However, they underestimate the gravity of such corrupt thinking. For with the acceptance of mystical, idolatrous and baseless beliefs, one's view of God is distorted, to the point that one's life might be useless, thereby forfeiting the Afterlife. If God is not viewed as the only source of our fortune, and Jews accept imaginary powers or forces, such people have the wrong understanding of God. Their prayers are not directed to the true Creator, and therefore they cannot be answered. Reward and Punishment – a Fundamental – is not accepted by them. Jews believe in "other" means through which they might achieve success and health. The Jew need not comply with Torah, since he feels amulets, practices, and human blessings might also work. He does not read the Torah's clear words on this subject. Instead, he prefers to follow the blind masses, gaining their approval over God's. His entire life is based on falsehood, and in some cases, his mitzvahs and knowledge are worthless.

The primary problem with mysticism and idolatrous beliefs is that they are false. A wise Rabbi defined mysticism and idolatry as "*assuming a causal relationship when it does not exist.*" For example, assuming that wearing a red thread will ward off harm, or that a note thrown into a Rebbe's grave will be answered, are both "idolatrous" or mystical, since there is no causal relationship between these acts, and the desired result. There-

fore, both are Torah prohibitions. But taking medication is called scientific, since certain, ingested substances directly correlate to better health. Of one who follows a life where we reject our senses and believe unproven notions, King Solomon said, *“a fool believes everything (Prov. 14:15).”*

Fortunately, the Jew is not beyond repair, as he does not seek a Tzadik or a Rebbe’s blessing to regrow amputated limbs, or resurrect loved ones. He has boundaries. Using those boundaries, we might use reason to extrapolate to other cases, and bring him to his senses, saying, “If human blessings, amulets or reciting Tehillim cannot regrow a limb, it cannot do anything else. Change occurs only through God, or nature.” There is no correlation between these practices, and success. Therefore, these beliefs are akin to idolatry, which also offers no correlation.

In contrast, it is rewarding that when we show people the marvelous insights, and the unique approach to Torah wisdom based on proof and reason, many are filled with delight and deep thanks. The emptiness they tolerated as they endured their previous belief system – which could never be validated – is happily abandoned and replaced with the pleasure of following ideas that jive with their minds. This occurs since God created man to find the greatest joy in a life of wisdom, and to find reason more preferable than unproven beliefs. Man knows once he sees something proven, that it is unshakable, thereby offering stability in eternal truths. Man yearns to know what is absolute truth, so he might not delude himself. However, belief cannot offer a firm basis justifying any man to follow them. No sane argument for a blind faith can be constructed in its defense. God granted each person intelligence, so we might engage it in the greatest mitzvah of Torah study. King Solomon taught that nothing compares to it (*Prov. 8:11*). So we have two tasks at hand: 1) to correct the Jewish idolatrous trend; and 2) to share Torah’s brilliance.

What is the true Torah lifestyle, and why live it?

The answer is based on a number of principles and considerations. If we follow the path of reason, we realize that Judaism is designed by God; that it perfectly compliments our human natures; and that a life of Torah Judaism offers us the most rewarding and fulfilling existence.

Our emotional tendencies were surely affected during our upbringing. Our natures, and those who nurtured us, contribute to who we are today. It is crucial that we accept the effect of emotional influence, that these emotions conflict with our reasoning, and this must be in check in order to live by truths and Torah. For this reason, the Rabbis taught that we must educate only those who have proper character traits. Otherwise, we can

try to teach, but a person with poor traits or strong urges and lusts or false notions will reject our education. We will have wasted our time.

Happiness. It's a powerful desire. But does having a desire demand we follow it? How do we determine which desire to follow, if any? And if happiness is a worthwhile pursuit, how do we achieve true happiness? Can I avoid fooling myself in my search for happiness? Just as we follow a rational path to attain other goals, we must do so in our religious and emotional lives. Certain causes have very definite effects on our plans. Other causes have no effect. To arrive at any objective, we must engage only those causes proven to achieve a desired outcome. Happiness is a state where our primary needs are satisfied. They include health, shelter, financial stability, self-esteem, friends, adhering to a sense of morality, and understanding. If any of these are lacking or absent, we are unhappy. Of these, the satisfaction of more primary needs leads to greater happiness. While we need friends, we are less concerned about them when we are starving. And even with ample food and friends, we feel empty if we do not engage our minds. Regarding this central part – our mind – man senses this is truly his mark of distinction; what elevates us above animals. Man feels most insulted when called stupid, as opposed to poor or sloppy. Intelligence defines man more than other considerations.

Additionally, we can only eat so much, and partake in pleasures only so often until we tire or sense pain. But the pursuit of wisdom and understanding can be sustained, and also offers the greatest rewards. For this reason, the Aristotles, Freuds, Einsteins and Maimonides of the world pursued wisdom over all else. They were known to be captivated by scientific problems for weeks on end; something we never hear about in connection with physical pleasures. This must draw our interest, that these wise men found such captivation and fulfillment while studying God's universe and His Torah. If they could find the deepest satisfaction in these pursuits, others can too. We all share one, identical design.

But there is an advantage possessed by the Torah student: direct communication from the Creator. No other people lay claim to an event witnessed by masses, incorporating supernatural phenomena, and God's communication addressing those masses from amidst flames. The survival of this transmission through today attests to the reality of that event. For no fantastic claim of mass attendance will be accepted and transmitted, without proof. No people numbering 2 million would transmit the words referring to Sinai, "Lest you forget what your eyes saw," unless they saw it. While other religions "claim" miraculous events, they lack the mass witnesses required for proof. So they demand blind faith. Some even possess conflicting accounts of their presumed histories. Simply put,

other religions do not possess proof.

In contrast, Judaism possesses a single history spanning thousands of years with only one version. Astonishing events witnessed by millions, thereby dispelling fabrication of distortion. Even other religions accept our Torah as truth. They cannot deny historical fact. Torah histories – namely Revelation at Sinai – would never have reached us today, had they never occurred. Had Sinai been false, anyone spreading such a fabrication with internal contradictions would be mocked. The Jews’ sustained, verbal transmission validates Torah as the only God-given system. Had Moses been an impostor, attempting to proliferate lies of a miracle attended by masses, telling a people “You were there”?...not one person would agree to being where he or she was not. Not one person would replace his or her true history with Moses’ fabrication. Certainly, Moses’ lies would not become the singular history of those people thousands of years later. However, we possess one, miraculous transmission, and no other history. Torah is accurate.

God taught us how to live the greatest life. He gifted us with commands – each one targeting the good for mankind. Communal laws foster harmony and security. Monetary laws direct us to exact fairness and protect ownership. Moral laws address questions of when life begins, when to take or preserve a life, and when punishment is warranted. And the philosophic commands like Tzitzis, Tefillin and Mezuzah engage us in a high level of thought and understanding of the Creator. These offer the greatest fulfillment in understanding God as far as humanly possible.

We exist because God alone created each of us. He gave us laws, for our own good...to be truly happy. He created “happiness,” so He knows best how man might achieve happiness. God does not need our service; He needs nothing. His creation of mankind obligates each of us in His laws. We exist for a reason. And fulfilling that objective entitles us to continued life. It behooves us to study Torah, to learn from the Patriarchs, Matriarchs, Prophets and the Rabbis, and to understand how the study and performance of each command contributes to our happiness, and eternal life. And as we study, we experience the most enjoyable life, since the process of discovery in Torah and science is unmatched by any other pursuit. You must experience this discovery to accept this as true.

In an era where Jews believe in falsehoods and mysticism, when they wish to impress their peers more than God, deviating from Torah commands...a primary purpose of this compilation is to place the focus back on Torah’s very words. Popular practices and beliefs will be discussed, false notions will be exposed, and Torah truths and the method used to unravel metaphors will be shared. This will offer you great satisfaction

and an appreciation for the Torah's wisdom and ultimately, for the Creator. After you are exposed to a number of examples of the Torah's reasonings and methods, I hope you will apply this approach to all other cases you encounter.

Torah is about truth. If we wish truth and not to delude ourselves, we must accept only that which we find stated in the Torah, Prophets or Writings. If some notion is not found in these books, it does not form part of Judaism. Certainly, if the Torah rejects certain practices, we too must reject them. As Maimonides teaches, we are to accept as truth only those matters that are: 1) proven by reason, 2) experienced by our senses, 3) or Torah transmissions. I have included his Letter on Astrology (*Letter to Marseilles*) at the end of this book where he states this.

I have included chapters on fundamentals, methodology, human nature, falsehoods, mitzvahs, God's justice, and human perfection. In this manner, you might appreciate how Torah wisdom is applied to many areas of our lives. Throughout, I cite examples of metaphors and suggested interpretations, demonstrating the great insights of the Rabbis. I intend to share how non-literal interpretations offer deep insights, while literal readings force us to accept fantasy. At the end, I have included important sources so you might have easy access to them.

May you rise above the need for human approval, to the Torah's goal of loving God, and being loved by Him. May you conquer all emotional bias and live by reason alone. May you discover your errors in character and in deed, and abandon them. May wisdom and truth become your reality and joy, and may you increase in both. May you share your newly learned truths with many others.

RELIGION *of* REASON

Part I
FUNDAMENTALS

The pursuit of truth – to know reality – requires a specific process. First, we must determine what constitutes accurate sense perception. We must follow only those parameters. Next, we must use reason to approach those acquired truths and their implications. And we must remove emotional bias from both.

This approach also leads to a conviction about Torah, which grants us knowledge of fundamentals and the Creator's will in unobservable matters, like morality. It offers us truths that would take many lifetimes to uncover without Torah.

We begin with fundamentals. These foundational points of Judaism teach great wisdom. But they also ensure that we learn matters in order of priority, and train us in thinking patterns that parallel God's wisdom. This is the path that will yield insight and enable us to independently distinguish truth from fallacy.

WISDOM AND REASON

“The fear of God is the beginning of knowledge...” (Proverbs 1:7) “The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God...” (Psalms 111:10) Kings Solomon and David make it clear: knowledge demands an appreciation of God.

If gaining knowledge of God is not our goal when we study, then all we learn is false. For example, a scientist might harness the Earth’s resources and create amazing technologies. But if he does not view these materials and laws as created by the Creator, then his knowledge is false. For he lacks the most primary understanding – the “existence” of the phenomenon. In fact, matter exists only because there is a Creator who willed it to be from nothingness. Matter cannot create itself. All matter possesses form, weight, color, dimension, etc. But most central to matter, is its existence...that the thing “is”. Errors concerning why something is narrow or green are not as crucial as the error of how it exists. If the theories of Aristotle or Plato are followed, where matter always existed in some form, one denies God as “creator.”

If our discoveries do not imbue us with a great awe for the Creator, we have failed our mission in life. The multitude of creations, and their remarkable designs, enables man to continually discover new truths, and impress him with God’s wisdom. Knowledge of the world is not to end with the phenomena we study. If it does, and we walk away from a biology class impressed with the great design of the body, but we don’t view the body as evidence of the Creator and His wisdom, we do not truly understand the body. For the body has a purpose only in relationship to a life where God is central.

This being said, we must pursue truth over all other concerns. We must not cower to reputations, accepted norms, masses, fear of rejection, or anything else. If we understand something as false, we must treat it that way. The only path to living in line with truth is reason. Belief has no place in this search for God’s wisdom. God granted each person the faculty of intelligence, so that “each” of us might engage this amazing tool to determine what is true and what is false. We are not to follow a Rabbi and rely solely on his words. Rabbi Bachya ben Josef ibn Paquda (author of “Duties of the Heart”) makes this point:

Whoever has the intellectual capacity to verify what he receives from tradition, and yet is prevented from doing so by his own laziness, or because he takes lightly God’s commandments and Torah, he will be punished for this and held accountable for negligence.

If, however, you possess intelligence and insight, and through these faculties you are capable of verifying the fundamentals of the religion and the foundations of the commandments which you have received from the sages in the name of the Prophets, then it is your duty to use these faculties until you understand the subject, so that you are certain of it - both by tradition and by force of reason. If you disregard and neglect this duty, you fall short in the fulfillment of what you owe your Creator.

Devarim 17:8-10 states: "If a case should prove too difficult for you in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, between (leprous) mark and mark, or other matters of dispute in your courts...you must act in accordance with what they tell you."

The verse does not say simply accept them on the authority of Torah sages and rely exclusively on their tradition." Rather, (Scripture) says that you should reflect on your own mind, and use your intellect in these matters. First learn them from tradition - which covers all the commandments in the Torah, their principles and details - and then examine them with your own mind, understanding, and judgment, until the truth becomes clear to you, and falsehood rejected, as it is written: "Understand today and reflect on it in your heart, Hashem is the God in the heavens above, and on the Earth below, there is no other (ibid, 4:39)."

Maimonides on the obligation to use reason (*Guide for the Perplexed, Book III, Chap. LIV*):

Our Sages further say, that man has first to render account concerning his knowledge of the Law, then concerning the acquisition of wisdom, and at last concerning the lessons derived by logical conclusions from the Law, i.e., the lessons concerning his actions. This is also the right order: we must first learn the truths by tradition, after this we must be taught how to prove them, and then investigate the actions that help to improve man's ways. The idea that man will have to render account concerning these three things in the order described, is expressed by our Sages in the following passage: "When man comes to the trial, he is first asked, 'Hast thou fixed certain seasons for the study of the Law? Hast thou been engaged in the acquisition of wisdom? Hast thou derived from one thing another thing?'" This proves that our Sages distinguished between the knowledge of the Law on the one hand, and wisdom on the other, as the means of proving the lessons taught in the Law by correct reasoning.

Ibn Ezra also expresses the vital role of thought and reason (*Exod. 20.1*):

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

Radak (*Samuel I, 28:25 towards the end*):

...although the implications of the words of the Rabbis - blessed their memory - indicate from the Talmud that the (idolatrous) woman resurrected Samuel, we do not accept these words when our intelligence tells us the opposite.

Radak rejects the notion that the woman idolater literally resurrected Samuel, as it violates all reason. Therefore, our reason is what we must follow, even when confronted with statements of the Rabbis which seem to imply the opposite. This lesson is most vital and even echoed by our greatest Rabbis. But it doesn’t stop there. As we said, God created the human intellect. He desires we engage reason and proof. This was exemplified to the highest degree when He orchestrated Revelation on Mount Sinai. This was performed in front of the entire nation of 2 million people, to serve as proof for them and all future generations. God desires we only accept that which can be proved. Had God given the Torah privately to Moses, no proof of its Divine origins could be substantiated. It would be Moses’ word against others, just like all other religions bereft of proof.

Reason has many methods: deduction, induction, a fortiori arguments, and so on. As we proceed, I intend to share many lessons in correct thought. In this manner, you may grow in your capabilities, becoming more adept at distinguishing truth from fallacy, and fact from metaphor, so you might sharpen your analytical skills and so you might decipher God’s words and the words of His faithful followers – His Prophets – growing in your love of God.

WHAT IS GOD?

Moses wished to know God's true nature. God responded, "*For man cannot know me and live (Exod. 33:20).*" However, we must be capable of knowing something concerning God, since the first of His Ten Commandments is to accept that He is our God (*Exod. 20:2*).

This command refers to knowing that God is the sole cause of the universe. It refers to knowing His 'role', not His incomprehensible essence. Man is naturally perplexed by the fact that God always existed. This perplexity must be understood before we approach an answer.

By nature, people assume there exists only that, which they can fully explain. Thus, if something is incomprehensible, it is viewed as impossible. This assumption is easily removed. For we know what color is. Yet a blind person cannot fathom it. We do not say that colors do not exist since the blind person cannot fathom this concept. Similarly, we must not assume God required a creator before Him, simply because we cannot grasp His not having a beginning. All existences except God are restricted in this manner: nothing can create itself, and therefore, everything requires creation. However, God's existence is not *accidental*. Creation does not warrant existence, until God decided to create. And even after its creation, the universe cannot endure without God's 'continued' will. This dependence upon God for creation and continued existence is what we mean by *accidental* existence. Nothing exists of its own. It continually requires God's external will.

In contrast, God's existence is *essential*. Meaning, His nature is such, that He always existed. God expressed this to Moses upon his request to identify God when relating his mission to the Jews in Egypt. God said My name is "*I am that I am (Exod. 3:14).*" A wise Rabbi explained this to mean "I am the One who exists by My very nature; I did not need to be created like all else". The Rabbi explained this would be evidence that Moses truly received prophecy from the Creator. For no man would arrive at such an idea of an eternal being based on the natural operation of the universe; nothing in creation indicates such an idea. Therefore, when Moses related this new concept; this explanation of God's nature and His "name", Moses was accepted as having truly received prophecy. The Jews confirmed he must have been taught this idea from a source outside of nature: by God Himself.

It is only due to our natures and based on all that we see, that we find it troublesome to accept that God had no beginning. Everything else does!

God addresses this: "*I am the first and I am the last and aside from Me there is no other god (Isaiah 44:6).*" Based on Revelation at Sinai, we know

the entire Torah including Prophets and Writings to be true. Thus, God did in fact precede all else: He has no beginning. But we can also answer this based on reason, not only God's authority.

If we assume God to have a creator, we must be consistent and believe that creator also required yet another, previous creator. We must then say God was created by "Z", and "Z" was created by "Y", and "Y" by "X", in an infinite series traveling back in time without a beginning. The problem is, we thereby suggest there never was a first cause. And without a first cause, the process never started. Stop and think about that.

It follows that nothing could exist. For if something never started, if we never arrive at a first, if there was never a "first cause" for all else...there would be absolute nothingness.

However, reason forces us to accept a First Cause, what we call God. Although a being without a beginning is incomprehensible, reality cannot be otherwise.

We cannot understand "what" God is, and therefore, we cannot understand "how" He exists. Nonetheless, we know that He must exist, and that He is the sole cause of all that we witness. We say a "sole" cause, because the concept of something being "first" is synonymous with exclusivity. This explains why our morning prayers refer to God as the Creator: "Baruch Sh'Amar", "Blessed [is the one] who spoke and the world came into existence." Understanding and accepting this truth, we fulfill the first of the Ten Commandments, to know that God – the Creator – exists.

And as He alone gave each creation existence and its various properties, we know that Revelation at Sinai was His act. Since nothing else controls the universe, nothing but God is responsible for that miraculous event. God is the Creator, and the author of the Torah.

What is God? He is the sole cause of the universe and the One who gave us the Torah. Knowing this, we will find complete harmony between the natural world and Torah ideas. It is for this reason that our greatest Rabbis taught us to use the universe as a means for accepting religious ideas. If something is not witnessed by our senses, or reasonable to our minds, then it cannot be part of Torah. This demands that we do not accept other religions' and many Jews' beliefs in powers and forces other than God; this being the second of the Ten Commandments, not to accept other powers and gods. We do not accept such beliefs precisely because the universe has no evidence of such powers. The Torah instructs man in this fashion, to view the natural world and Torah in harmony: *"For God is the Governor of heaven above and the Earth below; there is nothing else (Deut. 4:39)."*

THE INCORPOREALITY OF GOD

God created the physical world. Therefore, He is something other than physical. Not being physical, He is bereft of all physical properties, including appearance, size, division, location, beginning, ending, weakness, hunger, tiredness, happiness, motion, and so on. Maimonides teaches the grave error in viewing God as physical. He states such an individual has no afterlife. This also explains why those 57,000 who looked into the Ark upon its return, assuming to “see” something in connection with God, were killed. Their idea of God was idolatrous in nature. They no longer deserved life. Similarly God commanded the Jews at Sinai not to ascend the mountain, lest they be killed for expressing a desire to “see” God. God is nothing imaginable. If we think He is, we are not thinking of God.

Therefore, statements like *“the Jewish soul is quite literally a part of God above”* (below) found in Tanya, are indeed heresy. This assumes God is subject to division:

*The second, uniquely Jewish soul is truly part of God above.
‘A part of God above’ is a quotation from Scripture (Job, 31:2).
The Alter Rebbe adds the word ‘truly’ to stress the literal meaning of these words. For, as is known, some verses employ hyperbolic language. For example, the verse describing ‘great and fortified cities reaching into the heavens’ is clearly meant to be taken figuratively, not literally. In order that we should not interpret the phrase ‘a part of God above’ in a similar manner, the Alter Rebbe adds the word ‘truly’, thus emphasizing that the Jewish soul is quite literally a part of God above. (“Lessons In Tanya,” published by Kehot)*

Suggesting that God is subject to “division” commits two grave errors: 1) it equates God with creation; 2) it assumes to know something about God. Two Torah verses teach otherwise: *“Man cannot know Me while alive (Exod. 33:20)”* told to Moses. God also told Isaiah, *“To what can you equate Me, and I will be similar? (Isaiah 40:25)”*. In both cases, God teaches that man cannot know God, nor is anything equivalent to God, in any manner. Therefore, suggesting God is subject to division denies God’s words to Isaiah that He is not similar to anything, and His words to Moses, that He cannot be known.

Maimonides discusses the incorporeality of God in his 13 Principles, as well as in his Mishneh Torah. I will quote the latter:

Maimonides' Laws of the Torah Fundamentals (1:7)

And since God has no body, nothing can occur to Him belonging to the occurrences of bodies, so that He might be divided and separated from another.

Maimonides' Laws of the Torah Fundamentals (1:11)

(God possesses) no joining or division.

Maimonides is clear: God is not subject to “division”. Hence, there cannot be a “part of God” in man. God is not divisible nor partakes of any physical character. Tanya, in this instance, denies the words of the Prophets, and corrupts the words of Job, 31:1,2:

A treaty have I made with my eye; for what shall I gaze at a virgin? And what portion shall I have with God above, and an inheritance of God on high?

Job declares he is upright, never gazing lustfully; for in doing so, one forfeits his “portion” with God. This is reasonable and in accordance with God’s system of Reward and Punishment. Tanya misinterprets “portion,” not as the end of the verse clarifies as “inheritance,” but carelessly ascribing “parts” to God. This is heresy. This also renders the verse unintelligible. This verse simply means that through sin, Job says he will lose the next world. Job is not describing God as having parts, God forbid. Job is describing his possible loss of an inheritance.

Additionally, Tanya’s claim that the Jewish soul is superior is both baseless and arrogant. For a soul is not “Jewish.” Even ‘people’ were not “Jewish” until year 2448 when Torah was accepted. Furthermore, our receipt of Torah did not change our souls. In fact, it was Abraham – the “gentile” – who received prophecy and God’s treaty of the new nation of Israel. No Jew today can lay claim to the unparalleled perfection of that gentile, Abraham. “Jewish” is merely a reference to one who adheres to Torah. If one’s parents follow Torah, but he follows Jesus, he has no share among Jews. And if one’s parents follow Jesus while he follows the Torah, then he equally shares Israel’s lot. Thus, it matters none who our parents are. Even Messiah descends from gentiles. God rewards and punishes based solely on the choices each person ultimately selects, not who our parents are. King Solomon says, “*Better is the day of death, than the day of birth (Ecclesiastes 7:1).*” For only after we die is our merit conclusive.

Lubavitch must be responsible to remove this heresy from the Tanya. “*For man is not righteous in the land, who does good and does not sin (Ecclesiastes 7:20).*” King Solomon – also a descendant of a gentile – teaches that we all err. Tanya’s author is not exempt. Even Moses sinned.

TZIMTZUM – GOD CONTRACTED HIMSELF?

As quoted above, “Man cannot understand me while alive” was God’s response to Moses after he requested to understand God’s essential nature. Man can grasp only those ideas that are connected to the universe. For example, a blind man can not comprehend the concept of color, or light. This is because the idea itself has no means of registering on the human mind unless connected with some sense perception. And although there is an abstract explanation of light, such an explanation makes no sense to man unless correlated to a sensual experience. This is simply due to our design. Similarly, man cannot grasp what resides inside a close, opaque, soundproof box, since none of our senses can penetrate that enclosure.

For this reason, man cannot know what God is, since God is completely removed from the physical universe. Thereby, man has no channel through which he might approach a understanding of God’s nature. All that we can know about God is what He revealed through the Torah, or by our study of creation. But this knowledge is not of God Himself. Rather, it is the knowledge of Him governing man, guiding the universe, and His manner of creation.

Therefore, the statement, “God contracted (tzimtzum) Himself in Creation” can only be understood metaphorically to mean that God revealed but a portion of His wisdom in the universe. That is, His creation reveals a portion of His knowledge to man, since physical creation embodies but a portion of His wisdom. God revealing a portion of His knowledge can be termed that He “contracted” or “minimized” the knowledge He revealed to man through creation.

But it is heretical to suggest that God occupies space, and had to physically contract Himself to make room for the physical universe.

REWARD AND PUNISHMENT

God’s exclusive role as Creator means there are no other forces that created the universe, maintain it, or reward and punish man. Despite this fundamental truth – that carries with its rejection the loss of the afterlife – Jewish organizations regularly advertise that they will check Mezuzahs, pray at the Western Wall and perform other acts, which they say guarantee fertility, ensure the matching of a marriage partner, or other successes...

provided you pay. Newer Jewish trends include rings or coins with certain inscriptions that also offer such guarantees. And these too have a price. Clearly, the intent is to be profitable, not to help those who don't have the means to pay. Perpetrators sin twice: 1) they commit an idolatrous infraction (*Deut. 18:14*), and 2) even though these practices are useless, in their own minds they refuse to help others without money. This is called "achzariyos," estrangement from other Jews. Maimonides (*Laws of Idolatry, 11:7*) refers to such practices as idolatrous, as they believe odd acts to be effective. Idolatry is akin to denying the entire Torah.

The claim of Mezuzah readers is that by reading a Mezuzah, one obtains true knowledge about the Mezuzah's owner. This is odd, since the identical text is written in all Mezuzahs. Nonetheless, the reader claims accuracy about your past, your present, and future events. Although they are liars, desperate individuals steep to them and their low tactics, grabbing onto any semblance of truth and retell what they are told, thereby granting validity in the hearts of others in need.

Others claim that faulty Mezuzahs are the cause of one's misfortune or sickness, thereby rendering God unjust, for His Torah exempts matters unknown to man (*Deut. 29:28*). Rightfully asked, why should man suffer, if his Mezuzah was unknowingly corroded by weather?

Over time, foolish people who believe fantastic things accepted and spread supposed accounts of kabbalistic Mezuzah readers who were the "real thing." Yet, no one ever witnessed such stories first hand. Lawsuits now continue against a prominent Israel-based Rabbi who swindled millions in his racket. When his Mezuzah "seeing abilities" failed to materialize, people wanted their money back. An additional concern is why Jewish publications promote these seers and organizations. They too err, preferring financial profit over upholding Torah values. They have no concern about misleading people and violating Avodah Zarah. And again, we hear nothing from Jewish leaders, which itself is a crime. We do not find Moses, Joshua, the Patriarchs are any Prophet succumbing to such idolatrous practices. So let us understand the fundamental problem.

Reward & Punishment - The Fundamental

Man is the cause of his actions. Nothing else compels him. (See Maimonides' Eighth Chapter printed at the end of this book.) This explains God's justice: He rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked. The belief that blessings, amulets or even religious items like Mezuzahs can shield one from God's punishment is foolish. If one is suffering from anything, he should first follow Maimonides' words that most suffering is self-inflicted: people make many poor choices. If he finds no error in his

choices, then he should review his religious acts; perhaps he has sinned and God is punishing him. And many times, one is not under God's Providence, so his misfortunes are mere chance.

Regarding this last possibility, one cannot be on guard to avoid it. And if the person does not correct his choices or his sins, then he has not addressed the two other causes of his suffering. In all three cases – self-infliction, Providence, and chance – no trinket, amulet or Rabbi's words will end the suffering, since the cause has not been addressed. Similarly, if one's arm is bleeding due to a knife that gashed him, his bleeding will not stop by bandaging his leg. The cause has not been addressed. What type of justice would it be, if God let a murderer off the hook since he wore a red bendel or did some other unrelated act? And if a righteous person was not wearing a red string, or didn't bake a key in a challah, is it just that God punishes him? These widely accepted Jewish practices cast severe accusations on God's justice.

If one believes a faulty Mezuzah or other nonsense to be effective forces, he has now violated Nichush. (*Maimonides, Laws of Star Worship 11:4*) For there is but one force in the universe: God.

In refutation of "Mezuzah seers," our Torah actually says "*Let us search and examine our ways and return to God (Lamentations 3:40).*" Here, the Torah teaches that Teshuvah (repentance) has nothing to do with Mezuzahs, but must occur after we examine our actions, realize our flaws, feel remorse, abandon our sins, and only then...God will forgive us. God's Torah contains only those ideas that are pleasing to our minds and hearts. "This makes sense" must be an intelligent person's response to this verse in Lamentations. God defines from where man might repent: he must recognize his flaws and resign himself never to act this way again. Only with such an intelligent realization of that which destroys us, and our abandonment of such sins, does it make any sense that God should pardon our sins, draw close to us to Him, and remove our sufferings.

If we count the sins involved herein, we find these: lying (to others about these readings), stealing (people pay for these false readings), idolatry, Chillul Hashem (since the seer represents this as Torah philosophy), Lifney Ivare (misleading), gaava (haughtiness, as in claiming knowledge of the unknown), distortion of the mitzvah of Mezuzah, denial of God's system of Reward and Punishment, and maybe more. These are the worst of sins. For Shima, which is written in the Mezuzah, is the Torah portion teaching of God's Unity, one of the most fundamental commands, and these sinners turn it into some selfish, magical item. Rashi writes, "*Do not seek knowledge of the future, but accept all that happens with perfection, and then you will be with God and among His portion (Deut. 18:13).*" Seek-

ing future knowledge, one is no longer “with God or part of His portion.” This is because God created the world with cause and effect, and free will, precisely so man uses his mind to learn “how” the world operates, so as to procure his good, and avoid evil. Had God desired Mezuzahs to offer this knowledge, He would not have prohibited this Mezuzah-reading practice, and He also would not have granted us intelligence to discern what actions lead to success or failure. Intelligence would be useless if all our answers are magically provided.

But as God gave us intelligence, and as a Rabbi taught, even called it by His name (Tzelem “Elohim”), we understand that God desires we use our intellects. This is how we are “perfect with God”...we follow His will that we use intelligence.

If a house catches fire, it will burn to the ground with all of its Mezuzahs. If the Mezuzah cannot protect itself, how can it protect man?

ALL MIRACLES WERE PART OF CREATION

As Maimonides teaches, time itself is a creation. Thus, God is above time. God’s perfection and His complete knowledge dictate that God knew at the very outset in Creation when specific miracles would need to unfold to assist man. Maimonides explains (*Ethics 5:6*) that with this knowledge, God orchestrated precise laws, perfectly timed to unfold and enact all miracles at the proper second. For example, miracles dealing with Earth were created in the Earth’s laws in its day of creation. All miracles dealing with water, such as the splitting of the Reed Sea and the splitting of the Jordan, were created in the laws governing water on its day of creation. This rule applies to all matter created during the six days of creation. As matter was created, specific miracles destined to unfold in the future were built into those natural laws during the six days. This principle attests to God’s supreme and complete knowledge of all events which are to unfold throughout all time. To assume that God performed miracles only “at the time” in history assumes that God could not anticipate the exact moment the miracle would need to be performed. It assumes ignorance on God’s part. It also assumes that God exists in time, as people. This is false.

Maimonides’ explanation on the mishna above demands that man attribute complete knowledge to the Creator. Man must affirm God’s wisdom and ability to create matter and natural law in such a way that specific,

short term alterations would occur at exact, defined moments throughout time. The question arises from the text of the mishna:

Ten things were created at dusk on the sixth day of creation, the mouth of the Earth (which swallowed Korach), the mouth of the well (during the 40 years in the desert), the mouth of the donkey (the account of Bilam), the rainbow, the Manna, Aaron's staff, the Shamir (the worm used to miraculously cut stones) the Hebrew letters, the inscription on the Ten Commandments, the Ten Commandments (the actual sapphire tablets) and some say even Mazikim, the burial site of Moses, the ram of Abraham, and some say even the first tongs (metal instruments used to forge other instruments).

The question is, why weren't these miracles also created in their respective days like all other miracles? What is the concept taught that they were created at dusk on day 6 of creation?

Understanding the mark of distinction held by these few miracles will lead to the answer. So how are these miracles different than all others? I believe the distinction is that these miracles incorporate that, which is antithetical to the substance in which it resides.

Take for example, the mouth of the rock which gave forth water. Rock is a purely arid substance – water is the opposite. The donkey is a most brute creature; yet it spoke, implying intelligence. The first tongs by definition are a contradiction: how does one make the “first” tongs, if there are no other tongs with which to forge that first one? The shamir worm is a tiny insect, a weak creature; yet it had the capacity to split huge stones.

In contrast, the splitting of the Reed Sea did not incorporate a direct contradiction in water's nature. The Torah says the water “piled in heaps.” One of the properties of water is surface tension, which can be seen in the small beads of dew on plants at daybreak. This means water possesses the behavior of piling up. Thus, the large piles that collected during the miracle of the Reed Sea were not a contradiction to water's nature. When Joshua prayed for the sun and moon to stand still, this motion of heavenly spheres (and all objects) is not a contradiction to the object.

So why didn't God incorporate inherent contradictory miracles into their respective days of Creation? What is the purpose of their delay until dusk? The answer is that it was not a ‘delay’, but it was an impossibility for these few miracles to inhere in a substance, before the substance became complete, with all its laws. I will explain.

As an example, had God brought stone into existence in a state containing moisture, the definition of stone would be different than what is needed for an inhabitable planet. At first, God had to create substances, which are defined as how they first come into existence. This is what took place on each of the six days of creation, i.e., matter coming into existence in distinct forms, each containing specific, essential properties. Once a certain substance exists in a desired form with its essential properties, only then can God make aberrations in its nature, without altering the actual substance in general. God desired that stone exists – this means an arid, hard substance. So God first brought stone into existence as a dry, hard element, and not as a moist object, which would not be stone. Subsequent to its creation, God can make aberrations. This is what is meant by “dusk.” Meaning, first, God defined matter by giving each substance unique properties. This occurred during the 6 days. Only subsequent to the completion of all substances, could God incorporate a “suspension” of those properties in a few items. But suspension means altering that which “already” exists.

Certain miracles were needed for future events, without which catastrophe would occur. As it is God’s wish to benefit man, the suspension of a few laws was essential to preserve mankind. Therefore God made concessions to man (implied by making these miracles at the “last moment possible”) by altering laws of created matter.

In summary, all miracles were built into creation. Miracles on the whole do not contain contradictions in material substance. Rather, they are multiple forces operating simultaneously, like wind and locusts, joining to create the Plague of Locusts. Due to the need for substance to maintain essential, structural properties, matter needed to come into existence as a defined entity. But since at certain times in the future man required God’s mercy to continue, like accessing water in the desert, and as such merciful acts (miracles) conflicted with natural law, these aberrations had to be made, but only once standard laws of nature were established. Subsequent to rock being created solid and arid, so mankind might have a sturdy terrain to live upon, God could then take an individual stone and create in its laws a contradictory deviation to assist man. But had God created stone as a liquid substance to allow man water in the desert, all of Earth’s stones too would be liquid, rendering Earth uninhabitable. Thus, God created “stone” as hard and arid. Subsequently, on day 6, He changed the laws governing a specific stone.

TWO TABLETS: AN EXTRAORDINARY IDEA

The Three Weeks commences with the 17th of Tammuz and focuses us on the tragedies contributing to this day's sorrowful nature. Talmud Taanis 28b records Moses' smashing of the Tablets as one of these tragedies. As he descended from Sinai with those two sapphire Tablets bearing God's laws, he encountered the Jews sinning with the Gold Calf. He responded by breaking the Tablets. A wise Rabbi explained that he did so, lest the Jews increase their idolatrous behavior and deify these Divinely inspired objects even more than the Gold Calf. Moses broke the Tablets to eliminate this possibility. God agreed. We might think the service of the Gold Calf as more worthy of making the list of tragedies. But as a friend suggested, sin is not a "loss," but a waste. A true "loss" is the removal of something of value or a failure to realize a gain. That loss was the Tablets. The removal of the positive is loss, not the engagement in the negative, the latter being "harm." Similarly, we mourn the loss of the Temple and not the idolatry or enmity between Jews that precipitated those two losses, although the latter are evils for which we must repent.

To comprehend the loss of the Tablets we must understand 1) what they were and 2) why God gave them to us. The indispensable need for the Tablets is derived from God's granting to Moses a second set of Tablets after he smashed the first set.

What I will suggest herein astonished me, but I feel Maimonides' words point to this discovery:

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"And the tables were the work of God" (Exod. xxxii. 16), that is to say, they were the product of nature, not of art: for all natural things are called "the work of the Lord," e.g., "These see the works of the Lord" (Ps. cvii. 24): and the description of the several things in nature, as plants, animals, winds, rain, etc., is followed by the exclamation, "O Lord, how manifold are thy works!" (Psalms, civ.24). Still more striking is the relation between God and His creatures, as expressed in the phrase, "The cedars of Lebanon, which he hath planted" (ib. 16): the cedars being the product of nature, and not of art, are described as having been planted by the Lord. Similarly we explain.

"And the writing was the writing of God" (Exod. xxxii. 16): the relation in which the writing stood to God has already been defined in the words "written with the finger of God" (ibid xxxi. 18), and the meaning of this phrase is the same as that of "the work of thy

fingers” (Psalms viii. 4) this being said of the heavens: of the latter it has been stated distinctly that they were made by a word, “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made” (ibid xxxiii. 6). Hence you learn that in the Bible, the creation of a thing is figuratively expressed by terms denoting “word” and “speech.” The same thing, which according to one passage has been made by the “word,” is represented in another passage as made by the “finger of God.” The phrase “written by the finger of God” is therefore identical with “written by the word of God,” and if the latter phrase had been used, it would have been equal to “written by the will and desire of God.”

Onkelos adopted in this place a strange explanation, and rendered the words literally, “written by the finger of the Lord.” He thought that “the finger” was a certain thing ascribed to God; so that “the finger of the Lord” is to be interpreted in the same way as “the mountain of God” (Exod. iii. 1), “the rod of God” (ib. iv. 20), that is, as being an instrument created by Him, which by His will engraved the writing on the tables. I cannot see why Onkelos preferred this explanation. It would have been more reasonable to say, “written by the word of the Lord,” in imitation of the verse “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made.” Or was the creation of the writing on the tables more difficult than the creation of the stars in the spheres? As the latter were made by the direct will of God, not by means of an instrument, the writing may also have been produced by His direct will, not by means of an instrument. You know what the Mishnah says, “Ten things were created on Friday in the twilight of the evening,” and “the writing” is one of the ten things. This shows how generally it was assumed by our forefathers that the writing of the tables was produced in the same manner as the rest of the creation, as we have shown in our Commentary on the Mishnah (Ethics 5:6).

Understanding Maimonides

We must pay attention to Maimonides’ words. He opens with “*And the tables were the work of God.*” His intent is to first discuss the Tablets – not their writing. He first explains how the Tablets were made via “nature,” meaning by God. They are not “works” or “art.” By definition, if natural objects are used in a new human construction or formation, like wood-working or paintings, we call this “carpentry” and “art” respectively. But if something is formed undisturbed by human influence, as leaves are formed with veins and trees with bark, this we call “nature” and not art.

Therefore, when addressing the Tablets, Maimonides writes, “they were the product of nature, not of art: for all natural things are called *“the work of the Lord.”* This means that the two Tablets formed naturally, but independently from the rest of the sapphire at Sinai that formed as a unified block. That is quite amazing. We will return to what this means. But they were not works of carpentry or art. Remain mindful of this distinction.

Maimonides then addresses the Tablets’ “writing”: *“And the writing was the writing of God.”* He states that although the Torah says the writing was “written by the finger of the Lord,” this writing was no less natural than the Tablets themselves, or God’s natural creation of the heavens. He disputes Onkelos’ suggestion that a tool was used to form these letters, and insists that those letters were created without a tool, just as God created the heavens, by His will alone and without any tool.

But focus your attention on Maimonides’ insistence that the writing was “natural” and not an act of carpentry or art. What does he mean by this? You must know that Maimonides bases himself on the verse that references both the Tablets and the writing: *“And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God (Exod. xxxii. 16).”* Maimonides teaches that this verse is not redundant. Not only were the Tablets a natural phenomenon, but so too was the writing. This is essential to our discussion. We must understand the distinction between writing that is natural and writing that is art.

God communicated Ten Commandments. Shortly afterwards they would be committed to the Sefer Torah Moses would write. Therefore, for what purpose did God create the Tablets with the same record of this communication? Is this not a redundancy?

Let’s briefly recount history. God orchestrated Revelation at Sinai. The nation heard great sounds. Moses ascends Mt. Sinai; he remains in commune with God forty days and nights and then he receives the Tablets from God. While still on Sinai, God informs Moses that the Jews sinned with the Gold Calf and that He will destroy the nation. Moses prays and God refrains from destroying the Jews. Before Moses descends the mountain we read these words, *“And Moses turned and descended from the mountain, and the two Tablets of Testimony were in his hands; Tablets written from both sides[I], from this side and that were they written. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, were they, explained on the Tablets (Exod. 32:15,16).”* Why is Moses’ descent interrupted with this detailed description of the Tablets? Why was this description of the Tablets not included earlier (31:18) where we read *“And God gave to Moses – when He concluded to speak with him on Mount Sinai – two Tablets of testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God?”* This division of the

Tablets' details into two Torah portions requires explanation, as does the term Tablets of Testimony: "testimony" to what exactly? And we wonder why "two" tablets are needed. Could not a larger tablet contain all the words; could not smaller letters accomplish the same message on a single tablet?

Maimonides also cited the Mishna in Avos: "*Ten things were created on [the first] Friday in the twilight of the evening,*" and '*the writing' is one of the ten things.*" Maimonides wishes to draw our attention to the necessity for God to have created the Tablets and their writing, at the end of the six days of Creation. What is his message?

In Exodus 34:1 God instructs Moses to hew a second set of Tablets and He says He will write on them the matters that "were" on the first tablets. Why doesn't God say He will write on them the matters that "He wrote" on the first Tablets? He uses a less descriptive term.

I also wonder if there was more to Moses' breaking of the Tablets than already explained.

Revelation

Revelation on Sinai was intended to remove all doubt, and for all time, that a Supreme Intelligence exists, created all, sustains all and communicates with man, and that there is only one Revealed Religion. God desired that this message would not end at Sinai's closure. A friend suggested that the Tablets were intended to be an everlasting "testament" (Tablets of Testimony). This explains why upon God's completion of His communication with Moses atop Sinai, we read, "And God gave to Moses – when He *concluded* to speak with him on Mount Sinai – two Tablets of testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God." That is, once God *concluded* His Revelation, He desired an *everlasting* testimony of this Revelation. God did not desire the "conclusion" of the event to conclude the lesson. Thus, "testimony" appears in this verse and not later in the second description of the Tablets. In order that this testimony is everlasting, the words are embedded in a permanent object – stone. So "stone" is also in this verse.

But cannot anyone write words in stone? Of what proof, then, are these Tablets? The testimony God intended is to the truth that He alone is the source of the universe. We read that these Tablets were "written with the finger of God." Maimonides said this was a "natural" phenomenon. Here now is the amazing idea and how these Tablets "testified"...

Astonishing Tablets

These miraculous Tablets contained something not found elsewhere in nature: naturally formed letters, sentences and commandments! Imagine a tree with branches that grew in the form of words, or leaves where the veins spelled-out sentences. That is how astonishing these Tablets were. As God formed these unique Tablets over time at the end of Creation He also formed the “writing” simultaneously, and naturally. These commands were not subsequently ‘carved’ into the Tablets, but they literally grew with the stones as the stones formed through nature: “And the writing was the writing of God.” Maimonides said above this means a natural phenomenon. This explains why God tells Moses that He will write on the second Tablets the matters that “were” on the first set, and not matters that He “wrote” the first set. For God did not “write” on the first Tablets. Yes, the words appeared “written” as the verse states[2], but not through an act of one thing carving into another, resulting in writing. Again, the verse does not say, “I wrote” on the first Tablets, but rather, “were” on the first Tablets. The letters in the first Tablets formed simultaneously with the Tablets themselves. This is an amazing phenomenon found nowhere else. Perhaps the natural grain of sapphire formed of the letters and verses of Ten Commandments. Anyone viewing these Tablets would realize the writing was a natural phenomenon, a miracle, and not possibly a subsequent etching, as the Tablets were solid. Perhaps the writing was ‘inside’ these translucent stones with no access to its inner portion and thereby testified to its miraculous nature. (Writing internally is impossible.) Perhaps for this reason, Maimonides includes in this chapter his critique of Onkelos’ suggestion that the stone Tablets were carved through an instrument.

The Need

What consideration demanded that God create such a phenomenon? Although the words appearing on the Tablets were duplicated in the Torah scroll, it was not the words per se that demanded the Tablets’ existence, but the *manner* of existence of these words. This natural formation of letters in stone is God’s message that He created both; 1) the natural world, and 2) the Torah. This is needed, for many people view nature as devoid of God’s creation and rule. Man becomes accustomed to phenomena by his very nature. The sun rises and sets; seasons change, and species beget their own kind. We take all for granted, thinking all occurs due to “nature” – not God. But with the existence of naturally formed Torah commandments in natural objects, we can no longer maintain a view of

an unguided world. Nature is finally understood to be the expression of the Torah's Author. Torah and science are complimentary and have the same source. How can one ignore a natural object that has Torah commands naturally imprinted, and not the work of art? This was the lesson of the Tablets.

Therefore, the Torah scroll's commands sufficed for the 'content' of His words, but not for an everlasting 'testament' which was revealed through natural stones containing intelligent words. We can no longer separate nature from God. His very words are embedded in these stones in a natural manner.

Why didn't God give the Tablets to Adam the First? Perhaps Adam had no need for them. God's original plan was that man use intelligence to discover God. The beauty and precision of natural law is sufficient for a person following a life of wisdom. However, at this era in mankind's development, these Tablets were intended to offer mankind a new leap in our wisdom of God. The ability for nature to produce such a phenomenon would offer us tremendous appreciation for the Creator of this nature. They were to be viewed and not placed in an Ark.

But as these Tablets were being delivered, the Jews sinned with the Gold Calf. The extraordinary lesson of the Tablets would not be realized with those Jews. These first Tablets required destruction. However, a lesson was required: the nation must now have a reminder of what they lost. God instructed Moses to hew a new set; their tablet form would not come about naturally, but by human craft. God also "wrote" the matters on this second set; again, no longer a natural phenomenon of words that were part of their natural design. A gap now existed between the Jews and God. The intended, intimate relationship that could have been, was now lost. To emphasize this break from God, these Tablets must be stored out of sight; in an ark. Perhaps this explains why King Solomon hid the Ark and no other vessel. He reiterated this message of "distance" between God and the nation through digging caverns to eventually hide the Tablets and the Ark.

*Ten things were created on [the first] Friday in the twilight of the evening.
(Ethics 5:6)*

As natural law needed to tolerate these unique Tablets, they had to be planned with the creation of the substance of sapphire. This could not be created later, for the very blueprint of how sapphire forms must contain natural laws that would generate stones with embedded communication. As this would be a "property" of sapphire's substance, it must be set at the time that God endowed sapphire with its formative properties – during Creation.

And Moses turned and descended from the mountain, and the two Tablets of Testimony were in his hands; Tablets written from both sides, from this side and that were they written. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, were they, explained on the Tablets.

Why is Moses' descent interrupted with this detailed description of the Tablets? Why was this description of the Tablets not included earlier (31:18) where we read, "And God gave to Moses...two Tablets of testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God?" We said earlier that the first account expresses the purpose of the Tablets – testimony. Thus, we learn that the testament is in durable stone, and that the testament is a unique phenomenon. But when Moses is about to descend to the sinful Jews, we are told of the Tablet's nature that conflicts with their idolatry: the Tablets were "God's work," intended precisely to fend off idolatry. This aspect is relevant in connection with the idolatrous Jews and therefore not mentioned until its relevance surfaces – at Moses' descent towards the Jews now performing idolatry.

We now appreciate the loss of the Tablets: our prospect of attaining greater knowledge of God was lost. This is the ultimate tragedy. What an amazing sight they must have been! Perhaps in the future this will be the means by which God will make His name fill the Earth. For we do not know if the Tablets were the only natural elements in which God embedded natural communication: perhaps others will be revealed. And as this was God's will at Sinai, perhaps in the messianic era He will unveil this again to a more fitting generation.

[1] Ibn Ezra rejects the notion that the letters Mem Sofit and Samech (O-shaped letters) had miraculous center pieces floating. The Tablets' letters were not hollowed from one side completely through to the other, according to Ibn Ezra. They were simply written on two faces of the stones, as the stones were thick. Alternatively, I suggest the letters were internal facets in the translucent sapphire, seen on "both sides," like a crack can be seen from any side of a diamond. Furthermore, God does not perform impossibilities, so to have legible writing passing through a stone, with the exact wording seen on the opposite side, is not possible. God can do miracles, but not impossibilities. Similarly, God cannot create a circle that is a square.

[2] Exod. 32:15

ASTONISHED

We read in Isaiah 6:3 that the angels *“called one to the other and said, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy is God of hosts, the entire universe is filled with His honor.’”* To mimic a sentiment of those perfect beings, we repeat these words in our Kedusha twice daily. We also stand all day on Yom Kippur, again, an attempt to target the perfection of the angels, who metaphorically “stand” as they have no knee joints.

We understand that angels are not physical beings; we know not what they truly are. But in order to express our desire to reach perfection, we mimic those perfected beings. Of course, we must ask what perfection is expressed in the angels’ first “calling to one another,” and then subsequently responding together in praise of the Creator. Why must one call to the other “first?”

An interesting parallel is located in the source for our “Zimun” blessing, which precedes our Birchat Hamazone. The Talmud teaches a dispute as to the source for Zimun. One view is the verse, *“Praise God with me, and we will exalt His name as one.”* The other verse is, *“For the name of God I call, [we shall] give greatness to our God.”* In either verse, one person is calling to the others, so as to praise God together, paralleling the angels. Thus, we find a theme in the Torah. A “theme” meaning that which is of great enough importance that it deserves God’s repetition. So what is this importance of one being calling to another?

I believe the lesson here is to emphasize the astounding nature of the Creator. Blessing or praising God is evoked by our recognition of His exclusive role as the Creator of the universe. This universe is so stupendous, it requires a Designer of the greatest wisdom. We are convinced of a “Source” for these grand galaxies and billions of stars, as well as all Earthly marvels. And when we realize how great the Creator of all these must be...we cannot remain silent. We must communicate this amazement! Much like the sentiment expressed when seeing a shooting star: “Did you see that?!” is the sentiment expressed by both man and angel. Not that angels experience human amazement; nonetheless, they too perceive God’s majesty and give great honor and praise the Creator. They too are created, and realize the necessity of a Creator. Both intelligent creations – angel and man – recognize God through the universe, to the degree that evokes praise. And both creations call to their peers.

These verses teach us that this response of “how amazing the universe is” is an essential idea. It forms a theme in Torah, explaining its repetition. Man cannot simply recognize the Creator, but he must become so overwhelmed by God, that this “calling to another” is the only acceptable reaction when recognizing God. Any less a reaction reflects a flaw in our

makeup, and in our values. With this in mind, we should ask ourselves what occupies our time, speech and interests most; what do we find most riveting? If we are not awestruck at creation and wisdom, but find ourselves pulled more towards other involvements, we are missing out on that which can truly captivate us and fill us with extreme excitement and satisfaction. We all seek happiness. This lesson shares with man what captivates the angels, and what will captivate us. We are to mimic the angels, since we too share their capacity of attaining this amazement.

It is unfortunate that we are derailed from this pursuit, as society and the media entice us with success, fame and pleasures. It is rare that an individual stops, and questions the actions of the masses. We typically assume the masses have it right. But God says they do not. Our sense of reality is distorted: we follow the beliefs and actions of others with no attempt to discern if they are correct. We ignore what God teaches, since our peers do otherwise, and we might fall from their graces if we walk to the beat of our own drum.

If however we are brave enough to accept that God's words are true, and we invest more time in our Torah and science studies...we will do more than simply recognize God's great wisdom: we will be astonished.

CAN GOD DO ANYTHING?

How would you answer someone who asks the question, "Can God do anything?" If we say yes, we arrive at great problems. For in truth, God cannot be unjust, He cannot destroy himself, He cannot make Himself physical, He cannot make my birthday a different day than it was, he cannot place something in two different locations simultaneously, and many other impossibilities. In other words, God being limited is a truth. Most people feel limitation in respect to God is an imperfection.

To correct the error, we must attribute "perfection" to God, under which all other attributes must fall. We do not start with the infantile notion that God can do anything, even impossibilities. This latter belief is the source of the error: it is carried over from youth and has gone unchecked. But realizing the problem, one must now ascribe limit to God, and this limit is a perfection.

Imagine a judge who can never accuse wrongly, and in each and every one of his cases he proves the innocent as innocent, and finds the guilt in the guilty. Would we not attest to the greatness of such a judge, as he is

flawless in his judgments? Would we not say that although he is limited to finding the truth in every case, and cannot err, that he is more perfect than a judge who does make mistakes? The same applies to God.

God cannot make Himself physical, nor kill Himself, nor judge falsely, nor punish the righteous, and we say in all these cases that this attests to His perfection. Limitations like these prove God's perfection.

A LESSON IN DESIGN

Observe a leaf. Do you see a design...a unique arrangement of any kind? What structure is formed by merging rivers, or our veins and arteries? And what about a tree's branches? See a pattern yet?

Each generation is caused by the previous. Here too the progression of generations grows in branch fashion like all the above: preceding generations are fewer, just as lower branches grow fewer and fewer as one draws back finally to the single trunk. A branch structure is also found in categories or knowledge. Each category is generated by fewer categories above it.

In all of these creations, we witness a duplication in design: a main stem that branches off, and exponentially branches further. Why does this duplication exist? Why is *this* unique pattern duplicated? Whether we view physical entities, events or causes, or the structure of human knowledge, we witness the same, identical pattern. By itself, it is quite intriguing. But why must this be? Why did God permeate so much of His creation with *this* design?

If we view the solar system, it appears identical to the planetary orbits of electrons revolving around the nucleus of an atom. In both cases, there is a primary object and other objects that rely on it: planets would fly away into space without the sun, and all Earthly life would perish. And without the nature of electrons and nuclei, matter could not exist. The heart of man is the same: all limbs rely on it for blood.

Taking this notion of "dependency" to another level, man needs food, water, air and sunlight. Plants and animals – man's sustenance – require the same. Whatever man needs to live are themselves also in need. Why must man be dependent? Why must man's needs themselves be dependent? Rabbi Bachya ibn Paquda (*author of "Duties of the Hearts"*) among

others, refers to the design witnessed in creation. He states that we need not see the author (referring to God) to know His existence:

...it is enough to see the manuscript; the inferences drawn about the author from his work, from his handwriting style, serve us instead of our actually meeting him. We may conclude with certainty – based on the consistent style and uniformity of the manuscript – that there existed one writer...a work written by two different authors would be marked by diversity, a lack of uniformity, inconsistency of style, and would fluctuate in quality and character.

Reading this, and reflecting on the images above, we understand the metaphor as referring to God. We understand what he means by “uniformity of style” as seen throughout creation. But I wonder: is there more to this design than only pointing to the “Author?” Is there a message in addition to there being one Designer, that we can derive from these specific branch and orbit patterns? What might be the most fundamental lessons that God wished to impart through repeating, natural patterns? Do the patterns have a hint?

Maimonides organized the fundamentals of Judaism, located in his Yesodei HaTorah 1:1-3. He commences with the two most primary fundamentals:

I. The foundations of foundations, and the pillar of wisdom is to know that there exists a First Cause (existence). And He caused all existences. And all that is found from the heavens and Earth and what is between them do not exist, except due to the truth of that First Cause.

II. And if you might entertain the notion that He would not exist, nothing else would be able to exist.

III. And if you might entertain the notion that nothing else would exist, except for Him, He alone would exist. And He would not be eliminated through the elimination of all other existences. For all existences need Him, and He, Blessed be He, does not need them...and not one of them. Therefore, His truth is not as the truth of anything else.

Lesson 1: A First Cause

In all our observations, we witness a root, or singular starting point that branches out, or from which veins emanate. This is intended – in my opinion – to replicate Creation, and point to a Creator. That is, from One God (the root) did all creations emanate (branches). This is Maimonides’ first fundamental. From one tree root, from one leaf’s stem, from one initial lightning bolt...branch out numerous offshoots. This is creation: one Cause that generated all other existences.

God made nature into a physical metaphor for fundamental ideas He desired to teach man. Foremost, God desires that mankind recognize the most primary lessons: the truth of a First Cause from which everything emanates. This lesson is successfully illustrated through its repetition all around us; physical creations, how events work, and even how knowledge is structured, remind us of this fundamental. *“The fear of God is the beginning of knowledge (Proverbs 1:7).”* Therefore, since God desires man to obtain knowledge, He placed His “footprints” in the sands and creations of Earth. He publicizes His presence and identity as Creator of all...the source and root. But there is another lesson. In all cases, the root is a ‘source’, which delivers blood, water, or energy through all its branches. This is the second fundamental idea...

Lesson 2: Dependency

The second thing we can say about this design is that a life source (rivers; a leaf’s veins; a tree’s nutritive branches; veins carrying blood) delivers its sustaining properties through a path that exponentially divides. Even lightning is delivering necessary energy; starts at one point and branches out as it approaches Earth’s surface. We see this concept in atoms, and in our solar system as well. A central force – a source – is what all else depends on for “continued existence.”

This is Maimonides second fundamental. Nothing can exist without God. Not only is God the First Cause, but also He is the sustainer of all existence, just as the veins and branches deliver sustenance. We must not be deceived that once a creation comes into existence, it might continue independent of God. Not so. The very truth that everything required creation – a transition from nonexistence into existence – proves that by nature, nothing should exist. It is only by God’s will that all came into being, and that all continues. Nature once again displays a fundamental. Nature embodies this abstract concept that all creations rely on God, through the very real observation that all existences are dependent existences: be it on food, sun, water, or air.

God created man as a dependent being to constantly remind us that our very existence depends on Him. Through our daily dependence on water, and food, and our constant dependence on air, we are to arrive at the higher lesson that we are dependent on God for our lives.

God permeated our world with these two reminders:

- 1) all existences require a cause, or root;
- 2) all existences require His maintenance.

If we take these messages to heart, we become truly indebted to God. We realize our place in the universe. And this indebtedness should fuel our dedication to His will, to follow Torah. That is the final objective of all these lessons. It is not for God that we dedicate ourselves to Him, but for us. God needs nothing, as Maimonides said, “For all existences need Him, and He, Blessed be He, does not need them...and not one of them.” God gave us hints all around that our life’s goal is to recognize His exclusive role as Creator and maintainer.

1) A First Cause, and 2) the dependency of all existences on that Cause, are precisely Maimonides’ two most primary fundamentals. And it is these two fundamentals that we witness in creation. If these two ideas are so fundamental, it is plausible that God permeated these lessons into creation. For it is creation’s purpose to give evidence of the Creator. God created the world to testify to His existence. “*The heavens speak the honor of God,*” said King David. Of course the heavens cannot speak, but this means they “convey” God’s wisdom, His honor. Now, what is His honor? As Maimonides said, it is that He is the First Cause, and that upon Him do all existences rely. We learn that creation is to point man towards a knowledge of the Creator, and that upon Him do all existences rely for their continued life. Thus, we might safely assume that God embedded these lessons in all matter.

It is quite amazing that the two lessons Maimonides deemed most primary exactly parallel two prominent designs in creation.

HOW GOD TEACHES MAN

God informed Moses of his error in his perception of his role, afflicting him near death. (*Exod. 4:24*) This taught Moses that he was “dispensable” in God’s plan to redeem the Jews.

Why does God teach man by way of subtle indication, in place of outright clarity? We also learn that when Solomon was made king at the age of twelve, God appeared to him saying, “*Ask what I shall give to you.*” (*Kings I, 3:5*) Solomon then asked for wisdom, as he realized God would not make such an offer for that which he may procure through natural channels. God was “indicating” that Solomon now had the opportunity to obtain something no other man could: “instantaneous wisdom.” Solomon responded, requesting wisdom to judge the people. But God might have simply given him wisdom outright! What need was there for this method wherein God does not openly reveal His message?

Additionally, God’s very Torah is written quite cryptically, and the very existence of an “Oral Law” too teaches that not all wisdom is readily available, on the surface. (The Oral law elucidates the Written Law) King Solomon writes that he wrote his metaphorical Proverbs so man might “*Understand proverb and poetic expression, the words of the wise and their riddles.*” (*Proverbs, 1:6*) Furthermore, God gives man prophecy in the form of riddles. We may learn from God’s “cryptic method” of teaching man, what I feel, is essential knowledge, about our “attainment” of knowledge.

God does not desire that mankind simply “hear His word,” and respond, without thinking. For this reason, Revelation at Sinai was a one-time event, “*A great voice that did not continue.*” (*Deut. 5:19*) This outright, undeniable proof of God’s existence was necessary. However, not being present at Sinai ourselves, future generations would require intelligence to derive this proof of God’s existence. God does not wish to create miracles always, and thus writes, “*A great voice that did not continue.*” Miracles are not God’s plan for mankind’s approach to Him. Maimonides also teaches that our primary command to love God is achieved by studying the universe. (*Laws of Torah Fundamentals, 2:2*) Why must this be?

The Study of Reality

God’s plan for mankind is to observe the universe, and with his intellect, understand the nature of things. Study of God’s created world and Torah is man’s sole objective. To enable Moses to accomplish this, God did not communicate his sin in words, but displayed his sin – through an event – which afforded Moses the opportunity to “study God’s relationship to the world.” Without an event, Moses would have lost the

opportunity to engage his mind in discovering a new truth on his own. Moses, seeing his own debilitating illness, discovered a new idea: man is not essential for God to carry out His plan. But this was only discovered through witnessing “how God relates to man.” Events are essential for man’s observation, and ultimately, his study.

Throughout the Torah, God teaches man by way of created events. Through these events, punishments, rewards, miracles, and so on, God displays to mankind sufficient ‘evidence’ for man to approach God through gaining increased knowledge of God, specifically “through how He works.” To simply read in books, or to hear God informing us of His methods, man forfeits the realization observed through witnessing reality “in action.” Only by witnessing the very real operation of the world, does man acknowledge a “reality” to God’s methods.

God created the physical world precisely to bestow mankind with a “laboratory” in which to study God’s knowledge. This applies not just to the physical creations, but also to the metaphysical. God also created laws of justice, laws of Divine Providence, miracles, and many other realities.

Since God desires that man possess intellect, it is clear that we are to engage this intellect. In order that man comprehend some amount of God’s infinite knowledge, God created the physical and metaphysical worlds. However, these alone cannot contain the full depth of God’s knowledge. How then will man continually expand his knowledge, gaining greater truths about God? It is only through intelligent study, that greater knowledge may be observed.

Creation’s Limitation

The physical and metaphysical worlds are limited in scope. Something other than mere, physical senses are required to penetrate further. This is where the intellect comes in. It examines, deduces, induces, and unravels endless layers of God’s wisdom. The Torah as well is cryptic. Written words cannot contain all of God’s knowledge. Therefore, Torah was written in a manner that draws the mind in, conveying hints and subtleties that enable further truths to reveal themselves. We will never reach God’s complete knowledge. However, intelligence enables our continued growth in knowledge. Thus, God created an event for Moses to grow in his knowledge too.

Let us use the example of water. What knowledge of God may be contained in such a simple substance? Using our senses alone, all we may derive is its form, color, behavior, temperature, moistness, and taste. If we stop there, we learn little about God. I say “little about God,” and not “water,” as all creation targets man’s knowledge of God, and not the cre-

ation in itself. Our goal is to arrive at a love of God. Therefore, when our knowledge ends with the object studied, in truth, we have not learned the true nature of this creation. Knowledge of creation means knowledge of “its relationship to God.” To derive knowledge of God from His creations, we must seek reasons for His creations, culminating in an appreciation for His designs.

Let us further examine water, now including deductive and inductive reasoning. Water is plentiful, it conforms to any shape, and it flows. We wonder why this must be part of God’s plan. Including God in our analysis, we may derive knowledge of His kindness, through His creation. We know that water is essential to all life, but it is not found readily in all areas. As mankind, plants and animals require water, we realize water’s characteristic of a “fluid form” teamed with gravity and Earth’s topography (mountains and valleys) allow water to “flow”: it may reach distant areas, although not originating there. All members of mankind may obtain water, even though it does not originate close by. It is malleable, so it is not obstructed from reaching distant communities: it may travel through very narrow paths, reaching all life forms. Water contains oxygen, providing another essential component. It also possesses no taste: since it is essential for all creatures, and an unfavorable taste would preclude many from ingesting this life source. Water is clear: enabling man and animal to detect and procure aquatic life for food and other needs.

This is but a brief glimpse into water, but it serves to illustrate how our physical senses alone cannot avail us to greater knowledge of God. We must use reasoning to appreciate the depth of knowledge contained in creation. *“Behold the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You” (Kings I, 8:27).*

Matter and senses alone, respectively, cannot uncover all of God’s knowledge. They are limited in scope. By definition this is the nature of all physical creation. However, God designed the universe precisely in a manner that human reason is required to understand God. Thus, God creates events through which, if we use our minds, we may learn. Moses too was afforded this opportunity through that event.

Physical Man Interacting with Metaphysical Knowledge

Knowledge is not physical. It is not “contained” in the physical world. But we are physical! How does man attain knowledge? What is the “gate” to the world of wisdom?

It is the physical world, and the Torah. God designed both, precisely, in a manner that their perceived features act as portals to vaults of wisdom. When we perceive creation, examining features unique to each created

entity, when we study a Torah portion, or a section in Talmud, each instance contains a unique character: water is wet, clear, and malleable. Tefillin are to be worn on the head and arm. Tzitzis must be attached on four corners, in the form of strings and knots. Every case is unique in design. This is to afford mankind the opportunity to delve in, examining these unique features, and ponder their essentiality; to ponder their purpose; to ponder why the Creator demanded their very existence and design. Ultimately, we arrive at an ever-increasing number of insights into God's wisdom.

God's wisdom is not comparable to man's. Billions of galaxies exist. A multitude of laws govern the consistent and perfect operation of the human body. If we merely gaze at creation, we know little more than their evident design. However, it is only through reason, our Divine gift of a metaphysical faculty, which can unlock immense wisdom. Intelligence is the entry gate to the world of knowledge. To attain wisdom, as sensual beings, God granted to mankind the universe and Torah. Each physical creation, each Torah verse acts as a "tip of the iceberg," designed in a manner wherein our exploration will yield greater and greater insights.

This is how man attains wisdom. God's methods of interacting with man are cryptic. Otherwise, there would be nothing compelling us to seek new wisdom. We would be at a dead end as soon as we exhausted our study of the limited, physical characteristics of the world. But God's knowledge is not finite. And He desired that men of even 1000 years of age like Adam's generation never run out of material to study. Our lives may be short relative to the universe, but they are sufficiently long so as to explore much of God's wisdom. Therefore, God designed His Torah and His world in a way that reasoning unlocks ideas. Everything follows this design: be it how God interacts with man, how He designed the world, or how He worded the Torah.

God's will is that man enjoys his life of study. But one cannot "look" at wisdom; he may only reach it through engaging his mind. What propels man towards this activity is his curiosity. "Curiosity" too is an essential part of creation! Creation and Torah are perfectly designed puzzles, engaging our curiosity at every turn, affording us all an endless pursuit in the one area we will truly be drawn into, never tiring from, and completely fulfilled by its immensity, and its beautiful design...culminating in an awe of the Creator.

As physical beings, whose objective is the perception of, and appreciation for metaphysical wisdom and its Creator, we have been presented with portals into worlds of knowledge in the form of a cryptically designed universe and Torah. We are thereby enabled to uncover wisdom

through God's generous clues, which tempt us with alluring inconsistencies and rarities, seizing our minds, and alerting us to dig deeper.

"If you seek it (wisdom) out like silver, and search for it like a buried treasure, then you will understand the fear of God, and knowledge of God will you find (Proverbs 2:4,5)."

DOES IDOLATRY WORK?

If you were told that idolatry actually worked, would you believe the person? Let's say that the person was a Jew? Perhaps the person was even a Rabbi? This is exactly what the Talmud takes up in its discussion on page 55a of Avoda Zara. There are two incidents in which two different Jews asked Rabbis what their opinions were. Both incidents seemed to imply that idolatry was in fact effectuating change in the world.

Case 1:

Zunin (a Jew) asked Rabbi Akiva, 'Both of our hearts know that there is no truth to idolatry, however, there was this cripple (dislocated joints according to Rashi) who entered into a church, and left in a recovered state.'

Rabbi Akiva responded: 'I'll give you an analogy, there was this trustworthy man by whom all residents of his town would deposit their goods without witnesses. There came a man who normally used witnesses, but didn't on one occasion. The trusted man's wife came and said, 'Let's deny his goods (as he has no witnesses to testify we received them).' The trusted man responded to his wife, *'Shall we throw away our livelihood because of this one fool?' So also is the way with disease, they are to visit man for a certain time, and they are to leave at a certain day, at a certain hour, through a certain means, and by a certain medicine. Now, should they abandon their oath (their natural course) and remain because at this moment this fool entered into a church?*

Rabbi Akiva explained this case as "coincidence." It just so happened that when the cripple left the church, his ailment was expiring at that very moment. Such coincidences do happen. God's perfect laws of nature are not suspended in such circumstances merely to accommodate the fool and deter them from idolatry. Rather, nature continues to adhere to its laws,

as has been designed by God (adherence to their laws is euphemistically referred to as their ‘oath’). This teaches that God desires that man change himself to follow reality, and not the opposite – that God should change reality (nature) to follow man. In this case we see a connection in “time” (the cripple entered a church, and was then healed). Yet, the Rabbis do not ascribe powers to the church or its god. Even more so we must follow the Rabbis and not ascribe any power when no change is seen.

Case 2:

Rava the son of Rabbi Isaac asked Rabbi Judah, ‘There was a church in our town, and when the world needed rain, their god appeared in a dream and told them, ‘Kill a man, and I will cause the rain to come.’ The people killed a man, and it rained.’

Rabbi Judah responded: ‘Had I already died, you would not have learned what I learned from Rav. He taught, ‘Why does the Torah teach (Deut. 4:19) ‘Lest you lift your eyes to the heavens and see the sun, moon and stars, all the hosts of heaven, and you turn aside and prostrate yourselves to them and worship them which God has smoothed them out for all nations under the entire heavens’? Rabbi Judah continued, ‘This teaches that God made their ways smooth so as to remove them from the world.’

A few questions present themselves when we contrast these two cases. We must keep in mind that this section of Talmud is bringing two cases which are dealing with the same area, but each must have a unique, new insight not taught by the other:

1) Why didn’t the first case answer this second question of Rava? Isn’t this Case 2 also coincidence?

2) How do we define “coincidence?”

3) In case 2, did their god actually appear?

4) How would a wise man interpret the Case 2, had he lived in that town at that moment when it rained? Would he say that their god is real and actually caused rain?

5) What is the meaning of “God made their ways smooth so as to remove them from the world?” What type of justice is this of God? Do we not also read, “Do I truly desire the death of the sinner, says God Elohim. Is it not his repentance from his ways [that I seek] and that he lives (Ezek. 18:23)?”

6) Who made their ways “smooth”...God? Is this teaching that God actively makes it smooth for an idolater to keep to his path? Or is it referring to another party?

A distinction between the two cases must be made clear. The Talmud

does not record two cases if they deal with the same phenomena. This second section of Talmud is discussing the phenomena of “relation.”

The first case is an example of what we call “coincidence.” We define coincidence as “the simultaneous occurrence of two or more unrelated events.” For example, if someone throws a ball and simultaneously a shooting star appears in the sky, we say this is coincidence that both occurred at the same moment, as they are not related by any natural laws. If, however, one throws a ball and sprains their arm, we do not call that coincidence, as the relationship is clear. This is Case 1. There is no physical relationship between one entering a church, and one’s body being healed. (We are barring psychological causes as we are elucidating this Talmud strictly according to the text.) Here, man creates a relationship in his mind which is not validated by physical law.

If the second case were strictly coincidence, it would not have been recorded, as the Talmud is not redundant in its teachings. One may then ask, “Am I to say there *is* some relationship between killing a man and rain falling?” Of course not. But it is also not a case of coincidence as the two events did not occur at the same moment. Here, the second event occurred some time after the first. Normally we would not assume a relationship between two events separated by time. However, the element of a “forecast” fools man into believing a relationship exists.

So there are two mistakes man makes when interpreting phenomena: Case 1) Man assumes a causal relationship when witnessing events occurring close in time or simultaneously. Case 2) Man assumes a causal relationship due to a forecast, even if the events were distanced by time. In both cases however, man has erred, and there is in fact no relationship.

When the Rabbis began elucidating this area, they understood that idolatry is false. There is only One Force in the universe, the Creator of heaven and Earth. However, the Rabbis analyze an area and present categorical findings. They saw two distinct categories when it came to explaining assumed effects of idolatry. But we may now ask why a fool believes this?

This is what I believe the words “God has smoothed out” come to teach. God designed man’s psyche in a way where he always has the ability to freely select intelligence as a way of life. God does not desire that man is ‘forced’ into this selection. Say, for example, man was always frustrated by his desires, i.e. he couldn’t overeat due to immediate stomach pain; he couldn’t oversleep due to sudden headaches; he couldn’t have intercourse more than once a week due to illness, etc. In this scenario, man would not be abstaining from desires and lusts based on an effort to curb his desires, but from adverse reactions. Internally, he would still be craving these desires. This is the central point.

God desires that man select a path in life based on intelligence, and without a choice, he is not selecting. If one cannot leave a lifestyle, he is not there by choice. He need not analyze the benefit of such a life; since he has no other option, analysis is of no practical value. Case 2, something external (prediction) contributed to the assumed relationship. In such a case, there is a choice:

1) The individual can believe what he sees on the surface, that is, he can follow what is 'smooth' in his own eyes. God is not smoothing it out, but God designed man that this 'smoothness' of explanation is available to mankind. Emotions have appeal, although they provide wrong conclusions, and false relationships.

2) He can follow wisdom. The wise man will see that someone had a dream – which was his own fantasy. There are no other gods. This wise man would try to stop them from killing an innocent man, as his mind tells him that there is no relationship between the murder and rain. Regardless of the fact that it rained, wisdom dictates his thoughts and actions. The wise man knows idolatry is false, but the average man doesn't. Many onlookers will follow their fantasies for idolatry.

Why would God want to "smooth out their ways to remove them from the world?" This seems to imply that God purposely made idolatry appear work so as to remove man from following Torah ideals.

God did not make the phenomena misleading and smooth. Rather, He made man with the ability to project smooth and appealing interpretations. To "remove them from the world" is not God's goal, as we see from the quote, "*Do I truly desire the death of the sinner, says God Elohim. Is it not his repentance from his ways [that I seek] and that he lives.*" To "remove them from the world" refers to the numerous phenomena of desires which appeal to man as 'smooth,' so as to act as the other choice for man. Without smooth, or attractive emotions, man has no choice. So God making them smooth to 'remove them from the world' is allegorical for 'God made emotions attractive to man.' God's goal is that man choose between what satisfies his emotions and what is right according to his mind. This is the plan for mankind: that we have both emotional drives and intelligence (the yetzer hara and yetzer hatove) and we must choose between them.

In summary, the Rabbis dismiss both cases, as they are examples of man assuming untrue relationships.

Man creates relationships in his mind, as a function of his ability to think. Accurately perceived relationships follow the laws of reality. A real relationship is one where there is perceivable, physical interaction. When there is no contact, can we say there is still a relationship? Our Talmud teaches that we cannot. The Talmud exhausts all possibilities. In Case 1,

the relationship is baseless, as a simultaneous occurrence does not suffice to create a relationship between two events. All that is similar between these two phenomena is their timing. But there is no physical contact. Case 1 deals with coincidence in time. This relationship is drawn between two real phenomena, but they in fact have nothing to do with each other.

In Case 2, man draws a relationship based on successive events linked together in man's mind by the presence of a forecast which removes this second case from being categorized as coincidence.

One may also add that 'dreams' are not considered 'events' as they happen in one's mind, not in reality. Therefore, there isn't even a second 'event' to talk about.

THE FIRST TWO COMMANDMENTS

Exod. 24:12: *"And God said to Moses, 'ascend to Me to the mountain, and remain there, and I will give you the Tablets of Stone, and the Torah, and the Mitzvah that I wrote, that you may instruct them.'"*

This verse recounts God's command to Moses just prior to His giving Moses the Tablets. The Sages differ in their opinions of what is referred to by the two references of "Torah" and "Mitzvah." Saadia Gaon suggests they refer to the Written and Oral Laws respectively. Accordingly, Saadia Gaon is of the opinion that God is about to give Moses three entities: the Tablets of Stone, the Written Law, and the Oral Law.

Unlike Saadia Gaon, Sforno states that at this moment in history, God is giving but one thing: the Tablets of Stone. The word "Torah" refers to that inscribed "portion (commands) of thought," while "Mitzvah" refers to the "portion (commands) of action." The Ten Commandments may be divided into laws governing thought, and governing action. Sforno suggests this is the meaning behind God's distinction of "Torah" and "Mitzvah."

However, Ibn Ezra poses the most difficult explanation. As Sforno states, Ibn Ezra too suggests this verse teaches there was but one thing given to Moses at this point in time, i.e., the Tablets of Stone. But Ibn Ezra states that "Torah" refers to the first and fifth of the Ten Commandments, while "Mitzvah" refers to the remaining eight – an odd division. Ramban's quote of this Ibn Ezra is slightly altered: he replaces the fifth with the second command. I would like to explain Ibn Ezra, but using

Ramban's quote. This means that Ibn Ezra says "Torah" refers to the commands of knowing God's existence (Command I) and the prohibition against idolatry (Command II). "Mitzvah" refers to the last eight of the Ten Commandments.

The question is this: When instructing Moses to ascend to receive the Ten Commandments, why doesn't God simply say, "ascend to Me and I will give you the Tablets of Stone?" Instead, God says, "and I will give you the Tablets of Stone, and the Torah, and the Mitzvah." If in this verse, the words "Torah" and "Mitzvah" refer to commands inscribed in the already mentioned Tablets, then the words "Torah" and "Mitzvah" are somewhat redundant. What is God teaching Moses when He says come to Me to receive not just Tablets, but the Torah and Mitzvah that is written upon them? Moses knows that God is not giving him blank tablets. So what is Moses to learn from God's words, "and I will give you the Tablets of Stone, and the Torah, and the Mitzvah that I wrote?"

We can say quite certainly that God is teaching Moses that He is not simply giving him laws, but these laws belong to distinct categories, i.e., "Torah" refers to knowledge of God's existence and the prohibition of idolatry, while "Mitzvah" refers to the other laws. But why must God – at this moment – categorize these laws for Moses? We must also explain why God says to Moses that he must ascend, and also "remain" on the mountain. What relevance has this with Moses' acceptance of the Ten Commandments? What of the final statement, "instructing them" in these laws? Why must this be included in this verse? (We have a tradition that all elements in a given Torah verse must have a relationship.)

Talmud Moade Katan 9b records two students of Rabbi Shimone bar Yochai who correctly arrived at the Torah's teaching that one must 'weigh' the commands, and select the greater command for himself, allowing others to perform lesser commands. The Torah's commands do in fact have a hierarchy of importance. The Talmud concludes that Torah study outweighs all other commands. Regarding the Ten Commandments recorded in Exodus, Ibn Ezra cites Saadia Gaon, stating that the Ten Commandments are in two sets: the first five address laws between man and God, and the second set address laws between men. In both sets, from beginning to end, the commands successively decrease in importance. By definition, this places the conviction of God's existence (Command I) and the prohibition against idolatry (Command II) as the most important laws, as they are the first two. Saadia Gaon also states that these Ten Commandments are the head categories for the remaining 603 commands. This places even more importance on the first two of the Ten Commandments.

Regarding the first two commands, Maimonides wrote that a Prophet has no advantage over others, as their truths are arrived at by reason, which is equally available to all (See beginning of second paragraph, underlined):

The Guide for the Perplexed, Book III, Chap. XXXIII:

It is clear to me that what Moses experienced at the revelation on Mount Sinai was different from that which was experienced by all the other Israelites, for Moses alone was addressed by God, and for this reason the second person singular is used in the Ten Commandments; Moses then went down to the foot of the mount and told his fellow-men what he had heard. Compare, "I stood between the Lord and you at that time to tell you the word of the Lord" (Deut. v. 5). Again, "Moses spake, and God answered him with a loud voice" (Exod. xix. 19). In the Mechilta our Sages say distinctly that he brought to them every word as he had heard it. Furthermore, the words, "In order that the people hear when I speak with thee" (Exod. xix. 9), show that God spoke to Moses, and the people only heard the mighty sound, not distinct words. It is to the perception of this mighty sound that Scripture refers in the passage, "When ye hear the sound" (Deut. v. 20); again it is stated, "You heard a sound of words" (ibid. iv. 12), and it is not said, "You heard words"; and even where the hearing of the words is mentioned, only the perception of the sound is meant. It was only Moses that heard the words, and he reported them to the people. This is apparent from Scripture, and from the utterances of our Sages in general.

There is, however, an opinion of our Sages frequently expressed in the Midrashim, and found also in the Talmud, to this effect: The Israelites heard the first and the second commandments from God, i.e., they learnt the truth of the principles contained in these two commandments in the same manner as Moses, and not through Moses. For these two principles, the existence of God and His Unity, can be arrived at by means of reasoning, and whatever can be established by proof is known by the Prophet in the same way as by any other person; he has no advantage in this respect. These two principles were not known through prophecy alone. Comp., "Thou hast been shown to know that," etc. (Deut. iv. 34). But the rest of the commandments are of an ethical and authoritative character, and do not contain [truths] perceived by the intellect.

Notwithstanding all that has been said by our Sages on this subject, we infer from Scripture as well as from the words of our Sages,

that the Israelites heard on that occasion a certain sound which Moses understood to proclaim the first two commandments, and through Moses all other Israelites learnt them when he in intelligible sounds repeated them to the people. Our Sages mention this view, and support it by the verse, "God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this" (Ps. Ixii.11). They state distinctly, in the beginning of Medrash Hazita, that the Israelites did not hear any other command directly from God; compare, "A loud voice, and it was not heard again" (Deut. v. 19). It was after this first sound was heard that the people were seized with the fear and terror described in Scripture, and that they said, "Behold the Lord our God has shown us, etc., and now why shall we die," etc. "Come thou near," etc. Then Moses, the most distinguished of all mankind, came the second time, received successively the other commandments, and came down to the foot of the mountain to proclaim them to the people, whilst the mighty phenomena continued; they saw the fire, they heard the sounds, which were those of thunder and lightning during a storm, and the loud sound of the shofar: and all that is said of the many sounds heard at that time, e.g., in the verse, "and all the people perceived the sounds," etc., refers to the sound of the shofar, thunder, and similar sounds. But the voice of the Lord, that is, the voice created for that purpose, which was understood to include the diverse commandments, was only heard once, as is declared in the Law, and has been clearly stated by our Sages in the places, which I have indicated to you. When the people heard this voice their soul left them; and in this voice they perceived the first two commandments. It must, however, be noticed that the people did not understand the voice in the same degree as Moses did. I will point out to you this important fact, and show you that it was a matter of tradition with the nation, and well known by our Sages. For, as a rule, Onkelos renders the word "va-yedabber" by "u-mallel" ("and God spake"): this is also the case with this word in the beginning of the twentieth chapter of Exodus, but the words "ve-al yedabber immanu Elohim," "let not God speak to us" (Exod. xx.19), addressed by the people to Moses, is rendered "vela yitmallel immanu min kodam adonai" ("Let not aught be spoken to us by the Lord"). Onkelos makes thus the same distinction, which we made. You know that according to the Talmud Onkelos received all these excellent interpretations directly from R. Eliezer and R. Joshua, the wisest men in Israel. Note it, and remember it, for it is impossible for any person to expound the revelation on Mount Sinai more fully than our Sages have done,

since it is one of the secrets of the Law. It is very difficult to have a true conception of the events, for there has never been before, nor will there ever be again, anything like it. Note it.

The Significance of the First Two Commands

With this information, we now understand that the first two commands have an elevated status in contrast to the remaining eight. What is their significance? Again, Maimonides states:

For these two principles, the existence of God and His Unity, can be arrived at by means of reasoning, and whatever can be established by proof is known by the Prophet in the same way as by any other person; he has no advantage in this respect. These two principles were not known through prophecy alone. Compare, "Thou hast been shown to know that," etc. (Deut. iv. 34). But the rest of the commandments are of an ethical and authoritative character, and do not contain [truths] perceived by the intellect.

On the two Tablets of Stone, the Ten Commandments, God teaches Moses an important lesson; there are two branches of knowledge: 1) intellectual truths, arrived at by reason, and 2) ethical and authoritative laws. According to Ibn Ezra, God teaches Moses this idea by saying "I will give you Tables of Stones, and the Torah and the Mitzvah." God desires to make this clear to Moses. There are two branches of knowledge, intellectual truths, and ethical and authoritative laws. But the first category is deemed more important, as we stated. What is its importance?

The answer is that acknowledgement of "truths" forms the core of mankind's Earthly objective. The most important of commands, (derived from Saadia Gaon's explanation of their order) are those demanding our recognition of what is absolute and real, they are: Command I: Knowing God Exists, and Command II: Denying Idolatry. These are examples of "absolute truths." Unlike ethical laws, which govern man's societal relations, "absolute truths" are not of a subjective nature, in the respect that they are to serve societal needs. Of course even God's ethics and authoritative laws reflect His infinite wisdom. But the very nature of a "truth" is that which is not relative to man's existence. Ethical and authoritative laws – by definition – are not absolute, i.e., without mankind, they have no reality. However, the idea that God is the Creator, and that He is One, and that there are no other gods, are "absolute truths." They are not relative. The reality of absolute truths means that they embody ideas, "which cannot be otherwise." In contrast, laws of society are truths, but only once societies exist.

There is another subtle point here: not only did God make Moses aware of these ideas' significance but He did so 'before' He gave the Tablets. I believe this was done, as there is a priority of importance God wished to convey through this act: man must order his studies. Moses had to be taught that learning has an "order." God first taught Moses the concept of "absolute truths" before giving him the body of knowledge contained in the Tablets. In other words, God was indicating that essential to one's studies, is to study what is primary first. God tells Moses that He is giving him "Torah" and "Mitzvah," as one is more primary to successful study.

Why is knowledge of God essential to all other knowledge? The answer is that if our knowledge does not eventuate in an appreciation for the Source of this knowledge, it is academic. Scientists may ponder the greatest formulations and laws of the universe. However, if they do not recognize the Creator, their years of study fail to have true meaning. In their minds, they marvel at the cosmos, but to them these billions of galaxies are not the work of a Designer. What they have is mere aesthetic appreciation, but no concept of God. Their lives were a waste.

If we appreciate the design of a tree, but fail to realize God, the Designer of that tree, then we have no real knowledge of the tree. We fail to arrive at the underlying truth of the existence of this tree, and it's purpose: to feed man, that man may sustain his body, so he may be free to use his mind and discover God's wisdom in all of creation. This is where all knowledge must find its end, if we are to acquire true knowledge. Knowledge of God must exist, if we are to have any knowledge. It is primary. This is the lesson.

Fundamentals: Available to All

God wished to teach Moses and ultimately all mankind, that knowledge is not only the priority in life, but within knowledge itself, there are concepts, which are more primary. This must be realized. Without knowledge and conviction of the Creator, to the exclusion of any other imagined god, man has wasted his life. If man does not recognize God, his sole purpose in his existence, he has failed to realize his objective as a human being.

These two first commands are so crucial, that they are not limited to a Prophet, but each member of mankind has the ability to know them. This is Maimonides' point.

Our objective is to arrive at a realization and conviction in what is "real." This is the function of the intellect, and why Moses had no advantage over others regarding this knowledge. Of course Moses excelled beyond all of mankind. But Maimonides teaches that the apprehension of

God, i.e., His exclusive role as Creator; and the denial of any other force or god, are two absolute truths that all members of mankind equally possess the ability to attain.

There are two, essential ideas here: 1) these first two (of the Ten) Commandments are equally attainable by all men, as they are not dependent on an authority's demand, but on reason alone, and 2) precisely why they are equally attainable – is that they are self evident, “absolute truths.” Knowledge has as its primary focus those ideas that are “absolute truths.” Knowing what is real and true is man's objective as a creature designed with an intellect. To function in the most profoundly happy state, man must be involved in this pursuit of knowing what is true. Only in this pursuit will man find true happiness. Only when man is using his intelligence and reason, is his entire being absorbed in a completely satisfying area of endless inquiry. Only in God's wisdom can man never reach the “end,” and continue to be excited at new findings.

A Relationship with God

Additionally, man's relationship with his Creator plays a role in his studies. God said, “*ascend to Me to the mountain, and remain there.*” In other words, man must approach God, “ascend to Me,” and he must tarry his stay, “remain there.” For Moses to receive the Tablets of Stone, he must approach God, and he must be of a nature, that he wishes to remain with God, to remain in his studies, with little interest in other matters. We all have the ability to derive tremendous enjoyment from Torah study, but this cannot come overnight. We must initially endure a bit of frustration, i.e., studying the language, memorizing new words, and training our minds. But then we suddenly see a new idea, a new insight presents itself, and we start reaping the rewards. Any student of Talmud or Torah will confirm this. God told Moses to remain there, and this truly is the means to optimally enjoy our lives. Minimizing our work, maximizing our studies as Ethics teaches, is the correct path, and the only method for becoming proficient in the science of Torah. When one immerses himself completely in any area, he will succeed. This is the one area each of us has no option to delay immersion. It is an obligation, and it is the source of true happiness.

The Availability of Knowledge

That absolute truths, these precious and enjoyable ideas, are things we can perceive, indicates that God desires it to be this way. God desires that the knowledge He embedded in this universe is available for man's perception. It is God's will that His knowledge fills the entire universe,

so wherever man turns, he cannot escape the reflection of God's wisdom.

These absolute truths predate Torah. Meaning, they were attainable by an Abraham. With his mind alone, Abraham extricated himself from the fallacy of idolatry, and recognized the absolute truth that a Creator exists, He is one, and there are no other causes for the universe. From Adam through Moses, no member of mankind was left without the tools required to ponder and be convinced of these ideas, and countless others. Absolute truths, then, is the category of knowledge that seamlessly weaves together man's entire history. Man was never withheld from acquiring knowledge of these absolute truths. Although man distorted his life with his man-gods and deities, but as Abraham proved, man has a Divine gift that enables him to find the truth. Man possesses intelligence, and the sharper his mind becomes, the more curtains of fallacy he may shred, exposing greater truths.

Man is to be confronted by God's wisdom at every turn, throughout his entire life. We recite "last in action first in deed," regarding the Sabbath. It was last in creation, but primary in God's plan for mankind. The Sabbath is a day bereft of physical labor, dedicated to pondering wisdom.

THE TABERNACLE'S COVERING

And Moses raised up the Tabernacle, and he gave it its sockets, and he placed its upright beams and he gave its [horizontal binding] poles, and he raised its pillars. (Exod. 40:18)

Sforno comments that the words "And Moses raised up the Tabernacle" refer to the woven covering alone. Meaning, since the Tabernacle's four structural components make up the remainder of this verse, the item referred to by "Tabernacle" must be something other than sockets, beams, poles and pillars. Sforno says what Moses first raised up was the woven covering, referred to by "Tabernacle" in this verse. Sforno states this again in Exodus 21:1, "And the Tabernacle, make 10 sheets..." where Sforno comments, "The sheets were referred to by the name Tabernacle."

Sforno says this covering was the "essence" of the Tabernacle structure, but in what manner? Not only that, but Moses somehow held the coverings in their place (or they were suspended by a miracle, says Sforno) and then Moses assembled the Tabernacle's rigid components underneath it. This is an intriguing method of construction. Sforno means to say that the

Tabernacle's essence – the covering – must be erected first, presumably to indicate its primary role. We wonder: when is greater value given to a covering or a roof than the structure beneath? Keep this question in mind.

The covering was composed of 10 equal-sized sheets; 5 stitched together, and the other 5 stitched together. These two sets of 5 sheets were joined into a single covering of 10 sheets via gold clasps. This point, or seam, where they joined by clasps was positioned exactly over the Paroches curtain, which later was suspended and separated between the Holies, and the Holy of Holies. Thus, the covering – before all else was placed under it – was to bear this distinction of the soon-to-be-created two rooms. It would appear from this that at the very commencement of building the Tabernacle, the lesson of the two rooms was essential. We might say Tabernacle cannot – at any point – be disassociated with whatever concept these two rooms teach. Additionally, Exodus 26:6 states when joining these two sets of 5 sheets, that the Tabernacle then became “one.” This verse suggests the combination of the two rooms creates a unity of some sort. What is this unity...this “one?”

We must also note that the cherubim – birdlike figures with children's faces and wings – were embroidered into these coverings. What are cherubim? Maimonides explains them as angels[1], the vehicle of prophecy:

Naturally, the fundamental belief in prophecy precedes the belief in the Law, for without the belief in prophecy there can be no belief in the Law. But a Prophet only receives Divine inspiration through the agency of an angel. Comp. “The angel of the Lord called” (Gen. xxii. 15) “The angel of the Lord said unto her” (ibid. xvi. 11) and other innumerable instances. Even Moses our Teacher received his first prophecy through an angel, “And an angel of the Lord appeared to him in the flame of fire” (Exod. iii.) It is therefore clear that the belief in the existence of angels precedes the belief in prophecy, and the latter precedes the belief in the Law.

...the belief in the existence of angels is connected with the belief in the Existence of God; and the belief in God and angels leads to the belief in Prophecy and in the truth of the Law. In order to firmly establish this creed, God commanded [the Israelites] to make over the ark the form of two angels. The belief in the existence of angels is thus inculcated into the minds of the people, and this belief is in importance next to the belief in God's Existence; it leads us to believe in Prophecy and in the Law, and opposes idolatry. If there had only been one figure of a cherub, the people would have been misled and would have mistaken it for God's image which was to

be worshipped, in the fashion of the heathen; or they might have assumed that the angel [represented by the figure] was also a deity, and would thus have adopted a Dualism. By making two cherubim and distinctly declaring “the Lord is our God, the Lord is One” Moses dearly proclaimed the theory of the existence of a number of angels; he left no room for the error of considering those figures as deities, since [he declared that] God is one, and that He is the Creator of the angels, who are more than one.

God doesn't talk directly with man, other than with Moses. All other Prophets received God's communications via angels. And Maimonides teaches that even Moses' first prophecy was via the angel, in the burning bush prophecy. Prophecy is essential for validating Judaism; without a belief in prophecy, we deny Revelation at Sinai, for this event included Prophetic elements. And prophecy relies on the angels, or cherubs. So to accept the truth of God and His only religion, man must accept cherubim, which are angels.

What are angels? We do not know their true natures, but suffice it to say that one type of angel is a metaphysical being that communicates God's will to man. With this background, we can begin to address our questions.

The Temple's two rooms – the Holies, and the Holy of Holies – correspond to the two “areas” of knowledge: 1) what man can know, and 2) what man cannot know. Thus, man is punished with death for entering the Holy of Holies. Entering here is akin to saying “I can approach God; I can know what He is.” But God told the greatest man ever – Moses – “*No man can know me while alive (Exod. 23:20).*” Therefore, it is vital that we accept our complete ignorance of what God is. Even the High Priest must light smoky incense in the Holy of Holies upon his once-a-year visit, to establish this “cloud” between him and God.

Nonetheless, the priests do enter the Holies daily. This conveys the idea that there are areas of knowledge open to mankind's exploration. We must know that the world requires a Creator, who rested on the seventh day; conveyed through the seven-branched Menorah in the Holies. We must know that God is omniscient, all-knowing, so an incense Altar indicates God “knows” man's sacrifices. And we must know that God is omnipotent, all-powerful, so a Table with twelve bread loaves indicates His ability to sustain the Tribes. Thus, we enter the Holies, but never the Holy of Holies. Our approach to understanding God's universe is two-pronged: 1) we accept there are areas open to human investigation, and also, 2) there are areas we cannot penetrate, indicated by the Paroches curtain that restricts entrance into that room housing the Ark and the cherubim. Just as

we do not know what God is, we also cannot know what angels are.

What is unapproachable is placed in that unapproachable room. This explains why the cherubim were in the Holy of Holies, as were the Tablets of the Law that target God's knowledge.

Two Realms of Knowledge

Our objective is to arrive at a love for God through the study of matters available to human intelligence. God revealed great wisdom in His creations and in His Torah. But as created beings, we cannot grasp the Creator Himself. Even the angels praise only God's "name" and not Him directly: "*Baruch kivode Hashem mimkomo: Blessed is God's honor from His place.*" His honor is what is blessed, for even angels cannot bless God Himself, the unknowable One. Additionally, our Kedusha (*Isaiah 6:3, Ezekiel 3:12*) cites the angel's admission that God is "kadosh," separate, or rather, unknowable.

So crucial is this notion, that upon Moses' construction of the Temple (which exists to impart knowledge to man) the coverings were raised first, constructed of two joined halves: the half that covers the Holies, and the other half that covers the Holy of Holies. Immediately, we are confronted with this truth that knowledge has two realms, and one is off-limits to man. This lesson is particularly required in Tabernacle, where one might be misled to believe God is actually "there" occupying space. For God said, "*You shall build be a Temple and I will dwell among you (Exod. 25:8).*" King Solomon too was aware of this danger, so upon his completion of the Temple, he said, "*Can God truly be on Earth? The heavens and heavens of heavens cannot contain You, how much less this house that I have built (Kings I, 8:27).*" He wished to warn the people, lest they believe God occupies space. So we fully appreciate the need for man to be reminded – especially at the Temple's inauguration – of what is beyond human apprehension.

If we assume that we have fully exhausted any area of knowledge, we fool ourselves. For if we perceive true knowledge, we sense there is so much more awaiting discovery...but we also know we will never tap the full depths of that knowledge. Albert Einstein said, "My religion consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable Superior Spirit who reveals Himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble mind." Einstein attested to this very point: God's wisdom is unlimited, and we are very ignorant. Maimonides said, "Know that for the human mind there are certain objects of perception which are within the scope of its nature and capacity; on the other hand there are, amongst things which actually exist, certain things which the mind can, in no ways grasp; the gates of perception are closed against it." [2]

When we do arrive at a truth, it is accompanied by the realization that we have only scratched the surface; this truth leads to even greater wisdom, much of which we will not uncover. And this must be, since knowledge by definition is a reflection of the Creator, who is unlimited. Thus, the knowledge we perceive must reflect this “illimitable Superior Spirit.” In this manner, knowledge is identified with the Source of that knowledge – God. And this must be our objective in the pursuit of wisdom, to know God. Thus, the covering was not one unified set of 10 sheets. It was made of two sets of 5 sheets each, as stated. They are joined together. This joining is to indicate that attainable knowledge – 5 sheets covering the Holies – is inherently related (clasped) to the other area of unknowable truths – 5 sheets covering the Holy of Holies. Meaning, our studies must always target an appreciation of God. And in this fashion, the joining of the 2 sets of sheets makes “one” Tabernacle. One, referring to a unified approach to wisdom. This approach demands that drawing close God (Holy of Holies) must always be the objective of our study (Holies), not that we study an area for itself, so that we might merely better manipulate the world and its resources.

A “Covering” Over What?

It is therefore quite fitting that Sferno holds these coverings to be of central importance. We asked where else a covering is more important than the structure below it. But think about the word “covering.” Isn’t that the idea we just explained? There are areas of knowledge that are “covered.” This may be Sferno’s message. Perhaps he has intimated that these sheets are to teach us the idea of “concealment.” Meaning, Tabernacle is to educate man, and a primary lesson is that certain knowledge is concealed. Therefore, the Tabernacle’s covering is a lesson itself, and the rigid structure beneath it is merely there as a frame to support this covering. Therefore, the covering must be erected first, indicating the primary importance of the Tabernacle. Intriguing. This covering is to teach man to accept that there are matters beyond his grasp...“covered” matters.

But you may ask: “I understand why the Holy of Holies is covered, but why cover the Holies? Was this area not open to human comprehension?” Yes, but even those ideas derived from the Holies first require a process of analysis, so these ideas too are initially “covered!” All knowledge increase is accurately described as an act of “uncovering.”

We can now suggest why the cherubim were embroidered in both sets of sheets. Perhaps not just prophecy, but even knowledge attained in our waking state, knowledge of all areas, might require a system of angels, through which we obtain new insights. How is it that one second we are

clueless, then later one we make a discovery? If the knowledge was not with us beforehand, how did it arrive in our minds later on? This might explain why the covering is the proper item to display forms of cherubim. But there is yet an additional facet to the complementary nature of the knowable and the unknowable...

Knowledge Demands Recognition of God

Only with the acceptance that all we know emanates from God do we know anything at all. There is an intimate relationship between these two areas of knowledge: the knowable and the unknowable, just as these two sets of sheets are related. If one does not know of God, then all of his knowledge is false. For he is unaware that what he discovers was created by God, and by definition, his knowledge is bereft of its primary truth. Knowledge is only knowledge if our minds view that knowledge as part of God's will. Otherwise, we simply possess a means to manipulate the world. For example, an atheistic doctor might cure cancer, but his understanding of life is not related to the Creator. Thus, his scientific knowledge fails to reach its objective. He has failed. An expert agriculturist who does not view food to sustain human life so man can discover his Creator also fails to attain real knowledge. Although both doctor and scientist assist others, they are ignorant of what life is, as they fail to realize the human objective of relating to God...the very purpose of our creation.

Angels: Gold vs. Embroidered

Angels exist in the metaphysical world, not on Earth. This is expressed by the gold cherubim being limited to the Holy of Holies, unapproachable by us sensually. Is there something to be derived from the fact that the cherubim in the coverings were merely representative diagrams, but not real gold figurines?

All of our experiences are as sensual beings, and even our encounters with angels in Prophetic visions must be a filtered presentation of those angels. For we cannot relate completely abstractly, even in dreams, as we are physical and they are not. We cannot relate to purely metaphysical angels. Human imagination presents the angel to a Prophet at times in the form of a man, "*And three men stood upon him... (Gen. 18:2).*"

Although there exist "real," metaphysical angels...the Prophetic vision is a representation for man's sake. This parallels the "real" gold angels over the ark, while only illustrations are embroidered in the curtains. The curtains represent human knowledge and how we relate to it. But beyond this world, real angels exist in their full "form," just as in the Holy of Holies, there are golden angel forms. Thus, the illustrated angels woven into

curtains and the gold angels in Holy of holies, stand in direct relation to angels in prophecy and true angels. The curtains and gold figures parallel reality to educate us.

Maimonides writes [3]:

We have already stated that the forms in which angels appear form part of the Prophetic vision. Some Prophets see angels in the form of man, e.g., "And behold three men stood by him" (Gen. xviii.2): others perceive an angel as a fearful and terrible being, e.g., "And his countenance was as the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible" (Judges xiii. 6): others see them as fire, e.g., "And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire" (Exod.iii. 2). In Bereshit Rabba (chap. 1.) the following remark occurs: "To Abraham, whose Prophetic power was great, the angels appeared in the form of men; to Lot, whose power was weak, they appeared as angels." This is an important principle as regards Prophecy; it will be fully discussed when we treat of that subject (chap. xxxii. sqq.). Another passage in Bereshit Rabba (ibid.) runs thus: "Before the angels have accomplished their task they are called men, when they have accomplished it they are angels." Consider how clearly they say that the term "angel" signifies nothing but a certain action, and that every appearance of an angel is part of a Prophetic vision, depending on the capacity of the person that perceives it.

[1] "Guide," book III, chap. XLV

[2] "Guide," book I, chap. XXXI

[3] "Guide," book II, chap. VI

ANGELS

Based on Maimonides, and verses in the Torah, there appear to be a few understandings of what an “angel” means. Maimonides explains one type of angel (*Guide for the Perplexed, Book II, Chap. XLI*):

We have already shown that the appearance or speech of an angel mentioned in Scripture took place in a vision or dream.

Maimonides holds that when an angel “appears” or “talks” it is part of some prophecy or dream – it is not occurring in physical reality, on Earth.

Maimonides found it impossible that man should be awake while experiencing an angel. Why? As Maimonides understood it, angels who appear and speak partake of two characteristics that are impossible to exist on Earth. They are 1) intelligence (*an angel speaking*), and 2) will (*an angel appearing*). Maimonides is teaching a crucial concept: there is no intelligence on Earth besides man.

All Earthly creation aside from man is limited to non-intelligent life. When the passage states that an angel “spoke” or “appeared,” Maimonides is forced to interpret the passage as having taken place in a vision. The metaphysical world is the only plane where intelligence other than man exists.

The first type of angel applies to cases when the angel “speaks” or “appears.” This type of angel is a metaphysical being and therefore can be perceived only in a vision, which is a phenomena of the mind, a metaphysical element.

However, other instances of “angel” are found – not forming part of a dream or vision. Maimonides states a Torah account of angels must take place in a vision or dream, but only when the angel “appears” or “speaks.” But if no speaking or appearance takes place with the mention of “angel,” it would seem from Maimonides that we do not have to understand the account as a vision, and we may take the account as literal. For example, “angel” can also refer to a person, like Pinchus, who Maimonides describes as being on a high level, and could be called an angel. So here, angel refers to a normal human being of high caliber.

In Baruchi Nafshi (*Psalms 104:4*) King David says, “*oseh malachav ruchos, umsharsav aish lobate: He (God) makes his angels messengers, and His ministering angels flaming fire.*” Rashi and Metsudas Dovid explain this to mean that God makes the natural forces his messengers. Angel can also refer to a force of nature.

All I mean to suggest here, is that Maimonides did not accept the idea there exists on earth other intelligences besides man. Any mention of an angel appearing or speaking indicates a being with reason and will, and therefore, must occur only in a vision, in man's mind, not on Earth.

Maimonides' principle discounts any truth to the false notion of "forces" which many people assume to have existence, will, and the ability to affect man. This is false. Man's life is in his own hands, "*Hakol b'day shamayim, chutz mayiras shamayim: All is in God's hands, except the fear of God (Tal. Megilla 25a).*" This means man's will is his own, unaffected by anything but his will. Therefore, there cannot be anything in creation which could deter man from choosing to follow God. Additionally, there is nothing in creation that can assist or harm man. All theories of powers, forces, psychics and the like, are baseless notions. They do not exist.

THE FOURTH PRINCIPLE

Maimonides' First Principle is that God exists, and that He is the Cause for everything. His Fourth Principle is that God is the "first" – existing before everything else. What is the distinction between these two principles; what does the Fourth Principle add? Although from the First Principle we learn that God caused everything, this does not necessarily mean He came first, in the opinion of those like Aristotle and Plato. Their view was that universe existed simultaneously with God, always. Plato differs in that God formed eternal, unformed matter into what we view today. Aristotle says the universe as it is, was always this way. But both hold matter to have existed eternally with God. The universe to God is like His shadow: both coexisted eternally. Accepting Aristotle or Plato, we deny God's greatness, claiming He could not bring matter into existence from nothingness, which is the Torah's view. This is why Maimonides classifies this idea of creation *ex nihilo* (from nothing) as a Torah Fundamental. Without this concept, our view of God is not correct. A Rabbi explained that Aristotle and Plato do not view the universe as God's "will." This is central to Maimonides' Fourth Principle.

THE SECRET OF THE ARK

In Parshas Bamidbar, God commanded Aaron and his sons regarding the unique treatment of the Tabernacle's vessels. The Tabernacle housed the Ark[1], the Table of showbread, the Menorah and the Gold Altar used for incense. Outside of the Tabernacle's walls rested the Copper Altar used in animal sacrifice. God commanded Aaron and his sons, when preparing for journey, to cover these vessels. They should not be transported on the wagons in an uncovered state.

All but the Table had two coverings: a garment of dyed cloth, and an animal skin. (The Table had two dyed garments and an animal skin.) We wonder why the Torah alters the terms "garments" of cloth, and "coverings" of skin. Are they not both "coverings?" The Rabbis teach the purpose of the skins was to protect the vessels from the elements. This is sensible. But we are curious as to the purpose of these colored garments, and why they are called "garments."

All vessels excluding the Copper Altar were covered with a blue garment, while the Copper Altar was covered with a purple garment. Why this change? Additionally, all vessels had a single colored garment, while the Table alone was covered in both blue and red garments. Of unique distinction was the Ark, for it was covered with the skin first, and then covered by its blue garment[2]. In contrast, all other vessels were first covered with their respective colored garments, and then covered externally with skins...the reverse order. We also wish to learn of these specific colors; do they have unique meaning? Ramban explains that the blue garments reflect the heavens, as he quotes from Exodus 24:10, "*k'etzem bashamyim latohar: as the essence of the heavens in purity.*" So what did the purple – not blue – garment on the Copper Altar represent, and what did the extra red garment on the Table indicate? We will come back to this.

The laws and specifics I cite may be somewhat technical, but I ask your indulgence. My objective is that you come to appreciate how many laws and formulations that seem arbitrary and unrelated actually create a beautiful harmony.

These questions lead us to investigate more details pertaining to the Tabernacle. We are specifically interested in the Ark, as its blue garment was to be external to its skin covering, while all other vessels were to have the skins external to the garment.

What was the purpose of the Ark? It is most unique in that its cover comprises two gold winged cherub figurines. The Ark contained the Tablets and the Torah. We learn that when God spoke to Moses, He created a voice that emanated from between these two cherubs and then penetrated

Moses' ears. What consideration demanded this unique means of prophecy? (Exod. 25:22)

The Ark may rightfully be viewed as the centerpiece of the Tabernacle. But here's the strange part: Maimonides omits the Ark in his list of the Tabernacle's vessels (*Hilchos Beis Habechira, 1:6*)! Every other item is listed, except the Ark. And when he does finally mention the Ark in chapter 4 (*ibid*) he does not offer any details of its measurements or design, as he does when describing the other vessels. He discusses what seems as extraneous material: the stone upon which the Ark rested (the Evven Shessiyah) [3], the wall that separated the Ark from the other room, and other matters. But not a word of the Cherubim, or the Ark's design! Astonishing. It is also curious that Maimonides, when formulating these laws of Temple, includes this history of Solomon creating caverns to hide the Ark. These caverns have nothing to do with Temple law! We are also puzzled as to why King Solomon did not care to hide the other vessels. Does this teach that the Ark – and no other item – required complete secrecy? If so, what's the secret?

We do find Maimonides discussing the Ark later (*Laws 2:12 and 2:13 if Hilchos Klay Hamikdash*). There, Maimonides teaches three laws: that the Ark must be carried directly on man's shoulders and no other means; the carriers must face each other's faces; not facing a uniform direction (face to back); and the Ark's poles must never be removed. Alone these laws deserve explanation. Even more intriguing is where Maimonides places these three laws: together in his formulation of the incense! He could have equally placed these laws in the previous chapter addressing the oil. We are at a loss as to Maimonides' juxtaposing of the Ark to the incense. There must be a connection, but what is Maimonides' lesson? And we must ask what is the purpose of the incense.

The Vessels' Coverings

Although inactive while in transport, the vessels demand honor. These objects possess the God-given status of "objects of mitzvah." We must treat objects used in mitzvah with greater care than mundane objects. Certainly, we must have a higher regard for items used in Temple service, for they are Kodesh (sanctified). Additionally, anything dedicated to Temple has an even greater status.

Now, although each vessel had a skin covering to protect it from the elements, God also commanded that each vessel have a "garment." What is a garment? A garment is not always intended to 'cover', but at times, to highlight a distinction or delineate honor. Thus, a king wears unique garments and a crown. The High Priest also is made unique through his

garments. The same concept applies to the Tabernacle's vessels.

The vessels must be treated with honor. To do so, all vessels except the Copper Altar were dressed with a blue garment. Blue represents the created heavens and thereby we recall the Creator. This was to teach that each vessel contributed to some aspect of our knowledge of God. The Menorah's seven branches related the idea of seven days in Creation. For our definition of God is the Creator. The Table contained twelve loaves of showbread, teaching God's omnipotence, and the incense Altar teaches that God is omniscient, for He is aware of man's acts (offerings). So the blue garment is to highlight a vessel's contribution to our knowledge of God.

The Table had an additional red garment. Red is the color of blood, or human life. God feeds us by sustaining plant and animal life. The Table housed the 12 loaves of bread, which represents this sustenance. So it is reasonable that a red and blue garment be associated with the Table. For the Table teaches us about God (blue – pointing to knowledge of God, He is omnipotent to supply our needs) while also teaching that this sustenance preserves our very lives (red garment).

However, the Copper Altar was clothed with a purple garment alone. It had no blue garment. And there is an interesting idea here. Purple is the combination of blue and red. It is also significant that the Copper Altar was not inside the Tabernacle. I believe this was because the Altar does not contribute to knowledge of God, as do the other three vessels found inside the Tabernacle clothed in blue. The Copper Altar is used to sacrifice animals. Why do we kill animals? The definition of sacrifice traces back to the very first sacrifice. Adam, as soon as he was created, offered a sacrifice. He did so because, as Ibn Ezra teaches, he was a great intellectual. Thus, he immediately realized that he was 'created', and that his existence is not mandatory. Only God's existence is necessary. Realizing this truth, Adam wished to express this truth by proxy: he killed an animal to be in his place, demonstrating to God and to himself that this lifeless beast represents man's real state. Man does not have to exist. It is only through God's kindness that each of us lives.

In essence, sacrifice is the combination of two ideas: 1) human life is unnecessary, and 2) man's realization of the Creator and his reach towards a relationship with God. We must use sacrifice to constantly remind ourselves of our mortality, and that we are created beings. Human life (blood), God/Creator of heavens (blue) – red and blue create purple. The Copper Altar was clothed in a purple garment, representing this combination. And again, the Altar's placement outside the Tabernacle alludes to its different role: it is man's approach to God, which is of a lesser level

than pure knowledge of God conveyed through the inner vessels. This lesser status is also conveyed through a lesser metal: copper is not as precious a metal as is gold.

Above the dyed garments, skins were placed to protect the vessels from the elements. However, the Ark was first covered with the skin, and then the blue garment was placed over that skin. Why the reverse order of all other vessels?

Torah: No Objective Outside Itself

The Ark required no service – “*avodah*,” its mere existence is the objective. Torah is not given with intent to serve any ‘purpose.’ Torah exists to convey God’s wisdom. Thus, the Ark was not a vessel or utilitarian. To convey this idea, the blue garment was placed on the outside of the Ark. This was done to teach that the Ark was never compromised in its purpose, even while in transport...unlike the other vessels. The Ark, i.e., Torah, is always ‘active.’ We are to be in a state of contemplating God and His laws all day, as we read in the Shema. We must always see the blue covering on the Ark to remind ourselves that Torah is to always be engaged.

In contrast, the other vessels were ‘utilized’ objects: their varied purposes were only realized when functioning in the Tabernacle and serviced by the priests. But when not in service, they were to be stored. They were to be covered with skins on the exterior to signify these vessels were inactive.

This also explains why Maimonides excluded the Ark from his list of “*kaylim*,” vessels (*Hilchos Beis Habechira 1:6*). A vessel is something utilized. The Ark is not utilitarian in nature; it contained God’s Torah. For this reason, the Ark’s poles were never removed. For the Ark did not find a greater purpose while inside the Tabernacle or the Temple. The Ark is synonymous with Torah: God’s wisdom. It needs nothing. It functions for itself.

This could very well explain why Maimonides groups the laws of the Ark together with the incense, and not the oil. For the incense was made for itself too: it was to be fragrant, as Maimonides teaches. That is, existing simply for itself. But the oil was “used” to anoint. It was utilitarian, unlike the incense and the Ark. And Maimonides’ very formulation bears out this idea:

“It is a mitzvah to make the anointing oil that is should be prepared for matters requiring anointing with it”[4]. Whereas Maimonides’ formulation of the incense reads:

“The incense was made yearly, and its making is a positive command”[5].

There is no mention of a “usage” in connection with incense, but the oil was “prepared for matters requiring anointing.”

The Secret

There are some other questions pertaining to the uniqueness of the Ark. Why did King Solomon create deep subterranean, winding caverns to hide the Ark?

Why did he not seek to hide any other vessel?

Why did Maimonides include this history in his laws?

Why did God command His Torah to be placed inside an Ark? This was actually a command even prior to the Temple, when Moses received the second Tablets (*Deut. 10:1*).

The Holy of Holies was off limits by punishment of death to all who approached, as witnessed in the death of Nadav and Avihu. Man must accept ignorance of God’s nature as a fundamental in our approach to God. No one was permitted to ascend Mount Sinai for this very reason, lest man feel he can draw “near” to God. Of course, God was not “on” the mountain – God cannot be localized, as He exists outside time and space. It is heretical to suggest otherwise. And we learn that 57,000 people were killed for looking into the ark upon its return from the Philistines. Why did they open the Ark? It is because they felt they could “see” something concerning God. A heretical notion.

We must know: God is unknowable. *“For man cannot know Me while alive (Exod. 33:20).”* This fundamental is beyond the scope of Temple. It is for this reason that King Solomon treated the Ark with such secrecy even though he knew the Temple would be destroyed. This fundamental of man’s ignorance of God surpasses the walls – and times – of the Temple. And since God’s knowledge (the Torah) is the very identity of the Ark, Maimonides includes this history in his chapter addressing the laws of the Ark. This is not a historical record for history’s sake, but to illustrate the nature of the Ark’s uniqueness. Thus, this history belongs in the discussion of the Ark’s very distinction and its laws.

Additionally, an Ark – by definition – is something that conceals. So it is not a mere container, but the Ark embodies this idea that God is concealed from man’s intellect.

Why did Maimonides not discuss the Ark’s measurements? I am not sure, but this is an interesting quote:

“Rabbi Levi said, ‘We received a transmission from our forefathers that the Ark was not capable of being measured’ (Talmud Megilla 10b).” Rashi explains that the room where the Ark was housed (the Holy of Holies) mea-

sured 20 cubits square. The Ark was 2 cubits wide, so if it was centered in that room, there should be 9 cubits distance from the Ark to the walls, on both sides. The Ark measuring 2 cubits, plus the remaining 18 cubits of space would give the proper total of 20 cubits. However, when measuring the distance, there was found to be 10 cubits of space between the side of the Ark, and the wall. Meaning, the Ark occupied no space! I am less concerned with how this occurred than “why” such a miracle was necessary.

But we may answer that in line with the purpose of a room that is off limits, teaching that God is off limits to our minds, a miracle was created to embellish this very concept. Man’s mind cannot explain the existence of a three dimensional Ark that does not detract from the space of that Holy of Holies room. This inexplicable miracle enables man to then admit he cannot explain all, and thereby apply this acceptance of ignorance to his appreciation of God. Just as one matter is inexplicable, man can then accept God as inexplicable.

This then, is the “Secret of the Ark:” a secret that is never revealed. It is the unknowable nature of God. Although man is sensual, requiring his ideas be connected to the physical world, it is impossible that we might know anything about God. Just as we cannot “see” a thought, also true is that we cannot perceive God’s nature. Even Moses’ knowledge must first emanate between two physical cherub forms before it penetrated his ears. Human knowledge must be tied to something physical. This is the purpose of Creation: that man have a physical universe through which we may all witness God’s wisdom, but never God Himself.

And as this is a truth independent of the Tabernacle and Temple, and predates both, Maimonides recorded the history of the caverns that Solomon built to hide the Ark. I believe Maimonides recorded this history in his law book because he wished to highlight the true essence of the Ark. The unapproachable Holy of Holies and Ark is to teach our inability to approach knowledge of God. This is independent of God commanding man to build a Temple. It startles us at first, that a law book contains historical data. But now we understand that this very history of hiding the Ark highlights the very nature of the Ark. Hiding the Ark was meant to teach that God is unknowable, even when the Temple is in ruins. Thus, Solomon did not seek to hide away any other vessel. For it is the Ark alone that teaches man of certain knowledge that is “out of reach” and hidden.

We now understand why in that chapter[6] Maimonides also discusses the separating wall, for this too contributes to the “separation” between man and knowledge of God.

An interesting point is that this chapter starts with another historical fact cited in a few sources[7]. The Ark rested on a stone in the Holy of

Holies. This stone is called the “Even Hashessiyah,” the stone from which the Earth was established. The idea of a relationship between the Ark and the Earth’s foundation stone implies that the purpose of the Earth’s creation is realized in the objective of the Ark.

[1] Not a “vessel” according to Maimonides’ classification: Laws of the Chosen House 1:6

[2] The Ark was first covered by the Paroches: the curtain that divided between the Holies and the Holy of Holies. Above the Paroches was placed the animal skin, and then the blue garment last, on the exterior.

[3] Yoma 27b (Jerusalem Talmud) and Tosefta Yoma 2:12 cite the Even Hashessiyah, the stone from which the Earth was established.

[4] Klay Hamikdash 1:1

[5] Klay Hamikdash 2:1

[6] Hil. Beis Habechira 4

[7] Yoma 27b, Jerusalem Talmud and Tosefta Yoma 2:12

Part II

METHOD & METAPHOR

Without intelligence, the faculty that tests notions, man's only other faculty – his instinctual drive – takes over and leads him to accept that which is not real. An intelligent method is required for man to determine what is real, and what is fantasy.

The Rabbis spoke in metaphor to encapsulate many truths in few words; to keep secret those matters that people are not yet equipped to grasp; to ensure such truths are safely transmitted like a locked treasure chest; and to attract the studious mind with amazing images. Their intent was that we unlock the mystery, and in doing so, engage analysis which trains us for future studies.

CHUKAS: METHODOLOGY

Developing the proper questions is crucial to arriving at the intended lessons. When studying Jewish history in Torah, Prophets, Writings, or Jewish Law in the Mishna or the Talmud, it is essential to keep the following in mind: the Torah was designed word for word, letter for letter by God. The Talmud – based on God’s Oral law – was written by extremely wise Sages. One commits a grave injustice, both to the ideas and to one’s self, by offering simplistic explanations. *“For God gives wisdom, from His mouth come knowledge and understanding (Proverbs, 2:6).”* Everything must be appreciated and understood on this level. Every sentence in the Torah, for example, must contribute to the explanation of the area. In any given Torah narrative the precise amount of information is disclosed to us by God so that we can detect the issues. Certain unusual words will be used to catch our attention. Certain passages will, at first, seem out of place, and impossible phenomena are described which force us to delve onto the area. These are all generous clues for the investigation.

Besides having the correct appreciation for the design of the Torah, we must also approach our studies with the correct questions. As a Rabbi once said, “The right question is 90 percent of the answer.”

Many times when asking a question, we already have more information than we think, and by using that information in our question, we will more likely arrive at the correct answer. For example: When you see a flat tire on you friend’s car you can ask, “What happened?” But you already know what happened. He drove his car over some sharp object. The question should be reformulated as, “Over what did you drive your car?” Asking the question in this structure, you will start pondering what could have punctured his tire. You’ve directed your thoughts directly to the area that contains your answer: a type of sharp object. If you would have persisted with your first question of “What happened?,” you would have placed your mindset in an “astonished” state, as opposed to an “inquisitive” mode. Being astonished creates an emotional curiosity that does not necessarily instigate an intellectual search.

The following area in the Torah will illustrate this point. I will first give a brief summary of the area. Then I will show an indirect and direct way of asking questions.

Numbers 21:4-9 states that the people traveled towards the land of Edom, and their patience grew short on the way. They complained regarding God and Moses that there was no bread and water and they were tired of the light bread (the manna). God then sent fiery serpents to attack and kill the people, and many died. The people saw their error and went

to Moses and confessed that they spoke wrongly about God and about Moses, and asked that he pray that the serpents be removed. After Moses prayed, God told him to create a serpent and to place it upon a pole and that any who looked at it would be healed. Moses did so, and made a copper serpent and placed it on a pole, and any man that was bitten gazed at it and lived. This is the basic story. Be mindful that to successfully answer an area you must first focus on the main issues, and separate what is peripheral. This cannot be emphasized enough.

The main questions: What was the fault of the people? Why did God choose to give “fiery serpents” as punishment here, and not something else? What does the added affliction of “fiery” serpents accomplish? Why did Moses have to make a serpent if the people already confessed? Why put it on a pole? Why did Moses make it out of “copper?” How did looking at this serpent heal?

Rashi said, *“Let the serpent who was punished due to his evil talk [addressed to Adam and Eve] come and exact punishment from those who spoke evil. Let the serpent come, to whom everything tastes as one, and exact punishment from those who denied the good...that one thing [manna] was changed for them to many things.”* According to Rashi, the Jews received a corrective measure through snakes because of evil talk. However, this isn’t the first time someone spoke evil. Why didn’t Miriam receive snakes when she spoke against Moses? Why didn’t the Jews receive snakes in all other instances, in which they spoke wrongly?

These are the basic questions. It is very possible to work with them as they are. But if we make slight changes to their structure, we will direct ourselves closer to the answers. Remember, all of the information needed to answer these questions is in these passages. This is God’s design of all Torah, Prophets and Writings.

The main question should be addressed first. Why snakes? Well, we know why. They spoke evil. So we must ask more directly: “What was the difference in the evil talk of the Jews here as opposed to all other cases, that they received the serpents?” Asking the question in this way, we direct our minds to contrast “speech” in this instance against other cases. You know that in other cases the Jews complained to God and Moses, and they didn’t receive snakes, let alone “fiery” snakes. So speaking evil per se cannot be what is the cause of their extraordinary punishment. What is different here? The difference is that it never mentions anywhere else that the people “grew tired on the way.” This first passage seems extraneous at first. But now, rephrase the question using this information in the first passage: “What is it in the fact that they were tired, that their ensuing evil talk must be punished with serpents?” We immediately make the connec-

tion that their evil talk was the direct result of being tired. Meaning, their evil talk was unjustified in relation to the object of their complaint. It was just talk, used to vent their emotions regarding exhaustion. There was no inherent flaw with the manna!

Talking can be used for one of two things: 1) communication, 2) an emotional outlet, as when one is hot tempered and breaks something. So instead of breaking something, one might whine and complain. This first passage hints towards the underlying cause for their complaining: they were tired of the journey, they didn't control their feelings, and began to displace their frustration to outlet their emotions.

We now also understand why they received such a different punishment here, as compared to other areas. Here, their complaint was not based on any real problem – the manna was perfect. They merely used the manna as a displaced object of ridicule. But in reality they shouldn't have complained. This explains why they received serpents. Serpents were given to them because they represent what the original serpent was punished for – evil talk – and to point out to them that they were victims of an emotion of venting their feelings through speech. Had there been another incident in Scripture where an individual, or people, had vented their emotions in this manner, and were on a level for God to administer a corrective measure, we would witness another case of “fiery serpents.” However, this is the only account where this specific flaw occurred, and therefore, the only account where fiery serpents come to correct the situation.

With this information, we can also answer why there was the additional aspect of “fiery.” The reason is because they denied the good of the manna. This is what Rashi was pointing to. If there were two aspects to their punishment (serpents and fiery), there must be a reason for both. So “serpents” are to correct their verbal venting, and “fiery” is intended to correct their denial of the good manna. Tangentially, Miriam wasn't punished with serpents because her degrading talk wasn't to outlet an emotion. Contained in her words was an incorrect notion regarding God's relationship with man. Thus, she had two faults; 1) she misunderstood how God relates to Moses (as compared to herself) and 2) she gave in to the feeling of haughtiness. God corrected her in both. He taught her how His relationship with Moses differed from His relationship with her, and He gave her leprosy, which lowers self esteem. This is another example of how God's punishments differ from man's punishments. When God punishes someone, or a people, it is to correct a fault. This is the concept behind “Mida k'neged mida” – measure for measure – where God's punishments respond to our flaws.

What about the question as to why God told Moses to make replica of the serpent? Didn't the people repent already? This is one way of asking this question. But we can deduce from the facts that there must have been something lacking if God told Moses to do something further. The question should be rephrased as the following: "What was it in the Jews' request for the removal of the serpents that their repentance was not complete?" You can see the answer clearly. Their confession to God and Moses is immediately followed by their request to have the serpents removed. (An important point about this is that they both take place in the same passage. When one passage contains a few thoughts, they are related.) Their repentance was only for the sake of removing their immediate pain from the serpents, and not a true correction of their error. Because of this, God instructed Moses to create a replica of the serpent so that they could stare at it and contemplate their problem properly, and remove from themselves their incorrect notions. Placing it upon the pole facilitated their directing of their thoughts towards God, Who is figuratively "upon high."

Summary

The following steps should be taken when approaching an area of Torah:

- 1) Know where the area begins and ends
- 2) Understand the area thoroughly
- 3) Distinguish between main points and side points
- 4) Ask yourself how this area differs from all other areas – this will help to point you towards the main topics
- 5) Formulate questions clearly using as much information as you have to work with
- 6) If the area deals with Gods relationship to man, detect either man's fault and see how the punishment fits the crime, or look into God's actions towards man to understand what He was improving upon
- 7) If the area deals with mitzvos (commandments), if they are positive commands, look into man's nature to see what they affect; and if they are negative commands, then they are coming to control a natural disposition of man, which must be tempered.

SHIVIM PANIM L'TORAH

Can two opposing opinions both be true? Can Maimonides and the Ramban be correct on a single truth, while holding opposing views? Ramban disputed Maimonides' words, so he would be the first to admit that both of them couldn't be correct. The gemara too, is replete with arguments. Did Hillel really think that Shammai was right on the very same point which Hillel disputed? Obviously not.

"Shivim Panim L'Torah" (many "sides" or truths to the Torah) means what, exactly? Does this mean that one can say literally any idea at all, and his view is defended by this principle? Or does it mean that when Maimonides said that Sacrifice commenced after Egypt, and Ramban said it dates back to Adam, they are both right, but "we are on such a low level we can't understand them?" Many Jews actually defend these two absurd interpretations, bred from the lack of independent thought and teamed with an improper respect for authorities. Jews are afraid to disagree and prefer to remain in a contradiction. This displays a crippled mind set.

In fact, Maimonides and Ramban or any two opinions that contradict each other cannot both be right. As far as halacha goes, yes: the Rabbis can tell us how to act, but not how to think. There is no "psak" – ruling – in philosophy. Psak is limited to halacha alone. Students of Hillel and Shammai would be in accord with halacha by following their respective, opposing Rabbi. But they need not follow him in philosophy. Here, psak plays no role, and the student must decide for himself. A wise Rabbi once taught that no one can tell you what to think.

Now, sacrifice can not have originated with Adam...and also after Egypt. Either one of these Rabbis is incorrect, or we missed the point of their underlying debate. And didn't both of these great minds know history? So how can they debate facts? The truth is, they do not. Their debate is not over the origin of the "act" of sacrifice, for this originated with Adam. Maimonides agrees with this. The debate might be regarding sacrifice's "status" as a "*halachic*" performance: Maimonides may claim this occurred after Egypt, and Ramban holds this role of sacrifice to have started much earlier. But to suggest they debate the date of origin of the act, and that both are correct, means we abandon reason. We cannot invoke Shivim Panim L'Torah to resolve mutually exclusive views. When we say Shivim Panim L'Torah, we mean that there can be many truths, even within a given point. However, the explanations must each make sense, and they must not contradict each other. There was a time in history when there were no disputes over halacha. It was only after people applied themselves less to study that we began to see disputes. Eventually, to keep one identity to the Torah, the

Shulchan Aruch, the code of Jewish law, was arranged.

Hillel and Shammai cannot both be right on the same point. But that doesn't matter, as the goal is not to determine what Moses knew, but to determine with one's own mind how one sees an area. Halacha is not based on what Moses would have said; it's based on what a Rav determines today. "*Had Yehoshua bin Nun told me such and such, I would not listen to him (Chullin 124a).*" What does this show? It shows that we are not looking for confirmation from the original baalei hamesora (Torah transmitters). This is not what creates halacha. Rather, as the Torah states, "*al pi batorah asher yorucha: in accordance with the Torah which they (the Rabbis) teach you (Deut. 17:11).*" The Rabbis today create halacha for us. When we are perplexed we consult our Rav. He determines the halacha. And as this verse teaches, it is in halacha alone that the Rabbis have jurisdiction. Furthermore, even within halacha, one's view of an area has prominence. The halacha is that if one has learned through an area in gemara, researched the Rishonim, and sees the law different than how he was taught, he has the right to follow his own mind. However, he must not teach this ruling to others.

One must not think that since someone of reputable status said an idea, then it must be true. Even Moses erred. Nor must we accept an idea just because it was found in print. Errors made their way into the Shulchan Aruch too. One must analyze what he hears. Just as the students in the time of the gemara asked questions on their rebbeim, so must we. We should not blindly accept ideas. Chazal say that "*v'lo habayshan lomed: an embarrassed person will not learn (Ethics 2:6).*"

If we are not to ask questions, but simply follow today's view of "we can't know, we are not on their level," then how did Chazal say this statement of "*v'lo habayshan lomed?*" Evidently, they were urging us to ask. Feigning a false humility with, "I am not on the level of Maimonides or Rashi, therefore I must not ask on their statements" will certainly lead to further ignorance. The Rabbis reject teaching students both: we can't question a Rashi or a Tosfos, and Torah must be followed without understanding. It also teaches human infallibility. All are false.

How can we expect our children to love learning if their minds are not stimulated by questions and if they aren't given the courtesy as equal humans to receive dignified attention to their concerns? Judaism is not dogma. We must urge students to ask their questions. And if as parents or teachers we don't know the answers, we must tell them "I don't know." Compliment them as well on their questions. You will never see a student or child light up as much as when they have a great question, and they are told so.

Teachers must be on guard not to seek reinforcement of their authority by squelching a student's zeal. This ruins a child. What could be a greater loss? Conversely, if we urge honest inquiry, and show respect to our children and students, you will see that in no time, your students and children will be learning out of a true appreciation for wisdom...*"Lesbma."* Youths have natural inquisitiveness, which can either be suppressed, or hopefully, encouraged. And when these children are encouraged, and then enter the world of Torah, they will not be afraid to ask.

We have the opportunity to create great students and teachers out of these children, offering them the true enjoyment of learning. Let us be careful not to dissuade them. Let us ensure that the next generation is an improvement over ours.

WISDOM OF THE VERSES: ABRAHAM & SODOM

We hear notions that do not fit the text, and notions that are not true. Teachers themselves are not aware of how God hides and reveals Torah insights. This forfeits the transmission and the delight possibly imparted to students. However, once a Torah student is exposed to the precise and insightful methods God uses in constructing the verses, that student will become imbued with an appreciation for Torah over all else he or she encounters. This is what we call "Love of God." We cannot know God's essence but we can know some of His wisdom on a human level. We love God through seeing His wisdom. And although it is minute wisdom, to us it can be remarkable. For this reason, we must not be satisfied with mediocre explanations and mere possibilities; we must insist on understanding why each word is found in each verse. Let us take an example:

"Shall I keep hidden from Abraham what I plan to do? And Abraham will surely become a great, mighty nation, and all nations of the land will be blessed due to him. For he is beloved on account that he will command his children and his household after him, and they will guard the path of God, performing charity and justice, so that God will bring upon Abraham what He has spoken. And God said [to Abraham], 'The cry of Sodom and Amora is great and their sin is greatly heavy. I will descend and see if in accordance with their cry that comes to Me I will annihilate them; and if not, I will know.'" (Gen. 18:17-21)

We understand from the following verse 18:25 that Abraham had a clear understanding that God would never kill the righteous on account of the sins of others:

Far be it to do such a thing, to kill the righteous with the wicked, and the righteous and the wicked would be equal, far be it...the judge of the Earth would not do justice?!

Abraham was correct in this exclamation. This was Abraham's knowledge of God all along: the wicked deserve punishment, and the righteous do not. This is justice.

However, God said earlier "Shall I keep hidden from Abraham what I plan to do?"

This is the first lesson: there are areas of knowledge which man cannot penetrate. And this is rightfully so, for man cannot possess all knowledge; only God does. Therefore, God expresses a sentiment to the Torah reader that if He does not disclose His wisdom on this topic of justice, Abraham will remain in the dark...it will be "hidden" from Abraham.

God also expressed His reasoning for inviting Abraham to investigate this matter: "*Abraham will surely become a great, mighty nation, and all nations of the land will be blessed due to him. For he is beloved on account that he will command his children and his household after him, and they will guard the path of God performing charity and justice...*" That is, God wishes the world to increase in their knowledge of Him. And since Abraham teaches his household of God's ways (and greatly benefits other nations by rebuking their idolatry, as Sforno states), God imparted to Abraham greater knowledge of morality. Examining the world or theorizing moralistic philosophy cannot uncover the secret we are about to discuss. That is the meaning behind the phrase "Shall I keep hidden." Therefore, God opened up a new area of knowledge so that Abraham should learn, and teach others.

The glaring question is this: If God decides not to hide this secret, where in this account do we see God informing Abraham of it?

Somehow, Abraham knew to ask God whether He would spare the wicked, based on numbers of righteous people. This mercy was not what Abraham knew before...this was the new piece of information God disclosed and did not hide. He assured Abraham that if at least 10 righteous people, He would spare all of them, even the wicked.

So we now know the secret: previously, Abraham assumed the wicked must die – no exceptions. But now Abraham understood that God's mercy can allow wicked people to remain, provided there exists the influence of at least 10 righteous people who can turn them back towards repentance and God. We understand this.

But again: from where did Abraham derive this new concept of God mercifully sparing the wicked people, on account of the righteous? God does not say this in the entire account! However, God does talk. The hints must be in what He told Abraham. Read it again:

And God said [to Abraham], ‘The cry of Sodom and Amora is great and their sin is greatly heavy. I will descend and see if in accordance with their cry that comes to Me, I will annihilate them; and if not, I will know.’

This is from where Abraham derived the new concept that God will spare the wicked. Do you see any questions that might hint to this newly-disclosed justice? I have one: If their sin is “greatly heavy,” why should they not receive punishment? This is compounded by God’s very words, “if in accordance with their cry that comes to Me, I will annihilate them.” God is saying that in accordance with their corruption, they deserve annihilation. Yet, God says there exists the possibility of Him ‘not’ annihilating them! Now, if their current state of sin requires God’s punishment, for what reason would God abstain? There is only one possibility where the merit to save them exists: the righteous inhabitants.

Abraham listened to God’s words, “in accordance with their state, they deserve annihilation.” But God also said a possibility exists that they will be spared. In God’s very words was the clue. Abraham now realized a new concept: God does not work with strict justice alone, but He also performs charity, “tzedaka.” Abraham knew about tzedaka, but he did not know all of its applications. It was necessary that God teach him this specific case. We might even add that God’s concluding words “I know” are meant to indicate to Abraham that this knowledge is what “God” knows, and not man. It is concealed until God imparts it through this prophecy. God intended to teach that this idea is of a concealed nature. He taught this to us through the future-given Torah narrative “Shall I keep hidden,” and He taught this to Abraham through the words “I know.”

Thus, God taught Abraham a new idea in justice that man could not arrive at alone: the wicked could be spared. And He also taught him that there are ideas, which are concealed if God does not offer man clues.

We learn that God presented just enough clues in His words to allow Abraham to think into the matter. Once he realized this new concept, the next question was how many righteous people are required to save the wicked. But why did God inform Abraham in such a subtle manner?

God does so as this increases a person’s intelligence, his reasoning power. Just as a Talmudic scholar is not born with his skills, but gains

them over decades of practice. . . Abraham too grew in his capacity to reason for himself through this experience. With thought, Abraham questioned his current beliefs and principles. Abraham moved beyond his previous boundaries, and excelled to greater wisdom.

Many times we prevent ourselves from alternative choices, simply because we are incapable of reasoning out all possibilities, or due to false assumptions. For example, a student may accept all ideas in books, simply due to his mind being crippled by the false notion that “all books must be true.” People are quite impressed by authors and feel each author knows about what he or she writes. But once the student sees an error in one book, this broadens his horizons and he will never again blindly accept any notion, just because it’s printed.

A wise Rabbi once cited Rav Moses Feinstein’s critique of the Ramban. Ramban condemned Abraham for leaving Canaan and descending to Egypt due to the famine. Rav Moses zt”l said that Ramban’s comment should be torn out of the Chumash. The lesson: even Ramban can be wrong. And even someone today can argue against a Ramban. But we incorrectly tend to shy away from such statements. We fear reputations. But you must know that the greatest of our teachers – Maimonides – openly invited anyone at all to correct his errors. Maimonides did not feel infallible; he admitted that those below him in wisdom could correct him. No one is always correct.

People sometimes say, “Who am I to argue with Ramban?” This means they credit Ramban, or any Rabbi, as possessing tools to attain accurate understanding. But God did not give Ramban alone the Tzelem Elohim – intelligence. God gave it to every human. He did so in order that we engage it, and not make such statements. If we continually refrain from challenging our teachers, we reject God’s will that we employ this great gift of intelligence. Of course we are respectful to all Torah scholars and teachers. But as one Talmudic Rabbi said, he cherished questions on his words, more than words of support.

Furthermore, any person who assesses the Rabbis as brilliant thereby admits he can accurately determine truth, i.e., that they are brilliant. And if he can determine truth, he then contradicts himself when saying he cannot argue with them. For if one can determine truth, and does so in a specific case, he must disagree with anyone who opposes that truth. Regardless of who it is. It is a false humility, or a corrupt mind that will at first passionately support his own view, and then back down when he learns a famous Torah scholar holds the opposite. If he was firm on his understanding at first, he must be honest and say he disagrees, regardless of whom he opposes. Again, the Torah commentaries disagree with each other, and do not blindly accept even those far greater than them.

Although I carried an awe of the Rabbis from youth, once I heard Rav Moses' critique of Ramban's words, I realized that no one is infallible. This was one of the greatest lessons that had the most dramatic affects on my studies. Furthermore, there is no Torah obligation to accept any idea outside of halacha. In matters of philosophy, there is no "psak" – ruling. Many times people say, "Maimonides is only a minority view, I need not follow him." Their error is in applying halachic principle of "majority rule" to hashkafa – philosophy. The Torah teaches, *"According to 'law' that they will teach you and the judgment that they will tell you, you should behave. You should not deviate from that which they tell you to the right or left."* (Deut. 17:11) One must not apply majority rule to philosophical matters. He must use his mind.

The refusal to accept popular opinions was Abraham's greatest trait. It was through questioning what he was taught, that he discovered the error of his father and of that entire idolatrous generation. This trait led him to discover God after 40 years of study on his own. There were yet areas that Abraham could not penetrate, but God assisted him. God also assists us in the form of His Torah. And if we continue to question the Torah, as is God's will, we will then unlock numerous other 'hidden' treasures. The verses are truly astonishing.

PURIM: METHOD IN LEARNING

There are different methods of analysis we apply, depending on the area studied. For example, when studying the Written Law (Chumash, Navi, Ksuvim) we must be sensitive to the very structure of the verses, for they are Divinely inspired. (This is not the case regarding Talmudic sections) In the Written Law, each word, sentence, and section reflects God's wisdom, and only with this appreciation do we uncover the layers of insights, and the depth of the ideas. It is only he who looks for the treasure, that finds it. If one sifts sand and locates a \$50 bill, he is ecstatic. But if one knows that a priceless chest of gold was somewhere in that vicinity, he would discard the \$50 bill along with the sand, until he finds the treasure. This applies in greater measure regarding the Torah student; he knows that in God's words lie vaults of deep wisdom and profound ideas, so he is dissatisfied unless he uncovers an idea that is nothing less than a marvel. So as he studies the Written Law, he asks, "What is the vital nature of each verse; why did God have to write 'this' verse? Why is it

following the previous verse, and preceding the next? What is the beginning and end of this area, so as not to force unrelated text into a working theory? How do all verses contribute to this section?" And the primary question: "Are there any unique matters here, not located elsewhere?" As each Torah lesson is unique, the rules in Torah methodology are many. Elucidation via example is the best means to illustrate our point. Let's proceed by addressing both Talmudic questioning, and that pertaining to the Written Law.

Below is a Talmudic quote (*Megilla 7a-b*) discussing the verse in Megillas Esther 9:22 when Mordechai established the laws for all Purim holidays to come. Mordechai instituted the mitzvah of sending portions of food to friends (Mishloach Mannos) and gifting two poor people (Matanos La-eyyonim):

And gifts to the poor – Rabbi Yosef learned, "[the Megilla states] And sending portions man to his friend" [portions is plural, meaning] two portions to one man, "and gifts to the poor people," [this means] two portions to two people.

Rabbi Judah the prince sent to Rabbi Oshiyah a leg of a third-born calf and a pitcher of wine, and the latter [wrote back] to him the message, "Our teacher has confirmed both duties to send portions one to another; and to give gifts to the needy."

Raba sent to Mari bar Mar through Abaye a bag of dates and a goblet full of flour of dried wheat. Said Abaye to him, "Now Mari will say, When a countryman becomes a king, he is still unable to remove the basket from his shoulder. And it is the same with you: now you are the Head of the College, and send to him commonplace articles." R. Mari bar Mar returned [a gift] to Raba through Abaye, a pouch of ginger and a goblet full of long peppers. Said Abaye, "Now the Master [Raba] will say, I had sent him sweets, and he has sent to me sharp things.

The first thing we note when reading this section is a distinction: the beginning derives lessons from the Megillas Esther text, and the latter are examples of Rabbis fulfilling the mitzvahs. Let's recognize this distinction, realize they deserve differing analyses, and address each separately. As the first section discusses derivations from the Megillas' verses, let's review the verses in context.

Analyzing the Written Law

9:15 *For the Jews that were in Shushan gathered themselves together on the fourteenth day also of the month Adar, and slew three hundred men at Shushan; but on the spoils they laid not their hand.*

9:16 *But the other Jews that were in the king's provinces gathered themselves together, and stood for their lives, and had rest from their enemies, and slew of their foes seventy and five thousand, but they laid not their hands on the spoils.*

9:17 *On the thirteenth day of the month Adar; and on the fourteenth day of the same rested they, and made it a day of feasting and gladness.*

9:18 *But the Jews that were at Shushan assembled together on the thirteenth day thereof, and on the fourteenth thereof; and on the fifteenth day of the same they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness.*

9:19 *Therefore the Jews of the villages, that dwelt in the non-walled towns, made the fourteenth day of the month Adar a day of gladness and feasting, and a good day, and of sending portions one to another.*

9:20 *And Mordechai wrote these things, and sent letters unto all the Jews that were in all the provinces of the king Achashverosh, both nigh and far.*

9:21 *...to establish this among them, that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same, yearly.*

9:22 *...as the days wherein the Jews rested from their enemies, and the month which was turned unto them from sorrow to joy, and from mourning into a good day: that they should make them days of feasting and joy, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor.*

9:23 *And the Jews undertook to do as they had begun, and as Mordechai had written unto them.*

9:24 *Because Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had devised against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur, that is, the lottery, to consume them, and to destroy them.*

9:25 *But when Esther came before the king, he commanded by letters that his wicked device, which he devised against the Jews, should return upon his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows.*

9:26 *Wherefore they called these days Purim after the name of Pur.*

Of course, when studying a text, many questions arise. So it is essential that we remain focussed on our precise topic: the two mitzvahs of giving portions of food, and gifting the poor. With that in mind, we filter extraneous text from our concerns and question the related text alone:

Why in 9:19 did the Jews give meals to each other...what does this have to do with a victory over the enemy?

And why in 9:22 does Mordechai add the command of gifting the poor, not originally performed by the Jews upon their victory?

To answer the first question, we noted that the salvation was of the “Jewish nation” and not of an individual. This was the primary cause for rejoicing, the very point we are discussing: commands of Purim that engender rejoicing. Masses – not individuals – represent the Jewish “nation”. Therefore, one may not celebrate individually, but only with others. So we understand the concept of delivering portions to a friend. Our mitzvah must incorporate a gladness with others...an expression of nationhood.

Our second question is why in 9:22 Mordechai added the command of gifting the poor? Stated above, Divinely written texts are highly precise in design. Therefore, we must also ask about the other new information included in 9:22: Why does this verse include “and the month which was turned unto them from sorrow to joy, and from mourning into a good day?” We have a tradition that all elements in a single verse are related. Equally important is to make certain we have covered all text related to our question, so we are fully informed regarding all of God’s “clues” in this area. Not possessing all the clues, we may get sidetracked, or ask misleading questions. Once we have studied all related texts, we continue.

We then deduce that these extra elements “and the month which was turned unto them from sorrow to joy, and from mourning into a good day” are related to Mordechai’s extra command of gifting the poor; they are joined in a single verse. Now we have a starting point: we compare the two elements of 1) gifting the poor, to the fact that the month was 2) transformed from negative to positive. Think about what might be a commonality...pause here.

Do you see what else we did? We also categorized the starting and ending points in the transitions as “negative” and “positive.” This categorization or definition of the two transformations will highlight a more apparent tie with gifting the poor. Think about it a moment, then read on.

Why did Mordechai institute an additional commandment of gifting the poor? Perhaps the very verse hints the answer. In the verse where Mordechai institutes gifting the poor, we also learn that Purim was a day that was a transformation, “from anguish to happiness,” and “from mourning to holiday.” Perhaps Mordechai’s message was akin to Passover’s message.

During the Seder as free people we must also recall our servitude. This contrast to our current freedom engenders within us a feeling of gratitude to God for His redemption. Mordechai too sought to perpetuate our gratitude for God's salvation from Haman's attempted holocaust by reminding us of that day's transformation. This was Mordechai's intent in creating the Purim holiday: to focus on God, as all commands must do. He did so by requiring that we all gift the poor as a recognition of man's lowly state, on the day when we celebrate salvation of life. Gifting the poor brings to our consciousness man's deprived state, and our need of God's graces for our very life and sustenance. The poor man is a model of our very state, prior to God's salvation from Haman. The verse recalls our transformation from negative to positive, and ties it together with the command to gift the poor, for this reason. In fact, the following verses bear out this contrast:

[Negative state of the Jews] Because Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had devised against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur, that is, the lottery, to consume them, and to destroy them.

[Positive salvation] But when Esther came before the king, he commanded by letters that his wicked device, which he devised against the Jews, should return upon his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows.

Why is the transition duplicated? The answer is found when we compare "anguish to gladness" and "morning to holiday." The former addresses a person's inner feelings, while the latter is the "expression in action." We were transformed both emotionally, and in action. This shows that we weren't only removed from anguish, but our mental state was brought the "height" of happiness, expressed in actions of holiday. God rendered a "complete" transformation, only seen when man celebrates. Thus, we learn that God's kindness is abundant, and not merely a minimal response to our needs. Malachi 3:10 reiterates this point: "*I will pour empty out a blessing more than enough.*" God also made the Patriarch's rich, even more rich than kings, "*And Avimelech [King of the Pelishtim] said to Isaac, 'Depart from us, for you are wealthier than us (Gen. 26:16).'*" "*And God blessed Abraham with everything (Gen. 24:1).'*"

Here is but a small example of some methods employed to discover new Torah truths. As a final note on the Megilla, we appreciate that Mordechai – who was not coerced into exile with the Jewish nation – volunteered himself into their fate to ensure the nation's well-being. He monitored the Jews participation in Achashverosh's feast, Jews who ostensibly

accepted foreign gods. Mordechai therefore made a public rejection of Haman when the latter demanded he bow to him. Mordechai wished to make the Jews acutely aware of their backsliding into this foreign culture. He used his public rejection as a wake-up call to all Jews. He also used his cunning with Esther to manipulate their salvation, complimented by God's Providence, as these two righteous souls sacrificed themselves for the nation. Now let us return to the second part of the Talmudic portion we study.

Oral Law: Analyzing Talmud

Rabbi Judah the prince sent to Rabbi Oshiyah a leg of a third-born calf and a pitcher of wine, and the latter [wrote back] to him the message, "Our teacher has confirmed both duties to send portions one to another; and to give gifts to the needy."

The Talmud continues with a few examples of the Rabbis' fulfillment of these two laws. It is important to note that Talmudic study focuses on theories, so as to grasp deeper insight into God's Torah formulations.

The Talmud asks, "What is the initial thought that we come and learn this lesson?" That is, every lesson comes to remove alternative possibilities, so we wonder why the alternative cannot be true. Rabbi Oshiyah tells Rabbi Judah that his one act sufficed to fulfill the two commands; normally construed as requiring two, distinct actions. Yet, Rabbi Oshiyah says otherwise: the food and wine you sent not only satisfies the requirement of giving "portions to a friend," but since I am also poor, you also satisfied the requirement of "gifting poor people."

Our task as Talmudic students is to now ask the following: "How might we construe the law that both Mishloach Mannos (food portions sent to a friend) and Mattanos La-evyonim (gifting two poor people) should be separate acts? And conversely, how might the law be formulated that even one gift – as Rabbi Judah the Prince gave Rabbi Oshiyah – suffices to fulfill both commands, in one act?"

The first thing to note is the unique lesson of any Talmudic portion, just as we seek when studying the Written Law.

What is unique here? We read, "Our teacher has confirmed both duties." Typically, one command is distinct from another, because by their very natures, one act cannot satisfy both commands. For example, the command to build a parapet (fencing) on our roof to protect one from falling, obviously cannot also fulfill the command to eat matzah. But what about the command to give charity, and gladdening the bride and groom: can we do one act of giving money to a poor couple, and accomplish both

mitzvahs? What theory would explain that we need not give two separate checks for each mitzvah? Where would we look for the answer?

We might take the inverse question, “What would be a reason to give two checks?” Examining the inverse many times brings to mind a more apparent observation. We might answer, “The Torah requires individual actions per mitzvah, so I must give two checks, as two actions.” To this, we state, “But if the mitzvah is to perfect ‘me’, and I recognize the perfection in charity and in gladdening the couple, nothing is lost by giving a single check.” Then, we are forced to apply this reasoning to our case, and wonder why we might have thought that Purim’s mitzvahs still require two actions. What might be different here, that the Talmud found it necessary to teach us otherwise? We then examine the nature of these commands. We ask ourselves what is unique to these two mitzvahs. We recognize that we are to “improve the demeanor of others.” But these two commands are distinct. We observe an intriguing new lesson...

When we give to a friend, the objective is different than giving to a poor person. The poor person requires sustenance. Although my friend may be rich, yet, I must give him portions of food. The reason is in order to foster good feelings of friendship. However, when giving to the poor, we are not fostering friendship, but addressing a deprivation and instilling dignity by commiserating. As such, we assume we cannot achieve both reactions in a single person. In typical mitzvahs, the fulfillment inheres solely in the “performer.” But in these two commands, the fulfillment depends on the reaction in the “recipient.” Therefore, the Talmud teaches that although that is the norm, if, as in Rabbi Oshiyah’s case, a recipient experienced both reactions, we can fulfill both commands, as did Rabbi Judah.

We have gained new insight into human nature, and into halacha. Human nature is that our individual relationships carry a single “tone.” We are either friends, benefactors, subservient, authority figures...the list goes on. We relate to others primarily in a single manner. Therefore, this singularity of our relationships precludes us from generating two distinct reactions in one person. It follows that we cannot fulfill Mishloach Manos and Mattanos La-eyyonim in one person. That is what we might have thought. The outcome or “maskana,” is that it all depends on the recipient: if he feels as did Rabbi Oshiyah, then we in fact might fulfill both mitzvahs in one person, since he can possibly appreciate our single gift in both capacities of friend, and benefactor.

Repetition

Raba sent to Mari bar Mar through Abaye a bag of dates and a goblet full of flour of dried wheat. Said Abaye to Raba, "Now Mari will say, 'When a countryman becomes a king, he is still unable to remove the basket from his shoulder.' And it is the same with you: now you are the Head of the College, and send to him commonplace articles!" R. Mari bar Mar returned [a gift] to Raba through Abaye, a pouch of ginger and a goblet full of long peppers. Said Abaye to Mari, "Now Raba will say, 'I had sent him sweets, and he has sent to me sharp things.'"

Why is this next portion relevant? This subsequent Talmudic portion validates the very theory we discuss: fulfillment of Mishloach Mannos does in fact inhere in the recipient, and not in us, the performer. Read it again!

Abaye – the messenger – is telling these Rabbis that this mitzvah of sending portions is only fulfilled, if the recipient is happy with the gift. Meaning, the reaction in the recipient determines whether the mitzvah was fulfilled...our exact point. And perhaps why the Talmud cites these cases here. Furthermore, satisfaction is a subjective phenomenon: we have two examples here. First, we see that according to Abaye, Mari's knowledge that Raba was a leader would disappoint Mari with Raba's mediocre gift. And second, Raba would be dissatisfied with Mari's sharp tasting foods, as compared to the sweets Raba had sent Mari. Many factors can contribute to the recipient's satisfaction, the exact affect we are required to elicit.

So the Talmud's repetition of the theory – now expressed in action – teaches the Talmudic student if he is on the correct track.

Summary

Aside from examining the method in Torah study, we have gained some interesting ideas. But let us review some of the methods we have outlined here.

1) Make certain to determine that the section of text to be analyzed is a self-contained area. Too little or too much content will confuse the core issues with superfluous matter. Review it to make certain.

2) Identify the unique matters you feel are not encountered elsewhere, and use that as your anchor to remain focussed on the unique lesson of your selected area.

3) Most areas run for many passages or lines of text, so look for a sequence. Understand the flow of the text or Rabbinic statements; these can clue you in to the intended lessons.

4) If you find yourself at a loss for answers, try asking the inverse. For example, if you cannot answer the question “What is the definition of a door?” Ask the opposite, “What do I lack without a door?” The absence sometimes alerts the mind to something more obvious.

5) When reading literally “any” text, ask yourself, “Why do I need to know this...what would I have though had this NOT been written?” This can hone you in to the unique lesson.

6) Look for any repetition as an indication of the primary lesson, or as a validation.

7) Ideas located together in a single verse must be related. Seek out the relationship.

8) When considering an explanation for any matter, suggest the minimal necessary to suffice as an answer. Viz., “The reason the glass broke was due to an object hitting it.” You need not posit object’s size, unless the question included “Why was the hole was that big?” Or, “The tire went flat since the car drove over a sharp object.” But we need not stipulate that speed of the car. That does not contribute anything to the answer, and confuses the issue.

9) Remember the Rabbis’ saying regarding the Written Law, “The answer is by its side.” This means that the content that generates your question, is also the very content that will give you your answer.

10) Don’t force a theory...if you hit on a correct answer, it should fit perfectly into the words.

11) Use others as a sounding board for your ideas. A wise Rabbi once said that is why King Solomon was called Koheles, from the term “kehila,” a group. He bounced his ideas off others so as to reduce the chances of his theories being incorrect.

“LET THE WORDS TALK TO YOU”

Maybe I heard that stated only once, but that’s all I needed. It was decades ago when a wise Rabbi said this during one of his many lectures. His words left a lasting impression.

He was referring to the correct method for deriving the intent of any Torah verse, as well as any Torah section. “Let the words talk to you” as opposed superimposing our own notions. We may have true ideas, but Torah study is “study,” where we are receivers: we seek to unveil the underlying meaning and not suggest anything unwarranted. We must learn to become highly sensitized to the deliberate nuances of a verse and the unique design of each of the Torah’s clues. God had Moses write each verse in such a way that if we are properly trained, we will notice astonishing questions that lead to their very answers.

“What *must* you say?” was another valuable piece of advice the Rabbi offered. With these words, the Rabbi’s intent was to make us aware that one could possibly attribute many meanings to a verse. But that doesn’t mean our interpretation is the true intent. By ensuring we do not say anything else than what is absolutely warranted by the written words and phrases, we remain true to God’s message, and do not convolute it with our projections unintended by the verses.

The Rabbi desired to uncover God’s intended truths. He understood that God encoded the Torah with a method of study, and that method is the only key to unlocking the purposefully obscured and profound ideas. He understood how to bring a Torah section to life with remarkable insights that floored you...and fit the words perfectly. It was that amazement at how he taught that caused myself and hundreds of others to stand in awe of the Creator and His remarkable Torah.

Applying his lessons, I took up the area of leprosy and Lashon Hara with a friend. In his Mishneh Torah (Laws of Tumah and Tzaraas 16:10) Maimonides refers to two Torah sections. Deuteronomy 24:8.9 reads as follows:

Be on guard regarding the affliction of leprosy to be exceedingly careful to do as all the Levite priests teach you as I have commanded; you shall guard to do. Remember that which God did to Miriam on the way when you left Egypt.

We must review that earlier account of Miriam’s affliction of leprosy. But we must be clear: Maimonides openly states that Miriam did not speak Lashon Hara about Moses, as he classifies only ‘derogatory’ speech as Lashon Hara (*Dayos* 7:3).

Maimonides says the following (*Tumah and Tzaraas* 16:10):

Ponder well what happened to Miriam who spoke about her brother [Moses]; and she was older than him, and she raised him on her lap, and she risked her life to save him from the sea, and she did not speak of him derogatorily. Rather, her error was that she equated him [Moses] to all other Prophets, and he was not particularly on all these matters as it says "And the man Moses was exceedingly more humble than any man on the face of the Earth." And even so, Miriam was afflicted immediately with leprosy. Certainly, regarding foolish wicked people who continually speak great, wondrous things.

Maimonides teaches that Miriam did not speak Lashon Hara, although she erred and received leprosy. He informs us that from Miriam one may derive an a fortiori argument (from the lesser to the stronger) i.e., one will certainly receive leprosy if one does in fact intend to degrade another person with speech. We thereby learn that leprosy is not only given for Lashon Hara, but for other forms of mistakes made with speech, as is the case regarding Miriam. Let us now study that sin of Miriam.

Numbers 12:1-10:

And Miriam and Aaron spoke about Moses regarding the matter of the black woman that he married; for he married a black woman. And they said, "Is it only with Moses that God speaks, does God not also speak with us?" and God heard. And the man Moses was exceedingly more humble than any man on the face of the Earth. And God said suddenly to Moses and to Aaron and to Miriam: 'The three of you come out to the tent of Meeting', and the three of them came out. And God was revealed in a pillar of cloud and it stood [at] the opening of the tent and He called Aaron and Miriam and the two of them came out. And He said, 'Listen please to My words: if there will be Prophets of God: in a vision to him I will make Myself known; in a dream I will speak to him. Not so is it with My servant Moses; in all My house he is trusted. Face to face I speak with him and in vision and not with riddles; and the form of God he beholds...and why were you not fearful to speak against My servant, against Moses?' And there burned God's anger with them and He left. And the cloud removed from upon the tent and behold Miriam was leprous like snow, and Aaron turned to Miriam and she was leprous.

Maimonides' words are that Miriam erred by equating Moses to all other Prophets. Meaning, we will follow the commentary that says Moses separated from his wife as God commanded after Revelation at Sinai. For through Sinai, Moses rose to a higher level and marriage was no longer befitting this level.

*Is it only with Moses that God speaks, does God not also speak with us?
And God heard.*

Miriam responds that she and Aaron did not separate from their spouses as did Moses, although they too received God's prophecies. She equated herself and Aaron, to Moses, an error that Maimonides says is the core issue. But we must ask why Miriam had to "discuss" her opinion. What forces one – with any opinion – to advance the "thought" to a "discussion?" The only change is that a discussion includes another person. Perhaps here, Miriam was too preoccupied with "social" framework: meaning, she assessed her relationship with Moses. But man should be focused on his or her relationship with God, not with other people.

And God heard.

Of course God heard...God hears everything. We must question the necessity to mention this here, and not in other cases where people sinned through speech. One answer: Miriam was not engaged in relating to God when she discussed Moses with Aaron. Therefore, God wrote in His Torah that He did in fact hear, indicating that this is where she should have been focused. Had Miriam acted properly, she would not have concerned herself with her status relative to Moses. She would not be "comparing." By teaching us that He did hear, we learn that Miriam was talking in a manner 'not in pursuit of God.' God is subtly teaching us that Miriam's sin was in the directing of her attention more towards man, than towards God. By contrast, "and God heard" highlights her focus on man.

And the man Moses was exceedingly more humble than any man on the face of the Earth.

Since Moses was so humble, he would not take such discussions to heart and concern himself with the relative statuses of people. It means nothing to the perfected man whether he "measures up" to others. He is not a competitor and his values have nothing to do with social acceptance or status. Rather, the perfected man is a philosopher, so only truth, and God's approval concern him. This verse explains at least two things: 1) why Moses didn't respond, and 2) it contrasts Moses' perfection to Miriam's imperfection, making Miriam's error more acute.

And God said suddenly to Moses and to Aaron and to Miriam: 'The three of you come out to the tent of Meeting', and the three of them came out. And God was revealed in a pillar of cloud and it stood [at] the opening of the tent and He called Aaron and Miriam and the two of them came out.

Again we read of an unusual case: God said “suddenly.” Why was a ‘sudden’ prophecy essential? The Rabbis explain that unlike Moses, other Prophets required preparation so as to receive prophecy. But in this one exception, God allowed Miriam and Aaron to receive a prophecy without preparation, “suddenly.” Miriam equated her Prophetic level to that of Moses. It was therefore necessary that she experience another type of prophecy; one in which she understands firsthand that she erred in grouping all Prophets under one type.

To support this point, I would ask why God does not address them after all three came out. Why does He again call only Miriam and Aaron, and only then He addresses them after that second calling?

This is to teach that the first calling (of all three) was not for the ‘content’ of the prophecy, for nothing was spoken. Rather, the absence of any message during the first calling taught Miriam and Aaron that the prophecy was meant to allow them to experience a Prophetic ‘style’ different than what they knew... a “sudden” prophecy. Thus, nothing was communicated during that first calling. For it was not intended for any communication, but rather, for their firsthand experience. Experiencing a different level of prophecy, Miriam and Aaron could now grasp they were wrong... they were now open to what comes next: God’s rebuke.

And He said, "Listen please to My words."

God again uses an unusual introduction. But in fact, in every Torah portion, there is something unusual, or rather, “new.” For every portion must teach something we cannot know from any other portion. Torah is not redundant. And when we are successful at identifying that unique lesson in each given area, we have sensed the distinction of this area... and we have “learned.”

Now, why does God open with these introductory words? Consider that Miriam’s error was in equating her Prophetic level with that of her brother Moses. One error has already been addressed: she has been shown that other levels of prophecy exist, aside from what she had experienced. She learned of a “sudden” prophecy, something she never experienced before. But prophecy is not only a unique phenomenon and experience with various levels. Prophecy also communicates “content.” In this too there are levels. This is the next lesson God offers Miriam and Aaron...

God opens with the request “Listen,” which means that without pondering the content – without “listening” – simple audibility is insufficient. God asks Miriam and Aaron to “listen,” to contemplate the meaning of His forthcoming words. God intimates to them that here is another area that you differ from Moses. And God elaborates on this...

*If there will be Prophets of God: in a vision to him I will make Myself known;
in a dream I will speak to him. Not so is it with My servant Moses;
in all My house he is trusted. Face to face I speak with him and in vision and
not with riddles.*

God teaches Miriam and Aaron that Moses need not ponder God’s word, for Moses sees the truth openly “face to face.” There are no riddles, since Moses is a higher intellect. In contrast, Miriam and Aaron must decipher Prophetic content, for they are not on Moses’ level. They need to “listen” to God’s words. The second lesson is now clear.

And the form of God he beholds.

God teaches another fundamental. When Moses receives a prophecy, it offers him a new reflection of God’s ways. It would appear that with other Prophets, such is not the case. Other Prophets must first decipher the prophecy, which initially may not offer knowledge regarding God, but abstract illustration...perhaps impressing upon Miriam that Moses perceives matters she has not.

And why were you not fearful to speak against My servant, against Moses?

God just described how Moses was involved in accurately comprehending the most lofty matters. He reached the highest level of perfection and was the “zenith of the human species” as the Rabbis state. This being so, Miriam and Aaron must have had a false idea concerning human existence. This was their crime. Instead of appreciating the true role of man, which would be expressed as learning from Moses, they missed this point momentarily and discussed their relative, Prophetic statuses as compared to Moses. Such a discussion completely misses the mark. They viewed Moses as a peer, in social framework, as opposed to their teacher. Miriam and Aaron should have never viewed Moses in any light other than his true worth: a perfected human – from whom to learn and not judge.

Their error was grave: it was regarding a Torah fundamental. As my friend pointed out, Maimonides 13 Principles includes Moses’ unique, Prophetic classification as the greatest Prophet ever. The primary reason this is a fundamental is that it precludes all others from claiming greater authority than Moses’ Torah. For if someone would claim to be greater

than Moses, then the Torah – given by Moses – could be obsolete. Torah depends on prophecy, another of Maimonides' 13 Principles. For Torah is synonymous with “communication from God.”

Moses reached the highest spiritual level any man can reach. Having made such an error about man's role, Miriam and Aaron received a punishment equated with death, teaching that such an error removes us from the objective of life.

The many lectures I attended by that wise Rabbi displayed a Torah system that requires patience until one finally “hears the words talk.” And when they do, it is amazing. Torah also trains us to say “only what must be said”: we learn to be receivers – not projecting anything we feel onto the verses. Torah ultimately excites us with an anticipation for each new area we explore in our pursuit of God's endless wisdom.

RAVA CREATED A MAN?

*Rava said, 'If one is righteous, he could create worlds [like God].'
As it says, 'For your sins separate you from your God' [Isaiah 59].
Rava thereby created a man, and sent him to Rav Zeira. He spoke
to him but he did not answer. Rav Zeira said, 'You are from the
chavrei [sorcerers], return to your dust.' On each Friday evening
Rav Chanina and Rav Oshiah would indulge in Sefer Yetzira
[book of Creation] and would create a third-grown calf and eat it.
[Sanhedrin 65b]*

That is some portion of Talmud! Can this be literal? Some recite such metaphors with literal acceptance. However, we know God is the only creator, discounting a literal interpretation of this Talmudic portion. We must ask the questions that can unravel metaphors.

First we notice that Rava “created” a human being and the others created an animal. Such stories must be metaphoric, and perhaps the Talmud commences with the most glaring impossibility to set the tone that the entire story is metaphoric. Why did Rava send the man he created to Rav Zeira, and what about it did Rav Zeira disapprove? Also, how does the quote from Isaiah fit in, “For your sins separate you from your God?” What is the connection between the two acts of creation of a man, and a calf? And why were Rav Chanina and Rav Oshiah apparently successful, as they “enjoyed” their creation, while Rava was not? Comparing the two

creations, we immediately notice that the second one is animal, not a man, and that it had a positive outcome.

The Talmud cites a quote from Isaiah that might be misunderstood, “For your sins separate you from your God.” It appears at first that only our sins separate us from God, otherwise we would not be separated. But this cannot be as we recite numerous times daily that God is “Kadosh” – greatly elevated and distinguished from all creation. The Talmud is actually showing how man cannot understand human creation, let alone perform creation. But it does so in a metaphoric style:

Sabbath is the day of Creation. As such, the Rabbis were accustomed to study areas of Creation, as they always studied “matters of the day.” (On Succos they would study that holiday as well, etc.) On one such Sabbath eve, Rava studied man’s creation, and felt he had a new understanding about how God created man, as if Rava “could create a man” himself. Rava did not send a “man” to Rav Zeira, but rather, he sent his findings from his studies, asserting he obtained a new insight. His sending must have been out of some doubt, so he desired his teacher’s analysis. Rav Zeira asked a question to Rava, to which Rava had no answer. Rav Zeira said “return to the dust” meaning, return to studies about dust, and not man, an intelligent being. Rav Zeira was saying that we cannot know so much about how God created intelligent beings like man: metaphysics is difficult. “Return to the dust” is Rav Zeira’s ridicule that Rava should return to studying lower areas within his grasp, i.e., “dust.” However, Rav Chanina and Rav Oshiah studied matters of biology alone, well within their abilities. “Creating a calf” and “eating” it mean “understanding biology” and “enjoying” it, respectively. But even in the more approachable area of biology, we read that Rav Chanina and Rav Oshiah were only able to create a “third-grown” calf. This means that human knowledge, although grasping some amount, is still incomplete. . . “a third” of the knowledge out there.

Perhaps also explained is that Rava’s independent studies resulted in errors, while Rav Chanina and Rav Oshiah who studied together were successful. This illustrates how essential it is to test one’s ideas on another, removing the possibility of errors generated by overestimation of the self and personal infallibility. Gaining a critique almost always minimizes mistakes, “*in a multitude of counselors there is safety (Proverbs 11:14).*” And as a Rabbi once taught, the very first verse of Proverbs also teaches this idea: “*The proverbs of Solomon son of David, King over Israel*” was stated by King Solomon to teach that he had a great teacher and an environment that fostered wisdom. The King wished to express that his work Proverbs was substantiated by great minds who influenced his thinking, and on whom he also tested his thoughts to determine their veracity.

THE SEVEN-HEADED SERPENT

Kiddushin 29b records a fantastic story of a “mazik” (destructive force) that plagued the study hall of Abayeh. As the account goes, Rav Yaakov bar Acha, upon witnessing his son’s poor Talmudic skills, ventured to Abayeh’s study hall, as he decided that he was more fit to learn than his son. When Abayeh learned of Rav Yaakov bar Acha’s upcoming arrival, he urged all townspeople not to offer Rav Yaakov hospitality. Rav Yaakov will thereby be forced to lodge at the study hall, and perhaps a miracle will be performed for him in his study hall, and he will be spared from this mazik. It was stated that even two students who entered this study hall, even during the day, were at risk due to this mazik. Rav Yaakov stayed in the study hall overnight. During his stay, this mazik appeared to him as a seven-headed serpent, a “tanina” in Aramaic. Rav Yaakov began to pray, and with each bow of his head in prayer (to God) one of the serpent’s heads fell off. The next morning, Rav Yaakov stated that had it not been for a miracle, he would have been in danger. We have no shortage of questions. But before reading mine below, think about the account for yourself.

- 1) Why couldn’t Abayeh himself rid the study hall of this mazik?
- 2) What do 7 heads represent?
- 3) Why was this mazik found in the study hall, as opposed to somewhere else?
- 4) Why couldn’t R. Yaakov rid it all at once, instead of only one head at each a bow?
- 5) How did prayer remove this mazik?
- 6) Is a mazik a real creature, or is it a metaphor for something else?
- 7) The serpent did not attack Rav Yaakov, or anyone for that matter. What then was the danger?
- 8) Why did Rav Yaakov attribute his success to a miracle? Did he not witness his actions himself?
- 9) What is the meaning of “even two who enter” and even “by day” are in danger?”
- 10) Why was the mazik also referred to as a “tanina,” a serpent?

Let us explore the method of Torah study in addition to offering explanations. This case presents a prime opportunity for unraveling the Rabbis’ metaphors and their hidden meanings. I have listed the questions above so you may think into them. I will demonstrate what I feel is an effective approach to questioning, offering explanations for this metaphor in the process. The fact that the mazik was only found in the study hall

should draw our attention. How should we formulate a question leading to an answer? Simply asking “Why was it there?” will not lead to a critical analysis. However, reformulating the question as follows will better lead to some insight:

“What is the distinction of a study hall, that a certain damage can occur there, as opposed to other places?” This reformulation drives our thoughts towards a study hall’s distinction. We can now answer, “It is a place designated for learning.” So we question further, “What danger is there when one learns in the study hall?” (The story clearly states this location is where this mazik was found.) Studying is the greatest of all God’s commands! What type of danger can exist when occupying our time with God’s greatest command? Let’s think. Whether we learn quickly or slowly, we still learn, so we are not in danger with regard to acquiring content. If we don’t learn at all, this is not characterized as a “danger.” If we learn false ideas, this is inevitable; we all make errors. Nothing can be done about man’s disposition to err. So where is the danger?

But there is one facet of study which is in fact harmful. One can learn for the sole purpose of being called a scholar, and this has destructive results. Man’s desire for self aggrandizement – even through Torah study – is scorned by the Rabbis. I believe with this small piece of information we can open up the entire mystery of this story.

The mazik being found only in the study hall shows us that there is a “damaging” force alive in this place. But it is not a being. This “mazik” is a metaphor for a psychological attitude. We are well familiar with it: “competition.” Learning in Abayeh’s study hall had an ill effect on those students: they felt they had to be as smart as Abayeh. This is unfortunately a common practice today, where people learn for the sake of honor. It is even promoted. However, this is not the derech ha’Torah – the way of Torah. One’s learning should be for one purpose; the love of Torah insights. The appreciation of the Torah system and all true ideas must be our goal – not the honor gained by our mastery.

In Abayeh’s study hall a competitive emotion grew among the students, which caused those who could not see themselves on Abayeh’s level, to view themselves as failures. Compared to Abayeh, they failed at learning, and threw up their hands in surrender. This occurred due to an egotistical motive for learning, not the true motive: love of the truth.

Abayeh knew this, and wished to remedy the situation. Upon hearing of Rav Yaakov’s planned visit, he wanted a demonstration shown that one could learn successfully, if he was on a proper level, and with proper motives. Abayeh therefore told all townspeople not to offer Rav Yaakov overnight lodging, forcing him to lodge in the study hall so it would be dem-

onstrated that Rav Yaakov, and anyone for that matter, could learn well, despite Abayeh's great reputation. Through his prolonged and public stay in the study hall day and night and not lodging privately at the home of a host, more students would witness Rav Yaakov learning for the proper reasons. But we see that the story states that this mazik even appeared to Rav Yaakov. This means that even he was under some degree of influence of this competitive emotion. But how did he combat it? He directed his energies towards God, and reconfirmed his purpose for learning through prayer. By praying, he realigned his attitude for learning with the zeal for discovering God's wisdom. It was a slow process; therefore the story states that with each bow he removed a head from the "mazik," from the danger. This competitive emotion could not be removed all at once, but only in a slow and steady fashion. So we read that the heads were severed one at a time, not simultaneously. In general, any change in our emotions takes time. (It is for this reason that Jacob limped on his leg after wrestling with his own personality [the "man"], and why Bilaam hurt his leg when slowly realizing his attempt to curse the Jews was a fruitless activity. A 'hurt leg' in both instances means that one's "path in life" is being redirected. "Leg" represents the vehicle for 'traveling' in a path of life, and a 'hurt leg' means this path is being inhibited.)

But why did the author of this metaphor design the creature as a seven-headed serpent? (The number seven is not important, as it merely indicates "many.") The answer: to show that the problem, the mazik, refers to that which involves the "head," i.e., wisdom. Abayeh was a great scholar – analogous to one with 'many heads.' Thus, the metaphor of the creature's form. I believe it is possible that the author of this medrash (story) referred to the creature as a serpent ("tanina") for a good reason. The tanina here represents the competitive drive which Abayeh's greatness awakened: the term tanina is used, because it also shares the same Aramaic root relating to learning, or one who learns. ("Tana" or "tanina" refer to an author of a Mishna.) So tanina is used in this story as a hint, that the creature represents the one who learned well, namely Abayeh.

The reason "even two students were in danger" is to teach us that normally, when two students study together, the self aggrandizement born out of one's independent studies is challenged by the partner's critique of his ideas. Two people who learn together always experience their ideas being tested and opposed by their learning partner. In normal circumstances, one's ego would be in check. This story hints at the specific danger through telling us that "even two students" were subject to this danger. This points to an "ego" issue.

“Even by day” teaches us that at night, emotions have the upper hand. Daytime normally dulls the impact of our emotions, so this emotion should have been less harmful at day. But here, this competitive emotion was so strong, that daytime did not dull this competitive drive.

Rav Yaakov, learning for proper reasons and humble enough to pray to God to assist him, demonstrated his removal of self-importance. He succeeded at not falling prey to this damaging emotion of competition, which was generated out of Abayeh’s tremendous reputation. My friend suggested this very same humility caused Rav Yaakov to attribute his success to God’s miracle, and not to himself.

My friend asked, “Why didn’t Abayeh come out straight and tell Rav Yaakov what he was up to, instead of keeping silent?” Two answers occur to me: 1) Had Abayeh done so, Rav Yaakov would be on guard for this phenomenon, and it would not have had the emotional impact necessary for demonstrating that one could conquer such an emotion. When one is on guard against his emotions, he is less affected by them, and the demonstration which Abayeh sought to have Rav Yaakov display (to rid the mazik) would never have occurred. 2) Warning would do no good, as Abayeh’s level of learning was the cause of the mazik, and could not be removed. This also explains why Abayeh could not rid the study hall of this mazik himself.

Perhaps Rav Yaakov was well aware of this competitive drive, as all wise men know psychology well. Rav Yaakov therefore made his journey to remove this problem.

After a careful analysis of this account, being mindful of the Rabbis’ lesson that bizarre stories are not to be taken literally, we arrive at a new insight into human psychology. We learn of a flaw that rears its head to Torah scholars. We also learn from Rav Yaakov’s response what the corrective measure is for such a damaging, competitive emotion.

The Torah does not hide from discussing any idea, even if it exposes our teachers flaws in the process. As a Rabbi once said, there is no hero worship in Judaism. We do not seek to view humans as infallible – not even Rabbis. For this reason, the Torah also teaches Moses’ flaws.

Training children and students that we expect them to attain a level like a Rabbi Moses Feinstein, may result in the student’s abandoning Torah study when he or she fails at such an impossible goal. What we should teach our children is to do their best, and nothing other than that is expected. They should be taught to learn for the purpose of discovering beautiful Torah ideas, which afford us all the greatest happiness available. A child’s natural curiosity is God’s will, and should be nurtured, not destroyed. We must be on guard to counter this devastating emotion of

competition, if our children are to enjoy Torah study and remain steadfast to its study throughout their lives.

Today's children are tomorrow's leaders. We must have deep concern for future generations. Let us ensure that others will benefit from our hard work at raising our children and students correctly, in line with the insights from this metaphorical, Talmudic account.

The "seven-headed" serpent is a beautifully constructed metaphor. Each element serves to elucidate some aspect of competitive study, its problems, and its remedy.

However, understanding such metaphors literally is not the Rabbis' intent. It leaves the Torah student with inexplicable phenomenon, making him believe in fairy tales. And once a student's sense of reality includes fantasy, all is lost. Concerning such a student, King Solomon said "A fool believes everything (*Proverbs 14:15*)."

Certainly this critique applies to teachers and Rabbis who teach these stories as fact, and not the metaphors they are.

GOD'S TEFILLIN

Ravin son of Rav Ada asked, "What is the source that God wears Tefillin?"
(*Berachot 6a*)

The Talmud makes derivations from various Torah verses, ultimately validating that God "wears" Tefillin. Of course, this Talmudic portion can in no way be taken literally, since:

1) God is not able to "wear" Tefillin. Tefillin are physical and He is not, and

2) He does not perform the commands He gave man. For commands are to perfect those who are imperfect.

The Talmud asks a central question:

What is written in Hashem's Tefillin? R. Chiya bar Avin says, "And who is like Israel, a unique nation in the land!" God told Israel, "You made Me unique by reciting 'Listen Israel; God is our God, God is One' – I will make you unique [by reciting] 'And who is like Israel, a unique nation in the land?'"

To unravel this metaphor, we must identify the central point: what is "written in God's Tefillin?" as the Talmud metaphorically suggests. Since

the main question concerns God's Tefillin (Tefillin contain texts) we must focus on the 'text' the Rabbis suggest are "written in God's Tefillin."

We also note the reciprocal relationship between Israel's claim of God's Oneness, and then God's response that Israel too is unique, and one. This too is a central point.

Tefillin must be defined...our Tefillin, that is. These boxes contain the Shema: our proclamation of monotheism. The Torah teaches that when other nations see our Tefillin, they will see God's name on them, and they will fear the Jews (*Berachos 6a*). They will recognize their fabricated religions as fabrications, and that the Jews are distinguished by God's Providence. Realizing their lives of idolatry are false frightens the idolatrous nations. The nations are also frightened by the insurmountable task of battling those whom God favors. But God wants all nations to follow Him. He only gave the Jews – and no other – a Torah, since they possessed true monotheistic ideas received from Abraham. It was due to Abraham that God spread His Providence over Abraham's descendants.

So when the Jews proclaim the Shema, "Listen Israel; God is our God, God is One," God in turn increases the Jews' recognition, fame and distinction, so all nations might learn to fear and love God. That is what it means that "God's Tefillin state that Israel is unique." This means that just as man's Tefillin have the purpose to distinguish the Creator as One, God in turn amplifies this crucial message by giving Israel – the monotheistic proclaimers – a global voice. God – as it were – "wears Tefillin" that duplicate Israel's attempt at claiming God's Oneness. By distinguishing Israel, God in fact assists His plan to help the entire world recognize what is true, and abandon falsehood. So, God "wearing Tefillin" means that He focuses the world on the Jew. Monotheism is thereby proclaimed, as if He wore Tefillin containing praises to the Jew.

Had we understood this Talmudic portion literally, we would ascribe to God physical properties that allow Him to wear physical Tefillin, and this is a grievous distortion. This is idolatry. Additionally, it would be no praise to God that He simply wears Tefillin. What praise is that?

What is true is that this is a metaphor that sustains the truth that God is not physical. It also teaches that His "Tefillin" is really a metaphor for His actions of favoring the Jew in real acts of kindness on Earth. These actions are praiseworthy; merely wearing Tefillin is not. This is in contrast to a literal and foolish understanding where God does no acts for Israel, but simply "wears Tefillin."

Succos is the holiday when, in the future, all nations will bring sacrifices to God, together with Israel. The entire world will recognize that "*we have inherited falsehood from our fathers (Jeremiah, 16:19).*" It is the Jews'

role to teach all peoples the Torah. We must not cower and thereby hide truth from our fellow man. As Abraham exemplified, we too must be concerned with God's creations...all of them. We must courageously, gently, but religiously, make truth available.

KING SOLOMON'S WISDOM

Kings I 3:16 states that two women came before King Solomon. Both bore a child. The careless woman slept on her child and killed it. While the innocent woman slept with her infant nearby, the murderess switched the living infant with her dead infant. In the morning, the innocent woman awoke and recognized what the murderess did. They both came before the King, each claiming that the living child was theirs. King Solomon arrived at his conclusion to cut the infant in two and to give half of the child to each woman. Of course he would not have gone through with this barbaric act. However, the King's seemingly bizarre and ruthless suggestion caused the lying woman to display her heretofore-concealed carelessness for her infant, as she subsequently said, "Both to me and to her, the child will not be. Cut the child!" The king successfully brought into the open the spine-chilling nature of the true murderess. Justice was served, and the infant was given to his true mother.

The Jews were in awe of King Solomon's wisdom, "*And all the Israelites heard the ruling that the King judged, and the people feared the King, for they saw that God's wisdom was in him to mete out justice (Kings I 3:28).*" What was King Solomon's great wisdom?

The Jews were impressed by King Solomon's plan to expose who was telling the truth. They were taken by his "justice," as this verse repeats the word justice or judgment three times. The Talmud states, "*Who is wise? One who sees the outcome (Tamid 32a).*" Why is foreseeing the outcome the definition of wisdom? I believe it is because wisdom exists only when there is no ignorance of results. One may have all the present facts, and use a cunning mind. However, if he cannot anticipate all outcomes, his current decision may prove tragic. Thus, he would not be termed "wise." One may only be spoken of as wise if he considers not only what is true now, but also what may be true in the future. The future is no less real to a wise person. He considers all of reality, and that does not refer to the present alone. As "time" is a factor, he considers all moments, and anticipates all results of a given decision.

But even prior to his decision to cut the infant in two, the King must have had some knowledge that he felt would be the most effective response. How did he arrive at his ploy? What did King Solomon consider? A closer examination of the verses reveals that the King already knew who was innocent and who was guilty, before his suggestion to cut the child in two. However, perhaps he did not feel his observation would be accepted. Let me explain.

Verses 22 and 23 state the quarrel between the two women:

*[22] And the other woman said, 'No! Mine is the living infant and yours is the dead. And the other said, 'No! The dead child is yours and the living child is mine', and they spoke before the king.
[23] And the King said, 'This one said 'Mine is the living, and yours is the dead child', and this one said, 'No, the dead one is yours, and the living is mine.'*

At this point, King Solomon commanded that a sword be brought. Thus, he had a plan. But what did the King already know, and how did he know it?

Why does Kings I record verse 23, where King Solomon reiterates (albeit to himself) what each woman said? Verse 23 is not redundant. I feel this verse is here to indicate that King Solomon detected a distinction in the women's words, he pondered this, and then devised his plan. Therefore, verse 23 records for us what the King pondered. He was pondering the women's words. So we must ask, what did he detect? These words in verse 23 appear to contain no clue whatsoever; they are a mere repetition of what they already said in verse 22. But there is one, subtle difference: the first woman refers to the living child first, while the second woman refers to the dead child first. Read it again: "Mine is the living infant and yours is the dead." And the other one said, "No, the dead child is yours and the living child is mine."

I believe the King knew the following principle: a woman always refers to her child first. From this principle, the King knew which woman killed her child. It was the second woman, the one who referred to the dead child first. But perhaps, this subtle, psychological principle alone would not be appreciated by Israel, nor be sufficient by his court so as to justify his return of the child to one of the women. Others were not as keen as the King and would not be able to appreciate the women's words alone as sole cause for a verdict, without demonstrative proof. Thus, he instantly thought of how he could demonstrate the true callousness of the murderess. He cre-

ated a scenario, in which he anticipated that the murderess might express her true nature. It worked!

King Solomon, in his wisdom, predicted the outcome of his plan: the murderess will express her callousness again. Forecasting an outcome he created the opportunity for the murderess to again express her cold nature. So when the King said to cut the infant in half, the murderess allowed it, “To me and to her, the child will not belong, cut the child.” She was more concerned that the other woman should not have a child while she does not have one, than with human life. This exposed her.

“Who is wise? One who sees the outcome.” We now understand why Kings I repeats for the reader that the King pondered the women’s words. It directs us to study the King’s specific observation, appreciating the level of wisdom he received from God.

The Jews were amazed by such insight. Today, we are equally awed, not at only the King’s wisdom, but by God’s formulation of these verses; a verse’s subtle clues reveal more knowledge than what the Jews witnessed back then.

God Granting Solomon Wisdom

Having come this far, can we determine why God imbued King Solomon with such unparalleled wisdom? Solomon became king at the age of 12. God then appeared to him in a nighttime dream (Kings I, 3:5-14):

[5] In Gibeon, God appeared to Solomon in a dream of the night, and He said, ‘Ask what I will give to you.’ [6] And Solomon said, ‘You have done with Your servant, my father David, great kindness as he walked before you in truth and charity and in an upright heart with You, and You guarded this great kindness, and You gave him a son sitting on his chair as this day. [7] And now God, my God, You have made Your servant king under David my father, and I am a young lad, I know not of going out and coming. [8] And Your servant is in the midst of Your people You have chosen, a numerous people that cannot be counted from their size. [9] And give to your servant a hearing heart, to judge Your people, to distinguish between good and evil, for who can judge Your people, heavy as they are?’ [10] And the matter was good in God’s eyes, that Solomon asked for this thing. [11] And God said to him, ‘On account that you asked for this thing, and you did not ask for long days, and you did not ask for yourself riches, and you did not request the life of your enemies, and you asked for yourself understanding, to bear righteousness, [12] behold I have done according to your words, behold

I have give to you a wise heart, and understanding, that none were like you before you, and after you, none will rise like you. [13] And also what you did not ask, I give to you, also riches and also honor, that none will be like you, a man among kings, all your days. [14] And if you go in My ways, to guard My statutes and commands as David your father went, then I will lengthen your days.'

God commences His vision to Solomon with the words, "Ask what I will give to you." How do we understand such a general offer? I would suggest that God only makes such an offer when someone would *not* have requested wisdom based on his accurate understanding of reality. Correctly so, Solomon understood that wisdom is arrived at through personal effort. God also knew what Solomon's new concern was, having been made king immediately before this vision and requiring wisdom to rule the people. But why didn't God simply imbue Solomon with this new wisdom without a dialogue, and without Solomon requesting it? God knew what Solomon desired! As a Rabbi stated, God wishes that man use his mind at all times. For this reason, God did not create miracles for Pharaoh that were undeniable. This would remove Pharaoh's chance to arrive at a realization with his mind that God in fact sent Moses. Being awed by overt miracles, Pharaoh's mind would be disengaged. This is not how God desires man to arrive at truths. Similarly, when Solomon may have the opportunity to think into a matter, and arrive at knowledge on his own, God will not remove this opportunity from him. Therefore, God framed this vision in a dialogue so that Solomon would be afforded this opportunity to learn something new with his own mind; a new idea about how God operates. Aside from receiving his newfound wisdom, God desired that Solomon's mind be engaged in the very dialogue itself.

Solomon then realized something new: "God would not make such an offer for a matter I may achieve independent of His interaction. God must be intimating that He offers to me that which is naturally unavailable." Solomon immediately seized the true sense of God's offer, and asked for the most admirable request: wisdom to judge God's people. Solomon desired to fulfill his role as king as best he could. This demanded that he, a 12-year-old, be equipped with wisdom.

Solomon was perfectly in line with God's will. Before asking for wisdom, he describes how God granted such kindness to David his father, and that he was now to replace David's position as king over "God's" people. Solomon was stating that based on God's will that the Jews exist as a "chosen" people, and must have a king, it is in line with God's will to ask for wisdom. Solomon requested something necessary to fulfill God's

will. This is why he made such a lengthy introduction before asking for wisdom. This is why he was granted such wisdom.

Unparalleled Wisdom: Why was it Necessary?

This case of the two women is the first event recorded after God imbued King Solomon with His great wisdom. We understand that the king's wisdom was superior. The king, successfully exposing the true murderess, had a profound effect on the Jews.

Previously, we read in verse 13, "...behold I give to you a wise and understanding heart, that before you none were similar, and after you, none will rise like you." But we wonder: why did God grant Solomon wisdom in this high degree, "unparalleled by others, both, prior or subsequent to him?" Could not a lower, "natural" level of wisdom – on par with other Prophets and kings such as David – suffice for Solomon to rule Israel effectively? Additionally, Solomon did not request wisdom of such a degree: God's gift was over and above what the king requested. As such wisdom was never offered to all others, we must examine these verses to detect any clues that might lead us to an answer.

For one, we can safely say that this degree of wisdom was viewed as "unnatural" – it was clearly granted through God's Providence. As no other human attained such wisdom, purposefully stated in the verses, Israel would recognize that Solomon's wisdom was achieved only by means of a miracle of God. We must then understand why this was necessary.

One possibility occurs to me: King Solomon was 12 when he became king. Perhaps a youth would not be well received by the Israelites, with the exclusive, authoritative power deserving a king. Imagine a 12-year-old running the United States. Many would be reluctant to subject themselves to such a youngster. Perhaps this was why God, on only this occasion, wished to give a man an undisputed and unparalleled mind. Only with the wisdom that undeniably was granted miraculously by God, would the Israelites find themselves with no argument against the king's continued leadership – it was God's leadership, through him. It is Solomon's age that distinguishes him from all other rulers and I feel this might be the reason for his receipt of such a gift.

Additionally, the verse may teach us another point. Verse 11 says that God gave Solomon this wisdom "on account that he did not seek riches, long days, or his enemies' lives." What does this verse teach? Perhaps God teaches us here that it was precisely Solomon's selection of wisdom over all else; he raised himself to a higher level through this very act of selection – a level where God would relate to him on such a plane, granting him unparalleled wisdom. A person who selects wisdom as his primary desire

in life causes God to relate to him on a higher level than all other people. Solomon was not 'entitled' to this wisdom without raising himself to the level where he responded properly to God's offer. Had Solomon selected something other than wisdom, he would not have received it.

Finally, why did God also grant Solomon those things he did not request? This teaches that requesting things such as riches, his enemy's deaths, or long life are improper. Such requests display one's view that these matters are ends unto themselves, and this is against the Torah's philosophy. By requesting wisdom, Solomon displayed a proper character, one in which he would relate to those other areas in the correct manner. Therefore, God granted to him these other benefits as well.

SATAN AND ABRAHAM

Talmud Sanhedrin 89b:

"And it was after these things, and God tested Abraham." (Gen. 22:1 regarding God's command that Abraham sacrifice Isaac). "Rabbi Yochanan said in Rabbi Yosi ben Zimra's name, 'after these things' refers to 'after the words of Satan.' As it says, 'the lad grew and was weaned.' Upon which Satan said to God, 'Master of the world, this old man (Abraham) you graciously gave a child at 100 years of age. At all his feasts, did he not have one turtledove or one pigeon to offer to you? God said, 'Has he done this only for his son? If I would say sacrifice your son before me, he would do so. 'Immediately God tested Abraham saying take 'na' (please) your son...' Rabbi Simeon ben Abba said 'na' refers only to a pleaded request.' This is allegorical to an earthly king who fought many wars and was victorious through the help of a great warrior. In time, the king was faced with a very strong battle. He pleaded with the warrior, 'stand with me in this battle, so my previous battles won't be disparaged saying there were no previous successes.' So too is the case here, God pleaded with Abraham, 'I tested you with many trials, and you were triumphant in them all. Now, stand though this test so they should not say there were no real triumphs in your previous trials.'"

Maimonides “Guide” Book III, Chap. XXII:

R. Simeon son of Lakish, says, “The adversary (Satan) the evil inclination (yetzer hara), and the angel of death are one and the same being.” Here we find all that has been mentioned by us in such a clear manner that no intelligent person will be in doubt about it. It has thus been shown to you that one and the same thing is designated by these three different terms, and that actions ascribed to these three are in reality the actions of one and the same agent. Again, the ancient doctors of the Talmud said: “The adversary goes about and misleads, then he goes up and accuses, obtains permission, and takes the soul.”

R. Simeon teaches that Satan is not a being, like man or an animal, nor is Satan an angel of any sort. Satan is part of man, since Satan also refers to the evil inclination, which is nothing other than our instincts. Based on R. Simeon, we understand that Satan is the instinctual component in man (yetzer hara) it turns man aside (Satan) and causes his death if he does not repent (angel of death). Therefore, we must interpret God’s dialogue above with Satan, since it is a metaphor. Let us now apply this understanding and unravel the mystery.

When Abraham celebrated his son’s physical maturity, it raised suspicion among the people as to Abraham’s true level of perfection. The people (Satan) harbored feelings that Abraham was not as great as he made himself out to be as they said, “*Did he not have one turtledove or one pigeon to offer to you?*” They were mocking Abraham for not having sacrificed anything to God. Perhaps they were astounded at his ability to have a child at 100 years of age.

The people of the land were jealous of God’s Divine intervention with Abraham. Why did this pose such jealousy? The people saw a righteous Abraham being successful in all of his trials. His trials were undoubtedly publicized as the allegory teaches, and such perfection in Abraham awoke in them – by contrast – their own lack of perfection. They were jealous and felt animosity towards Abraham.

Why jealousy and animosity? They sought to degrade his perfection, portraying him as no better than they are. Belittling Abraham’s triumphs, they can now live with themselves. They no longer feel less than perfect, as Abraham himself is now rendered imperfect, via their ridicule. They can say, “If Abraham couldn’t pass the hardest test, he probably didn’t pass the easier ones.” The people – referred to here as Satan – harbored the notion that Abraham would not sacrifice Isaac and he could not

achieve ultimate perfection. In order to substantiate to the world that man can indeed reach perfection, God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son. God desired that His lifestyle for man be displayed as achievable, not something so lofty that no man can succeed. To teach the world that man can reach the heights of perfection, God instructed Abraham in this most difficult trial. It is recorded as God “pleading” with Abraham, to teach us that such a trial is essential for mankind to witness. We learn that this trial of sacrificing Isaac was not only to actualize Abraham’s own perfection, but it was also designed to teach that God’s desired perfection for mankind is within reach. When the world sees a man who can perfect himself to such a degree, it removes all rationalizations posed by weaker peoples, seeking to justify their continued laziness and lack of perfection. But now that Abraham passed this test too, the world must admit that God’s plan for man is achievable by all mankind. Abraham’s ultimate trial teaches such a valuable lesson: that God’s will is achievable.

Our metaphor means that Abraham (the warrior) made God’s system successful on many occasions. He followed and taught God’s monotheism, and perfected his character traits. But people still felt (described as Satan complaining to God) if Abraham doesn’t stand the toughest test, he is nothing. They sought justification for their immoral lives. God then “pleaded” with His warrior to help Him succeed in this great battle – sacrificing Isaac. God could not win the battle Himself, as the only victory (that God’s will is attainable) must be through mortal man and the use of his free will. Only by a man – Abraham – displaying such devotion to God, will God’s system emerge victorious, and achievable.

PHARAOH’S WISDOM

Who is wise? One who learns from all men. (Ethics 4:1)

Of course, there are those simple people from whom we cannot learn. How then can we understand the this quote? I suggest this refers to one’s ‘attitude,’ that one is open to learning from anyone. Practically, we may not find knowledge in some people. But this means we receive truth from anyone if possible, and do not allow emotional bias to prevent us from approaching anyone, even those lower than us. Ego plays no role. Let us now learn from Pharaoh.

In Genesis 41:45, we find that after Pharaoh sees the undeniable brilliance of Joseph, Pharaoh selects Joseph to be his second in command

over Egypt. The passage states three ideas, 1) Pharaoh changes Joseph's name to Zaphnas Paneach, 2) he gives Asnas, the daughter of Poti-Phera (suddenly "Priest" of Ohn) to Joseph as his wife, and 3) Joseph goes out on Egypt (to rule).

We have a Mesora – a tradition – that when one pasuk (passage) contains many points, they must all be related, as God placed them all in a single verse.

The following questions arise:

- 1) What is the connection between all the points in this passage?
- 2) Why give Joseph the daughter of Poti-Phera? His wife accused Joseph of attempted rape! Wasn't there a better choice of a mate, if he must have a wife?
- 3) Why is Poti-Phera suddenly referred to as a "priest"?
- 4) What does Joseph's "going out on Egypt" have to do with anything?
- 5) Why does Pharaoh change Joseph's name to Zaphnas Paneach?

With a little consideration, the answers leap from this passage.

Pharaoh was ruler of the current world power and he was not without intelligence. When he summoned Joseph from prison to interpret his dreams, Pharaoh was cognizant of the future political problems faced with elevating an imprisoned Jew to viceroy status. More to the point, Pharaoh was appointing one accused of rape. This would not wash well with his subjects, or his country. How would Pharaoh deal with this? I believe with the following answer, we unveil insight into Pharaoh's wisdom.

Pharaoh attempted to dispel any rumors of Joseph's ill repute by giving him this specific woman for a wife. Who in their right minds would believe that Joseph attempted to rape the wife of Poti-Phera, if she then allows him to marry her daughter? Pharaoh arranged this marriage precisely to dispel the rape accusation made against Joseph. Poti-Phera's wife would no longer accuse Joseph, as any accusation would bring shame to her daughter, and to herself. In addition to silencing the wife of Poti-Phera, Pharaoh sought to silence Poti-Phera himself about Joseph's alleged rape attempt. What do people desire more than anything else? More than money? Power. Pharaoh again displayed his cunning by granting a status of priest to Poti-Phera, in exchange for his silence. At first, Poti-Phera was not referred to in the verses as a "priest." This is changed afterwards, to silence him. Finally, Pharaoh's changing of Joseph's name was an attempt to transform his Hebrew slave reputation into an Egyptian icon. One's name creates a perceived status.

We now see how these ideas are all connected, and why God desired them to be in one passage. All of the elements in this passage share Pharaoh's one goal of denying Joseph's alleged wrongdoings. But what about "Joseph going out on Egypt?" What is the Torah's lesson of placing it here? I believe it is to show that regardless of Pharaoh's success in rendering Joseph into a leader acceptable by the Egyptians, Joseph never shed his identity as "Joseph the Righteous." It was still "Joseph" who went out upon Egypt, and not the fabricated, Egyptian veneer "Zaphnas Paneach" created by Pharaoh.

Behold the precision of the Torah, it reveals just enough information to suggest the problem, and just enough for the answer. It is brilliant that those very statements which cause the problem, are in fact, clues to the answer.

DIVINE DREAMS & THEIR LESSONS

When studying Joseph's dreams and interpretations, the analogy of a genius painter comes to mind. This painter would arrange millions of paint specks on a single paintbrush. Then, using only one stroke, he would move his brush across a blank canvas. Suddenly, a beautiful scene would emerge; trees with colorful leaves, birds in flight, sun and clouds, mountains, and streams. A passerby witnessing the picture-perfect scene emerge with one stroke would be in awe of how with one action, this painter anticipated how all the paint specks would fall into place and create a perfectly harmonious and picturesque scene. God's two dreams granted to the young Joseph paint such a picture.

When he was 17, Joseph dreamt of eleven sheaves bowing to him. And then in another dream, he saw eleven stars and the sun and moon bowing to him. Even after seeing his brothers' dismay at his retelling the first dream, Joseph nonetheless felt compelled for some reason to repeat his second dream to his brothers and his father, in a second recounting. It was due to these dreams that the brothers conspired to kill Joseph; eventually selling him instead. It was his father who rejected the dream's apparent interpretation that they would all bow to Joseph; the eleven stars being his eleven brothers, and the sun and moon representing Joseph's parental figures. At this stage, it does not appear that Joseph offered his own interpretation. Yet, thirteen years later, astonishingly, Joseph interprets not only the dreams of Pharaoh's stewards, but also Pharaoh's dreams. All

four dreams came true exactly! But how did Joseph know their interpretations? This question is strengthened by Joseph's apparent lack of interpretative skills with regards to his own two dreams. And many of the Torah commentaries including Ramban and Klay Yakkar do not suggest Joseph was Divinely inspired with the interpretations: he succeeded in unraveling each dream solely through wisdom.

Later on, when his brothers descended to Egypt to purchase food during the famine, the brothers do not recognize the now 39-year-old, bearded Joseph standing before them. It is suggested that a denial of this Egyptian viceroy truly being Joseph was generated from the brothers' rejection of any success Joseph would attain; having been humiliated by his brothers, they were sure Joseph was permanently psychologically crippled from long ago.

When Joseph sees his brothers, he "recalls the dreams." According to a wise Rabbi, this means that Joseph would use the Divine license provided by these dreams to subjugate his brothers into repentance. Creating a situation where the youngest Benjamin would be imprisoned on false charges, Joseph orchestrated a replica of his very own sale to force his brothers into a parallel dilemma: would they abandon the accused Benjamin now, who ostensibly stole Joseph's goblet, as they had done 20 years earlier when they sold Joseph? Or, would they display complete repentance, and sacrifice themselves for their brother? Normally, one is not permitted to place anyone under such a trial, but Joseph recognized his dreams as Divine in origin; a license to perfect his brothers. As this wise Rabbi taught, the first dream of the brothers' sheaves bowing to him – physical dominance – was the precursor for Joseph's dominance over them in the spiritual realm – symbolized by the eleven stars, sun and moon bowing to him. The first dream was meant by God to teach Joseph that when the brothers would bow to him for food, Joseph thereby received permission to rule over them in regards to their perfection, symbolized by higher bodies: the luminaries.

Subsequent to his dreams, Joseph understood their meaning; and not necessarily 39 years later when he first saw his brothers, but perhaps much earlier. The Torah only tells us that he recalled the dreams upon seeing his brothers, to teach that this was when he would act upon those dreams. But their interpretation may have preceded this by many years.

We must now ask this: when did Joseph become such a great interpreter? He was in prison most of the time in Egypt, and he didn't seem to offer interpretation to his own dreams at 17 years of age. From where did Joseph obtain such knowledge of dreams, that he would eventually interpret his dreams, the dreams of Pharaoh's stewards, and Pharaoh's dreams with such precision? We are aware of the Torah's description of Joseph as "Ben

Zekunim” or as Onkelos translates, “a wise son.” Jacob taught Joseph all the knowledge he attained at the Yeshiva of Shem and Aver. Perhaps this included lessons Jacob learned from his own dream of the ladder, and maybe others. So at the very outset, Joseph was a wise individual.

We also wonder why God gave these two dreams to Joseph, as they apparently contributed, if not caused, Joseph’s sale. But we cannot approach God’s true intent without His saying so. However, we can study, and perhaps suggest possibilities.

God’s Dreams: Altering History / Enabling Human Perfection

God is perfectly just. He would not jeopardize Joseph’s life or well being, had Joseph’s nature not warranted this sale. We learn that Joseph beautified himself. He also reported his brother’s wrongdoings to his father. He had an egoistic tendency, which was rightfully corrected as God humbled him in prison for many years. He publicized his dreams attracting unnecessary jealousy upon himself, which culminated in his sale and ultimately, his imprisonment. Thus, with Joseph’s dreams, God clearly intended to perfect him. But that was not the only reason for the dreams. As we mentioned, the genius painter performed one stroke of his brush, and created a perfect picture with tremendous detail. God’s dreams given to Joseph also had many ramifications.

The wise Rabbi I mentioned taught that the dreams also provided perfection for the brothers, as Joseph was licensed through the dreams to place them into this trial regarding Benjamin. Simultaneously, this forced Jacob to part with Benjamin, perfecting Jacob as well, by helping him restrain his excessive love for Benjamin, displaced from his beloved, departed wife Rachel. And we see that Joseph’s plan is successful. As Rashi states, when Joseph embraced his father after all those years, we would think Jacob equally embraced his son Joseph. But he did not: he was preoccupied “reciting the Shima.” Of course the Shima (Torah phrases) did not yet exist, but this metaphor means Joseph’s plan to perfect his father worked: Jacob no longer directed his excessive love towards man, but now, towards God. He re-channeled his passions towards the Creator, as should be done.

So the dreams perfected Joseph by contributing to his sale and refinement of his ego; they enabled Joseph to perfect his brothers by forcing them to defend Benjamin; and they perfected his father as well, forcing him to break his bond to Rachel, now displaced onto her son Benjamin. We might think these matters alone are amazing, that two dreams might offer so much good for so many. However, there is a great deal more to Joseph’s dreams. Something even more astonishing.

Dream Instruction

We asked earlier how Joseph transformed into such a brilliant dream interpreter. How did he know that the dreams of the stewards and Pharaoh were Divine? What did Joseph know about dreams? All he had were his two dreams years earlier. Soon thereafter he was cast into prison for over a decade. However, those dreams offered Joseph more than we think.

What was Joseph doing in prison this entire time? Of course he must have had chores, and he was promoted to oversee the other inmates. But he had his solitude as well...time to think.

Having received tremendous knowledge from his father, the teachings of Shem and Aver, Joseph gained deep insight into how God rules the world, and interacts with mankind. He knew the concept of repentance, for he was soon to be the conductor of his family's repentance. He too must have reflected on his own state, pondering his own repentance, "Why am I in prison? What is my sin?" He soon realized his dreams precipitated his descent into slavery, and that God gave him these dreams. He analyzed his dreams, and must have spent many hours, days, and weeks studying God's precise communications of the night. What did he discover?

Pharaoh and His Stewards

Ten years elapsed in prison. One day, Joseph saw the wine steward and baker troubled by their dreams, and he invited them to recount them to him. Joseph interpreted both dreams exactly in line with what happened: the wine steward was returned to his post, and the baker was hung. Two more years go by, and Joseph finds himself before Pharaoh. Pharaoh heard of Joseph's interpretive skills, and he too told Joseph his dreams. Again Joseph interprets the dreams with exact precision; they come true. But if God did not tell Joseph the future, how did he know it? We now arrive at the core of the issue...

Two Divine Signs: Dreamer & Duplication

God's dreams granted to Joseph contained content, but they were also "instructive." I believe God gave Joseph two dreams for objectives in addition to perfecting his family and himself. Besides the 'content' of the dreams, Prophetic dreams also have a 'style': the chosen dream recipient, and dream duplication.

Joseph received these dreams, and none other. He also received "two" dreams. Ramban states that two separate but similar dreams are unnatural: Pharaoh could have naturally seen both of his dreams in one single dream state (*Ramban, Gen. 41:32*). However, Pharaoh woke up and

dreamt similar content again as it was Divinely inspired. The same rule applies to the two stewards who dreamt similar dreams. And Joseph knew this. Joseph also had two separate dreams with similar content (*Gen. 37:9*). In Numbers 12:6 Ibn Ezra teaches that duplication in dreams indicates their Divine origin: “[*Divine*] dreams are doubled, as is the manner of prophecies.”

Joseph had many years to ponder his situation in prison, and much of what he may have pondered was the last event leading him into prison: his dreams while still at home. He knew they were from God, as he tells his brothers years later: “*God sent me before you to place for you a remnant in the land and to sustain you (Gen. 45:7).*”

What did Joseph determine were indicative of Divine dreams? He recognized dream duplication was unnatural. He also recognized that his dreams affected his perfection, so the “recipient” also indicates Divine intent. These two elements were contained in the stewards’ dreams, and in Pharaohs dreams. The stewards’ dream duplications were a variation, but no less telling of their Divine nature, since they both occurred the very same night, to two individuals. Pharaoh also had two dreams, and of additional significance, it was “Pharaoh” – the man with the wherewithal to address the forecasted famine – who received the dreams.

Joseph understood from his own experience that dream duplication, and as I learned from a wise Rabbi, a strategic dream ‘recipient’, are two indications of Divine dreams. So convinced was Joseph of their Divine origin that the recipient is of a telling nature, Joseph says to Pharaoh, “*What God plans He has told to Pharaoh (Gen. 41:25).*” Joseph meant to say, “Your reception of this dream as opposed to another indicates its Divine nature.” And Joseph repeats this in verse 28.

Had God not granted Joseph these two Divine dreams, Joseph would not have pondered dreams. He would not necessarily have studied their style, to the point that he was able to facilitate the good outcome God desired, by emancipating himself through the stewards’ interpretations, and rising to viceroy through applying his wisdom to Pharaoh’s dreams.

Amazing!

God used dreams not only to perfect Jacob’s household, but also to train Joseph in dream design and interpretation. . .the very matter essential for carving out Jewish history. The design of Joseph’s dreams contained the blueprint for determining the Divine nature of the other dreams he would confront. In other words: his dreams were actually dream instructions, not just messages. This is akin to a coded message, where the message content is one lesson, but the textual arrangement also contains hints to

decipher this new language. Joseph's dreams' "content" contained a message for directing his perfecting of his family. But the dream "design" (selected recipient and duplication) taught him how to unravel dreams in general.

With a single brush stroke of Joseph's dreams, 1) God placed Joseph in prison to humble him; 2) He caused the brothers to repent, this time not abandoning their youngest brother; 3) He caused Jacob to perfect his excessive love; and 4) He trained Joseph in the art of dream interpretation...the science essential for the aforementioned perfections of Jacob, his sons, and Joseph!

The very dreams that caused Joseph's imprisonment, also provided his escape, and helped sustain that generation. We appreciate God's wisdom: with one action He effectuates the greatest good for so many. We also realize that without Joseph's appreciation that God teaches man with sublime wisdom, Joseph would not have engaged his own wisdom to discern God's will, nor would Joseph acquire the dream interpretation skills he discovered while in prison. But since Joseph had such deep knowledge of how God works, he turned all his efforts while in prison to analyzing his dreams, using wisdom to 1) uncover God's message, and 2) study dream style so as to determine which dreams are Divine, and how to interpret them.

A Fifth Message

Additionally, dreams are, by definition, a manifestation of "hidden" material. Understanding this, Joseph knew that if God communicates with His Prophets in dreams (*Numbers 12:6*), it is for this reason. God wishes to indicate that just as dreams conceal deeper ideas, so too do God's dreams, and even more so. God's selected mode of communicating with His Prophets via dreams underscores the principle that God's words too must undergo man's interpretation, if the intended message is to be discovered. With that appreciation, Joseph delved into the study of dreams, both prophetic and mundane. He also determined that dreams of Divine origin contain a code, and once detected, can be understood. Joseph knew that wisdom is how God designed the world. Therefore, it is only with wisdom that man succeeds.

A Life of Wisdom

Joseph's approach to life was based on his knowledge that God created all. Thus, the world "naturally" functions according to God's wisdom. Despite the fact that God did not reveal Pharaoh's or his stewards' interpretations, Joseph secured perfection and sustenance for his family, all

of Egypt and surrounding peoples using wisdom alone. Since wisdom guided his actions, he was not in conflict with God's world that functions according to that same wisdom. Rather, he was perfectly in line with it, as his successes teach. We too can perceive God's wisdom if we earnestly seek it out from His Torah. Wisdom is the key to success and happiness in all areas. We do not need God telling us anything more, or sending signs, just like Joseph did not need God to interpret the dreams. In fact, God has already intervened by giving His Torah to us all.

Responding to our misfortunes with "religious" beliefs that "it's all for the good," man deceives himself, and will repeat his errors. It is only through analyzing our ways and seeing if they match Torah ideals that we will terminate our need to falsely pacify ourselves with "it's all for the good." Using reason in all areas, and admitting our errors with a responsible analysis teamed with internal change, we can engage wisdom to steer us to the truly good path, one that God wills for all mankind, and is readily available without further intervention. The Torah contains all we need. No quick fixes, amulets, or blessings will address our concerns. God says we require wisdom and personal perfection. *"For only with this may one glorify himself: understand and know Me; for I am Hashem who does kindness, justice and righteousness in land, for in these I desire, so says Hashem (Jeremiah 9:23)."*

AARON SEIZED THE ANGEL OF DEATH

In Parashas Korach (Numbers, 17:13) Rashi states an amazing story of how Aaron "seized the Angel of Death against its will." In order to understand this metaphor, we must first understand the events immediately prior.

God had wiped out Korach and his rebellion. The next day the Jewish people said the following (Numbers, 17:6), *"You (Moses and Aaron) have killed the people of God,"* referring to Korach and his assembly. Evidently, the Jews could not make such a statement the same day as God's destruction of the Korach assembly, perhaps because the Jews were too frightened at the moment. But as their terror waned, they mustered the courage to speak their true feelings on the next day.

The Jews actually made two accusations: 1) Moses and Aaron are murderers, and 2) those who were murdered are God's people. The Jews made two errors, and God addressed both.

The method God used to correct their second error was to demonstrate through a miracle that Aaron in fact was following God and Korach and his group were not: detached wood – the staff – miraculously continued its growth, and blossomed almonds. Aaron’s blossoming rod showed whom God favored, and to whom He related – even via a miracle. Now the Jew’s false opinion that Korach followed God was corrected, as it was Aaron’s staff which God selected, and not Korach’s.

But how did Moses correct the people’s false opinion, that he and Aaron were murderers? How did the incense that Moses instructed Aaron to bring correct the problem and stave off the plague that God sent to kill the Jews? Moses commanded Aaron to take the incense and stand between the living and the dead during the plague, which only temporarily stopped the plague. It was not until Aaron returned back to Moses that God completely halted the plague. So what does Aaron standing there accomplish, and what is the idea of stopping the plague temporarily? Additionally, what does his return to Moses and God at the Tent of Meeting do? This is where the Rashi comes in:

Aaron seized the angel of death against its will. The angel said, ‘Leave me to do my mission.’ Aaron said, ‘Moses commanded me to prevent you.’ The angel said, ‘I am the messenger of God, and you are (only) the messenger of Moses.’ Aaron said, ‘Moses says nothing on his own accord, rather, (he says matters only) through God. If you do not believe me, behold Moses and God are at the Tent of Meeting, come with me and ask.’

Moses knew that the people accused him and Aaron of murder. The Jews saw Moses and God as two opposing sides, they felt that Moses was not working in sync with God, as he apparently killed the “people of God,” i.e., Korach and his congregation. The Jews’ accusation “You have killed the people of God” displays the people’s belief that God was correct to follow, but that Moses opposed God’s will. Moses now attempted to correct the Jews, and show that in fact, he and Aaron were not murderers opposing God. Moses sent Aaron to make atonement for the Jews. What was this atonement, and how did it entitle the Jews to be saved from God’s current plague?

The Jews saw Aaron with this incense offering, standing at the place where the last Jew dropped down in death; the plague progressed in a domino fashion. And the Jews now saw that no more Jews were dropping down dead, due to Aaron’s presence with the incense. They were now perplexed: they had accused Aaron and Moses as murderers, but Aaron

was now healing, and not killing as they had previously assumed. This perplexity is what the Rashi described metaphorically as “Aaron seizing the Angel of Death.” Aaron was now correcting the “opinion” of the people which made them deserving of death, as if he seized the cause of their death, i.e., the angel. The peoples’ opinion was in fact, their own “Angel of Death.” This means that the angel is not a real, separate “being,” but the cause of death is man’s own distance from God. And these Jews were distant from God when they imputed murder to Moses and Aaron.

As the Jews were now second guessing their accusation, but not completely abandoning this false view of Aaron and Moses, the plague stopped, but only temporarily, reflecting their temporal suspension of their accusation. So we may interpret Aaron’s “seizing the angel of death” as his correction of the false notion that the Jews maintained that Moses and Aaron were murderers of Korachian revolutionaries. “Seizing the Angel of Death” means Aaron retarded the cause of death in the remaining Jews; he corrected their false notions, for which others perished at God’s hand in this plague.

The Jews were confused, and rightly so, when they saw Aaron standing between the living and the dead with incense, apparently causing a halt to the deaths: Aaron is Moses’ messenger, but the plague was clearly from God. So, how could Aaron and Moses overpower God? How could Aaron on Moses’ mission halt a plague from God? This is what Rashi means when metaphorically the Angel of Death tells Aaron, “I am the messenger of God, and you are (only) the messenger of Moses.” The Angel in this metaphor personifies the false opinions of the people, which caused death. But with a corrected opinion, God will not kill. So the Angel talking in this metaphor really represents the Jewish people’s corrupt opinion, which in fact causes death. (Sometimes, false views can be so wrong that the follower of such a view deserves death.)

Returning to the Rashi, Aaron replies to the Angel one last time, “*Moses says nothing on his own accord, rather, (he says matters only) through God. If you do not believe me, behold Moses and God are at the Tent of Meeting, come with me and ask.*” At this point, the plague was temporarily stopped. This caused them to entertain the idea that Moses and Aaron were not murderers – Aaron was atoning, trying to keep the Jews alive. Their perplexity about whether Aaron and Moses were following God had to be removed if they were to live permanently. This is what is meant that when Aaron returned to the tent of meeting (Numbers 17:15) the plague was terminated completely. As the Jews witnessed Aaron, Moses, and God “together,” they now understood that Moses and Aaron were in fact followers of God. The metaphor depicts Aaron as ‘seizing’ the corrupt views of the people

which demanded their death, allegorized by seizing an “Angel of Death.”

This Rashi is yet another of literally thousands of examples where the Rabbis wrote in riddles, as King Solomon taught in Proverbs 1:6. We learn from King Solomon, to whom God gave knowledge miraculously (*Kings I 3:12*) that riddles are a means of education. We must continue to look for the hidden meanings in the Rabbis’ words, which at first seem bizarre. We must not take amazing stories literally. There are no demons roaming the Earth, no angels of death, no powers of segulas that protect. God is the only power, and He created the Earth and heavens and all they behold, with distinct, limited physical properties and laws. Physical creation cannot exceed its design: a piece of twined wool with a scarlet pigmentation does not suddenly get transformed into a device, which wards off God’s punishments. It is unfortunate that we have become so backwards.

What is worse, children are taught to accept superstitions. They become prime candidates for missionaries. Superstitious rearing teaches children that Christianity is no different.

This new mystical, pop-kabbalistic Judaism blurs the lines between true Torah principles and all other religions. When Jews fail to see the difference between a superstitious Judaism and other religions, they more easily convert. And they are accurate in this equation: there is no difference between a Judaism that preaches segulas, and that parts of God are “inside man”...and between Christianity that makes identical claims.

What parents, teachers, and leaders must do is teach our fundamentals. If Jewish children were taught the “Whats” and “Whys” about God’s unity; that He is not physical since He created all physical things; that He created everything and nothing possesses powers but He alone; that we cannot know what He is; that His Torah is correct – and why; that He rewards and punishes...and if students were taught the proofs behind these ideas – then far less students would abandon their observance. Far more students would find profound reasons to remain observant, and continue their studies. Because reasonable explanations and enjoyable insights motivate a person to delve deeper. However, the fundamentals are not being taught. Although important, classes in Hebrew language, grammar and electives, are given priority to Torah Fundamentals, and Comparative Religion. Maimonides formulated his 13 Principles for a reason. Let’s ensure we teach them before anything else.

JACOB AND THE LADDER

Parashas Vayetze commences with Jacob arriving at a “place,” taking a stone from that “place,” making a head shelter with it, and finally sleeping at that “place.” Why the repetition? Why do we need to know this detail about how Jacob camped?

Jacob then has the famous dream of a ladder mounted on the ground with its top in the heavens, and God’s angels ascending and descending upon it. God stands “above” it. God informs Jacob that He is the God of Abraham and Isaac, and the land upon which he lays will be his and his children’s. His seed will flourish. Then God says He will watch him wherever he travels and He will return him to this land.

Jacob awakes at night, and is awed. *“Certainly God is in this “place” and I did not know this. How awesome is this “place”: this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven,”* Jacob says.

Jacob rises in the morning and takes “the” stone he used as shelter, sets it up as a monument and anoints it with oil. He then renames that “place” Beis Ayle (house of God). Jacob then swears that as God watches over him in his travels and that He attends to his physical needs, he will surely give a tenth back to God.

Why must God ensure Jacob – and not others – that he will watch him in his travels?

Why is Jacob surprised, saying, “Certainly God is in this “place” and I did not know this?” Jacob repeats the words, “How awesome is this place!” Why must we be told this?

Why does he take that specific stone and make it into a monument to God’s honor? What is the purpose of a monument?

Why does he rename the place to Beis Ayle?

Why does he make this swear?

Finally, what is the message of this amazing dream?

On the words “God is certainly in this place,” Abraham son of Maimonides writes as follows:

There is here a fine principle. That is, for it is known and clear that He, praised be He, is not a body and has no relationship to a place. However, even as this is so, He, praised be He, isolates certain places for honor. No man understands this principle, except for those to whom He, praised be He, reveals it. As He stated to Moses, “Remove you shoes from your feet, for the place you stand is holy ground.” This is to say that this place is isolated for honor.

Ibn Ezra too writes on the words “God is certainly in this place” as follows:

The reason is on account that places are found where miracles are seen. But I cannot explain why this is, for it is a wondrous principle.

When we read such statements from great minds like Maimonides’ son and Ibn Ezra, who are we to suggest explanations for what Ibn Ezra calls a “wondrous principle?” We cannot say we know what he means: he did not disclose any path through which we might unravel his words. Abraham, Maimonides’ son, describes the impossibility of our bodiless God to relate to space. And he also says “*No man understands this principle, except for those to whom He, praised be He, reveals it.*” He emphasizes his lesson, commenting on “and I did not know” that “this idea cannot be known unless through God revealing it.” In other words, this idea is not something which man can arrive at through reasoning. Jacob thereby expressed this problem.

Similarly, we see that God says concerning His planned destruction of Sodom, “*Shall I conceal from Abraham what I will do?*” God teaches us here that without His communication, Abraham would be missing an idea: an idea that is impossible for a human to uncover without prophecy. However, there, God does in fact reveal to Abraham and to us, what that principle was.[1]

But what about here: are we closed off completely from venturing into all parts of this matter? It is clear that God intends to share some ideas here with mankind, as He did record certain statements about this event in His Torah, given to all mankind, and to all generations.

Maimonides’ son Abraham does say “*for it is known and clear that He, praised be He, is not a body and has no relationship to location. However, even as this is so, He, praised be He, isolates certain places for honor.*” Perhaps this is what Jacob found perplexing: the idea that God relates to “place.” For this appears as a contradiction to all we know about our bodiless God who is not subject to location. The fact that God did relate to a certain place regarding Moses, and here too regarding Jacob, is a “wondrous principle” which seems to somewhat oppose the Torah fundamental of God’s incorporeality.

Although we do not know this principle, we can at least, appreciate the problem of God isolating certain “places” for honor. And we must stress that is only for His “honor,” and nothing to do with God essentially, Whose essence is unknowable. Our Kedusha too emphasizes “*Milo kol haaretz kovodo: The entire Earth is filled with His honor.*” (If this is so, that

the “entire” Earth is filled with His honor, how are certain places distinguished? I do not know.)

Perhaps this is also the reason for the Torah’s numerous repetitions of that word “place.” We are being directed to the very issue. Jacob is certainly astonished at this idea.

Making a monument of the very stone that at first, Jacob used as shelter, Jacob thereby declares some new principle about “place” as it relates to God’s honor. Therefore, the mention of that stone at the beginning and end of this account is essential for teaching how Jacob at first related to “place” in one fashion, but ultimately realized a new fundamental, and expressed this idea by taking that very stone and anointing it...and distinguishing that place. He also renames that place for this reason.

The Ladder

God standing “above” the ladder indicates that He is not “on” the ladder. The ladder represents the relationship between God and His creation. But that relationship is via angels...not through Him directly. He stands “above” or “outside” that relationship. God cannot relate directly to physical matter. A Rabbi once taught in Ibn Ezra’s name that the necessity for angels is just that: they are agents through which God relates to the physical world. This corroborates Maimonides’ son Abraham’s commentary. Ibn Ezra also teaches that “*Matters of below (on Earth) depend on what is on high; as if a ladder is between them (Gen. 28:12).*” This teaches a second idea: that the physical universe is subordinate to the world of the metaphysical. Proof of this is that God’s will alters natural law.

Therefore, the ladder offers two lessons:

1) that a relationship exists between God and His creation, and that relationship is only via angels, not directly connected to Him, Who cannot relate to the physical world. Only physical objects can relate to the physical world; and

2) the physical world is subordinate to the metaphysical world.

Why is Jacob – as opposed to any other – being taught these lessons? What is it necessary for man for God to distinguish certain places for His honor? As the Rabbis taught above, unless God tells us, this is a matter that will remain unknown to us, as it appears to contradict God’s metaphysical nature. Through Jacob’s astonishment we learn that it is surprising that God selects a location for His honor. Nonetheless, this account reiterates what we do know as true: God is not physical. A Torah fundamental.

[1] The idea is, I believe, that God will allow those deserving of death to live, although justice demands their death. God allows this, as He intimated to Abraham, since there are sufficient righteous people who might improve the wicked. But such an idea man cannot recognize through his own mind. That is why God says “Will I keep concealed from Abraham...?” But man – without God’s providential education – will not arrive at this reality of God’s generosity, and he will assume that those deserving of death meet with death. No exceptions.

“KNOW WHAT TO ANSWER A HERETIC”

Rabbeinu Yonah explains Rebbe Eliezer’s quote above (*Ethics 2:14*) as follows: “*Know how to respond to heretics, so others will not see you fail, and think the heretic is correct...ultimately profaning God’s name.*” Maimonides quotes the Talmud that teaches an additional lesson: debate idolatrous heretics but not Jewish heretics. For debating Jewish heretics strengthens them [most probably because they are more adept at perverting quoted texts]. Maimonides quotes King Solomon who says that heretics are irreparable (*Proverbs 2:19*). This may be because the heretic has habituated his thoughts towards twisting Torah sources. Thus, any further attempt to correct him through discourse will also be twisted. He will face the worst fate the Talmud warns of, “*Those who reject the Torah as God-given have no afterlife (Sanbedrin 90a).*”

How might we respond to the challenge to “Prove the Jewish God” when asked by someone who rejects Revelation at Sinai and who is knowledgeable of the Torah? I responded as follows:

There is a staggering number of high intellectual calibre universally-accepted Jewish minds who have accepted the Jewish God, based on Revelation at Sinai:

Maimonides, Nachmanides, Rashi, Sforno, Tosfos, Ibn Ezra, Samson Raphael Hirsch, Judah HaLevi, the Talmudic Rabbis, Prophets, Kings David and Solomon...and others.

The list goes on of the wisest of men who have written brilliant works like Proverbs, Psalms, Kobleles, all possessing intellectual greatness attested to by today’s leaders, and great thinkers like Rav Moses Feinstein and Rav Yosef Soloveitchik, zt”l. These minds dwarf us. And the Kings dwarf them.

Regarding Revelation at Sinai, Maimonides goes so far as to say “our own eyes saw it, and not a stranger (Yesodei Hatorah 8:1)” to im-

press how latter generations are equal to the eye-witnesses regarding this proof of the Jewish God. As you are well aware of the complete Orthodox acceptance of Sinai as proof, I have two questions for you:

1) We follow truth, and not people. But since so many leaders accepted Sinai, please explain what specific element of the account of Revelation at Sinai validated the Jewish God to all of them?

2) If you are suggesting that all of the aforementioned thinkers made an identical error regarding Revelation at Sinai, please explain what you judge their error to be.

The following is an actual heretic's response:

That might have impressed me back in high school. Giving a list of names doesn't prove anything. I'm sure the Muslims can also list a bunch of brilliant minds who accepted the Koran; is that proof? Maimonides can write whatever he wants...does that prove the event happened specifically in the manner the Torah states? They accepted the account because they all grew up with these tales as their culture, in the same way that all brilliant minds in other religions accept their stories as being the truth. It's the error of accepting a story based on cultural acceptance and not based on conclusive evidence.

My response:

You contradict yourself, as you too were taught these stories, yet you don't accept them. You also avoid the facts, for if you read these thinkers' words explaining why they each accepted Sinai, you would realize it is not as you conveniently suggested, without opening their books. Read the Kuzari for example. You will quickly retract what you imputed above. Once you have read the writings of a number of those thinkers I cited above, tell me if you still feel they all accepted Sinai based on cultural belief, or on reasoning, as they each attested. Then tell me what's wrong with that reasoning, unless you now accept Sinai based on the rationality of their writings.

Anatomy of a Heretic

After resisting my request to respond to initial questions, we abandon our discussion. For a discussion can only continue if both parties hear and respond to the other's words.

Heretics not only reject someone as wise as Maimonides on the grounds that he was functioning out of peer pressure, but they collectively dismiss all these great minds as making foolish errors, despite their brilliant writ-

ings. These include Prophets and world renown leaders. Yet this heretic, with no resume, feels superior to these leaders.

Understand the heretic's approach. First, he ridicules, "That might have impressed me back in high school." In doing so, he feels this strengthens his point. He is operating from an emotional standpoint, not a rational one. But our response must be related only to truth, meaning the facts and proper reasoning – and not the person, if we are to allow truth and proof to triumph.

Avoiding the Facts

Heretics suggest these thinkers succumbed to the emotional appeal of the masses or simply followed their culture without analyzing their beliefs. They deny the volumes of writings authored by these Jewish leaders and suggest that they accepted Sinai blindly. So we respond by showing them they do not have the facts. Asking a heretic to quote the words of these thinkers will force the heretic to admit his first position was wrong: they in fact accepted Sinai due to rational arguments, not cultural appeal.

Additionally, we engage a very effective maneuver. We show him what he is doing: not succumbing to the Jewish view! If he can resist being blinded by cultural stories – he rejects Sinai – why can't others?! Thus, from his own actions, the heretic is caught in a contradiction. So it is important not only to address his words, but also, to monitor his steps and contrast his actions with his claims.

This heretic's first and primary corruption is that he disregards facts; he is not searching for truth, but desires to justify his free lifestyle. If truth does not propel his decisions, then it can only be emotion.

Escapism

The heretic will change the topic when he sees he has no answer. He cannot admit being wrong. So we must be firm and repeat a question until he does. When he has no response, we then pronounce this to him, asking also why he is avoiding the issue by changing topics. Make known to him what he does, as he does it. Do not feel compelled to respond to new issues or questions he raises, until he admits error on the current issue. This is crucial when an argument might have a few steps, where each subsequent point relies on validating or rejecting a previous point. Do not allow him to escape any question.

Doubts do Not Revoke a Proof

Heretics and non-believers typically shift topics. They suggest that the ancient thinkers didn't have the science we have today. Of course, that plays no role in historical transmission: eyewitnesses and speech are all that's required. The heretic will run from issue to issue until he finds one that may not be answered. "Where is all the evidence of 2 million Jews dwelling in the desert for 40 years?" Since he is desperate to be relieved of Torah obligations, he justifies irreligious life with flawed thinking. He feels one unanswered question justifies a rejection of all else that has been proven. To this, we might ask him as follows: "If there existed a judge who proved the right decision on hundreds of cases, but one time a question was raised on one of his cases, would we then say *all* cases now lack proof?" Of course, all other cases stand firm as proper judgments. An unanswered question does not affect the other cases. In fact, it would be wise to assume the questionable case will bear out a correct verdict, since the judge has a perfect record. We should side with the track record, following the majority as we do in all cases of doubt.

Similarly, lack of evidence of the Jews in the desert – part of Jewish history – does not revoke the remaining, universally transmitted Jewish history. It doesn't even disprove that very history in the desert. It's a question, that's all. One which may soon be answered. And the very act of this heretic attacking Sinai's truth from a different matter – forty years of wandering – exposes his inability to invalidate Sinai internally.

Furthermore, lack of evidence is precisely a "lack" and not a positive. Meaning, "proof" is not derived from a doubt. "Proof" exposes all other possibilities as impossible, and this is not something "doubt" does. Doubt merely poses a question, but is not exhaustive in nature. Therefore, doubt cannot "prove" anything. But the heretic and the fool are seeking an out, so they latch on to anything.

This method – grabbing at straws – is also seen in the heretic's "numerous" arguments. Heretics will throw at us many issues. I have also heard it suggested that based on the varying "writing styles" this proves the Torah was slowly written by various writers over many years, until we have the Torah we have today. But again, such theories ignore the facts, as there are no different versions of Torah written by many writers, or in a piecemeal fashion. In fact, there exists only one transmitted version for how we received the story of the Jews and Revelation at Sinai.

Knowing how to answer the heretic means we not only expose his ignorance of facts, but we also comment on the contradictory steps he takes. At times we may not even need to answer his questions. As we expose his flawed or contradictory premises and steps, the heretic is shown to be wrong. His arguments are dismantled, and there is in fact nothing to answer. So know how to answer the heretic, but as the Talmud teaches, do not engage the Jewish heretic.

Part III
HUMAN NATURE

Understanding our emotional and psychological design and its dynamics is essential for appreciating the Torah's laws and accounts of its recorded personalities. Laws target the improvement of our natures; by recognizing our design, we can appreciate God's laws. And the many accounts of Torah personalities and interactions are not for historical recording. God deemed each recorded account crucial to understanding both perfection and corruption, exemplified in different people. Each account offers new insights in action, not merely in theory. We learn the actual dynamics, human perfections and flaws. This guides us closer to God.

We will begin with a seemingly strange verse that will give us great insight.

MAN'S THREE SOULS

Better is anger than laughter... (Kobeles 7:3)

In order to answer why this is so, Ibn Ezra first explains human nature at length.

He states that it is known by wise individuals who follow proofs, that man is composed of three souls, or faculties. The first faculty addressed desires sex, food and love. He calls this faculty "nefesh." The second faculty perceives via the senses and is the cause of man's movements and actions. This faculty also desires honor, and he calls this "ruach." The third faculty is what enables man's speech, discerns truth from false and possesses wisdom. This one he calls "neshama." He states that Saadia Gaon had the same understanding of these three faculties. Ibn Ezra adds that the second faculty is "between" the other two.

This is a direct parallel to Sigmund Freud's division of human nature into the "id," the "ego" and the "superego," matching the same order listed above. (You will see in the next chapter on Bilam, the very same three divisions in man.)

The idea that the ruach is "between" the other two, is that man (ruach) is pulled by his nefesh (desires) and by his sense of "right" (neshama) as if man were made of metal, and stood in between two powerful magnets. He would feel an attraction to both. We sense this ourselves, how our emotions pull us one way, but our sense of truth and morality oppose our desires.

Ibn Ezra explains: the nefesh (instinctual drive) is powerful, and since it has a body, as well as the support of other instinctual drives, it is impossible for the neshama to overcome it. He means to say that when man is pulled by an emotion, man being physical (body) strengthens the nefesh, and other emotional forces are activated, adding to the tug and making it more difficult to refuse an urge. When the Jews sinned with the Golden Calf, the Torah says they also ate, drank and indulged in illicit sexual activities (*Exod. 32:6, and see Rashi*) This shows that one emotional arousal awakens other instincts. As the Jews satisfied their idolatrous emotions, other emotions sought gratification too. On this truth, Ibn Ezra warns: one that indulges in eating and drinking will never become wise.

So how does man escape the grips of his nefesh? Ibn Ezra says he must make a few calculated steps. First, man must team his ruach (ego) with his nefesh to seek honor or greatness. Man seeks honor more than baser gratification, so man can conquer his nefesh by feeding his ego. In doing so, a small portion of man's neshama is awakened, as he requires some intelligence to direct a strategy for his social advancement. But in this

phase, man still cannot realize abstract wisdom, due to the power of his ego seeking honor, which also gives birth to anger.

Here, Ibn Ezra answers our verse above, that “anger is better than laughter.” For he says, anger can exist only when ego is involved. Without ego, one cannot feel angry that something did not go as he wished. This angry “intolerance” is an expression of ego. But as he said earlier, ego awakens some portion of intelligence. So anger is better than laughter, since anger carries some intelligence, while laughter does not.

At this point, when man has strengthened his neshama (intellect) through the assistance of the ruach (ego) by engaging the neshama to help his ego goals, Ibn Ezra says man must now immerse himself in wisdom, causing the neshama to grow stronger, to the point that it can subdue the ego. This plan, Ibn Ezra advises, is how man can arrive at a life where his intellect rules his urges and his ego. The rest of his commentary removes all assumed contradictions in Koheles, by applying this, and additional insights into the workings of “man’s three souls.”

BILAM & THE DONKEY

Following Ibn Ezra’s analysis in the previous chapter of man’s three faculties, an interpretation of Bilam and his donkey offers further insights into this topic.

The story of Bilam and his donkey contains unbelievable events and is described in great detail. As the account in Numbers 22:21 goes, Balak was the king of Moav at that time and was faced with the fear of millions of Jews damaging his land by gaining safe passage. To avert this problem, Balak called upon Bilam, a Prophet, and requested that Bilam curse the Jews so that Balak would have ease in attacking them and in driving them out. When Balak sent the first group of messengers to Bilam, Bilam’s reply was that he must consult with God. God’s answer was that Bilam should not curse the Jews for they are blessed. Bilam informed the messengers that he was restrained from going by God’s word. Balak persisted and sent more messengers; now higher in rank. Bilam responded by saying that even if his house was filled with silver and gold he couldn’t go. Nonetheless Bilam requested an answer from God. This time God gave him permission, however, he still must refrain from cursing the Jews.

What happens next is quite remarkable. Bilam arose early and God was angry that he went. This was after God gave him permission! God

placed an angel in the path to deter him as he was riding on his donkey. It states that the donkey saw the angel standing in the path with an outstretched sword in his hand, and that the donkey turned aside and went into the field. Bilam hit the donkey to return it to the path. The angel stood a second time in the vineyard. There was a fence on both sides of the donkey and Bilam. The donkey saw the angel and pressed up against the wall in avoidance, crushing Bilam's leg. Bilam continued to smite the donkey. The angel passed to a place that was narrow with no room to pass left or right. The donkey saw the angel and crouched down under Bilam and Bilam's anger burned, smiting the donkey – this time, with a stick. God opened the mouth of the donkey and it said to Bilam, *“What have I done that you have smitten me these three times?”* Bilam responded, *“Because you have mocked me. If there were a sword in my hand I would kill you.”* The donkey said, *“Am I not the donkey that you have ridden upon from long before until today? Is it my nature to act this way?”* Bilam replied, *“No.”*

God then opened Bilam's eyes and he saw the angel of God standing in the path with a sword outstretched in his hand. Bilam then prostrated himself before the angel. The angel said to Bilam, *“For what have you smitten your donkey these three times? Behold I have come out to turn you away because your way is contrary to me. Your donkey has seen me and turned aside these three times. Would it be that you would turn aside. Because now I would kill you and cause her (the donkey) to live.”* Bilam says, *“I have sinned. I didn't know that you stood in the path to turn me aside. And now if this is bad in your eyes, I will return.”* The angel informs Bilam that he may continue, but only that which he tells him may he say. Rashi states that the significance of “three” times represents two things: the three forefathers, and the three Jewish festivals. Ibn Ezra states that once the donkey spoke it died, and that with each successive hitting, Bilam used a stronger object.

Following are questions on this section, including the meaning behind both Rashi's and Ibn Ezra's statements:

- 1) Why didn't Bilam see the angel of God at first?
- 2) What's the significance of the sword?
- 3) Why, according to Ibn Ezra, did Bilam hit the donkey with a stronger object each time?
- 4) Why did the donkey die after it spoke?
- 5) What was the argument of the donkey?
- 6) Why wasn't Bilam astounded at the ability of an animal to talk?
- 7) What does the fence allude to, and why did the path become more and more impossible to traverse with each appearance of the angel?
- 8) Of what significance is it that Bilam's leg was crushed?

Maimonides states (*Guide for the Perplexed, Book II, chap. XLII*) that every case in Scripture where we find an angel appearing or talking, the entire account is describing a vision, and not an actual physical event. The event didn't take place in physical reality, but in a person's mind. This being the case, this entire story must be interpreted in this light, according to Maimonides. This is a parable for a conflict with which Bilam was struggling.

If we refer to the events leading up to Bilam riding on the donkey, we see that Bilam comes off appearing as a true follower of God. But with a closer look, his true nature is seen. He was asked to curse the Jews. God told him he could not. The fact that Bilam (during the account of the second messengers) requests from God again to know whether he can curse the Jews shows that he wanted to curse them. That's why he said, "God has restrained me from cursing." Meaning that he really desired to curse, but God prevented him.

This desire to curse the Jews awoke in Bilam a strong conflict. On the one hand, he desired the destruction of the Jewish people. On the other hand, he knew that God blessed them. Bilam was well aware that God's establishment of His Providence over the Jews was due to our forefather's perfection. Abraham's self-realization of the absurdity of idolatry, his conclusion of the reality of monotheism and the Oneness of God secured this treaty of God's Providence. With this knowledge, Bilam was greatly troubled as to which path to follow, namely 1) his desire for the destruction of the Jews, or 2) the word of God. This entire account is a parable of his conflict.

Interpreting the elements of this story as representing psychological phenomena, the story's real meaning can be explained.

Bilam, in great conflict, decides to travel to Balak with the goal of cursing of the Jews. In order to do so, he must suppress his knowledge of God's command to refrain from cursing them. Riding on his donkey represents the suppression of what his conscience (the donkey) "sees." "Riding" conveys a sense of dominion over another object. Bilam himself (in this vision) represents his evil instincts and thus, isn't aware of reality (the angel of God). One's instincts aren't designed with the ability to judge what is morally good or evil. Instincts are not perceivers: they simply emot. This explains why Bilam couldn't "see" the angel. Bilam, in this story, represents his instincts – a faculty of man unable to 'perceive.' Instincts have only one function: they guide a person towards instinctual satisfaction.

The donkey represents Bilam's conscience: the part of man that detects good and evil.

The angel represents reality, or his intellect: the ability to perceive what is real and true. Bilam's inability to curse the Jews was so threatening, it was represented by an angel of God wielding a sword, a very terrifying sight. The conscience, represented by the donkey, is designed to perceive and make value judgments. This is its main function.

Now that we understand the main components of the parable, (Bilam, his donkey, and the angel represent respectively the instinctual drive, the conscience, and reality), we must interpret this account accordingly.

Bilam riding on his donkey can be interpreted as "his evil instincts are riding (suppressing) his conscience." His conscience alone is aware of the reality – "the donkey sees the angel," but Bilam doesn't. Whenever the conscience goes "off of the path," it starts to become more conscious, making Bilam sense his error. Therefore, Bilam "hits" his conscience to suppress it – "hitting the donkey." His conscience slows him down – "crushes his leg" – as he tries to go on his "path." Bilam's weapon for suppressing his conscience becomes stronger – "he hits the donkey with a stick." Then the conscience finally prevails and 'speaks' – "the donkey talks." The argument of the donkey is that "it's not me who's at fault" – meaning that Bilam gains insight (from his "talking conscience") into his actions and realizes that there's something behind his suppression of his conscience. At this point, Bilam becomes aware of his denial only through God's kindness. That's why God had to open his eyes. The donkey dying after it spoke means that once his conscience made him aware of this information, the conscience ceases to function – termed here as death. It did its job. It "dies."

Rashi's statement that the three things shown to Bilam's donkey alludes to the three forefathers and the three festivals fits in beautifully: the donkey – Bilam's conscience – was contemplating the primary reason for God's direct Providence over the Jews, namely the perfection of our forefathers – which entitled the Jewish nation to God's Providence. Bilam's conflict was directly caused by these three individuals (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob). Had it not been for them, he might have been able to curse the Jews. That's why the donkey turned aside when it thought about the forefathers. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob brought about the relationship with God, and now, Bilam desired to curse them! But all curses are from God. We also see why Bilam acted calmly towards a talking animal, as Maimonides states, this was all a vision.

In summary, the entire account of Bilam and his donkey – according to Maimonides – was a vision or conflict, happening only in his mind. In

order for the Torah to inform us of this, the Torah writes it as a metaphor so that many ideas and psychological principles can be capsulated into one account. A parable also conceals ideas from those who would shrug at them, if they were written openly. The fact that Bilam did travel to Balak in physical reality is not discounted by this explanation.

IN THE DARK: THE INCENSE ALTAR

Why was the Incense Altar omitted from Parashas Terumah, where the other vessels are discussed? The incense altar is one of four vessels located in the Temple. The other three are the Ark, the Showbread Table and the Menorah. Why was the Incense Altar not included in the discussion of the other three vessels?

I started to look over this section and noticed that the command to burn incense is connected to both the cleaning and lighting of the Menorah, each morning and evening respectively:

And on it Aaron shall fumigate a spice incense every morning, when he cleans the lights, he shall incense it. And when Aaron lights the lights in the evening, he shall incense it, a regular incense before God for your generations. (Exod. 30:7,8)

What is the connection between the Incense Altar and the Menorah? Is the burning of incense only accidentally tied to these two parts of the day, or does something in the incense require this timing? The Talmud teaches that the incense is to be burned quite literally “during” the cleaning of the Menorah: the priests would clean the wicks and ashes from 5 of the 7 bowls of the Menorah, interrupt their cleaning with the lighting of the incense, and return to clean the remaining two bowls. What is the reason for this interruption? Which demands which: does Menorah demand incense, or does incense demand Menorah? Perhaps they require each other. Reading the actual verses below, it appears to me that the Incense Altar follows the ‘lead’ of the Menorah: it is fumed only when work is done with the Menorah. So we conclude that the time of burning incense is subordinated to the Menorah. What is this relationship? What purposes do these two vessels serve? God’s laws must be reasonable.

Another interesting point is the Torah’s law regarding the Incense Altar’s position. It is actually described first:

And you shall place it before the Paroches, which is over the Ark of Testimony; before the Kaporess which is on the Testimony, by which I meet you there. (Exod. 30:1)

Of course we wonder why two relationships are stated. The Incense Altar is to be placed 1) before the Paroches (separating curtain) and 2) before the Kaporess (the Ark's cover with the golden Cherub figurines). So which one is this Incense Altar to be placed in front of: the Paroches or the Kaporess? And why is its position considered "before" the Paroches? It is in fact not directly in front of it: this Incense Altar is further away from this Paroches curtain than are the Menorah and the Showbread Table. Rashi answers: it is equidistant from the left and right walls as one enters the Temple. In contrast, the Table was at the north side at the right, and the Menorah was on the south side at the left, not centered, as was the Altar. Rashi states that "before the Paroches" teaches that one must align the Incense Altar to be directly in line with the Ark's position. So although further removed from the curtain covering the Ark, it is centered in front of the curtain aligned exactly with the Ark's centered position. This means that there is a relationship between the Altar and the Ark. What is it?

An interesting chapter in Maimonides work, the "Guide" is apropos at this point.

Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed, Book III, Chap. IX

The corporeal element in man is a large screen and partition that prevents him from perfectly perceiving abstract ideals: this would be the case even if the corporeal element were as pure and superior as the substance of the spheres; how much more must this be the case with our dark and opaque body. However great the exertion of our mind may be to comprehend the Divine Being or any of the ideals, we find a screen and partition between Him and ourselves. Thus the Prophets frequently hint at the existence of a partition between God and us. They say He is concealed from us in vapors, in darkness, in mist, or in a thick cloud: or use similar figures to express that on account of our bodies we are unable to comprehend His essence. This is the meaning of the words, "Clouds and darkness are round about Him (Ps. xcvi. 2)." The Prophets tell us that the difficulty consists in the grossness of our substance: they do not imply, as might be gathered from the literal meaning of their words, that God is corporeal, and is invisible because He is surrounded by thick clouds, vapors, darkness, or mist. This figure is also expressed in the passage, "He made darkness His secret place (Ps. xviii. 12)." The

object of God revealing Himself (on Sinai) in thick clouds, darkness, vapors, and mist was to teach this lesson; for every Prophetic vision contains some lesson by means of allegory; that mighty vision, therefore, though the greatest of all visions, and above all comparison, viz., His revelation in a thick cloud, did not take place without any purpose, it was intended to indicate that we cannot comprehend Him on account of the dark body that surrounds us. It does not surround God, because He is incorporeal. A tradition is current among our people that the day of the revelation on Mount Sinai was misty, cloudy, and a little rainy. Comp. "Lord, when thou wentest forth from Seir, when thou marchedst out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped water (Judges v. 4)." The same idea is expressed by the words "darkness, clouds, and thick darkness (Deut. iv. 11)." The phrase does not denote that darkness surrounds God, for with Him there is no darkness, but the great, strong, and permanent light, which, emanating from Him, illuminates all darkness, as is expressed by the Prophetic simile, "And the earth shined with His glory (Ezek. xliii. 2).

Maimonides makes it quite clear that God orchestrated Revelation at Sinai with clouds. This was done precisely to teach our ignorance of what God is. One might think – especially at Sinai – that he has received some positive knowledge of God. Therefore, God cloaked that event amidst darkness, cloud and rain. He desired that no one would walk away assuming they acquired any positive knowledge about Him. Moses too reminds the people: “you saw no form” when referring to that awesome event. So disastrous is the fallacy that we might know anything about God, that God killed 57,000 people when they looked into the Ark upon its return from the Philistines. Once someone feels there can be something “seen” in relation to God, he has forfeited his life, as he errs in the most primary of all areas: what God is and what He is not. He is worthy of death.

Clouds

God manifests His Providence over Israel via cloud – both in the Temple and during the Exodus. God uses cloud to embody the idea that He cannot be understood: His true nature is “clouded” by our very physical natures, as Maimonides stated. On Yom Kippur the High Priest smokes the entire Holy of Holies, lest he too fall prey to a notion that something may be seen in connection to God, in that exalted room housing the stunning Cherubs and the miraculous Ten Commandments.

Ramban's Equation

The first Ramban on Parashas Terumah states that if one were to study the account of Revelation at Sinai, he would understand the Temple and Tabernacle. I did notice some eye-opening parallels:

- 1) The Jews left Egypt behind them, where, during the first Passover sacrifice, they denounced animal worship.
- 2) Upon their exit from Egypt, the Jews were led by God's cloud by day, and His pillar of fire at night.
- 3) They were sustained with Manna, God's miraculous bread.
- 4) All of this took place en route to Sinai where the Torah was given.
- 5) Sinai took place amidst a flaming mountain.
- 6) God's words emanated from the darkness.

Now compare those to these:

- 1) The priest leaves the altar behind him outside the Temple, where animals are killed.
- 2) Upon entrance into the Temple, he first encounters the Gold Altar of incense, which makes clouds only by day, while he lights the Menorah only at night.
- 3) In the Temple is the Table housing the showbread, twelve loaves correspond to the Twelve Tribes.
- 4) All of this is en route to the Holy of Holies, where God's Torah is housed.
- 5) The Ark is a golden structure that mimics the flames.
- 6) God's words emanate from the concealed Holy of Holies.

History Reiterated – Temple Embodies God's Providence

I am not offering a conclusive explanation here. I merely wish to suggest my observations. But I do find them intriguing. Why do we reflect the cloud, the pillar of fire, Manna, and Sinai in the Temple's vessels and design? These events imparted to us levels of knowledge of God's Providence. Such knowledge is our objective: to arrive at an ever growing knowledge of God's ways, His justice, kindness, mercy, and all other methods. These historical events become eternally solidified in the Temple's vessels. Each one alludes to some aspect of how God relates to man, teaching us more truth about the Creator. Although we never experienced it first hand, all future generations benefit from what God imparted to those Jews who left Egypt, by studying or experiencing the Temple. The

Divine Providence they experienced, teaching them new truths about God, is also available to us through studying the Torah's record of those events, and through the Temple.

Subordinate to the Menorah

Besides recalling the pillar of fire, perhaps the Menorah's light also alludes to "knowledge of God." Its seven branches certainly remind one of Creation's seven days, an allusion to God's wisdom. Light too in Torah is equated to Torah knowledge, "*For a flame is a mitzvah, and Torah is light (Proverbs 6:22).*" Perhaps then, our limited knowledge of God must be tempered by the Incense Altar's cloud. As Maimonides taught, cloud always encompasses God. Similarly, cloud must encompass light. The Altar must always provide cloudy fumes when actively working with the Menorah. That which embodies the knowledge of God – the Menorah's light – must be accompanied by the realization that we never achieve positive knowledge of God: He is cloaked, and thus, the incense must cast a veil with its billows.

For this reason, the Altar is to follow the Menorah's lead: when one works with the Menorah, only then does the Altar enter the picture. The Altar "negates" something, and does not exist of its own. It is therefore not recorded together with those other three vessels that impart positive concepts. The Incense Altar reminds man that he cannot possess any positive knowledge about God.

Not only is it true that we have no positive knowledge of God, but if we were to assume this, we would then follow with an additional error: we would 'project' onto God. It is man's nature that when he is familiar with something, that he assumes more than what reality dictates. You might meet someone new who is similar to an old friend, and then you might assume other similarities exist, although you never witnessed such similarities. The same is the case in connection to God. If one were to make one false assumption, he would make others. Perhaps this is an additional reason why we are so careful not to make any assumptions about God. The very existence of this Incense Altar addresses the need to constantly reiterate never to cross that line.

Position

This approach would also answer the positioning of the Incense Altar. It was aligned with the Paroches, as this very "curtain" carried the same function as the Incense Altar: they both serve to "cover" something. I found the verse describing the positioning of the Incense Altar quite interesting. I will note it again: "*And you shall place it before the Paroches, which*

is over the Ark of Testimony; before the Kaporess which is on the Testimony, by which I meet you there (Exod. 30:1).” The verse keeps shifting what it is exactly that we place the Altar before: is it the Paroches, the Kaporess, the place where God speaks to us?

Perhaps the very structure of this verse alludes to the elusive nature of knowledge of God. We are not told to place the Altar before one, single object, but many references are given, as if to say, even in Temple, there is no such idea of “before God.” He is not physical. He takes up no space. He is not “in” the Temple.

On this point, my friend suggested this verse conveys “degrees of separation” between God and us. And this is conveyed only in the Temple. For it is only when a ‘relationship’ exists – in Temple – that degrees of separation may apply.

The Paroches is mentioned first in our verse because of its similar function to the Altar. Ultimately, though, we are to arrive at the purpose of the Temple: greater knowledge of God. Thus, the end of the verse refers to the place where God speaks from: where knowledge emanates. This is the objective of Temple.

Addendum

On a micro level, the Menorah and the Incense Altar create light and darkness respectively. Through them we are mindful of what we can and cannot know. On a macro level, again we see this parallel: God’s first creations included light and darkness. It is as if these two entities precede all others in importance, and rightfully so: knowledge is the purpose in God’s creation of a universe...for mankind to study His wisdom. The parallel continues even into man’s very workings: man’s conscious and unconscious minds deal with what is known, and what is hidden.

FROM EGYPT TO SINAI

There is an interesting parallel between the Jews' history and the Temple's structure. The Jews left animal worship behind them upon their Egyptian exodus. God led them through a desert by way of pillars of smoke and fire, while sustaining them miraculously with the Manna. They arrived at Sinai and obtained God's Torah. These events are directly paralleled by the Temple's design: the priests enter the Temple with the animal sacrifice behind them. Inside, they encounter smoke from the Incense Altar, fire from the Menorah, and bread set on the Showbread Table. These are all in service of the primary vessel, the Ark that houses God's Torah. It too is cloaked by a Paroches curtain, as was Sinai cloaked in darkness, rain and cloud.

These phenomena of pillars of smoke, fire, and the Manna, were not simply conveniences, but precisely planned by God. Each served a lesson, not just for the Jews who left Egypt, but also for all future generations. So important are their lessons, they form the design of the Temple: God desired that the Egyptian, terrestrial journey mirror every man and woman's internal journal. We all must leave our own "Egypt." Life is a struggle to abandon our infantile and primitive natures, our own Egypt, and adhere to the truth, embodied by the Menorah's light. And as we said, we temper our knowledge with our admission of our ignorance, conveyed by the Incense Altar's cloud. And if we truly devote ourselves to this mission for which we were created, God's Manna – His Providence for our physical needs – will be readily found, just as it was prepared for the Jews. And just as the Manna was miraculous, we too will not understand how God provides, as we engage more hours in Torah study than in work, but He does. God wishes that man devote himself more to study than to accumulation of wealth (*Ethics 4:12*). The Manna was actually commanded to be on display in the Temple (*Exod. 16:33*) as a proof of God's ability to sustain us. Again we learn: the lessons of the desert are to be permanent lessons. Maimonides also teaches that one who abandons the life of monetary concerns, devoting himself to study God's Torah, God will provide his needs (*Mishneh Torah: Laws of Shmita and Yovale, 13:13*).

Just as the Jews arrived at Sinai to obtain the Torah, so too, the Temple's focus is the Ark which houses the Torah. We are reminded daily of our true purpose: to arrive at an ever-increasing love of God. This may only be accomplished by studying His creation and His Torah. We learn how essential it is that we are aware of our inner natures – our primitive and instinctual tendencies. We all possess them. These emotions and drives work on us each day. We must evaluate which urges rule us, understand their destructive natures, and abandon them, or satisfy them properly. But our minds are

to rule our emotions, not the reverse. This too was exemplified by the Jews' Passover sacrifice. Before being redeemed, they had to display their disbelief in the Egyptian animal god. For many, it was too strong a desire, and they perished along with the Egyptians in Egypt. One cannot simultaneously adhere to God and an animal deity. It ends up that all those ancient events are not quite so ancient. It would appear that God desired those events to embody mankind's mission...in every generation. It follows that God commanded our recurring Jewish Holidays to permanently display these educational episodes. This journey applies to us all, and Temple is the permanent reminder. There are other similar laws. The new moon for example is said to wax and wane, teaching man that he too may decrease by sin, but like the moon, he may again wax to glow in his perfection. The Rabbis indicate that this is an actual purpose in the design of the moon's phases.

Our internal world is hidden and rarely studied. Temple teaches that matters should be the opposite; we must examine our natures, admitting poor character traits, and improve them as outlined in the Torah. This is where the Keruvim come in.

The Keruvim, or cherubs, were the childlike, gold figurines, which form the Ark's cover. Why were such images attached to the most prized of all Temple vessels housing God's Torah? What do they have to do with the Torah? The Rabbis teach they were similar in design to an infant. What is an infant? How is it distinguished? I believe cherubs are to embody man who is not yet distorted; he does not yet follow the instinctual, primitive and idolatrous emotions. He is innocent. Keruvim portray man in his yet, uncorrupted state: a child. Although a child possesses instincts, these faculties are not evil of themselves. God deemed we have them so they must be good. These instinctual drives are what the knowledge of Torah (housed under the Keruvim) target. Mature adults should return to that state where the emotions are not yet corrupted. Keruvim are the focus of the Temple, as man's focus is to return to a state where he is similar to a child in this respect: uncorrupted by misguided instincts.

The zenith of man's existence is when he is untainted with sin, as a child. But this is joined to his other spiritual element: his soul. Man has two missions, to free himself from his instinctual, and to cleave to the intellectual, the world of wisdom. But they work hand in hand: man's attachment to the world of wisdom (embodied by the Tablets inside the Ark) is proportionate to how far he removes himself from the grips of his emotion, the Keruvim. The Ark's dual nature of Tablets and Keruvim above embody man's dual nature of an intellectual and emotional being. Although the ancient Jews made but one journey from Egypt to Sinai on the ground, all Jews must journey from "Egypt to Sinai" internally each and every day.

THE CARPENTER

I'd like to tell you a true story...

Long ago, on an island named Ianis, when trees had not yet grown, vegetation was limited to plants. The islanders lived in huts made of reeds, for wood was still unknown to them. Years later, a traveling carpenter named Sesom arrived at this island with many types of Harot tree shoots, and planted them there for the islanders' benefit. After many years, Sesom had grown a beautiful forest. However, since the islanders had never seen trees before, they had no idea what to do with them. Sesom had received his carpentry training from a master, who actually first invented the art of carpentry. Sesom, being an expert, then trained the islanders in wood-working, carpentry, architecture, and construction. He taught the islanders all he knew. Half of Sesom's training of these islanders addressed the physical characteristics of wood, and various species of trees: how to saw, carve, sand, and finish the wood. Sesom demonstrated this physically. But the other half of his teachings was abstract principles, essential for building furniture, homes, and great structures. This knowledge could not be seen "in the wood" of course, as they were abstract principles and laws. They had to be learned over years from Sesom, orally.

Sesom had to train these islanders to think about construction, as they never knew what construction was. To them, it was a completely new science, something they were unfamiliar with. Without knowing what wood was, they could never fathom the science of construction. Many islanders, as soon as they got their hands on this new substance called wood, were overeager to start working with the wood, and didn't attend Sesom's classes. These few islanders built homes, but they all quickly collapsed. They realized they required Sesom's knowledge, so they began attending his classes. Before long, all of the islanders were knowledgeable in wood-working, carpentry, and architecture. The islanders built great homes, all of which remained standing for many years.

Sesom desired that no one on even the furthest reaches of this island ever experience a home collapsing again. Sesom desired that the original principles of carpentry and architecture never be lost. He also knew that no one, without Sesom's original training, could ever understand how to build simply by examining the physical wood. Training had to accompany any would-be builder, and that training had to trace back to Sesom's lessons and thinking. Sesom alone possessed the highest knowledge of woodworking and building, and was the best teacher. Therefore, Sesom

transmitted his teachings to the islanders with one condition: “Do not deviate from my teachings, because your homes will collapse. Follow my lessons, because they are not seen in the wood itself. Without my verbal lessons, you cannot possibly learn how to build properly. It is impossible. The wood does not come with instructions written in it; those instructions are in my mind, and in the minds of my students. You may learn from them, or from me. But someone who did not train under me, or under my students for many years, cannot possibly have the true, original knowledge of building.” These were Sesom’s instructions, for the benefit of his fellow islanders.

As the years passed, Sesom died. The islanders flourished, spreading out far and wide, and carried with them both Sesom’s wood in hand, and his teachings in their thoughts. For 3000 years, the islanders steadfastly followed the craftsmanship and principles taught by Sesom, and worked only with his wood. All the houses and structures they built were stable. Those who had built homes with incomplete knowledge did have some problems. But they asked for solutions from the older builders, who knew the principles, and they repaired their homes with success.

About that same time, an islander from afar named Demrofer obtained some of the wood, but did not train with Sesom, nor did he follow the teachings of Sesom’s students. He built many homes, but they constantly collapsed, and required daily carpentry. For him, it was easier not to spend years studying the principles of Sesom, but just jump right into building with no training. Although easier, it proved to be a poor decision for Demrofer. So he tried to develop his own ideas about building, but again, his structures all fell to the ground. Whenever he looked at a home that was properly built, he only saw the wood, because the “principles” of building are not things man can see with his eye. The principles were not “in the wood,” but had to be learned from someone who knew them. He realized that the wood itself was only one half of what he needed to build properly. Nonetheless, Demrofer refused to study under Sesom’s followers.

Like Demrofer, other islanders were also impatient and abandoned training under Sesom’s students. They collectively created a new group of islanders. They attempted to build structures as perfect as Sesom’s followers, but they constantly fell to the ground. Although it was a more tedious existence to constantly rebuild, Demrofer’s people were stubborn, and did not take the time to study, and learn how to build perfect structures. True, it was initially easier to bypass study and quickly jump into construction, but each time, that ease met with frustration, as their structures required daily maintenance.

As is the way with mankind, laziness is emotionally attractive, whereas rigorous study requires restrictive and enduring discipline. Therefore, Demrofer attracted far greater followers than did Sesom. In time, even many of Sesom's people defected to Demrofer's side of the island.

Demrofer's movement is now about 200 years old. Many follow him. However, Demrofer was never successful at one thing, claiming authorship to carpentry and building. Even those in his camp know that historically, Sesom was the originator.

The Metaphor

I'm sure many of you have figured out what I am describing. Yes, this is a true story, but the names must be reversed, if you are to arrive at the metaphor's true meaning: The island of Ianis is Sinai, Sesom of course is Moses, Harot (wood) is Torah, and Demrofer is Reformed Judaism.

Moses brought "Harot" wood or rather the Torah to the Jews. With it, one can build great "structures" of wisdom, and learn new, true principles which are foundations of even greater ones...but on the condition that the other half of Moses' teachings accompany the "building" or Torah learning process. This other half of Moses' teachings is the Oral Law. Moses did not receive a Torah scroll alone, but also a body of knowledge and principles called the Oral Law. These were never written down until years later, for fear of losing them.

On Sinai, God gave Moses the Written and Oral Laws. Sesom taught the islanders of Ianis, it is impossible to use this wood and build anything, unless you understand the building process. So too, it is impossible for one to refer to the Written Torah alone and succeed at arriving at God's true Torah, if one ignores training under a teacher, who also studied under another teacher, all the way back to Moses. If one would study the Written Torah alone, and attempt to arrive at an understanding of God's word, he must fail. In such a process, he ignores half of God's word to Moses, i.e., the Oral Law.

The Oral Law is not simply a body of knowledge. It was given orally for a reason: God desired that it be taught only in a 'teacher-to-student' fashion. In this manner, it is assured that the original "method of study" received by Moses, will be successfully handed down, person-to-person, generation-to-generation. A teacher-to-student style is the only exclusive method of study, and the only way the original concepts are transmitted. This fashion of transmission was in fact how Moses transmitted the Torah to Aaron, to his sons, to the elders, and to the Jews. He did not teach it to all of them in one sitting. But if someone does, as did the Reformers of Judaism, and veers at all from the Sages of the Talmud, who received their

training all the way back to Moses, then these Reformed Jews no longer have the exact Torah system that Moses had. Herein lies the grave nature of the crime of reforming or conserving the original Torah: it is no longer God's exact Torah, and for that matter, not Torah.

God gave Moses 613 commands. Two of them are not to add and not to subtract from His words. The Reformers violated these very commands. God knew what was the best system for all generations. God knows the future. By suggesting that the Torah requires an update or adaptation based on considerations of "modern times," man foolishly suggests that God lacked the foresight to design Torah for application to all generations. Based on this same argument, we discount Christianity's claim that a "new covenant" abrogates God's prior commands.

It is man's arrogance and ignorance which leads him to feel he possesses more knowledge than the original Torah recipients. How can one know better than the teacher? The islanders of Ianis could not figure out how to build without Sesom's instruction. For 3000 years, from Moses, through the elders and the Prophets, and the Sages through the Rishonim (medieval Rabbis), not one of these great individuals or Prophets suggested what the Reformers suggested. Judaism's true leaders, who contributed to the Torah's content, who wrote Psalms, Proverbs, Deuteronomy, and those like Maimonides and Ramban, never suggested what the Reformers suggest. The original leaders of Torah, the true recipients of Moses law, the Torah's "authors," certainly possess greater authority than those who have not trained in Oral Law. Just as Demrofer could not study the wood to gain the principles of construction, the Reformers cannot examine the Written Law to arrive at what the Oral Law is. Without years of tutelage, tracing back to Moses, one cannot arrive at the knowledge, or the method of Talmudic and Torah study and elucidation.

The following are examples of Reform's deviations from God's Torah:

Samuel Holdheim (a major early reformer):

The present requires a principle that shall clearly enunciate that a law, even though Divine, is potent only so long as the conditions and circumstances of life, to meet which it was enacted, continue; when these change, however, the law must also be abrogated, even though it have God as its author....The Talmud speaks with the ideology of its own time, and for that time it was right. I speak from the higher ideology of my time, and for this age I am right. (Blau, MODERN VARIETIES OF JUDAISM, p.37)

THE PITTSBURGH PLATFORM – prepared in 1885 by a group of 15 Rabbis...became the guiding principles of Reform Judaism in America for 50 years (Isaacs , p 58):

- *We accept as binding only the moral laws and maintain only such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives, but reject all such as are not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization.*

- *We hold that all such Mosaic and Rabbinical laws as regulate diet, priestly purity and dress originated in ages and under the influence of ideas altogether foreign to our present mental and spiritual state. They fail to impress the modern Jew with a spirit of priestly holiness; their observance in our days is apt rather to obstruct than to further spiritual elevation. (Courtesy: Bluethread.com)*

For 3000 years since the giving of the Written and Oral Laws, Judaism held steadfast to God's Torah, which He commanded we not alter, nor veer from the Rabbis "left or right." God knows both the over-religious emotion and the emotion of modernity. With the over-religious emotion, man desires to do what God has not commanded, as seen in Aaron's two sons who offered a "strange fire." They met with death. The opposite emotion is to diminish God's laws, or alter them, for many reasons, including Reform's rationale of modernity.

God created man. God knows the future. God gave one system. If we are to benefit and live as God wills, we are well advised to follow what the Creator intended, as is seen in the practice of His Prophets. God would not have selected Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon, and all the Prophets, had they deviated from His word. These men were inspired by God's words precisely because they followed God. God does not place His opponents in leadership roles. By the very fact that a Prophet was addressed by God, we are taught that God endorses this person and his teachings. It is therefore a clear lesson that we are to follow these Prophets, and those who do not veer from their words.

Orthodox Judaism is the original Judaism, and adheres meticulously to the teachings of Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon, the Prophets, and the Sages of the Talmud. For 3000 years few people disputed Judaism's singular identity, an unchanging system, even with the change in times.

Do not be impressed with large numbers, nor with new sects within Judaism. Their founders boast no comparison to a Maimonides, a true genius whose works amaze us. Reform's founders and followers display no sign of Orthodoxy's adherence to Moses Torah, nor does Reform Judaism have any member or founder who comes close to the genius of Ortho-

doxy's giants. The opposite is the case: their reasoning is severely flawed, as they claim God could not foresee the future needs of His nation.

Had Reform or Conservative Judaism been correct, that they truly possessed God's word and intent, they would have had the Prophets, and not Orthodoxy.

It is to our benefit that we follow God's exact intent and words. Otherwise, we are likened to a builder with no guiding plans. We will watch our entire efforts end in collapse. This applies not only to how we run our individual lives, but how we run the greater body: the Jewish nation.

MOSES: A DIVINE PHENOMENON

Unfortunately, we are conditioned when reading any text, especially those containing stories or historical accounts, to accept that there is nothing more to the story than the surface information. We err when viewing Torah accounts in this superficial manner and forfeit God's intended messages. Maimonides expressed this in his Guide (*Book III, chap L*). We must be highly sensitive to all Torah portions. Only then, will the questions leap from the pages to our surprise, and delight.

We are told of Pharaoh's enslavement of the Jews, and then of his plan to exterminate all males. The Rabbis teach he feared the astrologers' prediction of the birth of the Jewish messiah, and therefore wished to kill him. Names are disclosed of the midwives who feared God and saved the newborns, whom the Rabbis teach are Moses' mother and sister. This is followed by Moses' birth, but it describes his father and mother as Levites. Why do we need to know all of this added information?

We read further, and must ask of what significance it is that Moses was "good." Good in what way? He was yet an infant, an early stage where one is incapable of goodness.

What is so vital about Pharaoh's daughter's coinciding bathing and finding the infant Moses; her pity on him; the information that she took him as a "son" – that Moses ended up raised in Pharaoh's palace? Subsequent to this, the Torah continues with Moses' "going out" to his brothers; his killing of the Egyptian; a second "going out" and the rebellious Dathan and Aviram; Pharaoh's desire to kill him; and Moses' defense of Yisro's daughters after he fled Egypt.

In Genesis we learned of God's command to Abraham that he leave his home town. We learned of Joseph's dreams which forced his sale and

eventual rise to viceroy status. Whether it is an outright, Divine decree to Abraham, Joseph's Prophetic dreams, or a series of ostensibly "natural" events surrounding Moses, the Torah's record of these accounts intends to communicate important lessons. Not history lessons, but lessons of God's Providence and human perfection.

It appears from the sequence that due to the enslavement, God created Moses. Yes, God "created" him Divinely, with his high level of intelligence, like no other man. Moses was necessary at this precise historical moment to function as God's emissary. His timed birth, prematurely, saved him from the Egyptian murderers. And his keen intellect was necessary for him to perform the miracles. The fact that he was "good" must refer to his unusually beautiful appearance, also indicating Divine intervention. His parents were of the house of Levi, those immersed in the study of God. This too may have contributed to Moses' development in God's path. Aaron and Miriam – described by Maimonides as the two people after Moses next in perfection – add to the greatness of their parents.

Moses' striking form may have been necessary to appeal to Pharaoh's daughter, which caused her to pity him and take him in as a son. His beauty could have also bolstered her ability to violate her father's decree on infant males. I did not see a source, but I wonder if God kept her barren, as the verse indicates to me her taking him as a son might suggest she had no son prior. Being barren would add to her desire for a child, even a Hebrew.

What demanded that Moses be raised among royalty? The following acts of his "going out" to care for his brothers may answer this. One who is raised with a level of social superiority might be better groomed for his eventual leadership role, and have a greater ability to confer with kings, which Moses eventually required in connection with Pharaoh. Despite this, Moses did tell God later, "Who am I to speak with Pharaoh?" However, this does not mean Moses was not better prepared to do so through his upbringing. This only refers to his great humility, a perfection. But one can be perfected and humble, yet possess the ability to stand before kings.

"Going out to his brothers" immediately follows the account of Pharaoh's daughter, teaching that one is related, or due, to the other. Moses' "going out" may serve to substantiate that his upbringing successfully offered him leadership abilities. Moses also went out on two occasions, teaching that his concern and ability to lead was not an isolated case. And following this account, we learn of Moses' defense of Yisro's daughters, a third case of Moses expressed abilities.

IDOLATRY'S PROGRESSION

Maimonides states that the original star worshippers made the error of assuming that God's will was for man to glorify the stars and planets that "minister" before God. Those people –Adam's grandson Enosh included – erroneously assumed that the stars are in proximity to God. Error number one: God does not exist in space. God created the universe, and does not exist 'within' it. The proof: God existed prior to the universe. King Solomon said this too, "The heavens cannot hold You (Kings I, 8:27)." Maimonides underlines their error as "assuming star worship is God's will." This is their essential sin: "assuming God's will." How can man know what the Creator of the universe desires? Nonetheless, these foolish people did so.

Idolatry is the act of attempting to approach God differently than His outlined methods. Therefore, if one attempts to reach God through star worship, he commits idolatry.

Maimonides continues to describe the downward spiral of civilization in its progressive deviance. First, man accepted that God exists, but suggested that His worship demanded star worship. Next, false Prophets arose, lied to the people, claiming that God spoke to them, and instructed them in the construction of statues. They made up these forms in their fantasies, instructing them in God's name that all people should worship them. The incentive offered by the false Prophets to the people was that they would meet with success if they heeded his words, or failure if they didn't.

Eventually, other false Prophets said the stars themselves appeared to them with instructions to do such and such worship. Soon, God was completely forgotten, and the worship of these statues remained as the only worship. Their priests assumed there was no such thing as God...only these idols. It appears from Maimonides' words that this final state remained unchanged. I say unchanged, as we see there was a progression until this final stage.

Why did idolatry progressively deteriorate, until it reached the final state of worshipping stone and metal gods? We must understand why there was this phenomenon of "progressive deterioration," and also, why idolatry finds itself not progressing after this final practice was reached.

To gain some insight into idolatry, let us look to the famous case of the Golden Calf. Moses told the people he would ascend Sinai, and return forty days later. The people miscounted, including his ascension date as day one. Therefore, when they thought it was day 40, it was really only day 39. Moses' absence caused some great concern. Why? These were their words:

And the people saw that Moses delayed to descend from the mountain, and the nation assembled on Aaron and they said too him, 'Get up and make for us gods that will go before us, for this man Moses that took us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him. (Exod. 32:1)

We immediately notice the use of the extra word “man” in “the man Moses.” Of course Moses is a man. What does this extra word indicate? It teaches us the precise cause of idolatry: man’s need for tangible leaders. But even more than just tangible, the “man” Moses means that mankind is predisposed to needing an authority figure, which is “man.”

From youth, we view parents as incomparable. They lift us, feed us, care for us, and direct us. They become a force not to be reckoned with. Psychologically, many adults do not ever mature past the need for the parent. God created the institution of parents by design. He could have made mankind as He made Adam, with no parent. But God’s wisdom demanded that mankind endure the stages of childhood and adolescent development for good reason: God wishes man to acquire a respect for authority, to be ultimately transferred onto Him. With no parent, we cannot obtain any semblance of respecting authority. We will never arrive at viewing God as an “authority.”

Now, when one matures, he can choose one of two paths; acceptance of his parents as mere mortals where he abandons his previous infantile awe of them, or he can succumb to his infantile emotions. In this latter scenario, he cannot abandon the need for parents, but simultaneously he realizes his parents are no better than he is. He is stuck. He seeks parental direction, as he remains an infant in his mind, so his only recourse is the invention of gods. This is where idolatry finds its roots: in man’s infantile psyche. This is why the Jews said to Aaron, the “man” Moses is gone. The Jews returned to the infantile the moment this “physical” leader was gone. They could not tolerate Moses’ absence, and demanded that Aaron create something physical to relate to. As Ramban says, “no fool would think the gold in his ear took him out of Egypt.” They desired the Gold Calf as something physical. They were as children who lost their parents.

We may now answer our first two questions. The reason idolatry finds no further progression once it reaches the practice of statue worship is because this is the raw, infantile expression of relying on the parent. Once these idolaters mentioned by Maimonides had deteriorated to pure statue worship, with no realization of God, there was no further to go. This is the infantile state of a child who finds his total comfort when his parents are in the room – as long as a form of a person is around, the infantile

mind feels secure; he has his “parent.” He feels protected, and his fears are gone. There is nothing more the child needs. So too, there is nothing more an adult needs in idolatry, for idolatry is the complete reversion to this infantile state of seeking the parent. For this reason, many idols are formed after the likeness of man. And for this reason, God warns against making the forms of man:

And guard your souls greatly, for you did not see any form on the day that God spoke to you in Horeb from amidst flames. Lest you act destructively, and make for yourself a statue, the form of any design, the form of male or female. (Deut., 4:15,16)

Why was there a progression of varying states of deteriorating idolatry? Because until the primary emotion was satisfied (i.e., statues) man was not yet completely satisfied with his current state of star worship. One may ask, “Why didn’t the first idolaters go straight to statue worship, and ignore God right off the bat?” The answer is that the emotions of man cannot make large steps. This would be a shock to the system. In general, man finds it difficult to make any sudden changes. Idolatry is the same. Also, at the outset man had enough awareness of the reality of God that they could not blatantly deny His existence.

We now understand why idolatry had a progression, and why it then came to a halt: it was seeking to completely mimic the infantile attachment to the parent, and when it found it, it was satisfied, so no further deviation was needed.

Parenthetically, the reason that false Prophets became part of the progression is not to be found in idolatry’s dynamics, but in a commonly found human expression: ego. Man’s ego, if not tempered by the realization of the true God, and His authority, will always seek to express itself. Thus, many false Prophets lied, claiming they were selected by God for communication. It is not surprising that in the drive towards denying God through idolatry, the “self” steals the spotlight, and many liars claimed to have been contacted by God.

We see that times have not changed at all since Adam’s grandson. In recent years, Sun Myung Moon proclaimed himself the Messiah.

THE WISDOM OF THE PLAGUES

Did God select all Ten Plagues as an absolute plan, or were the plagues selected and administered based on Pharaoh's actions?

We must appreciate that each Torah verse has great meaning. For example, after Pharaoh's astrologers mimicked the plague of blood, Exod. 7:23 says, "And Pharaoh turned and came to his house." Why must this necessarily be taught?

Why did the plague of frogs follow the plague of blood? We also learn that the frogs infested every square inch of Egypt, not mentioned by the other plagues. I believe our first verse teaches why frogs had to be sent next.

A Rabbi once taught that Pharaoh's turning aside after the blood plague was an act of denial. Based on this, we can suggest that Pharaoh found enough justification in his astrologers' sleight of hand to reject Moses' miracle of blood. But Pharaoh sensed some truth in Moses, which is why it is significant that he went home: to escape. Therefore, the next plague did not allow Pharaoh any escape, for the Torah teaches that the frogs infested every room of every home. This was in direct response to Pharaoh's action, not necessarily planned from the outset. The frogs emerged from the very location that Pharaoh initially rejected – the Nile – forcing Pharaoh to reconsider his original dismissal of the plague of blood. The frogs also croaked, and I am sure quite loudly, this time offering Pharaoh no psychological escape from the reality of God's miracles.

If the astrologers were able to duplicate the frogs, why does Pharaoh call Moses to remove them? Ask the astrologers to do so! We must say that Pharaoh realized a difference, that only Moses could remove the frogs. God was teaching Pharaoh that his astrologers were frauds. Eventually, God sent boils to completely eliminate all credibility of the astrologers, as you will read in the next chapter. But God takes small steps, not deploying a final blow until necessary. God originally desired Pharaoh to use his mind to discern the difference between his fraudulent magicians and Moses.

This was God's plan: to force Pharaoh – a mystic – to start engaging his mind. For only if Pharaoh would switch gears and "think," would he be able to see the true God, and the nature of Moses' miracles as superior to his astrologers. Yes, God could have made any miracle He desired that would have been undeniably clear...but that would not engage Pharaoh's mind. Pharaoh would – in such a case – be forced by his emotions to release the Jews, but not to any credit of his intelligence. God wants man to use his mind.

If we are sensitive to every nuance and distinction of the plagues' descriptions, we will continue to uncover more hints like these, and a greater appreciation for God's ways.

DON'T FOLLOW THE LEADER

Many times, although well-intended, individuals present Torah interpretations that are not based on anything more than their subjective views. They may cite a verse, but then they suggest a lesson that is not derived from the verse, is obvious, over-simplistic, or infantile. And sometimes their points are often false. This problem is severe. God carefully selected each word in all verses. If we simply offer an explanation without analysis, we fail to uncover God's intended lessons. We are merely using a verse as a springboard for our own thoughts. But this is not Torah study. This will not impress people. And Torah is all about conveying to others a deep appreciation for God's great wisdom. A true Torah lesson should generate awe, inspire, and leave people with an increased appreciation for God's wisdom. Nothing less. And an appreciation of God starts with appreciating His written words.

*And the astrologers could not stand before Moses because of the boils; for the boils were on the astrologers and all of Egypt.
(Exod. 9:11)*

What is problematic with that statement? Think it over for a few moments.

It says the astrologers couldn't stand before Moses. But we wonder: how do boils – a malady of the skin, not bones or muscles – affect posture, so standing is impossible? Also, of what relevance are the boils on “all of Egypt?” Why mention that “all Egyptians” had boils, if the verse's message concerns only the astrologers' inability to stand? Furthermore, of what significance is the astrologers' inability to stand before Moses, as opposed to standing before Pharaoh or others? And if they truly could not stand, let them sit. But “stand before” has another meaning...

We are being taught many lessons here. We are to use the verse as the starting point, and let it teach us. We must not start with our own unchecked thoughts and then seek support.

The posture of lying mystics adds no great wisdom to God's Torah. The

real lesson must address the basic theme of the Ten Plagues, as the plague of boils was delivered together with the other nine.

Standing also means to “present” one’s self...to appear before others. The astrologers attempted to reproduce the plagues, only to expose their inabilities. This is significant, since God records their feeble attempts. It appears from the very few words concerning the plague of boils that the objective of this plague was precisely to disarm their claims to superiority through astrology and magic. Torah verses carry profound lessons; they are not mere historical accounts. Our verse means to teach that boils purposefully targeted the astrologers.

“And the astrologers could not stand before Moses because of the boils; for the boils were on the astrologers and all of Egypt.” This refers not to posture, but to their ability to sustain their dignity...they could not “appear” before Moses who outperformed them. They were ashamed. But why were they any more ashamed during the plague of boils? The answer is the second part of the verse: “for the boils were on the astrologers and all of Egypt.” Here, God hints to us...

Let the Words Talk

What might we derive from this latter half of the verse? These words appear to make a comparison. Both the astrologers and the Egyptians possessed boils. We must now ask this: what about this comparison prevented the astrologers from appearing before Moses? Why was their “equal” status with all other Egyptians an embarrassment to them? We see the answer quite readily! It was the very equality of their condition to that of all other Egyptians that disarmed their claims to greatness. They were no better! They could not defend themselves from boils. What type of powerful astrologer allows painful blisters to afflict him over days? It is the liar who allows this to happen, since in fact, he has no more defense from boils than any other Egyptian. It was this diminution of status that was their embarrassment, and why they could not “appear” before Moses.

How God Teaches Us

As a wise Rabbi said, the Torah’s words are carefully selected. Our verse is just one example of hundreds of thousands. With His meticulously crafted texts, God provides us with just enough information to discern a problem, and that hint is the very opening to the answer. *“Its answer is by its side (Sotah 29b)”* is a Rabbinic statement describing this very phenomenon.

Knowledge is endless, but written words are limited. How then can God direct all generations to continuously uncover new truths? If knowl-

edge was limited to the written word, when we concluded any text, we would have nothing more to gain. This is only true of human works. But Divinely inspired works are different. The Torah's and Rabbis' apparent inconsistencies, the exaggerations and contradictions force the mind into the world of induction and deduction, and other forms of reasoning. Wisdom has a design. It has layers and curtains, where truths are only unveiled with precise methods of Torah analysis.

We must appreciate the "Chocmas haKasuv," the "wisdom of the written words," and search for God's intended teaching by listening to the words with a great deal of sensitivity and awe. "*For God gives wisdom, from His lips [come] knowledge and understanding (Proverbs 2:6).*" This verse teaches two matters: 1) to be cognizant that God is the "source" of all wisdom and 2) that His "lips" offer an additional benefit. "Lips" refer to the written word – that which has been articulated. These articulations or Pasukim can reveal great insights if we spend the necessary time considering the problems in each verse.

God's messages embedded in the Ten Plagues are numerous. Clearly, the act of unveiling the astrologers' lies through boils was precise. For only with a plague that attacks the "body" was it illustrated that the astrologers have no powers and that all people are equal. This explains our previous question why boils caused the astrologers' shame, as opposed to any other plague. For it was boils alone that made a comparison between all Egyptians, exposing the astrologers as equals, and not the superiors they claimed to be. The very fact that God chose to include this comparison as the exclusive effect of this plague indicates the very purpose of this plague.

But why was the demotion of astrologers so essential that a separate plague was required to address it?

Leaders: Inspiration – Not Deification

From their inability to reproduce the Plague of Lice and from their silence regarding all subsequent plagues, we realize God's primary lesson is, as He said, "*There is none like Me in all the land (Exod. 9:14).*" God wished to educate the Egyptians away from idolatry, magic and astrology. They are all false. And He did so by showing His exclusive reign over the universe and all of its laws.

We must ask what more was achieved when demoting the astrologers' status, specifically through boils. We already know that astrology is false, since from the Plague of Lice and onwards, the astrologers could not reproduce any miracle brought by Moses. What more was added in Boils? The verse says the astrologers could not stand before Moses. Again, we

see a comparison: the astrologers are contrasted to Moses. I believe this lesson is to force us to consider what we must value, and what we must disregard. Although they were a higher social status than Moses, the astrologers realized their lowly state. It matters none that they were in positions of power, and that Moses and his people were slaves.

Roles must play no role. Pharaoh and the Egyptians – as well as all other human beings – attribute more credence to a person of a higher status, simply because he or she possesses that status. A times, even the higher-ranked person dupes himself into believing he is superior. In his dream, Pharaoh saw himself standing literally “on” the Nile, the source of Egypt’s fertility. He too was deluded by the fantasy of greatness.

The lesson here is to ignore reputations, and view one’s actions or ideas alone. The Torah says “do not fear man,” and “do not respect the rich or the poor.” In all cases, human emotions of favoritism will lead to corruption, not to God’s truths, and justice.

Moses was unaffected by the boils that reached the astrologers. This directed the Egyptians to the realization that although in high office, a person can be a fake. It is clear from the institution of leadership that man enjoys subjugation to a director – people want a leader. But we must be so careful and accept as a leader only a person who is guided by reason and Torah truths. We must be sensitive to this human frailty of insecurity and the desire for a father figure. We are to abandon that need and mature into intelligent people. In no way should we respect leaders’ words or actions alone: they must pass the litmus test of reason and Torah. The leader too must not fall prey to seeking popularity. That must not be his objective. He must lead only with the desire to educate others towards a life of reason, Torah, and ultimately a love of God...not a love of himself. A Rabbi once cited the Talmudic lesson, “Any leader whose subjects like him is doing a poor job.” This means that a true leader admonishes his followers towards truth, although he risks losing his post.

Summary

We conclude that the Torah teaches in a very subtle and deep manner. It takes time to master this style, but it can afford us great insights. We must study the verses, allowing the words to lead us, and not use them to support our whims. We learn that every plague offered deeper lessons than meets the eye. And we learn that we are not to follow the leader, but we must use reason to determine truths. Moses, although of a slave population, spoke truth, while the astrologers attested to their lies by their inability to stand before him. Don’t follow the leader. Follow the truth.

9/11 – MEN AND MONUMENTS

Much can be learned from history and from an intelligent analysis of the Torah and psychology. *“And they said, ‘Let us build for ourselves a city and a tower with its top reaching the heavens and let us make for ourselves a name, lest we be scattered upon the face of the entire Earth (Gen. 11:4).’”*

The builders of Babel’s Tower sought to make a name for themselves that would also survive their own generation, as they said, “let us make for ourselves a name (Ibn Ezra, Gen. 11:3).” Man constructs monuments to attribute eternal value to his beliefs or values. Man thinks that just as a monument will stand eternally, so too will the subject of its testimony. But man errs thinking his beliefs might be validated through a structure. Man is correct to value only that which is real, and what is real, is eternal. But something false is not rendered true by building a testament.

With its top reaching the heavens

This expresses man’s desire to create something unsurpassed by others. In other words, “Ours will be noticed more than others.” Man is unchanged, and today is no different as countries erect structures taller than others, as if the tallest structure “wins”. Sadly, too often the sentiment heard about 9/11 refers to the towers’ collapse, not loss of life. This validates this truth that people are awed by structures.

The brutal and vicious attack of Americans in the world known Towers – beacons of democracy – displays the terrorists’ need for human recognition, just like Babel. If erecting a monument gains recognition for the builder, destroying that monument is a rejection of those values and proclaims the terrorists’ values. But if God were truly man’s sole concern, human recognition would be irrelevant. Islam is clearly preoccupied with man, valuing a social agenda over the Divine.

The tower builder, and destroyer – the terrorist – are both insecure individuals where opposition is intolerable. This intolerance is a denial. It is generated by the unanswered questions other religions pose to one’s own views. One thinks, “If other views exist, perhaps my view is invalid, and maybe even rejected by God.” The terrorist’s solution is “might makes right,” similar to the Crusades and pogroms. He murders, since reason will not validate his views, and he senses his doubt. As he does not follow a life of reason that will allow him to abandon his beliefs when shown to be false, he is propelled to preserve his view as “right” by murdering all

opposition. But this self doubt exist only in the minds of those who follow unproven views. In contrast, the Jew is not threatened by any number of religions of philosophies. He has proof. He knows all other religions are impostors. The Jew is calm, content and confident. The only times the Jew kills, is in defense, or for punishment, or to remove irreparable cultures that would mislead others. But even in war, we extend peace before using force. And all that we do is based on God's commands. These commands are all validated by Revelation at Sinai. This one time in history, God revealed a religion. Its is from here that the Jew derives his complete conviction in Torah, and realizes all others are false. God proved which religion is His, so man need not prove anything.

An additional insecurity is displayed in the phenomenon of "culture." What causes so many people to follow a singular path, even though outsiders clearly see the flaws of such a culture? The desire for social acceptance propels people of all cultures not to deviate from their peers. The ego is powerful, and most people act on it daily. If others like us, this satisfies our egos, so we follow others to gain their applause. Throughout time, men and women of all generations followed their peers to attain and maintain a pleasing self image. Mankind has thereby forfeited the pursuit of truth, in place of the pursuit of the self. This is why most cultures exist. What adds to the phenomenon of culture, is the trick of the mind that whichever culture I am part of, must be the best. This is another reason why the builders of Babel's tower said "Let us make for ourselves a name."

Lest we be scattered upon the face of the entire Earth

Babel's builders ascribed to "strength in numbers." The fear of being scattered expressed their dependence on masses. The insignificance of the individual is bothersome. But the Jew understands that truth is worth following, regardless of few adherents. Babel's culture was attached to people, not truths. Thus, if scattered, they felt this compromised their philosophy. The Hajj is the largest Islamic event where yearly, pilgrims join processions of hundreds of thousands of people, who simultaneously converge on Mecca for the week of the Hajj, and perform a series of rituals.

From the opening chapters of Genesis, God has long ago revealed the workings of the human psyche. Monument building and destruction present nothing new to the Torah student. When misguided and living based on emotions and not intellect, man will act today as he did back then. Building monuments, taller than others, he will strive to eternally validate his beliefs and culture, and silence opposition. Following the pack and

RELIGION *of* REASON

never questioning the religious status quo, he derives his much needed self image. And since such men cannot reason and are propelled emotionally, when confronted by other views, these cultures will continue to execute innocents, unprovoked, in the name of “proving” themselves right.

Part IV

FALSE NOTIONS

Jewish life has become tainted by man-made religions, mysticism and pop-kabbalah. An intelligent analysis of Torah reveals beautiful insights. Judaism is the only religion based on proof and reason, not blind faith and superstition. Intelligence is the only key that unlocks God's wisdom. We must distinguish and teach others what is authentic Judaism and discard what is merely a popular notion. Intelligent people will prefer the Torah's genuine brilliance to these exposed falsehoods.

IDOLATRY

Parasha Re'eh includes God's commands to abolish idolatry and all its traces from the land we were about to inherit. Idolatry forms the second of the Ten Commandments as well as the fifth of Maimonides 13 Principles, giving it vital focus and demanding we fully grasp this fundamental. Additionally, Maimonides teaches[1] that we derive a fundamental from the Rabbis: *"One who admits to idolatry denies all of Torah, all prophets and all that the prophets commanded from Adam through all generations. And concerning one who denies idolatry, the converse is true."* Maimonides adds, "and it [idolatry] is the essence of all the Mitzvos." Let's start by understanding that last statement.

How exactly is the command not to violate idolatry the "essence," let's say, of waving the Lulav and Esrog? How is it the "essence" of rejoicing on the holidays through eating meat and drinking wine, or wearing Tzitzis?

Maimonides does not mean idolatry forms the essence of the *act* of all commands, but rather, the "objective." God's goal of each command is our realization of His wisdom. If we don't understand the concepts in each command, Rashi says the performance is useless. This makes sense, for what benefit do we achieve by waving a palm branch and citron if it is not motivated by some ideal? But if we study the Rabbis' words, we realize that waving up and down demonstrates our acceptance of the One who created all that is up (in heaven) and down (on Earth). That is, God created all corners of the universe. And when we wave in the four, horizontal Earthly directions, we demonstrate our conviction that all man's horizontal travels and doings are recognized by God, and that we benefit from His providence. Thus, God created all, and governs all. Now we can appreciate this command of waving produce at harvest time. Our very sustenance is due to the Creator. And this idea rejects the notion of idolatry.

Tzitzis calls to mind "all" mitzvos: *"And you shall see them, and you shall recall all the mitzvos of God and you shall perform them, and you shall not go astray after your hearts and after your eyes, after which you deviate."*[2] We possess senses and desires. We can easily be aroused by both, A) visuals and B) imagination. God commanded we wear an item that recalls the total Torah system. When about to sin, we are faced with this A) visual reminder that forces B) recollection of God. Tzitzis visually obscures a tempting visual, and the command to recall all the mitzvos is a mental activity that combats another internal function – our emotions. This restraint on our desires also conditions us not to follow idolatry, which is found only in our desires and not in reality. Contemplating the Torah sys-

tem as well, focuses us on God, and mitigates the drive towards “other” beings.

Even the rejoicing with food on holidays generates good emotions associated with the holiday: a recollection of God’s providence. Thereby, we do not accept that an idol rescued us from bondage, or sheltered us in huts, or gave us the Torah. This is what Maimonides means by “idolatry is the essence of all the Mitzvos.” All mitzvos are to increase our appreciation for the only God, simultaneously rejecting the notion of idolatry.

The Core Idea

Maimonides teaches the central theme of idolatry is that we must not worship anything created.[3] This includes the sun, moon stars, angels and constellations, down to humans, animals and plants and all elements and minerals. We must appreciate that the source of idolatry is human insecurity. If man were self-sufficient, having no worries or cares, he would not pray or seek assistance. But we are in fact, dependent, with needs. Intelligent people realize that as all in the universe is created, they do not seek assistance from anything or anyone except the Creator, the only being truly capable of hearing our cries, and responding with assistance. Maimonides adds[4] that we also do not admit of a true idea of God, while seeking intermediaries. The practice of seeking intermediaries in any form expresses a false view of God: I cannot relate to Him directly, nor that He can relate to me directly. Worse, it expresses the idea that God is not independently sufficient, i.e., He requires an intermediary or assistant.

Major Themes

Idolatry includes a few major parameters: one cannot create idols or instruct others to make them; one cannot worship them; one cannot look at idols; one cannot derive any benefit from idols; one cannot create figurines for beauty even if not for idolatry; one must abstain from idolatrous practices like omens, horoscopes, amulets, consulting the dead, witchcraft; and one must destroy idols and all that is used in its worship.

Regarding the various objects under this prohibition of creating idols, we wonder how both Maimonides[5] and the Shulchan Aruch[6] state that creating figures of animals is permissible, while Deuteronomy 4:17 teaches we cannot create such figures. Was not the Gold Calf a primary example? To compound this question, Deuteronomy 4:16 groups man with animals as the forms prohibited regarding the creation of replicas (idolatry). Thus, man and beast should be equal.

Statues of Worship vs. Beauty

We must contrast the source prohibiting “idol” creation to the verse prohibiting the creation of figurines for “beauty” and not for worship.

Exodus 20:4 (the Ten Commandments) prohibits all forms of idols: *“Do not create for yourself a statue of any form that is in heaven above and that is in the Earth below and that is in the water under the Earth.”* (Deuteronomy 4:17 cites Moses’ additional warning not to do so.) In both cases, the Torah prohibits the replication of any being for the sake of “worship.” In this prohibition, man is no different than animal. So in what sense are animals (and plants) permitted?

The permitted replication of animals and plants is for beauty, like statues on one’s lawn, or in his home. When not created for idolatry but merely for decoration, we are taught that animals and plants can be replicated. Even decorative replicas of man and the heavenly bodies and angels would be permitted, were it not due to the Torah’s separate concern that erring individuals not be misled and follow idolatry. So as not to mislead people, even the creation of statues or figurines for decoration is prohibited, but this prohibition applies only to man, the heavenly bodies and angels.

The verse Maimonides cites for this second prohibition is Exodus 20:20: *“Do not make with Me gods of silver, and gods of gold do not make for yourselves.”* Notice the words “silver” and “gold,” i.e., ornamental materials. It is thereby learned that this verse does not come to prohibit idolatry, what Torah already prohibited in Exodus 20:4, but it must add a new prohibition. This addition is the creation of figurines that are ornamental in nature, and not idolatrous. Nonetheless, they are prohibited.

A friend suggested the exclusion of prohibitions on plants and animals – from decorative purposes – is due to their lack of intelligence. Thus, the Torah only went so far to protect people from error, and only prohibited decorative statues that reflect beings possessing intelligence and capable of answering man’s cries; those things that could possibly be treated as idols. But as plants and animals have no intelligence, the Torah did not go so far as to prohibit these categories of replicas, when not made for idolatry.

Perhaps another reason is that plants and animals of each species are identical. One can barely distinguish two lions, two zebras, or two maple trees. Thus, the individual member of each species offers man no satisfaction that “this one” is unique and worthy of worship. Thus, animals and plants are not prohibited when created for decoration or beauty. In

contrast, the sun, moon, constellations and descriptions of angels are all unique. This uniqueness of each individual subject lends itself to man's projection of unique greatness and thus, "powers." Therefore, these latter subjects are prohibited, even if created for beauty. But let's further appreciate the Torah's formulations...

Replica vs. Imagination

What is the need for this additional verse, and command? Why are not the angels and the spheres subsumed under the primary prohibition taken from the first verse we quoted in the Ten Commandments, "*Do not create for yourself a statue of any form that is in heaven above and that is in the Earth below and that is in the water under the Earth?*"

Our second verse (Exod. 20:20) is precise, also saying Do not make "with Me." "With Me" means to say "Do not make forms of ministers who minister before Me on high"[7], referring to the various angels and the spheres. Of course, God does not occupy space, so the heavenly spheres and angels are not "with" God.

"*The Torah speaks in man's language,*"[8] thus, "With Me" refers to subjects that man deems more closely related to God, such as the spheres and the angels. But "with Me" carries another idea...

Do not make "with Me"

This refers to a new category of idolatrous prohibition: objects not subject to replication.

We don't know what God is. And anything "with God" implies that it shares something with God. But nothing is comparable to God![9] What then does this mean?

I believe the equation is that just as God is unknowable and not subject to replication, the angels too are not subject to replication. Even the spheres cannot be replicated, as Abbayeh taught.[10] Maimonides too points to this distinction, as he says we cannot create the "similitude" (dimus) of the angels or the spheres. Maimonides does not use "similitude" when describing replications of man, since man can in fact be accurately replicated. Since the concept of a replica cannot apply to angels (of which we're ignorant) or spheres (true replication is impossible due to sheer magnitude) Maimonides correctly includes these objects under a new heading, requiring a different verse for their prohibition. So the first verse in the Ten Commandments prohibits true idol creation. This includes those objects, which can be replicated, i.e., animals and man, and also anything

made expressly for idolatrous use. But the Torah also warns against creating things incapable of replication: either due to its size (planets, sun, etc.) or due to our ignorance of what it is (angels). Such creation cannot be deemed “replicas” and thus, Maimonides places these laws under a different heading. We now appreciate the need for two verses.

As we said at the outset, Tzitzis guards against our nature to “see” and be led astray, or to “imagine” with our hearts and be led astray. The Torah is beautifully consistent, as we are warned not to replicate what we “see” (viz. animals) or what we “imagine” (angels).

God must be viewed as the Creator – the sole source of the universe. Idolatry assumes that God does not exist and there is something else, or that He does exist, but requires additional assistants to create or run His world.

The study of physical reality – sciences – and the study of Judaism both reject the notion of a Godless world that created itself or always existed; a world where God depends on imaginary forces. Thus, as Maimonides teaches, we have no need for, nor is there truth to intermediaries. No force exists, other than God. There is nothing, except for Him alone. We need only Him. For nothing can run the world, which He already created. No man or object can help us. We are taught to pray to Him alone. We can call to Him, and He can answer. . .from anywhere.

[1] Laws of Star Worship 2:4

[2] Numbers 15:39

[3] Laws of Star Worship 2:1

[4] *ibid*

[5] Laws of Star Worship 3:11

[6] Yoreh Daya 141

[7] Talmud Rosh Hashanna 24b, Laws of Star Worship 3:11

[8] Laws of Torah Fundamentals 1:9

[9] Isaiah 40:18

[10] Talmud Rosh Hashanna 24a

[11] Deut. 10:17. See Sforno’s commentary

RABBIS' BLESSINGS

Rav Saadia Gaon stated, "man has no power over the elements." People go to Rabbis to get blessings to help with medical problems, infertility, shidduchim, and various other travails and afflictions. What is the idea of a "Rebbe's bracha?" Does it have the power people attribute to it?

Rashi states (*Gen. 30:2*) Rachel desired children and asked Jacob to give them to her. Jacob responded (with anger), "*Am I in God's stead?*" Rashi adds "*God has withheld children from you and not from me.*" We must know that Jacob was not vicious or callous to another human being, certainly not to his own wife. Jacob meant to say, "You have the need, not me, and God has not answered you. It must then be you who prays." A wise Rabbi mentioned that the person's prayer is the essential one, and not what someone else prays on your behalf. This makes sense, since the deprived person is the one who knows him or herself. She is the one from whom God has held back children, the one who can introspect, determine a flaw, improve...and thereby merit children. When what we seek from God goes unanswered, prayer enables us to reflect on our needs and our flaws. A Rabbi explained the word "tefila" (prayer) means "to judge," as in judging or weighing our values to determine wherein we require improvement. "Which of my values has caused God not respond to my request?" The institution of prayer assists us in detecting our flaws that render us unworthy of God's response. The reason for this is that prayer, when performed correctly, has an elevating effect. The ideas we ponder in the prayers awaken us to these profound concepts. When one adheres to these values, he is more under God's Providence, and will experience a different, more perfected existence, now benefiting from God's involvement in his life to a higher degree. (*The Guide for the Perplexed, Book III, Chap. XVIII*)

It is the perfection of one's soul that causes this good. God is not the One who changes in this scenario. I paraphrase Maimonides: "as a thing approaches fire, it becomes illuminated, once it comes closer, it is heated; as it comes even closer, its form is actually changed by the fire." But in all cases, the fire never changes. It is due to the proximity to the fire that the thing experiences varying effects. So too is our relationship with God. The more distant, the more in darkness we are. The closer we come, the more we are affected by His created Providence. However, God never changes. What is perfect can be no more perfect. God does not change... even through our prayer: "*I am God, I do not change (Malachi 3:6).*" This concept also explains the Mishneh in Ethics where ten miracles were created at sunset on the primordial Friday. All other miracles were also created then, but in their proper day, as Maimonides states. (*Ethics 5:6*) This

means that God made the world with all miracles built in to the fabric of their respective substances. God did not need to ‘wait’ until the miracle is necessary in order to render it. He has foreknowledge, and was able to implant all miracles into the creation – during creation. Additionally, God is above time.

This also teaches us that God is the One Who performs all miracles, and man performs none. Today, people have the belief that Rabbis perform miracles. From Ethics above, we see that the Torah’s words declare absolutely that God alone causes *all* miracles.

Man cannot effect changes in natural law, since natural law was completed before man was created. Even Moses had no recourse other than praying to God on numerous occasions. Moses alone had no power to do so (*See Mishna, Rosh Hashanna 29a*). The concept of a Rabbi possessing power is against Judaism (*See Sforno’s opening commentary on Parasha Chukas – all miracles are God’s works*). If Moses prayed to God for change, it follows that we must do the same, and we cannot effect changes in nature ourselves. Saadia Gaon says in his work *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions (Yale Judaica Series, pp. 147–153)* that no man, not even the Prophets, possess powers. Had they been given power, or protection from death, mankind would project false notions of their being superior to other mortal men, and this is not so. Saadia Gaon gives numerous arguments against this idea.

The Talmud on Blessings of Rabbis

Moade Katan 9a teaches that both Rav Shimon ben Yochai and Rav had sent their sons to receive blessings from their respective students. Why didn’t Rav Shimon ben Yochai and Rav bless their sons themselves? They were definitely greater than their students! Yet they both desired that their students give the blessings. It is also interesting to note that Rav Shimon ben Yochai only sent his son to his students after he saw that these students were “anashim tzura: wise men.” The gemara also inserts that Rav Shimon ben Yochai’s desire to have these students give blessings was only after they came back to take leave of him an additional time. As the story goes, Rav Shimon ben Yochai was visited by these two students. They gave farewell, and left that night. The next morning they returned to give farewell again, at which Rav Shimon ben Yochai asked why they did so. They responded, “Rebbe, you taught us that if a student takes leave of his teacher, but sleeps over in that town, he must once again take leave the next day.” To this, Rav Shimon ben Yochai turned to his son and said, “These men are wise men, go to them that they may bless you.”

What is so significant about this mechanical activity of returning to

take leave a second time that caused Rav Shimon ben Yochai to consider these men wise? Aren't there more difficult commandments that convey greater intelligence other than merely traveling back to say goodbye to a teacher? I believe the gemara says that this command was followed by these two students for good reason, and it is very germane to this story.

Rav Shimon ben Yochai could have blessed his son. But blessing doesn't mean one performs miracles or controls nature in any way. Man does not have this ability, as stated. When these two men returned to Rav Shimon, a friend suggested that Rav Shimon was testing the students by saying, "Why have you returned?" Rav Shimon ben Yochai didn't forget the law. He was merely testing to see if their return was one of a personal nature. Meaning, were they so attached to him they didn't want to leave, or perhaps their return was out of respect to objective law? When they answered Rav Shimon that they returned "as the law prescribes," Rav Shimon saw in them an intellectual objectivity, and not a lower, emotional dependence. It was this objectivity which he felt was necessary for one to see his son's true nature, and to bless him accordingly. Rav Shimon may have felt that he held some bias towards his son, and this is why I believe both Rav Shimon ben Yochai and Rav had their students bless their sons, and they themselves did not. They both saw the need for objectivity. They both understood they are subject to bias. These were honest Rabbis.

We now see how the gemara cleverly cited that these two students returned for this specific halacha. This halacha of returning is to remind oneself of the town's real importance – the Rabbi, the teacher of God's Torah. These students displayed that their relationship to their Rebbe was objective – not a personal attachment. This performance may be simple in action, but it is indicative of one's perfected relationship with his fellow man. Interesting is that both Rav Shimon and Rav did not instruct their sons to request a blessing on a specific matter, as is done today when people ask a Rabbi to bless them with children or monetary success. Both Rav Shimon and Rav allowed the wise students to decide what is best for their sons. No previously formulated requests. Respect for objective advice alone was the motivation of these two great Rabbis.

What is a "bracha," a blessing?

A Rabbi once expounded on this topic. He mentioned that when Jacob blessed his sons, he merely pointed to each son's nature, and underlined it. Without bracha, one may have to decide whether to take a certain position or not. He has no knowledge how it will play out later in life. He can be very successful, or a failure. However, with prophecy, as Jacob had, he was able to remove doubt from his son's lives, and share with them Divine

Knowledge to assure their successes. Jacob also counseled his sons based on their natures, and pointed out their shortcomings, which requires no prophecy.

But as the Talmud states that prophecy ceased, we today, as well as Rav Shimon and Rav, do not have prophecy. So how does “blessing” apply to us? Also, what does the gemara mean that when sick, one should go to a chocham – a wise person? The latter means that a wise person is objective, studies your character, and points out your character flaws and poor judgments and values, so you understand how to operate better, and remove yourself from sin. The reason why one gains illness may be due to a misguided life. *“Many evils befall the righteous, and they are saved from them all (Psalms 34:20).”* This teaches that one who is not righteous may suffer illness. To teach man of his wrong, God may deliver illness apropos of the mistake, “mida kneged mida” or “measure for measure,” as He did to Miriam the Prophetess. She was smitten with leprosy for speaking against Moses, her brother.

Man has no powers. When Prophets seemed to revive dead children, our great Rabbis taught that when they “laid upon the child and he revived, laying eye to eye, mouth to mouth” he only laid upon him so as to concentrate on his prayer to God. The Prophet prayed, and God revived.

The Blessings of the Rabbis’ Students

These wise students of Rav Shimon ben Yochai asked Rav Shimon’s son upon his arrival, *“What do you request here?”* He responded, *“My father sent me to you to receive a blessing.”* When these students heard this, they quickly surmised that this son of Rav Shimon was still taking direction from his father. Perhaps this is why their blessing was for longevity, a wife and children. By making this wish to the son, perhaps this young man will abandon his current paternal dependency and feel secure through this blessing (advice) to start a life of his own. This I believe may be the purpose of that specific blessing.

Rav Saadia Gaon stated, “man has no power over the elements.”

THE CURSE OF THE WISE COMES TRUE

“And now, lift their sin, and if not, erase me please from Your book that You wrote (Exodus 32:32).” (“Book” refers to the Torah). Moses says this to God, attempting to obtain a pardon for the Jews’ Golden Calf sin. God responds to Moses, *“Those who sinned against Me, I will erase from My book.”* Is God disagreeing with Moses? It would appear that He is.

The Elders of Tosfos (Talmudic commentators) said that Moses made a bargain of sorts:

If you forgive me for breaking your tablets, forgive them, for You are not one who is biased in judgment.’ God responds: ‘Whoever sinned against Me will I erase. They caused you to sin Moses, and the sin of the Tablets is theirs (not yours). You acted properly, as they were not fit to receive the Tablets.’ Nonetheless, Moses’ name was erased from the entire Parasha of Tetzaveh, for [the name] ‘Moses’ is not found there. This was done because ‘the curse of the wise comes true, even if made on a condition.’

Of course, we need to understand Moses’ equation between his breaking the Ten Commandments and the Jews’ Golden Calf sin. But let us address the main idea: “The curse of the wise comes true, even if made on a condition.” Moses cursed himself, by suggesting his name be erased from the Torah if the Jews would not be forgiven. However, God seems to suggest that He will not uphold Moses’ wish of erasure, as He says, “the sin was the Jews’ as they caused you to sin, Moses.” Our obvious question is, if that is so, and God says Moses did not sin, why then does God erase Moses name from the Torah, albeit in the single Parasha of Tetzaveh?

God says, “He who sins will I erase,” and God did in fact erase Moses’ name. How do we understand God’s contradictory words: on the one hand He says Moses needs no pardon since the Jews caused him to break the Tablets. On the other hand, He erases Moses’ name from Parashas Tetzaveh! I see only one possible answer: Moses’ name deserved erasure. I do not mean that Moses sinned; there may be another reason why his name must be obscured. I will elaborate shortly. For now, let us line up the questions:

1) What is meant by, “The curse of the wise comes true, even if made on a condition?”

2) Why was Moses’ name erased from Tetzaveh, as opposed to any other Parasha: is it due to its coming immediately prior to the Parasha containing the Golden Calf?

3) What was Moses’ sin?

4) How does erasing his name address the issue?

King David's Curse

The Talmud cites another case where we apply an almost identical principle, *“The curse of the wise comes true, even if made for free.”* (Here it is made for “free,” while Moses’ curse was made “conditionally.”) Talmud Makkos 11a records that when King David was digging out the Temple’s foundation, the sea threatened to flood the Earth – a metaphor. King David inquired if it was permissible to write God’s name on a chard to be tossed into the sea, so as to contain it. None answered him. He cursed with suffocation anyone who knew an answer and remained silent. Achitophel then considered that since God’s name may be erased from the Sotah’s document to create marital harmony, certainly it could be erased in this case to save the world, and he instructed the King accordingly. King David did so, and all was saved. Nonetheless, later, when Achitophel saw his counsel to Avshalom was disregarded, he hung himself, dying precisely in line with King David’s curse of suffocation (*Samuel II, 17:23*). The Talmud teaches that although Achitophel heeded King David’s threat, nonetheless, Achitophel seemingly died by the very curse of the king. We thereby support, “The curse of the wise comes true, even if made for free.” But what is this justice?

We must be careful. We have a tendency to evaluate a Talmudic portion, or any part of Torah, based on our first notion. We may think that King David possessed the ability to curse. After all, he was a king, and it appears on face value that his “curse” came true. But this is a superficial and false view of a curse, which is merely the opposite of a blessing. No man has the ability to alter nature or someone else’s free will by uttering words, as with a curse or a blessing. It is the infantile reading of stories like these, and a lack of knowledge of our fundamentals which leads to these false conclusions.

Let us approach this Talmudic portion intelligently. King David was human. He possessed no greater capabilities than any other person. So how may we understand that his curse “came true?” Looking at all the facts in the story, one stands out: Achitophel did not readily assist the king until King David made a threat. Why would Achitophel remain silent at first? It must be based on some reluctance to assist the king. We see later on as well, Achitophel counseled Avshalom, King David’s son, on how to successfully rebel against his father, the king. A picture begins to emerge: Achitophel harbored some animosity towards King David, and this explains why he counseled the King’s son on how to succeed over King David. David’s threat of Achitophel shows Achitophel in the same light; Achitophel’s animosity expressed itself in that case in the form of silence.

So let us explain the phenomenon: King David has no powers, yet Achitophel does in fact die the way the King cursed. How did this happen? The answer is, “observation.” What do I mean? King David observed a negative trait in Achitophel. His “curse” that anyone who withholds information die means that the king was pointing out that Achitophel possessed some negative trait, deserving of punishment. King David merely identified a flaw – which is described as a “curse.” But the king’s words cannot cause Achitophel’s death. We even see that Achitophel hung himself! It was not David! So why does the Talmud attribute it to King David? The Talmud is agreeing with the king. When it says, “*The curse of the wise comes true, even if made for free*” it teaches that when the “wise” say something, they are observing reality accurately. This is why the Talmudic principle only applies to the “wise.” What they say – be it a curse or a blessing – is in fact an accurate observation, but it is not causative. Thus, King David observed that Achitophel possessed a flaw, which he knew would cause him his own downfall. King David did not ‘cause’ Achitophel’s death; Achitophel hung himself. But his death is euphemistically ascribed to the king, as if to say the king was right.

King David said whoever remains silent will suffocate. Why suffocation? It makes sense. Achitophel sinned by his mouth (throat) and King David knew that this type of life must cause his downfall. King David knew that a counselor (Achitophel) whose tools are his throat and mouth, and who is also deviant, would eventually, when using his mouth, suffer by it. (Anyone who is deviant who also functions in a specific capacity the majority of the time will find his end connected with that function.) King David may have assumed that Achitophel was too wise not to know this himself, and upon his own self-realization that he erred with his mouth, would kill himself in connection with it through hanging himself. Perhaps Achitophel suffered from a certain amount of guilt from using his counseling abilities for evil, to destroy King David. Perhaps his animosity towards the king was because of his role as king – a coveted position to say the least. Radak states that Achitophel hung himself because he knew Avshalom would not succeed without his advice. Therefore, the king would discover Achitophel as a rebel, and would seek to kill him. Achitophel saw the writing on the wall and preempted the king’s decree of death. We conclude that King David’s curse was merely an observation of what was probably inevitable. He knew that Achitophel’s deviance used in counseling would bring him to his death. There is no causal relationship between man’s words and reality.

Moses' Curse

Now, how does this apply to our case of Moses and the Jews? Moses too cannot cause a change in nature or people simply by uttering words. God alone controls the very natural laws exclusively under His guidance. God's laws were fixed before Moses or any Prophet entered the world's stage, so how can they change what God already completed? They cannot! However, we are forced to reconcile God's statement that the Jews sinned, and the fact that God did erase Moses' name, which appears to be a fulfillment of "Whomever sinned against Me I will erase." Moses' name required erasure...but why?

In Exodus 32:1, the people first demand to create a god (Golden Calf), as "Moses the man" who took us out of Egypt is gone. Moses, the "man?" Why the extra word? Of course he is a "man." But the Torah is offering a spotlight on the issue...and a direction to the answer. The Torah is pointing out the precise flaw: the people were overly attached to Moses, the "man." What does this mean? Look at what they did: they created a very physical Golden Calf. They became so attached to Moses' presence, they could not tolerate his absence for even a few hours longer than his scheduled descent from Sinai. They panicked, and immediately desired some physical icon to act as their head.

Perhaps Moses felt in some way that he contributed to their Golden Calf sin. Perhaps he was not clear in his words about his return; or maybe something else led them to such an act. We even learn that it was through Moses' prayer – a change in himself – that God pardoned the Jews. The fate of the Jews was bound to Moses' level of perfection. Evidently, Moses too realized his flaw. He asked specifically to be "erased," because he did not wish his flaw to act as a stumbling block for future generations. A righteous person, concerned with the welfare of future generations may use this logic so that his sins are not recorded. This explains Moses' specific request of "erasure." God replies, "Whomever sinned against Me, will I erase." It would seem that God agrees; Moses name had to be erased. God complied and erased Moses' name in one Parasha.

There may be another understanding. Perhaps the dialogue went as follows: "God, if you do not forgive the Jews, please erase my name so I do not act as a stumbling block to future generations." God replies, "Moses, I do not erase someone simply because they wish to shield others. That is not why I will erase someone. I erase someone who "sins against Me." It is for this type of sin alone that I erase someone."

Why Erasure?

Now that God erased Moses' name, we are taught that Moses sinned "against God" somehow. But a "sin" here does not mean a violation of some law, but that Moses – without guilt – was somehow connected to an error of the people. God said, "The people caused you to break the Tablets." God thereby exonerated Moses of breaking the Tablets, but not of some other matter. If we are careful with our reading, we do see that God adds two unnecessary words. . . "whomever sins *against Me*." This teaches an entirely new idea: God will erase someone who not only sins, but sins "against Him." Perhaps this means that if a man becomes too central, he is sinning against God. . . he "obscures God." We see the people had an attachment to Moses to the point that they could not tolerate his absence for a few hours. And God's response is perfect: He obscured Moses. When God says "I will erase the one who sins against Me," God means to say that He will remove from the Torah the person who sins against God, as one whose actions counter the focus of God. Not that Moses violated anything, but perhaps, somehow, Moses' existence obscured the Jews' focus from God onto himself. Not that Moses did so himself. It may have been the Jews' overestimation of his persona. It seems this is so, as they could not be without Moses "the man" for too long. But this does not mean it was the fault of Moses. God's use of the word "sin" may simply indicate that Moses somehow contributed to a negative state in the Jews. Similarly, Moses' grave was hidden from the Jews, so they could not outlet this sinful, over attached emotion after Moses dies.

We can resolve the contradiction found in the Elders of Tosfos: God indemnifies Moses of the Golden Calf sin. Yet, God erases Moses' name from one section, teaching that Moses somehow obscured God from the focus of the Jews, and therefore, the only remedy is to obscure Moses, allowing God to reemerge in "full view." This explains God's description of Moses as he who "sins against Me." But again, I do not mean a violation deserving of punishment. Thus, Moses own self-curse took hold, as he was correct that one who "sins" must in some way not harm future generations. So, inasmuch as God erased Moses' name, He shielded future generations, as was Moses' wish. Moses' curse, "even for free" (he really did not sin with the Calf) still took hold, and he was erased. Thus, erasure of Moses' name is the correction required, as "name" represents one's 'identity', and it was Moses' very identity which obscured God's.

Moses, just like King David, observed a flaw, albeit in himself. But he did not bring anything upon himself through mere words. It is impor-

tant that one understands clearly from these two accounts that man possesses no ability to curse or bless in the commonly misunderstood sense. Man's true curses and blessings are only observations about negatives or positives in others. When man curses someone, he is simply defining a negative trait, but his words cannot and do not effectuate any change in reality. What a wise man does when he curses, and this is only an act of a wise man, is to unveil a poor character trait in another person. Perhaps the person will desire to abandon this flawed character. Similarly, when someone blesses another, all he is doing is describing a positive element, which causes the person to cleave stronger to that positive trait.

We learn that God's will is that man is not elevated above Him. Many Jewish communities today make such a fuss over Rebbes and their blessings. Certainly we have proved that man has no powers. But from our study in this area, it would appear that excessive dependence on man, any man, even Moses, obscures our focus on God and must be avoided. Nothing may steal man's attention away from God. This theory also explains why King David could not build the Temple: his popularity due to numerous military victories would overshadow the Temple's status as "God's" Temple. There was nothing wrong with his bloodied hands, as he fought on behalf of God's fame, not his own. But when the people exalted him for his "tens of thousands," they bestowed fame upon King David, and this threatened to steal the focus away from God. This could not be tolerated. God gave the Temple's construction to King David's son, not as a penalty, but actually a deferred recognition of King David's zeal.

Our last, unanswered question: Why did God erase Moses name from Tetzaveh, as opposed to any other Parasha?

WESTERN WALL PRAYERS

I paid for two rounds of prayers at the Western Wall, and I was promised by this Jewish organization that I would be married. More than two years later, I am still single. A friend of mine also paid several years ago and she's still single too.

I received this letter not long ago. The Torah does not contain a notion that praying at the Wall – or anywhere – guarantees a positive response. Such lies raise peoples' hopes, only to let them down. It is thievery and a Chillul Hashem – disgrace of God's name – to take money for promises in

the name of Torah. It is cold and arrogant to say “Sometimes the answer is no” in response to dissatisfied customers, as if one knows what God has responded. These crooks parade as if they represent Torah. Exodus 20:21 says, *“Any place you mention My name, I will come to you and bless you.”* “Any” place. We don’t need a Wall for God hear us.

This thievery denies the Torah Fundamental of “Reward and Punishment.” For God teaches that we receive His good Providence based on our internal perfection. In his Laws of Repentance 2:3, Maimonides equates one who repents in his mouth but not his heart to one who ritually immerses but clutches an insect in his hand. Just as one is not cleansed as long as he holds onto the insect, one is not forgiven until he/she repents: an internal, true repentance.

Therefore, paying to have prayers recited on our behalf, while we cleave to our flaws cannot be effective. Who is more reasonable: Maimonides, or this deceptive WesternWallPrayers.org? Certainly, one who steals the money of fellow Jews in the name of prayer is sinning and will not be effective in his prayer for many reasons: 1) he sins by stealing so his prayers are those of a sinner; 2) he does so in the name of Torah and disgraces God’s name; 3) the person in need has not changed so as to merit God’s intervention; and 4) the primary reason such prayers are ineffective is because he prays not to God, but to a false notion of God he has manufactured. The true God does not endorse a prayer if the one praying is deluded that “location” trumps inner perfection.

God heard the prayers of the Matriarchs even when they prayed in various locations. Their husbands the Avot did not tell them to pray at the Wall’s location. Also:

Did God not answer Esther in Persia?

Moses on Horeb?

Daniel in the den of lions?

Joshua in Gilgal?

Joseph imprisoned in Egypt?

Elijah on Mt. Carmel?

Elisha in Jericho?

Jonah in the fish?

Chana?

The Matriarchs?

Selichos ends with all of the above cases when God responded – without the Wall.

God desires a sincere heart, and not a location. Read the Haftora of Tzav. God says He does not want our sacrifices, but rather, that we listen to His word.

“Do His will as your own, in order that He will do your will as His (Ethics 2:4).” We have a formula for success.

But you will ask: “Why do some people actually marry after such Western Wall prayers?”

There is a psychological explanation: they are duped into believing the prayer was effective, so they are emotionally more accepting and even wishful about their next match: they feel “this is the one” even before they meet him/her. However, the fact that we see so many people who have paid for the WesternWallPrayers.org service and remain single, reveals the lie.

If Jews would study God’s Torah, they would realize such practices violate the most fundamental Torah concepts, and reason. No one would be fooled.

WITCHCRAFT

Torah prohibits *Nichush* and *Onane* – heathen practices of setting signs or times for our activities, or inquiring of fortune tellers and the like. An example of setting a sign would be if a person whose food falls from his mouth, says, “This is a sign not to leave the house, as I will be unsuccessful, or I will meet with a tricky individual.” Another example is one who says, “A black cat crossed my path, it’s bad luck, and therefore I will restrict my actions because of this event.” Both are prohibited.

Why did the Torah group together the setting of signs and the setting of times? Also, why is fortune telling and speaking to spirits grouped together, and why were these latter two prohibitions given the additional command “not to inquire?” (*Deut. 18:11*)

The flaw in these activities is the regression to the infantile state of insecurity. In such a state, one seeks security from the external world, instead of engaging rational thought.

The Torah’s way of life is where man uses his mind to arrive at conclusions. He engages the world, determines his needs, and plans the best route to success. However, what these aforementioned individuals do is abandon thinking, viewing coincidental phenomena as if they are “willed” and happening as a message: “This cat crossed my path, that must be a sign.” “If I wear a red bendel, I will be protected.” How foolish is this, and how contrary to God’s plan. God endowed us with intelligence, to understand

that He alone controls all, and we must engage this intelligence to realize how the world operates, and live by its laws.

With minimal reasoning, these prohibited practices of imagined security can easily be shown as fallacious. Ask someone, “Is a black cat knowledgeable? Does this stray cat recognize you? If it was a brown cat would you feel the same?” The answers to all these questions will be “no,” and the person should see his error. Again ask, “If the bendel was green, would it protect you? If it was half red and half blue? If you wore it on your head and not your wrist? If it was made of metal and not thread?” These questions make others realize they have no reasoning for such beliefs. It will then make sense to abandon such foolish practices. (*See Tosefta Shabbos, Chap 7 for the prohibition against red bendels.*)

Nichush and Onane are attempts to establish a false sense security. One seeks assurance that his actions will be successful. Nichush and Onane are grouped together because the violator feels self sufficient to interpret events himself. However, fortune telling and speaking to spirits is a phenomenon where one individual would seek counsel from “another” who feigns to be a mystical enchanter or warlock with “powers” or possessing connection with spirits. This expression of idolatry is where the seeker needs another person to assist him. He is more infantile in that he cannot determine matters independently. He needs the psychological comfort of “another” that will direct him. This is also why we are forbidden to “inquire” as this act of inquiring is the expression of a need for another, guiding human personality.

Torah commands man to utilize his intellect to realize the fallacy of these sins, and to live his life independently, abandoning the childhood need for security.

There are no powers other than God. This follows reason. God created everything. Nothing can override His control of man’s affairs, or of the universe. God also says that each man is punished for his sins and rewarded for his good. This can only be true if man is free from all imagined “forces,” where the only one to blame when he sins or does good is man alone.

Reward and punishment are fundamentals of Judaism. If one deserves God’s punishment, wearing a red bendel or following other superstitions cannot stand in the way of God’s punishment. Conversely if man does good, natural causes will be no opponent to God’s rewards.

SEGULAS & AMULETS

The Torah teaches that Hashem punishes the wicked and rewards the righteous. It does not say that challah baking, brachos, praying at the Wall or any other activity will address our needs, as those practicing “segula” suggest.

When the Matriarchs were barren, they did not resort to segulas, or pray to the dead or near them, or seek brachos from their Prophetic husbands (who were far superior to today’s Rabbis) but rather: they introspected and prayed. On Deut. 10:17 “Hashem does not take bribes,” Sforno wrote the following commentary:

The punishment of a sin will not be removed at all due to the reward of a mitzvah that this sinner performed. As the Rabbis taught, ‘A mitzvah does not extinguish a sin.’ And all this teaches that one should not be confident that if he sins, that his sin is removed at all...except by complete repentance.

Sforno was a great thinker and a true voice of Torah thought. He remained loyal to Hashem’s Torah words, and did not follow practices that violated Hashem, unlike proponents of segulas. And it matters none how popular segulas have become, if they are in direct opposition to the Patriarchs, Matriarchs, the Torah and our Rabbis. Sforno taught that our mitzvahs cannot remove our personality flaws, which may deserve a punishment. The only way we are forgiven for our sins and remove Hashem’s wrath, is when we identify the cause of our sins, recognize the error, and abandon our poor behavior forever. Even occupying ourselves with many great mitzvahs in no way removes our flaws. “*Let us search and examine our ways and return to Hashem (Megillas Eichah 3:40).*” Eichah teaches what we must do, and it does not say segulas are the Torah’s approach.

Nothing in Torah supports segula; Torah sources actually reject it. If we deserve a punishment, and we don’t address our shortcomings, baking challas with brachos cannot help. And if we have no sin, then the correct approach to infertility and other ailments is medical treatment; the correct approach to suffering is self evaluation and changing our ways. In either case, segulas are useless, and violate the Torah prohibition of Nichush. Nichush in common day terms are good luck charms. It does not matter if the charm is a horseshoe, a challah, a key, a mitzvah, or a red bendel. The practice assumes that forces exist, which they do not, and it is idolatrous. Tosefta Shabbos chapter 7 prohibits red bendels. It refers to bendels as “Emorite practices” which are idolatrous. This applies to all

practices where we assume a causal relationship which does not exist. The gemara also says those who recite verses to remove sickness, lose their Olam Haba (*Sanbedrin 90a*).

Separating challa so that we remove infertility, find a shidduch, etc., assumes a causal relationship that does not exist. Hashem gave us sechel – intelligence – precisely because He desires we use it in all areas, especially in our Torah lives.

Hashem prohibited many idolatrous rites including praying to the dead or near them, since this is not supported by natural law. That is why He wiped out so many people; they worshipped gold gods, or believed in demons, spirits, and other forces that defy natural law and deny God's exclusive role as the source of man's fate. Hashem wants us to follow what our minds tell us is true, and not what our emotions wish to be so. Our actions must be based on Torah and reality.

To remove false practices from Jewish culture, instead of supporting segulas, we should spread these Torah sources to our friends. We must adhere meticulously to Hashem's Torah...the Torah He said, "*not to add to or subtract from (Deut. 4:2).*"

Maimonides, Hilchos Mezuzah 5:4:

Those who write inside the Mezuzah names of angels or holy names or a verse or engravings, they are included with those who have no share in the world to come. Because these fools, it's not enough that they are nullifying a mitzvah, but they are making a great mitzvah – which is the Oneness of the Name of the Holy One, blessed be He, and His love and His service – into an amulet for their own benefit as it occurs to their foolish hearts that this kind of nonsense thing can benefit them.

Maimonides hilchos Mezuzah 6:13:

The early Wise Ones said, "Whoever has Tefillin on his head and arm, tzitzis on his clothing, and a Mezuzah on his door, he is strengthened not to sin, because he has many reminders, and these are the angels that protect him from sin as it says (Tehillim 34:8): 'The angel of the LORD encamps around them that fear Him, and delivers them.'"

Teshuvah, tefila, u'tzedaka ma'avirin es roa ha'gzeira: Repentance, prayer, and charity remove the evil decree.

Nothing else is effective.

SHADIM – “DEMONS”

When describing those who believed in demons (*Lev. 17:7*) Ibn Ezra says, “Fools see demons.” Meaning they are not real, but phantasms. Ibn Ezra says further:

Anyone who seeks them and believes in them estranges himself from his God. Can one think that there is anyone that can do good or do bad except for God, the Honored and Awesome?

Ibn Ezra clearly states that there are no powers, only God. Besides God, man is the only other intelligence on Earth.

When approaching an area where the Rabbis discuss unusual and almost impossible phenomena, it is especially important to maintain a rational and objective approach. If we look into the instances discussing shadim, we find that the Rabbis tell us not to give greetings to “others” if we are in a field or at night, lest he be a “shade.” Other cases where one is warned not to give greetings to another includes pits (caverns), and mountain tops.

Additionally, a Talmudic portion (*Gittin 66a*) states that if one hears a voice calling from a pit, (telling anyone who hears) to divorce his wife, we listen to him. The gemara asks:

“Perhaps it is a shade (demon)?” [And we should ignore it] The gemara continues, “No. It is when you see a shadow.” [Therefore it’s a real person] The gemara asks, “But the shadim also can have shadows!” The gemara concludes, “No. You also saw a shadow of a shadow.”

The gemara ends, saying that since you saw a “shadow of a shadow,” this cannot be a shade, and we can divorce this man’s wife. On the surface, this is a very strange gemara indeed. But there must be an idea here. (We can also ask why a shade might be assumed in such a case, where one thinks he hears a man wishing to divorce his wife.)

There are a number of questions:

- 1) What exactly is a demon? Can it be taken literally that there are demons roaming the earth? Have any of us ever seen one?
- 2) Why are we not warned against greeting our friends in the city? Why is it only in the fields, pits, night time, and mountain tops? Are shadim unable to leave these four situations? This is truly odd.

3) What is the warning about? Will they harm us? If so, what's the difference if we greet them or not? Can they not harm us equally whether or not we greet them?

4) How does a "shadow of a shadow" prove that it is not a shade?

I believe the answer to all these questions can be approached by first looking at one peculiar bit of information: the location where we are warned not to greet "others." All the cases, pits, fields, mountain tops, and night time, are cases where one is in a situation of isolation to some degree. Either geographical isolation (mountain tops, pits/caves, or fields/deserts) or psychological isolation: at night.

What does isolation do to a person?

Man, a social creature by definition, fears isolation more than anything. This is why solitary confinement is the worst type of punishment. Isolation is even recognized by the Prophets as one of the worst situations, and requires one to 'bench gomel (praising God for being saved),' as we read in Psalms, 107:4: "*They wandered in the wilderness, in the desolation of the path; they found no inhabited city.*" Not finding inhabitants is utterly distressing, to the point that King David made mention of it in Psalms.

When a person is isolated, his desire to be around civilization causes him to project onto reality – he will think he sees someone. But it is all an illusion to satisfy his fear and loneliness. Thus, what the Rabbis are telling us not to offer greetings to is in fact our 'psychological fantasies.' Greeting a mirage is crossing the line from fantasy to reality, one of man's worst crimes. The Rabbis, knowing that these shadim are truly daydreams or illusions, warned us not to "talk to them." Talking to a mirage elevates fantasy to reality. There are so many areas of the Torah which deter man from living an illusory life. The Rabbis saw fit here, too, to remove us from this behavior. Talking to a phantom of the mind gives credence to it. The Torah desires that man abandon all that is false, "*midvar skeker tirchak: from falsehoods, keep distant.*"

This now explains why the gemara in Gittin said that if there is a shadow, then it is a real person, and you can divorce the wife of this person in the pit, although you do not see him clearly. When a person creates these illusion to comfort himself, he creates the minimal information needed to convince himself. His mind projects either a form of the person's face, his height, his hair color, or something else distinctive of the person he

desires to be near. But what is not needed is not created, such as a shadow. This offers the person's psyche no comfort, and is therefore not created by the fantasy. Therefore, if one sees a shadow, it most probably is a real person. The gemara goes on to suggest that even shadim have shadows. This means that in some cases, one will create a more defined illusion. This is possible so the gemara adds that when there's a "shadow of a shadow," then it is definitely not a shade. "Shadow of a shadow" means that completely detailed illusions do not exist, and hence, it must be a real person one is seeing. Greetings are then permitted, and divorce is warranted since the speaker is a real person. We may then follow halacha and act as a messenger on his behalf to divorce his wife, or carry out any other halachic act.

It now makes sense that shadim don't enter cities. Deciphered, this mashal (metaphor) means that images of friends are not created when they are in reality near to us, as is found when we are in cities. Here, no need exists in our psyches to create illusions. We have company around us. At night however, when we are psychologically alone, or in the mentioned isolated locations, we will create images to comfort us.

In summary, the Rabbis teach that shadim are illusions created to satisfy real concerns. They are fantasies created in our minds. The Rabbis warned us that we should not cross the path, treating fantasy as reality, even when we "see" it. How much more so when we don't.

Addendum

Rashi writes in Parashas Noach, that Noach took two of every species, "even shadim" in to the ark. I believe this fits in well with our theory. Noach was now embarking on a state of isolation aboard the ark. Perhaps Rashi is intimating this aspect of isolation by suggesting that Noach "brought shadim into the ark."

SAUL & THE WITCH: IMAGINATION – NOT MAGIC

I received this letter a few years ago:

I do personally believe the story described in Samuel I (of the Baales Ove – witch – who raised Samuel from the dead). Even the Egyptian conjurers performed miracles, and Moses' Torah said that a Prophet or a dreamer of dreams might do miracles and wonders and the miracles and wonders would come to pass or come true. Still, if they taught us to follow other gods, we should not listen to them. In other words if they performed miracles but gave us new laws, statutes and judgments different from those that Moses gave us from God, they were not a true Prophets.

Although the Torah tells us not to follow the signs of a false Prophet instructing us in Torah violations, his signs are not “magic.” Sforno states that “signs” in this case refers to heavenly signs, i.e., natural phenomena, predicted based on their observable and repeating natures. There exists no true “miraculous” sign of those deviant souls opposing God. God will not deceive innocent people, granting false Prophets the ability to predict and/or enact true miracles. Far be it. Sforno says further, “*Don't investigate his words to determine validity in some of it, for beyond any doubt, they are all lies, made up from his own heart.*” It is clear that false Prophets cannot produce miracles, and their words are lies. These are the words of the Rabbis.

Saadia Gaon states that the Egyptians – and anyone for that matter – possess no power other than what each man's sleight of hand can manipulate. In Egypt, the astrologers and magicians were no different than today's sleight of hand performers. Ibn Ezra said the Torah does not prohibit that which is real and true, rather, only lies are prohibited. God desires that we recognize the truth, and not ignore what is real. Thus, the reason necromancers, witches, enchanters, warlocks, psychics, et al. are prohibited is because they have no powers. Had they any powers in Egypt, why couldn't they remove God's plagues? Why couldn't they at least use their own magic and conjure up some sort of defense? Why did they not even try, if they truly possessed powers of any kind? This lack of any attempt by Egypt to remove the plagues clearly unveils the truth: they knew they possessed no powers. Pharaoh too must have realized this, for we find nowhere in the Torah any demand by Pharaoh on his astrologers and magicians that they remove Moses' plagues. Pharaoh always addressed Moses when he desired the plague to end. Your mind must find some satisfaction in this point. This is Egypt's confession: they possessed no powers.

Egypt was quite entrenched in the mystical, similar to today's phony mystics who believe in alien, unproven forces. All of these are idolatrous, as they all imagine forces other than God. These forces are not real, and have never been witnessed. Psychics are today's permutation of Egyptian astrologers.

Now, the witch did nothing, and if you will study that area, you will learn from the verses that she knew very well this was King Saul seeking Samuel. Therefore she feigned that she saw Samuel. Everything that she "predicted" that came to pass afterwards, i.e., that Saul died, was because Saul lost his own confidence due to his own imagined daydream of Samuel reiterating his previous rebuke, when Saul left Agag alive, ignoring God's commands that he slay him. Man – when not confident – will err in his activities, and unfortunately, Saul's next activity was war. Saul truly believed he heard Samuel foretell his imminent death at war, along with his son, and the Jews being captured. This was not Prophetic, but Saul's own imagination. This was all a daydream, as one who is desperate to speak to someone of greatness like Samuel, may actually believe to be doing so.

Saul previously displayed great insecurity a number of times; when appointed as king, he was hiding, (*Sam. I, 10:22*) and upon capturing Amalek, he succumbed to the people's opinion to save the good cattle and the king, Agag. And throughout his relationship with David, Saul was paranoid of David, and sought to kill him. Again with the witch, Saul demonstrated a great insecurity, and was so distressed that he sought an idolatrous and useless means of contacting the dead Samuel: "*When Saul saw the Philistine camp, he was greatly afraid and his heart trembled greatly (Samuel I, 28:5).*" Out of his horror, Saul resorted to useless idolatry. This event must be explained in the context of King Saul's personality. Instead of assuming forces which have never existed, we must explain this account metaphorically, "as if" Saul contacted Samuel. Here, the Torah employs metaphor to convey just how real Samuel was in Saul's insecure mind. This is precisely the message in the Torah's literal presentation of the witch raising the dead Samuel. Here, Torah uses a literal presentation of what all wise people know is impossible, but does so to emphasize Saul's belief in the witch. This teaches us about Saul.

I feel it appropriate at this point to stress what care must be taken when interpreting the Torah. Without years of tutelage under Rabbis trained in understanding the Torah, we cannot read an area and assume we understand it. God wrote the Torah. Therefore, much trepidation must accompany any reading of all portions: be it Torah, Prophets, or Writings. Certainly, if the Rabbis openly stated that an area is metaphoric, we are wise

to understand their heavy words, and not abandon their authority in favor of our assumptions, relatively limited knowledge and analytical skills. It takes decades to master competent, Torah skills. Only after this amount of training can one approach the Torah's intended meanings.

Returning to Saul and the witch, Radak said that “the witch saw but heard nothing; Saul heard but saw nothing; and the two men with Saul neither saw nor heard.” Radak teaches that the witch made believe she saw; out of his desperation Saul believed her so much, he thought he heard Samuel's voice, but the men who cared nothing about witches or Saul's quest, were indifferent and were unaffected by any hallucination or day-dream.

You must understand that just as King Solomon said in his opening words to Proverbs, the Rabbis “speak in riddles,” this case of Saul and the witch is also a riddle of sorts. The Torah described the witch “as if” she raised Samuel from the dead, to teach how real Saul imagined this daydream to be. The Torah presented Saul's fantasy as if it were reality, because it desired to teach how far man will believe his own imagination when he is desperate, as was Saul in this case.

Radak (*Samuel I, 28:25 towards the end*):

...although the implications of the words of the Rabbis - blessed their memory - indicate from the Talmud that the (idolatrous) woman resurrected Samuel, we do not accept these words when our intelligence tells us the opposite.

AYIN HARA — THE “EVIL EYE”

Rashi states that when the brothers of Joseph came down to Egypt, their father Jacob commanded them to enter Egypt through separate entrances so the Ayin Harah (evil eye) should not have power over them. Does this mean that Ayin Harah is a magical force that truly exists? Can people successfully cast a “spell” or curse on someone else? If so, how does a person attain such power?

In truth, we do not witness this power, so we must reject the claim of literal forces. Also, it would be quite cruel of a God to create a destructive force and not inform mankind.

Don't be led to believe something because many others (even Jews) follow it. This is no proof. Many people following a “belief” does not show

the belief to be accurate. You must follow your mind.

Assuming a supernatural force is unnecessary here. One should try to give an explanation which assumes the least. This principle is called “Occam’s Razor.” For example, when we witness a ball being dropped, and its bounce keeps diminishing until it finds itself at complete rest, we don’t assume that there is a creature inside the ball moving progressively slower, and this is why the ball behaves as such. We look for a simple, logical explanation. We don’t assume what is unnecessary. If we can explain the phenomena by understanding the nature of the item at hand, we should look no further. The same applies to Ayin Harah.

Ayin Harah can be explained very simply: it refers to a psychological principle. If one says, “My! What a beautiful baby,” others will say, “Don’t give it an Ayin Harah.” Does this mean that this statement of admiration of an infant can cause some change in the baby? Not at all. Words have no power other than producing a change in the listener. What might happen is that another mother will be jealous that this statement wasn’t made about *her* child and unconsciously develops jealous aggression towards the favored baby or the mother. The unconscious of a person is very cunning and usually goes undetected, and needs satisfaction. This jealous mother might unconsciously, “accidentally” pour some of her drink on the mother, or the child. But the act of spilling doesn’t assume a new power in the universe. It is explained as an existing emotion of jealousy. The fact that spilling occurs on the heels of the statement of admiration is not due to a power, but to jealousy acting out through the unconscious. This mother can’t tolerate another child receiving more admiration than hers, and unconsciously pours her drink on the other mother, thereby satisfying her aggression.

We can dispense with mystical explanations of Ayin Harah. A person with *chachma* (wisdom) of human nature will explain this very easily.

The same applies to Joseph’s brothers as they entered Egypt. Jacob knew that his sons were of great stature, as we see that only two of them were able to destroy an entire city. Jacob figured that ten men of great stature coupled with a foreign appearance walking through the gates of Egypt would raise some eyebrows. Imagine ten tall foreigners walking through Tel Aviv Airport. Security would definitely be suspicious. There was no reason for the brothers to bring undue suspicion upon themselves. Jacob wisely commanded them to each enter through a separate gate. This would minimize any attention. Jacob’s suggestion was wise, and was not based on a fear of mystical powers. Rather, it was based on his understanding of human psychology and the desire for his sons’ safety.

Additionally, we find the term “Ayin Tovah” in Pirkei Avos (2:9). The

Bartenura and Maimonides both describe Ayin Tovah to be a person who is satisfied with what he has, and the Ayin Harah to mean person who is never satisfied. Both Rishonim do not make mention of any mystical powers. Let us follow the Rishonim, and not the simpletons of today's society.

We must endeavor to catch ourselves when we sense a need to explain something mystically. We should patiently try to understand the Rabbis words with rational thought, not with excited fantasy.

SUPERSTITION

All superstitious notions like lucky or good luck charms stars stem from a person's insecurities. People constantly seek a quick fix or a security blanket. Some are in the forms of wishbones, penny fountains, charms, etc., they are literally everywhere. You must ask yourself why these good luck charms exist. The answer is clear: people are insecure about what life holds for them, and are seeking protection and security. Conversely, Judaism approaches all areas with the utmost rationality. We learn that there are many forms of idolatry: warlocks, palm readers and enchanters, to name a few, which are strictly forbidden. There are many permutations of this disease of the soul:

Some wish to know if they perform a specific "action," whether they will be successful.

Some people need to know what "time of year" is a good time for them.

And some just want to be told things about themselves without asking any questions.

For each one of these concerns there are certain types of people who feign knowledge in these areas.

Rational thinking and dependence upon God are at the core of Judaism. If something makes no sense, even a written command in the Torah, Ibn Ezra, a foremost commentator says that we do not follow it (*Exod. 20:2*). He was a great mind, and extolled by Maimonides. If Ibn Ezra teaches that we abandon even a command if there is no intelligible understanding of its performance, then certainly we should abandon what is not only ridiculous but is not a command. When it comes to physical health, the same superstitious people don't go to witch doctors. All of a sudden, health becomes a matter where a proven doctor with years of schooling and successes must be consulted. But in areas of greater importance as one's philosophy, people readily run to palm readers. This is revealing

about today's society: the body is more important than the soul. By their same reasoning, since the body is not something you risk, they admit that the highest form of decision making is reason and proof.

We can use this line of reasoning to assist others. When we next witness a close friend or relative following superstitions, remind them of their rational approach to physical health. Stress to them that this demonstrates their greater acceptance of what is proven, and then ask them to apply this to their superstitions. Hopefully we can assist them in abandoning false beliefs.

ASTROLOGY

Some time ago my brother wrote me regarding the Torah's view of astrology. We discussed the matter, and after reviewing many sources, I wish to share our findings and my thoughts. To begin, Maimonides writes as follows:

I know that you may search and find sayings of some individual sages in the Talmud and Midrashim whose words appear to maintain that at the moment of a man's birth, the stars will cause such and such to happen to him. Do not regard this as a difficulty, for it is not fitting for a man to abandon the prevailing law and raise once again the counter-arguments and replies (that preceded its enactment). Similarly it is not proper to abandon matters of reason that have already been verified by proofs, shake loose of them, and depend on the words of a single one of the sages from whom possibly the matter was bidden. (Maimonides, Letter to the Community of Marseille)

Maimonides teaches that reason must be the ultimate guide of our thoughts and actions. Once we know something to be true based on reason and proof, any opposition, even from the Sages, should be of no consequence. Maimonides was guided by his understanding of the universe: there are fixed laws of nature and Divine Providence. Our acceptance of theories and truths have but a single arbiter: "proof." Once we see a proof for something, all other views are of no regard, for proof refers to conclusive knowledge of what is, or how something operates. Any view opposing that which has been demonstrated, must be false.

Certainly, defending a view simply because a Sage or Rabbi stated it, is self-contradictory, as seen in this example: Ruben accepts Rabbi “A” on a certain philosophical issue. Then, Ruben reads that Rabbi “B” opposes Rabbi “A.” What shall Ruben do? He already claimed support for Rabbi “A,” based on his reputation. Now when he learns that Rabbi “B” opposed it, how does Ruben decide which is truth? Two opposing views cannot both be correct: either one is correct and one is wrong, or both are wrong. But both cannot be correct if they oppose each other. Relying on reputation alone, Ruben is at a stalemate.

Many times, it is confidence alone that people lack – not proofs – and therefore they cannot verbalize the words, “I think Rabbi “B” is more sensible. Sometimes this stems from false humility, and sometimes, from the lack of independent thought and the inability to cleave to truth over reputations. Maimonides teaches that this path cannot be followed due to the example of Ruben’s stalemate. Man must use reason to determine truth: this is precisely why God granted “each” of us intelligence. We are not to simply “follow the leader.”

When approaching the area of astrology, we are faced with this dilemma: great reputations oppose each other. Do we follow Maimonides or Ramban and the Ramchal? Actually, this is not how a thinker frames his question. A true thinker cares nothing about reputations and is concerned for only what is reasonable. The thinker is not deciding between Ramban and Maimonides. He divorces the theories from the personalities, judging theories on their own merit. Maimonides writes (*“Letter to the Community of Marseille”, reprinted at the end of this book*):

It is not proper for a man to accept as trustworthy anything other than one of these three things:

- 1) clear proof deriving from man’s reasoning;*
- 2) what is perceived through one of the five senses;*
- 3) what is received from the Prophets or from the righteous.*

Every reasonable man ought to distinguish in his mind and thought all the things that he accepts as trustworthy and say, “This I accept as trustworthy because of tradition, and this because of sense-perception, and this on grounds of reason.” Anyone who accepts as trustworthy anything that is not of these three species, of him it is said: “The simple believes everything (Prov. 14:15).”

Maimonides teaches that our acceptance of truths must be limited to one of these three methods; reason, sense perception, or Torah tradition. Based on the third, let us review some Torah verses addressing astrology.

Torah Refutations

In Parashas Miketz (*Gen. 41:8*) Pharaoh has two dreams: in one, seven lean cows swallow seven healthy cows. In the second, seven lean ears (grain) swallow seven healthy ears. In both dreams, no display of ingestion could be discerned. Pharaoh was deeply bothered by his dreams, but “he could find no interpreter (*ibid.*)”

Typically, Pharaoh would accept his astrologers’ theories. However, in this case, as Pharaoh was distraught, his regular acceptance of astrological theories did not suffice to settle his mind. Here, when he was personally involved, he dismissed the baseless quality of his astrologers’ explanations. This teaches that there were no incontrovertible proofs in the words of his astrologers.

On verse 41:8 Rashi states that Pharaoh’s astrologers suggested the dreams to mean that Pharaoh will bear seven daughters and bury seven daughters. However, this never occurred. We learn that these astrologers were lying and had no knowledge based on their astrology. Why did they speak up when they knew they were lying? They desired to retain their posts as Pharaoh’s ministers: honor and fame is a great lure. Surely, his astrologers were consulted in the past. And just like back then, they again offered interpretations. Otherwise they had no use to Pharaoh. So they had to speak up to ‘appear’ as offering some insight from their false astrology. But if their interpretations did not come true, why did Pharaoh retain them? To maintain their theories, the astrologers maintained “You will *yet* have those daughters and you will *yet* bury them.” The astrologers were wise enough not to paint themselves into a corner. Pharaoh may have retained them at their posts for the reason that he needed to consult with mystics. And perhaps, sometimes, these astrologers guessed correctly. They clearly received their position based on some performance... mere intuition, or coincidence. But foreknowledge is clearly dismissed, as seen in this example of the seven daughters theory.

Why did Pharaoh accept Joseph’s dream interpretations? It appears from Joseph’s method of explanation that at a certain point, even before completing his interpretation, Joseph was convinced he imbued Pharaoh with the true explanation. Midstream in his interpretation Joseph exclaims, “*This is the thing that I told Pharaoh: what God plans to do, He has shown to Pharaoh (Exod. 41:28).*” Joseph could have said this only if he was certain that he already proved the dreams’ true meaning, and that this dream was Divine. Thus, he tells Pharaoh, in other words, “Do you now see? This proves your dreams are Divine!”

With the words “The dreams of Pharaoh are one” which Joseph repeats, Joseph was convinced in his interpretation, and that he also proved

to Pharaoh his interpretation was correct. Telling Pharaoh twice, "*The dreams of Pharaoh are one*," Joseph deviated from the arbitrary methods of the astrologers, focusing on a "design" in the dream, not merely offering an alternative explanation of the "content." With his explanation of design, Joseph distinguished his interpretation from that of the astrologers. Thereby, Pharaoh was convinced that Joseph was correct. Ibn Ezra (41:32) states that the dreams' duplication – in a single night – meant that God's plan was also imminent. So the dreams' duplication in general proved that the dreams were Divine and the fact that the two dreams occurred in a single night proved that God's plan was imminent.

In Exodus 2:3, Moses' mother could "*no longer bide him*." After a premature birth to Moses, just six months pregnant, Moses' mother Yocheved was only able to hide him (from the Egyptians carrying out Pharaoh's genocidal decree) for three months. According to Rashi, the Egyptians calculated when nine months would arrive after Yocheved and her husband reunited, expecting them to bear a child no sooner. This proves that the Egyptians' astrology was false: they continued killing infants fearing the birth of the Jews' savior...even after Moses was born! As Moses – the savior – was already born, why did they continue murdering infants? They must have felt the messiah was "yet" to be born. But they were mistaken, for Moses was already alive for three full months. Again, they failed at discerning a matter through astrology.

On Exodus 1:16 Rashi explained why Pharaoh decreed the death of the males: "*for the astrologers saw that a savior was to be born to the Jews*." But this is common sense: any oppressed people possess the probability of an uprising. Here, claims of astrological knowledge are unnecessary: psychological insight alone explains this. In Exodus 1:22 Rashi states, "*On the day Moses was born, Pharaoh's astrologers told him, 'Today the savior has been born, but we know no whether he is Egyptian or Jew.'*" The words "On the day Moses was born" are misleading, for one might think that Rashi was convinced that the astrologers knew the exact day that Moses was born. However, as a wise Rabbi once taught, this was not necessarily the first time the astrologers told Pharaoh a savior was born "today." They may have said this on numerous occasions, exposing their ignorance. Their claim again here, was merely chance.

Saadia Gaon remarks that Egypt's magic was sleight of hand and nothing more (*The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, p. 153). This also explains why the Egyptian astrologers could duplicate Moses' first two signs of blood and frogs. These objects can be manipulated with tactile dexterity. Saadia Gaon states the astrologers deceived others, using dyes to merely mimic blood, and tossing chemicals into the Nile causing the frogs to flee to

the unpolluted shores. Through their deception, the astrologers simulated Moses' two plagues. However, the astrologers could not manipulate the third plague of lice. Lice are too small for the hand to adequately manipulate. Thus, the Egyptians attested, "*this is the finger of God.*" They admitted their lack of control, but did so in a way – again – where they were not to blame, for "God is superior."

Supposed astrological powers or knowledge are repeatedly refuted. No proof for astrological theories are found in any of these cases. And astrological claims have yet to be validated even today.

Refutation in Prophets

But the most glaring refutation of astrology, is God's very words:

So says God, "To the ways of the nations do not learn, and from the signs of heaven, do not fear, for the nations fear them. For the statutes of the nations are futile, for a tree from the forest they cut, the work of an artisan with an adze. With silver and gold they adorn it; with nails and pegs they strengthen it so it does not disconnect. They are like a sculpted palm tree and they cannot speak, they are carried about for they cannot walk, do not fear them, for they cannot harm and they also cannot do good (Jeremiah 10:1-5)."

God teaches man that the nations live in foolishness, that stars or heavenly signs (occurrences) are nothing to fear, and idols are man-made. Man has no reason to attribute powers to his sculpted creations. They cannot speak or walk as man. Yet man attributes more powers to these idols than to himself. Herein is man's distortion: man is greater and can walk and talk yet he assumes these inanimate blocks of wood possess greater powers than him. God exposes the corruption of thought harbored by these nations, and He groups therein, the fear of heavenly phenomena. It is no coincidence that God groups heavenly signs together with idolatry in His ridicule. God says both heavenly phenomena and idolatry are equally futile. Would it then be sensible to claim that the stars and astrology are not for Jews to follow, but for gentiles it is permissible, or that it even works? But God plainly states, "*For the statutes of the nations are futile.*" This applies to the practice, not the practitioner. As the ridicule is of the gentile and as the teaching is for the Jew, we must say this foolishness applies to all mankind. God states openly "*for they cannot harm and they also cannot do good.*" These are God's words. This satisfies the third of Maimonides' three categories for determining truth, i.e., Torah traditions. Traditions must be true: certainly God's words, as read here from Jeremiah.

Maimonides' second category of truths is sense perception, that is, all that we perceive is accurate and true. And we have no perception or proof of the stars affecting our free will. Just the opposite is the case: our free will is "free" and uncontrolled by anything.

Maimonides first rule is that when something is proven, we care nothing about what we might find, even in the words of the Sages, as he says:

Similarly it is not proper to abandon matters of reason that have already been verified by proofs, shake loose of them, and depend on the words of a single one of the sages from whom possibly the matter was hidden.

Maimonides teaches that the very fact God gave us commands must be predicated on our ability to comply. We are free to follow God or oppose Him, and therefore, stars and zodiacs contribute nothing to our own choices, for which we are justly rewarded or punished. *"For all His ways are judgment (Deut. 32:4)." "Whose eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men, to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings (Jer. 32:19)."*

Talmud: Astrology or Psychology?

The Talmud (*Sabbath 156a*) suggests that depending on the day or hour of one's birth he will possess a certain personality. If taken literally, we can offer no explanation. However, we can answer this in light of what we have stated. But before we answer, why is this discussion in the Talmud concerning one's "birth?" Why is this specific moment given such status, when in fact, King Solomon said *"Better is the day of one's death than the day of his birth (Eccl. 7:1)?"* Why does the Talmud offer praise for birth, when King Solomon offered greater praise for one's death? Ibn Ezra answers: *"At birth, we know not yet what will be come of this child; he might turn out good or evil. But at death, he has already earned his good name (ibid)."* Thus, Ibn Ezra did not ascribe to "fate" and here he commits to his view that at birth, nothing is known. Death is better; for it is only then that we can determine through experience whether an individual was good or evil.

So how does the Talmud state that if one is born on Sunday he will be either "totally" good or "totally" evil? Rashi states that since Sunday is the "lead" day of the week, one who is born on Sunday will also be a "leader:" in either a good life or an evil life. This explanation removes any need for astrological theories and follows psychological principles to explain why such a person will lead: he identifies with that "lead" day

of the week, which itself would be insignificant had it not harkened back to God's six days of creation. So man is not directed by some unknown, astrological "power." Man functions many times based on his emotions: specifically his emotion of identification.

Since man's ego tends to endorse "his" existence with great value, he invests his very first day on Earth with unparalleled significance: "my birthday has meaning" he feels. Thus, he looks at what "other" significant events occurred on that day to bolster his self worth. He realizes God's creation is great and parallels himself to God's creation by viewing the day of his birth on par with that day of the week in Creation. He then latches on to that day's significance (the "lead" day in our case) and then creates a self-fulfilling prophecy. The Talmud continues with additional examples:

He who is born on the second day of the week will be bad-tempered. What is the reason? Because the waters were divided thereon. Division or disunity is caused by bad temper (Rashi). So will he be estranged from other people through his temper. He who is born on the third day of the week will be wealthy and unchaste. What is the reason? Because herbs were created thereon. (Herbs multiply very rapidly and also continually intermingle with other herbs.) He who is born on the fourth day of the week will be wise and of a retentive memory. What is the reason? Because the luminaries were suspended [thereon].

In all these cases, emotions of identification and ego work together causing man to believe what he decides himself. The Talmud is clear: man is mimicking the traits of each day. But heavenly phenomena play absolutely no causative role in determining his fate. We also learn "*All is in the hand of heaven, except for the fear of heaven (Tal. Megilla 25a).*" Man is solely responsible for his actions. This Talmudic portion can be explained reasonably with no need to resort to any belief in astrology. It educates man on his insecurities and his means to inflate his worth. In truth, King Solomon is correct: one's birthday is insignificant. But it is also true that man is partial to himself and ignores truths when they counter his ego.

Another explanation of the Talmud (one born on Sunday will possess qualities of that primordial day) may simply mean that "man is the focus of creation." This is expressed by stating that man reflects something of the initial six days of creation: man is the objective in the Earth's creation.

This Talmudic portion concludes with five additional cases where individuals were not subject to planetary influence, but received their good

lot based on merit. It is worth noting that two of those cases deal with serpents which might allude to those cases being metaphorical, discussing man's instincts (serpent), not real events. But even taken literally, we find two opposing Talmudic views debating if astrology offers any true knowledge. On this, Maimonides wrote as we quoted, that we do not abandon what is proven, even if opposed by a sage.

Astrology Equated to Idolatry: Human Insecurity

Jeremiah 10 warns us against attributing any significance to heavenly signs or idolatry, and God groups the two crimes together, since they are related. In fact, Maimonides teaches that it is precisely man's flawed awe of the stars from which idolatry was born. Idolatry is actually referred to as "Avodas Kochavim: star worship." Maimonides elaborates on this in his first laws of his Mishneh Torah, Laws of Star Worship (idolatry).

We cannot claim a belief in something if we cannot explain it. A Rabbi once defined idolatry as "claiming a causal relationship for things unrelated." He meant to say that idolatry has no basis in reason or in reality. Astrology is no different: if you cannot explain it, then it must not be accepted. Even if one were to say astrology is a force of nature, but he does not know what it is, it is worthless to say "I agree with it." This is a meaningless statement. To suggest astrology refers to "heavenly powers which guide human affairs" is a nonsensical statement since one cannot prove those powers exists, or that they govern man.

Regardless of which Rabbi held astrology to be truth or falsehood, I ask: "Why, without an argument reasonable to your mind, do you accept a premise: is it because others accept it?" Astrology is not an area of Jewish "law," so there is no ruling or "psak." Therefore, no obligation exists to agree with one view over another. And be honest: if there are two opposing views, one must be wrong. And if you cannot reasonably prove your view, your view may be the incorrect one. Certainly, if the opposing view is explained rationally, as Maimonides has done, and as we read in the Torah and know from experience that man has freewill, why should you not abandon your view in place of what makes sense?

We witness devotion to truth throughout the Torah. Honesty and truth are focus and the greatest value of every Torah scholar, Rabbi, and Sage. Not a single one remained in his view, once disproved.

You must also be sensitive to your feelings of insecurity to which astrology caters. Assuming there are "powers guiding me" is quite comforting and relieves one of his responsibilities. He can easily blame all his shortcomings on his horoscope. But remember that the Torah prohibits horoscopists. Horoscopes satisfy the very same insecurities which idols

were created to address. This is why God groups idolatry with heavenly signs in Jeremiah: they share the same origin of human insecurity.

Living in line with truth means we examine all facets of our lives which are primarily psychological in nature. If we ignore self-assessment and reflection, we will never see our flaws, and never repent, which God desires for our own good.

We are not born with all of the answers. But with honesty, we can arrive at an ever-growing attachment to truth where we spend less time defending our unexamined notions, and more time defenselessly seeking what is real and true. Ibn Ezra on Leviticus 19:31 says the following:

Those with empty brains say 'were it not that fortune tellers and magicians were true, the Torah would not prohibit them.' But I [Ibn Ezra] say just the opposite of their words, because the Torah doesn't prohibit that which is true, but it prohibits that which is false. And the proof is the prohibition on idols and statues.

Ibn Ezra teaches that since the Torah prohibits fortune-tellers and horoscopists, they must be false. Maimonides wrote that simply because one Rabbi accepted astrology, this is no basis to accept it, especially when you do not fathom what he did or understand his words and you also possess reason to refute it. First and foremost you must know what God said to be true, starting with Jeremiah and throughout the Tanach. This must be your measuring rod. Do not defend a cherished view if your mind tells you it violates God's Torah.

The Rabbis state, "*All is in the hand of heaven except the fear of heaven (Tal. Megilla 25a).*" This means that one's wealth, health, personalities, children and all matters aside from free will, are decided by God (heaven). Whatever God's means are for determining our personalities or world events, God does so with wisdom, whether we know how He does this or not: "All His ways are just." The One who gave such a perfect system of wisdom, i.e., the Torah, surely works with wisdom. The One who created and governs the universe with intelligent laws is consistent. Therefore, it is a denial of God's methods of wisdom to follow a Rabbi's reputation instead of correct theories, certainly when you are bereft of any understanding. God does not wish that man lies to himself and accepts a view, unless he understands that view. What our Rabbis teach is that we engage our minds alone for determining truth. If some view is contrary to reason, we are wise to ignore it. Judaism's teachers unanimously agree: our "methods" of decision-making are crucial; we are not concerned with "who" we follow.

We know quite little about how God governs the world. And just as we admit that, we must be consistent and admit when we do not understand any other matter. It makes no difference if a Rabbi claims to understand it. For if *we* do not understand something, we have no grounds to agree with that view. “Agree” means we apprehend a matter and understand it as consistent with how the world operates. Our allegiance to a theory must be, as Maimonides taught, based on intellectual proof, actual perception, or Torah transmission.

PRAYING TO THE DEAD

Despite the Talmud’s statement that prophecy had ended long ago, many still teach that the Lubavitcher Rebbe and the Baal Shem Tov were Prophets. It is clear they make these claims to support an untarnished image of their beloved teachers. Many people wish this of their mentors. But followers go too far as they insert personal notes into the grave sites of these Rebbes. Here is where we must draw a line between personal wishes and God’s words and the teachings of Talmudic Rabbis. Prophecy ceased long ago, so these personalities cannot be Prophets. What is worse is that God prohibits consulting the dead, but these Jews ignore God’s word, as do other Rebbes who encourage this. Lubavitch websites like “KingMessiah.com” and “Chabad.am” actually post ads encouraging their site visitors to email messages to the dead Rebbe, whom they call the “Messiah.” The criteria determining who is Messiah have never been met by anyone, making messianic claims embarrassing for all Jews. Additionally, these sites claim a “dead” man is the Messiah, a notion not found in Torah; rather, it is found in other religions like Christianity. Even those within Chabad Lubavitch who do not accept the Rebbe as Messiah commit crimes through their silence to claims that he is Messiah and with their failure to warn Jews against placing notes in grave sites. God hid Moses’ grave, as He knew the extremes of human emotions, and how idolatrous man can become in the name of religion, and creating leaders into saints. What is the Torah’s position on this? God tells us the following:

[Do not] inquire of the dead. For it is an abomination to God, all who do such things, and on account of these abominations, Hasbem your God wiped them out from before you. (Deut. 18:11,12)

As Ibn Ezra teaches, Torah prohibits only that which is false. And what is false is the communication with the dead. Tosfos cites regarding Calev, who went to the grave sites of the Patriarchs in Hebron during the Spies' revolt. Tosfos teaches that Calev did not communicate with the dead. Rather, he prayed to God (*Sotah 34b*). For Calev was well aware of the Torah's prohibitions to consult the dead, and therefore, he would not sin. He went to Hebron merely to bolster his own emotional strength. He was subjected to the Spies' plan to deny God's promise of the land. Thus, by visiting the site of the Patriarchs with whom God made the very treaty of the land, Calev sought to strengthen himself emotionally, in order to withstand opposing ten corrupt princes. Visiting the partners in God's treaty helped him.

It is shameful that leaders fail to condemn the views of such factions who freely malign God's Torah and cause Jews to violate not merely small sins, but sins that God refers to as "abominations." Leaders must teach that it is God alone who can answer our prayers: not men, and certainly not dead men.

Finally, let us review Maimonides criteria for the Messiah, which remains unfulfilled:

Maimonides Mishneh Torah, Kings (11:4)

If there arises a king from the house of David, who keeps the Torah, involved in the mitzvos, like David his father, according to the written and oral Torah, and he causes all Jews to follow this Torah, and he strengthens them in keeping the minutiae, and he fights the wars of Hashem, he then has a potential status of being the messiah.

If he does this and is successful, and rebuilds the Temple on its original ground, and gathers the dispersed Jews, he is then definitely the messiah.

REINCARNATION

All Torah ideas are reasonable, as they emanate from God. His wisdom is true and must follow reason. When Saadia Gaon calls reincarnation "absurd," he goes through an analysis of the theory, and dispels its false foundations (*"Beliefs and Opinions" Yale Univ. Press pg. 259*).

Saadia Gaon did not say "Since a reputable Rabbi held a view, I cannot oppose him." Not one of our Rabbis "followed the leader." They followed

reason, and as the Talmud states, a Sage once said, “Even if Joshua the son of Nun said it, I wouldn’t accept it (*Chulin 124a*).” This teaches that reputation is of no consequence in deciding truth. In philosophy, we do not follow an “authority,” even one who was under the direct tutelage of Moses, as was Joshua. “Following the leader” is of no merit to the follower, as his mind is absent.

What does the Torah teach concerning reincarnation, the belief that one can return a second, third, fourth time here on Earth? (I am not discussing God’s act of Resurrection)

God says, “*Ish bi-cheto yumasu: a man in his own sin will be killed (Deut. 24:16)*.” And many other verses speak of the punishment of death. An intelligent Rabbi said very well: “What threat of death and Karase (excision) can exist, if one returns? It must be that when Torah warns of the punishment of death, this is a finality of life.” Moses too urged the people to “*choose life (Deut. 30:19)*” and not death. Meaning that death is not life. Death has no return to life, as proponents of reincarnation suggest. And from the many deaths of our Patriarchs, we do not witness any Jew or relative suggesting their return. Rather, they eulogized the dead, and they mourned. Abraham eulogized his wife, Joseph eulogized Jacob, as did other great individuals. No one in our precious Torah entertained this reincarnation theory. Thus, the Torah’s verses unanimously reject this notion of returning. Certainly, we find even more distasteful the notion of returning to Earth after death as an animal or a plant.

BASHERT

We hear these reassuring catch phrases all the time:

“It’s bashert.”

“It’s meant to be.”

“Everything is for the good.”

“Everyone you meet is for a reason.”

These statements are intended to pacify others for their unrealized desires or upset feelings, like those still yearning to find a mate. The consoler misguides the consoled; “The world is at fault – not you.” The consoled party is indemnified and sadly, loses the valuable chance to introspect and make real changes towards success. Unfortunately, both parties do not wish to consider the reality that the problem might be self-inflicted.

We don't hear these phrases after one wins a lottery, or some other financial or personal success. "My daughter got engaged!" is not usually followed by, "It's meant to be." Or when businessmen are discussing a deal, does one tell the other, "It's bashert that you should sign the contract?" No. When it comes to issues that matter to us, like money, we don't rely on the "bashert" clause. This should teach us that we truly don't accept the notion of bashert. Bashert is only used to pacify and alleviate responsibility.

People also use these phrases when seeking some confirmation for their own indecisiveness. Since they are in doubt, they seek to reassure themselves that "everything happens for a reason." This phrase is used in response to undesirable events. But what prompts this statement? What psychological satisfaction do these beliefs provide us?

We must ask what the plain meaning is of these statements. Are people claiming that there is some intelligent force guiding every event in our lives? So when undesirable events befall us, are we correct to say it is caused by this force? And if this is the claim, what is the proof? And is it found in our Torah? Or does our Torah reject these views? Why don't people say when they passed a test, or were promoted, or experienced some positive change, that too was "meant to be?" Why is it only the undesirable events that meet with this response?

A wise Rabbi once taught the answer to this question: ego. One's ego always takes credit for good fortune, and does not wish to lose any opportunity to do so. So our successes are not followed by "it's bashert." And the same ego wishes to blame reality – it's meant to be – when evil occurs. The self is never faulted but always credited. God forbid we blame ourselves.

Torah Sources

In his Guide, Maimonides teaches that the evils that befall man are one of three types: 1) nature caused to man – i.e. tsunamis 2) evil that man causes to man – i.e. wars and 3) self inflicted evil such as a poor decision. Maimonides teaches that this third category is the source of most of our evils. This means that our lack of education, intelligence, or analysis of our actions and values causes undesirable results – what we call evils. But the evils are avoidable, as Maimonides teaches. God too endorses this, as He told Cain (*Gen. 4:7*) that all was in his power; he could follow his instincts and kill Abel, or he could refrain. He told Cain he could rule over his drives. God did not say that if Cain killed Abel, "All is meant for the good" or that "it was bashert." God said that Cain

would be punished if he sinned (*Onkelos*). In all cases throughout history, is it wise to say that all those who died by enemy hands: “It was meant for the good?” If so, what about the Nazis? It is apparent from these sources and from history that man is undeniably the cause of most of his evils. It is harmful to reiterate these baseless catch phrases to pacify ourselves and others. For with such pacification, comes avoidance of the introspection essential for removing an undesirable situation. When one says to himself or to another, “All is for the good,” he fools himself and creates a mindset of passivity. The one pacified accepts a “wait and see how things will pan out” attitude. But if Maimonides is correct, and we are the cause of our troubles, then waiting will doom us even further in anguish. The solution is not going to come from some fantasy, external source as people imagine. For since the real cause of our trouble is “us,” then changing our ways is the only solution. Taking responsibility, accepting fault, and improvement is how we resolve the problems at hand.

Man is insecure. He cannot accept that he is actually the driving force of his actions, as God told Cain. Man wants some safety net to alleviate all responsibility, assuring all will turn out okay. We already identified from where this feeling originates: infancy. Our parents assured us all was fine. They kissed our wounds, picked us up, hugged us, comforted us and attended to everything we needed. While some people’s psyches mature with their bodies, many others may grow physically, while their psyche is stunted, intolerant of independence, and always seeking security. People can express their need for the parent in many ways. Some people cannot progress with their financial or personal lives, keeping them closely tied to their parents’ monetary support. And others succeed financially, but read horoscopes or accept religious notions of guardian angels, Jesus, Rebbes, et al, seeking a ‘parental’ figure to replace their true parents. They can’t make a clean break as God desires. Consciously, the person might accept that his parents are equal to him. But unconsciously, he cannot abandon the security he once enjoyed as an infant with parental care.

Denial of Fundamentals

In truth, this idea of “destiny,” that our lives are pre-programmed, where “all is meant to be” rejects the fundamentals of Free Will, and Reward and Punishment.

Since we have free will, painful choices can be averted. And thereby, the pain we suffer is not “meant to be,” but self-inflicted. We also cannot

say that if we err and deserve punishment, that this is “for the good.” God does not prefer we are punished, so it cannot be for the good. If we cause most of our troubles, we can also cause most of our good fortune...if we select alternate options wisely.

There's no destiny.
 The future is unwritten.
 We each have free will.
 We are punished for our sins.
 God gave us wisdom to choose our own path.

Had all been decided, one need not work, eat or do anything, since some force of “destiny” will make things happen – regardless of my will. We will also suffer no punishment, since it was “destiny” and not me! But if I admit I have free will, then it is not destiny. It cannot be both. Just as something is either black or white, we either have free will and select our path, or we have no free will. And since everyone accepts by force of reason that we each possess free will, we must rationally conclude that “we” are the cause of our choices and experiences, not an imagined force called “destiny.”

Man might be frightened at the realization that nothing in his life is charted. So insecure is man that many cultures were built around fortune tellers, witches, astrologers, and those who tried to predict future events. And of course, as these practices are false, Torah prohibits them all. Pharaoh's astrologers are a perfect example. If man allows his emotions to reign free, he will find great insecurity. He will seek to remove his doubts about the future, by any type of charlatan. But as Jews, our path is to embrace wisdom and reality, and accept full responsibility. We can – if we so desire – live wisely and avoid most troubles others experience.

The troubles we face are due to our own ignorance. We fail to calculate all factors, or anticipate the possibilities that might result from our decisions. “*What is the right path? Rabbi Simeon said, ‘One who sees the outcome of his actions’ (Ethics 2:12).*” If we do examine all options and results, we will be removed from most troubles. But many people are careless when making decisions, when speaking, and when acting in general. Speaking back to an employer, complaining, allowing our frustrations to weaken us, giving up...these are all emotional responses that contribute to failure – not wise calculation. One who complains is not

analyzing his errors to avoid that mistake in the future. He is reverting to an infantile state where he simply vents or wants sympathy. People complain so as to be heard. But sympathy does not correct an error. So it should not be sought. Newton and Einstein did not complain about failed experiments: they analyzed their errors and changed their processes. We should do the same.

Talmud

The notions of “meant to be,” “destiny,” and “bashert” are quite appealing since they rid us of responsibility and self blame. These notions attract many followers, which often convinces others of their veracity. But all are baseless, since numbers proves nothing. Even when the Talmud states that “*All is in the hands of Heaven except the fear of Heaven,*” it means that free will is in man’s hands, while all else is under God’s control. But “God’s control” too must be understood. This does not mean that a leaf that fell from the tree at 9:32 AM was “willed” by God at that moment. Nature exists, as Maimonides teaches.

“All is in Heaven’s hands” does not mean that the person I met at the coffee shop today was “placed” there for my meeting. For he too has free will to dine there! This must dispel the notion that “everyone I meet is for some reason.” A Rabbi once asked, “In the wilderness, why does a lion select “this” deer as prey? Did this deer sin more than the others?” The Rabbis answered, “One deer is not more sinful and deserving of death than the other. God did not direct then lion’s selection of prey. It is chance that this deer was eaten, and not a Divine directive, for such a directive implies wrong ideas.”

All areas of our lives are to be governed by reason. Let us not become so insecure that we accept the foolishness of the masses when they make such claims. They make these claims to inject meaning into their otherwise dull lives. They have a craving for God to be in their life, so saying “it was bashert” elevates a mundane event into an imagined, Biblical event that satisfies that ego.

The Talmud (Avoda Zara 3b) also says “*All is in the hands of Heaven except cold and heat.*” This means that man has some ability to avoid weather patterns. Weather is something that has a “cycle,” therefore, man can forecast to some extent, since patterns are predictable.

Now, why was this Rabbinic statement made? I believe it is to show the other half of our first quote. We cited the statement “*All is in the hands of Heaven except the fear of Heaven.*” This statement is to teach one idea:

that man alone is not subject to any coercion, whereas all else is outside man's control. But, this does not mean that when "all is in Heaven's hands" that all else is God's specific intent, like the lion example above. No. The second statement that "*All is in the hands of Heaven except cold and heat*" compliments the first Rabbinic statement. Cold and heat are not part of "fear of God." Therefore, according to the first statement, we might think this is under God's control. But the second statement says that cold and heat are NOT under God's control! How do we explain this contradiction? The answer is that the "laws" of nature are God's domain and not man's. Man's "interaction" with them – as predictable phenomena – enable man to avoid them. The "sensations" of cold and heat are due to man's decisions. Man can avoid extreme temperatures. This resolves the contradiction.

In other areas of life, like who will I meet today, how many cars will cross that bridge, how many large and small clouds will fly overhead, have no rhyme or reason, as far as man can see. The variables are too many, so we cannot explain all the above. The truth is, thousands of factors contribute to the shape of a cloud. All "natural" factors. To say that since the cloud is shaped like a mountain, it's okay to travel to the mountains, is foolish, and prohibited by Torah. The reason we tend to say such events are from God, is simply because we lack the ability to calculate all factors. If we knew the factors, we would realize this is simply nature at work. We can understand "all is in God's hands" refers to nature, not necessarily a Divine directive for specific phenomena.

Consider this second example: I meet someone new. Either it was his choice to be where I was, or there was a highway accident that forced him my way, or he missed an exit sign while talking on his cell phone, etc. He ended up at my exit, and we met. The variables are too many. This can be explained as "in Heaven's hand" as well, Heaven meaning "natural law." I hope these examples show us all how foolish it is to say, "we meet every person for some reason." Nothing in reality indicates this is true and reasonably we should not accept it.

Divine Matchmaking?

Finally, the Talmud says, "*Man is matched [to a woman] according to his ways.*" Then the Talmud says, "*40 days before the formation of the embryo, a heavenly voice calls out saying, 'The son of this man is to marry the daughter of that man' (Sota 2a).*" That latter quote sounds like "bashert" phenomenon, doesn't it? The Talmud recognizes the contradiction: man is

either matched due to his ways (character) or by some “Heavenly voice.” Which one is it? The Talmud answers: *“One is matched by a heavenly voice applies to one’s “first marriage”; and being matched according to one’s character applies to one’s “second marriage.”* This needs explanation.

One’s first marriage means when one is initially attracted to the opposite sex. The Talmud states, is based on a “voice” calling forth 40 days before his embryo is created. What does that mean?

A Rabbi explained: 40 days before the embryo is created, means the causes of attraction are created in the womb. It is genetic, and natural. “Heavenly” voice, again means nature. Long before the embryo is ready to exit the womb, all causes are at play that generate our sexual attraction later in life. The reason the second marriage is not due to this is because man should have – at that point – learned a lesson that attraction is not to be the exclusive factor in choosing a wife. He chose based on attraction the first time. Thus, the Talmud is referring to someone who has learned a lesson, and now selects a mate based on character, not simply attraction. This explanation makes perfect sense. No need to suggest Divine will, unless of course the woman is an “Isha Mascaless,” a wise woman. On this, King Solomon says, *“A house and riches are [inherited] from fathers; but from God [is given] a wise woman.” (Proverbs 19:14)*

Summary

We must accept only proven principles. Destiny and “bashert” – as widely understood – have been shown to be false.

We must not be duped by the masses. We must not be impressed by catch phrases, regardless of who says them, or where they are printed. We must analyze for ourselves, and accept that as imperfect beings, we make mistakes. We must cease repeated, damaging behavior, and not blame anything external. Maimonides taught – man’s evils are mostly self-inflicted. So changing the self is how you will become perfected and happy. God told Cain to pick the right path since nothing is destined.

If we think rationally we will benefit from the world God created. He or she who complies with God’s natural design will benefit the most. Think of it as placing a square cube into a square hole: it fits. If we chose to ignore how the world works and how our psyche works, we are not living in line with reality.

PALM READING

A friend sent me a published response by Rabbi X written to Chaya, a woman seeking his advice regarding palm reading. I have quoted the Rabbi verbatim and remarked where noted.

Before proceeding, it is crucial that matters are clear and without any confusion. My objective is to share God's view on palm reading – not man's view. We possess many incorrect Rabbinic opinions and there exist many flawed books contradicting our Torah, Prophets and Writings. For only these three works are God's words. Literally all other writings are man made and subject to human error. When we find a Rabbi's words conflicting with God's words, we must not fear reputation and cower from disagreement, but rather, we must accept King Solomon's words that form part of the Divine Torah: "*For man is not righteous in the land who does good and does not sin (Ecclesiastes, 7:20).*" King Solomon taught divinely that all men err. God teaches this too when He admonished and punished Moshe, the prophets and our leaders for their errors and sins. Therefore, we are not to deny God by suggesting that any human is correct 100% of the time. We must admit that just like Moshe erred, so did Arizal, Zohar's author and all other men. "*Had even Joshua the son of Nun said it, I would not accept it (Chullin 124a).*" The Talmud clearly endorses human error.

Additionally, we must not quickly accept ancient books as bearing only truths, starting with the Zohar. This book is not at all equal to Moshe's Torah: the latter being absolute truth, while Zohar can contain errors. The fact that something is "ancient" leads ignorant people to blindly accept the writings contained as incontrovertible truths. However, this is a deception of the human mind and is clearly rejected by idolatrous artifacts. These artifacts are also ancient, yet we know that a statue did not create the universe. Just as we dismiss ancient statues and idols as false, we must be ready to dismiss ancient writings. The sole criteria for accepting truth is its compliance with 1) our senses, 2) reason, or 3) our Divinely-written Torah (*Maimonides' Letter to Marseilles*).

Let us now apply these rules to the falsehood of palmistry, defended by "Rabbi X"...

Rabbi X: While I don't have hands-on experience in palm reading, I can tell you what our sources say about it. Moses was told to select judges over the people, "And you shall discern (literally "see") from among the entire people, men of accomplishment, God fearing people, men of truth, people who despise money, and you shall appoint them leaders" (Exodus 18:21). The Zohar notes that Moses was told to choose the judges by "seeing" them, from which the Zohar learns that Moses was to perceive their qualities in the appearance of their hair, forehead, countenance, eyes, lips and lines in their hands.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Moshe was not to engage in palm reading, but to use his senses; selecting those whom he witnessed as "God-fearing, truthful, and despising money." This is clearly the intent of the verse. Moshe was to assess a person based on his virtues, not his bodily features. We are taught "Ain mikra yotzay midday pshuto; A verse may not be interpreted against its literal reading (Sabbath 63a, Yevamos 11b 24a)." The literal reading is that Moshe was to examine human virtues and not accidental, physical features. Therefore, to suggest this verse refers to palm reading, violates the Rabbinic dictum found in the Talmud.

The Zohar conflicts with reason as it suggests that genetic causes of our bodily features formed in the womb, correlate to our righteousness. But righteousness is impossible at this early developmental stage. Therefore, they are unrelated to the Zohar's claims. Furthermore, since our physical form (forehead and palm creases) are naturally formed, they are not due to imagined "mystical communication."

Rabbi X: The Zohar reveals that the Torah gives credence not only to palm reading, but also to reading facial features and even the hair. In fact, the Ramban (1195-1270) went one step further by asserting that this wisdom is actually found in the Torah: "every field of knowledge – whether it be science, agriculture, medicine or palmistry – can be learned from the Torah".

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Here, the Rabbi equates palmistry and science. And although the Rabbi claims Ramban accepts palmistry, this in no manner validates it as truth, for the ancient Rabbis erred based on the deficient science of their times. Man thought there were invisible layers of spheres in which the stars were affixed, and through the motion

of those spheres the stars moved. Man thought the Earth was the center of the universe. Man believed in astrology too. All have been empirically disproved or are bereft of support. To maintain the Rabbis were correct in these areas is to deny our senses. As our Rabbis accepted proven science, had they possessed the knowledge we attained over the years since they lived, they would agree with the later findings we now possess.

Additionally, Ramban does not say he found palmistry per se in the Torah. Rather, Ramban says every field of knowledge will be alluded to in Torah. This is agreeable. But if something is discovered to be a false belief, Ramban would abandon it, and he would not say a falsehood is in Torah.

In fact, Torah prohibits Nichush: the practice of assessing reality based on unrelated events. Thus, one commits Nichush when believing that reality or his future has been altered by a black cat crossing his path. If one opens a book to a random page, blindly placing his finger on a word and acts based on the word's meaning, here too one commits Nichush. Similarly, if one says "since the lines on my palm go this way and not that way, certain things are true", one commits Nichush. Conversely, science is where causes and effects are related. Science is valid. Grouping palmistry with science is not accurate, or intelligent.

Rabbi X: From the Tannaitic (1st – 6th century) through the Gaonic era (7th – 11th century), sages who knew the Torah's secrets also knew how to read faces and palms, and they passed their knowledge down from one to another. However, like the other secrets of the Torah, the wisdom of reading faces and palms has been lost. One notable exception was the Arizal (1534-1572) who approached the level of the Tannaim and could see on a person's forehead what he had transgressed, how many reincarnations his soul had been through, and what he had come to this world to rectify.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: I wonder which criterion the Rabbi deems accurate. When watching John commit a sin conflicts with the "reading" of his palm that says he is not a sinner, which one does the Rabbi accept? Certainly, John is a sinner, and the palm reading is a lie. An important principle is now revealed: perception is undeniable. Despite the palm reading that "said" John is not a sinner, intelligent

people know that perception outweighs theory: John just sinned, we saw it. For this reason Moshe was correct to review man's actions alone to appoint the judges. For that is the only barometer of human worth, not the creases in our hands. We now grasp that perception is reasonable, and must be followed. And since we dismiss the palm reading and favor perception, we agree that palm reading is something other than reality. Focus on that phrase, "other than reality": this means it does not fall within the pale of what is real and true. We have senses to determine truth, and nothing in our senses validates palm reading. And as palm reading is not reasonable, it must not be followed. And if a palm is read, and nothing in reality conflicts with it, should one accept the reading? Again the answer is "no". In this case, as in all cases, a person must use his senses to determine his actions. When seeking a mate, we investigate the other party and invest time in dating. When seeking a job, we also investigate...and do so thoroughly. What would you say of a man who accepted a job with no investigation, but based only on the reading of his palm? Would it be wise to marry someone blindfolded, also without an ounce of knowledge of that person, based on a palm reader's suggestion? In all cases, perception and reason will yield facts. Conversely, Torah violations such as Nichush (palm reading) prove nothing as they are unrelated to facts.

We must appreciate the foolishness of attributing significance to accidental and unrelated phenomena. Just as the size of a leaf is unrelated to the personality of a person, so too are our skin creases unrelated to our perfection. So foolish is this, that writing this sentence disturbs me. Yet, this is where Judaism has steeped to in our day, so we must respond.

The Rabbi also suggests reincarnation and a purpose for that reincarnation of "rectifying" something: two notions that again are without basis. He says this, despite Moshe's admonition that the Jews "select life (Deut. 30:19)" and not death. Thus, Moshe's very words are that one who selects death, will no longer have life. Moshe rejects reincarnation, yet the Rabbi endorses it.

Rabbi X: According to the Kabbalah, the way palm reading works is that when a soul is garbed in a body, it becomes imprinted in the body, particularly in the face and hands, and its nature can thereby be revealed.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: The Rabbi offers no basis for this, but assumes that citing Kabbalah as his source renders this practice viable and true, and worth disseminating. Such statements are quite dangerous. Since reason and proof are not required to support palmistry, endorsing it equally validates all other baseless beliefs, even following Jesus.

The Rabbi says the soul is “imprinted” on the hands and face. I wonder, at what moment is this imprint made? If while innocent an imprint is made, and then he sins...a palm reader will be in error as the imprint was of a sinless person. And if the imprint is after the person sins – that imprint being of a wicked person – and then he repents, again the palm reader is in error. For he will read the person as a sinner, even though he has repented. Or, do our palms’ creases change course whenever we sin, then change when we repent, and then change again when we sin? In truth, if someone repents, he still maintains the identical bodily features as when he was a sinner. Thereby, one who “reads” palms and forehead creases will err, since these creases are identical on the sinner, and after he repents. Thus, reading physical features is inherently flawed.

Or perhaps, the Rabbi does not mean the creases are read, but that some mystical communication takes place. In this case, looking at the palms is irrelevant, as communication is not viewable on one’s body. Here too the Rabbi will teach us nothing, since he has not defined what he means by “mystical.” Truthfully, the term mystical is used when a person cannot explain a phenomenon, but wishes to induce belief in others. Why do people induce others to believe what they cannot prove? In this case, I suspect to preserve a pristine reputation of the Arizal. Even when his words do not make sense, loyal followers repeat them, as if communicating unintelligible theories impresses others.

It is crucial to recognize that claiming knowledge of the future denies free will. It suggests matters that have not yet occurred, are fixed. Thereby, we cannot choose otherwise. And as we know free will is a reality, any palmistry forecast must be false.

Rabbi X: It is important to stress that in Judaism, reading the face and palm was used only to help ascertain whether one was worthy of a certain position or knowledge, or to help improve oneself. However, reading the face and palms in order to tell the future is a violation of the prohibition against divining auspicious

times (Leviticus 19:26), and the commandment to have perfect faith (Deuteronomy 18:13).

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Ibn Ezra differs with the Rabbi. Ibn Ezra states that all Torah prohibitions are prohibited, precisely due to their false nature: “Those with empty brains say, ‘Were it not that fortune tellers and magicians were true, the Torah would not prohibit them.’ But I (Ibn Ezra) say just the opposite of their words, because the Torah doesn’t prohibit that which is true, but it prohibits that which is false. And the proof is the prohibition on idols and statues (Leviticus 19:31).” This is sensible, that God prohibits falsehood and that palmistry is false.

Torah prescribes a specific, reasonable means of determining truth and falsehood. Our court system engages in inquiry and deliberation to arrive at convictions and acquittals. Imagine people’s outrage at a court that dismisses the evidence of witnesses and sentences individuals based on the lines of the litigants’ hands. But, if as the Rabbi suggests that truth is imprinted on our faces and hands, why would God demand a system where the courts are open to error relying on circumstantial phenomena, when we could attain absolute truth through palm reading? Would God not be committing a grave injustice by allowing His creatures to err, when He could in fact charge us to palm read and determine the absolute truth?

Such arguments clearly reject palmistry and all similar beliefs as falsehoods and lies. They are prohibited by Torah. Their inclusion in Zohar or Kabbalah does not mean it is true. These two areas are not Divinely written and free from error. Unlike the Rabbi’s assessment that palmistry was “lost” from Judaism, in fact, it is the farthest thing from Judaism.

It is wrong for the Rabbi to claim a belief is part of Torah, a belief which he did not prove. Regardless of the author, be it Arizal or anyone, if one cannot prove a notion, then he does not know it to be a truth. To then repeat unproven ideas is wrong, as it misleads others. Moreover, it is a lie to present as fact, that which one has not proved. Repeating Arizal’s teachings bereft of validity is of no merit to the one repeating, or to the audience. Therefore, it is meaningless. If one wishes to teach, this means he demonstrates a truth. But without proof, a notion is not a truth. Silence is demanded.

Finally, what of this notion of telling the future? It must be clear that man cannot do so. This is because human perception is only via one of the five senses. And as the future is not something our senses can detect, we cannot perceive it. It is unknown.

Primarily, the future is not subject to perception for it has not yet occurred. The future is not yet a reality. Thus, man's senses do not relate to the future. No man can tell others about something unreal, and no man can perceive what is outside his senses.

Part V

PROVIDENCE & JUSTICE

The study of God's governance of man helps us understand what He determines is just, and removes many of our complaints. This authoritative knowledge cannot be gained by observation alone, nor can man imagine it. God's prophetic words must be studied. This study is also a prerequisite for our fair, just and charitable dealings with others. Studying His many interactions with the Patriarchs, Matriarchs, Prophets, Kings, individuals and nations, we learn what is truly good, what is evil, and what God wills for mankind.

SPARING THE WICKED

I was once asked this question:

If the Jews did not produce their quota of bricks, the Egyptians punished them by substituting their infants for missing bricks. The question was asked by a Jew why Hashem allowed this; Hashem answered that He permitted this because if the infant lived, he would be a rasha – an evil person. When Ishmael was sent out of Abraham’s house by Sarah the angels told Hashem that Ishmael should not be saved, that his offspring would attack the Jews in the future. Hashem answered the angels saying He would judge Ishmael on his “current” merit, not on future sins. How do we resolve this conflict?

Why did God save Ishmael, while the Jews in Egypt should not also be saved?

God did not kill the Jews in Egypt, the Egyptians did. So there’s no question about God killing them. God was inactive and did not save them due to their sins. God’s Providence is removed from the sinful man (Maimonides). Rashi agrees, stating that four fifths of the Jewish population were killed in the Plague of Darkness. Evidently that Jewish population was corrupt beyond repair. The infants not yet accountable for sinning were not saved, since no Providence related to them. Similarly, God destroyed all people – young and old – during the Flood. Anyone raised in that time was doomed to failure.

In the case of Ishmael God did perform salvation based on “As he was there” (*“ba’asher hu sham”* – *Gen. 22:17*) meaning Ishmael’s current status was righteous, unlike the infants in Egypt. He was not deserving of punishment, but salvation.

Rashi (*ibid*) records your cited medrash that although Ishmael himself was righteous, the angels asked God: “Ishmael’s descendants will pain the Jews, perhaps this justifies not saving Ishmael?” Was there not inevitable evil in Ishmael’s case too? Why did God save Ishmael and not the infants?

Ishmael was not the one who would perform the evil in the future – it was his offspring. Ishmael was now over 13 (*Gen. 17:25*) and had merits. In contrast, an infant has no merits, and unfortunately no claim of righteousness could have been used to defend those infants. Ishmael already matured and made righteous decisions, thereby earning him God’s Providence. So God saved him. “As he was there” on his current merit, is applicable only to Ishmael and not to the infant Jews in Egypt.

The angels presented an argument based on numbers. Many Jews will be hurt by Ishmael's descendants, so killing one to save many seems justified. However, God does not punish man, for the sins of others. God is just. *"ish bi-cheto yumasu," "a man in his own sin will be killed."* (Deut. 24:16)

In summary, we see the analogy is not exact. The question regarding the infants was about their "own" inevitable wickedness, while Ishmael was not wicked himself. Thus, there is fault that justified no salvation for the infant Jews, while Ishmael's merit explains his salvation.

DOES GOD CREATE EVIL?

Different definitions of "Create"

Maimonides[1] answers this question. Let us review. Prior to reviewing the Torah's text, Maimonides clarifies a misconception of the word "create." He quotes the sect of Mutakallemim who viewed blindness and deafness as positive properties, thereby considering them actual creations of God. Maimonides demonstrates their error via analogy: One who removes an obstacle from another person's motion is in some effect "creating" motion. Similarly, one who removes a building's support pillar in some way "creates" the ceiling's downward motion. Although in both cases, the person's action related to the obstacle and the pillar respectively, and not to "motion." Nonetheless, we say that the people removing the obstacle and the pillar are "creators" of the resulting motion. In the same way, one who removes light from a room, is said to have created darkness, although darkness is not something real, as is light. Darkness merely remains when light is removed. One may be called the creator of darkness in this sense, although nothing new was created, as darkness has no new existence.

Having shown this clear and valid distinction between two types of creation, i.e., creation of a new entity, and 'termed' creation of new things such as darkness, Maimonides continues to examine a Torah passage dealing with this issue: Isaiah 45:7 states, *"I form the light and create (boray) darkness, I make (oseh) peace and create (boray) evil..."*

Maimonides points to the distinction of different words applied to light and darkness, and peace and evil. Regarding light, the word used is "yotzare," which means to form one thing from existing matter. The sun was

made from a material already in existence, therefore the term “yotzare” is employed. However, when describing the “creation” of darkness and evil, the word used by God is “boray,” which refers to acting on nothingness, as in “In the beginning, God created (boray) heaven and Earth.” Here too, God was creating our world from nothingness, so the word “boray” is used to teach just this point. The rule is that when God relates to nothingness, the term “boray” is used.

When this passage says God created “boray” darkness and evil, it means he created it in the following sense: He is the cause of darkness and evil only in as much as He created light and peace which can be removed – leaving darkness and evil. The fact that God does not create darkness as He creates an object is clear: He only creates positive entities. Creation per se means, to affect a real object in some way. When there is an object, it can be spoken of as having been created. But darkness and evil are not positive entities, how then can one act on that which is not positive, but merely a privation? Creation is a force which causes something new to emanate as a positive entity; such as creation of the Earth, the Sun or any other real, object. But darkness is not an object, and therefore it cannot be created.

“Evil” has No Real Existence

Maimonides then moves on to demonstrate what “evil” is. He shows all evils are privations, and not positive entities. Evil is termed as that which is lacking – it is not positive. For example, it is an evil that man is poor, hungry, blind, or ignorant. And in all these cases, the evil is where man has not achieved financial success, he has not eaten, he lost his sight, or he never became wise. The evil in all these cases is the deprivation of some real, positive object. Therefore, these evils were not created, because evils are not really in existence. They are terms denoting the lack of real positive entities as food, wisdom, or wealth. For this very reason, Maimonides teaches that the term “and it was good” is used in Genesis in reference to creation on each day. God only produces real existence, and all existence is good. All God’s ways are good. God cannot create evil, as it cannot possibly be created. The problematic theory that God creates evil, is gone.

“From God’s mouth there does not go out the evils, or the good.” (Eicha 3:37)

[1]“Guide for the Perplexed,” Chapter 10, Pages 265-267, Dover Publications)

WHY THE GOOD SUFFER

A few introductory remarks are necessary. The question of why good people suffer deserves the same objectivity as do all areas. It is then wise that this topic be discussed when people are at ease, and not tragedy stricken. For during such times, a person has difficulty hearing answers which do not satisfy the emotion of the moment. It is also important to note, that prior to such tragedies, one does not usually question God's justice. This demonstrates that the question is usually asked from a personal and biased perspective – not from an objective, rational inquiry.

We must first understand that all knowledge is not within man's grasp. Truthfully, we know very little and must appreciate that there are areas in which we will not be totally satisfied. But this is due to our ignorance, not because of any lack in God's justice. Abraham our forefather was of the wisest of men, yet, God had to inform even him on how His justice operates. We do not match Abraham's caliber, therefore we require even greater instruction. Additionally, when treating of this subject, King Solomon said, *"Even the wise men will not obtain an answer (Ecclesiastes 8:17)."* This is due to the impossibility to examine all cases of justice, and the myriad of variables affecting its principles. We must also be aware within ourselves, whether we inquire honestly, or under the pretense to abandon Judaic beliefs.

Just as is so regarding a famous doctor with an impeccable track record, where we fail to appreciate one out of a thousand of his remedies, so too, we see that Torah benefits man in all ways. Although we may not find all the answers to some of our questions, one should maintain his high esteem for the Torah, and attribute ignorance to himself. One should not blame the system, or God; certainly when there is no conclusive evidence to do so. For one must not judge whether something is evil or good; making such a judgment based on the effects of the moment. Perhaps after twenty years this event will show itself to be a good in the larger scheme of things.

Having said this, we must recognize when asking "why good people suffer" we are not in place of God, and therefore do not have the ability to determine who is truly "good." We cannot ask, why this "good" person suffers. We may look at someone and feel that they fit a "profile" of what we feel is a righteous person. But this is a false notion. A righteous person has no "profile." Being righteous is purely internal, as the Prophet says, *(Micha 6:8) "It has been told to you man, what is good and what God desires of you, but to perform justice and acts of loving kindness and walk modestly with your God."* One who is truly righteous is humble, "walking modestly,"

and does not seek public acclaim. He draws no attention to his righteous acts, gives charity and performs kindness anonymously. If one seeks to do kindness as it should be performed, he does not seek or care for acclaim. He seeks only God's approval, not human accolades. Thereby, external observations and judgments on our part are of no consequence. And many times, those who become known for their charity, actually seek publicity and use charity as a vehicle for their selfish means. This does not remove whatever good God deems applicable for such charitable work. All people possess ego but we cannot view external phenomena and judge someone solely on reputation. Such superficial assessment of man will lead to false conclusions about God's justice when man is afflicted. We may wish to believe someone is righteous for other reasons and associating with this caliber individual compliments oneself. It is not our place nor are we capable of making such a determination about another's level of piety. Torah obligates us to judge all men favorably. This is a statement that urges us to act; not to make absolute summations of a person's thoughts and deeds. Only God can do this, as the prayers of Rosh Hashanna teach us, *"(only) God knows the thoughts of man."*

The Wise Usually Do Not Suffer

Wise people examine all aspects of life. Most unfortunate circumstances are anticipated by them, as they take measures to avoid such mishaps long before their occurrence. This incorporation of wisdom in every area of life is the mark of a chocham, a wise man. He is rarely taken by surprise. The unexpected travails of life which others experience, he avoids. King Solomon describes the fools (*Proverbs, 1:27*) *"When your dread arrives like a storm, and your calamity like a whirlwind."* Again, (*ibid, 1:32*) *"For the waywardness of simpletons will slay them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them."* The fool seeks instantaneous pleasure. He knows not how to use wisdom in order to anticipate the outcome by asking "What will happen if I do such and such?" Due to his nearsightedness, the fool will ambush himself, and his lack of consideration will invite tragedy to blast through his front door, like a "storm or a whirlwind," unexpectedly.

The righteous person might encounter mishaps in life, even with much foresight and planning. Nonetheless, he has one other factor to safeguard him, (*Proverbs, 3:25,26*) *"do not be frightened by the sudden terror, or the stormy destruction of the wicked when it comes. For God will be your confidence, and He will keep your foot from entrapment."* The righteous person has God as his source of virtue, and as his Protector. We also read, (*Psalms, 34:10, Ibn Ezra*) *"The righteous do not fear that harm or lack will come to them even through their own actions."* Also, (*Psalms 34:20,21*) *"Many tragedies be-*

fall the righteous, and from them all God saves him. He (God) watches all of his bones, not even one is broken." This means that world order continues to operate, but God utilizes direct Providence to shield the righteous from all mishap and tragedy.

No Suffering without Transgression

This last statement now begins to enlighten us to God's system. It states that not even one bone is harmed, provided the person is a Tzaddik. This means that God does not allow harm to befall a perfectly righteous person. However, if one is not on this pristine level, he is not necessarily shielded from harms way. It is the suffering of this latter individual which generates the question of why the good suffer. For although so righteous, his one sin can invite punishment. This makes it appear that God harms the righteous. Talmud Sabbath 55a discusses God's justice outlined in Ezekiel 18: *"There is no death without sin, and no suffering without transgression."*

Ezekiel teaches that there are 3 types of man; 1) one who is evil, 2) one who was evil but repented, and 3) one who was evil and repented "fully." It is this third type of man which Ezekiel teaches that God protects from all harm. He is not only granted life, "*chayo yichyeh,*" now that he repented like the second man, but it states of this third man, "*lo yamus,*" "*he will not die.*" Meaning, the fully, penitent individual has nothing to fear in life. No harm will ever befall him. Maimonides states that when we see someone suffering, it has come upon him due to his own misdeeds. This concept makes sense to our minds, as a punishment delivered by God is always a corrective measure. One who has no faults needs no correction and will go without suffering at all.

Punishment of Mankind

We cannot exhaust this area, as King Solomon stated. Yet, I will list but a few Talmudic statements that may increase our appreciation of God's justice, and humble us as to the numerous considerations that affect justice.

Talmud Sabbath 139a: *"All the punishments that come to the world do not come except because of the (evil) judges of the Jews."* (Based on Micha, 3:1) This implies that if God's justice is thwarted, which is dependent upon the Jewish courts, then the world's purpose is compromised. Thus, Jewish judges carry a great responsibility.

Talmud Yevamaos 63a: *“Punishment does not come to the world except because of Israel.”* Rashi comments, *“To fear the Jews, in order to return them to repentance.”* Again, since the Jew is to act as a beacon to the world, when this primary purpose of mankind is corrupted, the world is at risk.

Talmud Succah 29a: *“There is no nation that is punished, without their gods being smitten with them.”* This teaches that the crimes of other nations are primarily their religious sins.

Talmud Baba Kama 60a: *“Punishment does not comes to the world except in a time when there are wicked people in the world.”* One must not think God afflicts without cause.

Talmud Baba Basra 8a: *“Punishment comes to the world because of the unlearned Jews.”* Torah is the greatest mitzvah, and when unfulfilled, the world’s purpose is not realized. God informs us through punishments.

Talmud Sanhedrin 102a: *“Not a single punishment comes to the world which does not contain some small measure of the sin of the Golden Calf.”* The Jews’ sin of the Golden Calf was an expression of their need to relate to God in some physical, idolatrous manner. The unique character of this idolatrous act over all others, was its performance during God’s presentation of miracles and His giving of the Torah. This highlights how strong the idolatrous emotion is, that even at this event, it demanded expression. If here, this sinful expression could not be contained, certainly it is rampant throughout all other generations and people. Thus, God rightfully says the world shares in this base drive. Following the principle that God does not afflict a man for the sins of his friend, the world must be punished due to their own sins paralleling the Gold Calf, but not “for” that sin, in which, they were absent.

God is Not the Creator of Evil

The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works. (Psalms, cxlv. 9).

Justice

Guide for the Perplexed, Book III, Chap. XVII

We, however, believe that all these human affairs are managed with justice; far be it from God to do wrong, to punish any one unless the punishment is necessary and merited. It is distinctly stated in the Law, that all is done in accordance with justice; and

the words of our Sages generally express the same idea. They clearly say: "There is no death without sin, no sufferings without transgression." (B. T. Sabbath, 55a.) Again, "The deserts of man are meted out to him in the same measure which he himself employs." (Mish. Sotah, i. 7.)

Self-Inflicted

Guide for the Perplexed, Book III, Chap. XII

The numerous evils to which individual persons are exposed are due to the defects existing in the persons themselves. We complain and seek relief from our own faults: we suffer from the evils which we, by our own free will, inflict on ourselves and ascribe them to God, who is far from being connected with them! Compare, "Is destruction His [work]? No. Ye [who call yourselves] wrongly His sons, you who are a perverse and crooked generation." (Deut. xxxii. 5) This is explained by Solomon, who says, "The foolishness of man perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord (Prov. xix. 3)."

Extenuating Circumstances

Talmud Baba Kama, 60a

Once God gives permission to the destroyer, it does not distinguish between righteous (people) and the wicked. And furthermore, destruction commences with the righteous, as it says, "And I will cut off from you the righteous and the wicked" [Ezekiel, 21:9]. [The righteous are mentioned first]. Abaye said, this is a good to them, as it states, [Isaiah 57:1] "The righteous expires, and there is no man. Place [this] on [your] heart. And men of kindness are gathered [to death] and none understand: for due to evil is the righteous gathered."

God states He will kill the righteous, just prior to when God's justice demands that He deliver punishment to the world. The righteous are killed to spare them the anguish of witnessing humankind's disaster, not because they sinned.

Not Fully Righteous

Talmud Avodah Zara, 4a: "And I will cut off from you the righteous and the wicked." (Ezekiel, 21:9) This means that since these righteous ones had the ability to rebuke the sinners, but did not, they are not considered to be

‘wholly’ righteous. Thus, the “righteous” are also included in this verse, concerning those whom God punishes. Tosfos adds that this is applicable only when the sinners would have listened. But if the righteous people know that the sinners will not accept their rebuke, then the righteous are not at fault for remaining silent.

Death of Children

What should one think when a tragedy occurs to an infant, someone who is not capable of sinning? Rashi on Deuteronomy, 9:20 says this is a punishment for parents’ sins. This can be understood, since children (under 13) have not yet earned any merit through which they can claim a right to life. If parents sin so grievously, God might take the child as punishment. This case of tragedy – is true regarding all others – can also be due to the lack of Divine Providence, if some family or individual is not on the level deserving it.

The Torah (*Lev. 20:20 according to Rashi*) indicates that loss of children can be a punishment for sexual prohibitions, *“the nakedness of his aunt he revealed, his sin he will carry, he will die ‘ari-rim’ (childless).”*

However, the most clear statement is from the Torah in, Deut. 24:16: *“Fathers are not killed for the children’s sins, and children are not killed for their father’s sins: each ‘man’ in his own sin will they be killed.”* Rashi says here that the word “man” teaches that only once one reaches adulthood is he killed for his own sins. But if one is not yet a ‘man’, he is not 13 years old, he may be killed for his father’s sins, and infants are killed by the hand of heaven for their father’s sins.”

The Torah is teaching that in such cases, this type of tragedy can be a correction for the parent. As the child is not one yet who discerns bad from good, he cannot be held ‘accountable’ for his own acts, and therefore his death cannot be a corrective measure for him. God in His wisdom grants life, and takes life. He does not “owe” the child anything, and the child has no claim against Him at such an early stage. It is only once the child becomes an aware adult with a developed conscience, only then will God punish him based on his own status. In His wisdom, God uses such means to correct the parent. Although we may not understand why God acts this way, perhaps as we continue to ponder the Torah’s ideas, we will understand how this means of punishment is just.

Should we find ourselves unable to bear this kind of justice, we should reflect on our most wise forefather Abraham, who did not hesitate to slay his own child, the only son for whom he had waited many decades. Abraham’s mark of distinction was his knowledge of God’s justice. We see how Abraham discussed the fate of the inhabitants of Sodom. How

Abraham investigated God's justice, and how God stated this concerning Abraham, *"I know him that he will command his household after him to keep the path of God, doing charity and justice."* Abraham did not resist the command to slay his son, although he could not necessarily comprehend how God's intended perfection would come about. He did not share the commonly found sentiment of denying God's infinite wisdom due to a desire to avoid personal loss. His love for Isaac was great, but his love for truth was greater.

I am certain that just as Abraham thought into the justice of Sodom's fate, he also pondered what benefit would be derived from the slaying of Isaac, but his pondering did not delay his fulfillment of God's command.

Wise Men Have No Questions – God is Just

In Malachi, 3:13, when evildoers were triumphant, the Jews of that era questioned how this could be, and what benefit there was in following God's system? Two other groups of Jews heard this question being asked, the "God fearing Jews," and "those who pondered His name." It was only the God fearing Jews who stopped to discuss the 'problem' now raised in their minds by this question. They discussed the matter but came to no understanding. God guaranteed He would disclose this information to them in the future. However, we do not see the group of "those who pondered His name" having any issue or concern with the question. The reason is that those who "pondered His name" already had the answer. They, unlike the other group, did not worship God from fear, but from the attachment to truths derived from pondering God's name, or rather, God's system. When this second group met with a nation of disheartened Jews who witnessed successful evildoers, it was of no concern to them. Their "success" was purely physical, and not a true success. True success was realistically measured by this group in terms of wisdom, the appreciation of ideas and living a life steeped in the pursuit of truths. This is what success truly is, success at functioning as "man," a thinking and inquisitive being in search of reason and beauty in all of God's ways...not the search for material gain as an end. These thinking and pondering Jews also understood that the wicked will be successful at times as reward in this world for some small good they have done, thereby being rightfully being paid by their Creator. (*Rashi on Deut. 7:10, Rashi on Psalms; 92:8*)

God will not allow harm to befall purely righteous individuals. The Torah is replete with God's acts of kindness to those who followed Him.

We should take note of the righteous themselves, and see that they encouraged the following of the Torah. They deeply penetrated the Torah with their analysis, and pondered all of the questions which we ask. Yet,

they desired nothing other than to be involved in the life of Torah and wisdom. No wise, righteous person ever abandoned the concepts of the Torah when tragedies befell people. For they could not determine fully the level of those stricken, whereby they might question the justice of such events. As Maimonides said, “they must have deserved what befell them.” Although at times no apparent answer presented itself to their questions of justice, they saw the entire system created by God as just.

We do not understand the genius of certain individuals. When they speak of matters we do not comprehend, we do not categorically discount them due to our failure to understand them. This certainly applies to our understanding of God. His actions at times are not within our grasp. However, through study we see the life outlined by the Torah is the best life for man. God designed us and knows what is best and we can see this from the ideas themselves.

When encountering circumstances beyond our understanding, our overall appreciation for the perfection of the Torah, as well as God’s justice should not be diminished by our own ignorance.

God will not punish one who is a perfect Tzaddik, under any circumstance.

TOLDOS: A STUDY OF GOD’S PROVIDENCE

Part I

Reading the Parasha each week, at times we gloss over “simple” information, assuming nothing more is intended below the surface. But this cannot be the case. Maimonides teaches, “*There is a good reason for every passage; the object of which we cannot see. We must always apply the words of our Sages: ‘It is not a vain thing for you’ (Deut. xxxii. 47), and if it seems vain, it seems your fault.*” (*The Guide, Book III, Chap. L*)

With this in mind, let’s recap the story of Toldos and then isolate the questions.

Rivkah experienced a troubling pregnancy: the children were moving violently within her. Ibn Ezra says that Rivkah first asked other women if her pregnancy was the norm. When the women told her that her pregnancy was abnormal, she sought counsel from God via a Prophet (either Abraham or Shem, Noah’s son). Rivkah was aware of God’s Providence; initiated with Abraham, sustained unto Isaac and herself. The nation of

the Jews was to be established through her. This pregnancy was unnatural and must be due to God's will.

Rivkah then sought out a Prophet and learned from him that she will give birth to twins (two nations) and that the "*greater son will be subservient to the younger.*" This was the primary message. When she finally gave birth, Esav exited first and the Torah describes him as red and covered with hair. Jacob then exited – his hand seizing Esav's heel. The Torah then says that Esav became a hunter while Jacob dwelled in tents. Isaac loved Esav, for he captured food for Isaac, while Rivkah loved Jacob. The Torah reveals an imbalance.

We then learn of the sale of the birthright. Jacob's alacrity in requesting the birthright in exchange for the lentils appears premeditated. Later, Rivkah "somehow" hears Isaac preparing to give the blessings to Esav. Rivkah dresses Jacob in goat skins and in Esav's garments to deceive the senses of the now blind Isaac, into thinking Jacob is Esav. The ruse works, and not a split second after Jacob leaves Isaac's presence, Esav enters requesting the blessings. This alarms Isaac greatly, as he realized through a successful blessing of Jacob that he must have been wrong about Esav. The blessings success indicated Divine Providence. Now our questions:

- 1) What was God's intent that Rivkah experience an unnatural, tormenting pregnancy?
- 2) Why was Rivkah's response to inquire about God's Providence from a Prophet, and why did she inquire of the Prophets Abraham or Shem, but not of her own husband?
- 3) Of what significance is Esav's hairy nature?
- 4) Why are we told that Jacob seized Esav's heel at birth?
- 5) Of what significance is it that "Rivkah loved Jacob, while Isaac loved Esav?"
- 6) How was Jacob "instantly" prepared to purchase the birthright from Esav when Esav asked for the lentils?
- 7) Why did Rivkah and Jacob agree they must deceive Isaac to obtain the blessings: why not ask Isaac openly?
- 8) Why was Isaac shocked when Esav came before him to receive the blessings?

It is clear, God intended Rivkah to obtain information vital to the establishment of the Jewish people. Her difficult pregnancy was intended to direct her to one who would inform her of God's intentions. With that new information obtained via the Prophet – "the older would serve the younger" – Rivkah now cherished Jacob over Esav, as she learned through that

prophecy that a matter of “nations” depends on the younger Jacob. (She was told that two nations would issue from her.) The prophecy taught her that she was to be instrumental in securing the younger son’s success as a means of establishing the nation of Israel. She also deduced that Isaac was not given this Prophetic information, for good reason.

The Patriarchs and Matriarchs did not function in accord with simplistic favoritism as we do today. We must not err and project our emotions onto them. Thus, when the Torah teaches that “Isaac loved Esav while Rivkah loved Jacob,” it must teach an important lesson. It appears this lesson is that Isaac was not as well informed as was Rivkah about the nature of their two sons. Thus, the Torah saw fit to teach us the imbalance of their divergent love, so we might appreciate how God orchestrated His Providence. As Isaac was misled by Esav’s “capturing his father with his mouth” (Gen. 25:28), Isaac loved him more. Isaac was deluded by Esav’s ostensible good nature. Esav disguised himself as upright with inquiries of proper conduct from Isaac (capturing him) to earn Isaac’s favor. In truth, Esav was evil. In contrast, the Torah teaches that Jacob was a “dweller of tents” (*ibid* 25:27): he was complete in his perfection and delved into the study of God.

Jacob’s proper lifestyle did not present the charade offered by Esav’s veneer. Esav presented himself in the manner he knew his father would cherish. He “captured his father with his mouth.” Thus, the Torah thereby informs us of the need for God’s Providence to work through Rivkah who was more aware of her son’s diverse natures. From the very outset of the lives of Esav and Jacob, Rivkah was taught that the younger Jacob was to rule his older brother and that Jacob was to receive the blessings. This was also substantiated through Jacob’s clutching of Esav’s heel. This strange phenomenon taught Rivkah that Jacob – right out of the womb – was one who could confront and usurp his twin. Later on, Rivkah relied on this crucial knowledge in her plan to deceive Isaac.

It was also vital that Rivkah receive the Prophet’s communication “before” giving birth. Now that she understood the younger was to be favored, she could interpret that act of Jacob clutching Esav’s heel as a Divine message. God was showing Rivkah the means He implanted into Jacob’s nature to ensure her success. God also created Esav with a hairy exterior which would also play a vital role in Rivkah’s plan.

The Torah tells us how Esav arrives home exhausted. The Rabbis teach that he had murdered, committed adultery and idolatry. He did so, for on that day, Abraham had died. A wise Rabbi taught that Esav – a man seeking an Earthly, hedonistic existence alone – was frustrated that his grandfather Abraham would actually perish from this Earth. Esav’s im-

mortality fantasy was abruptly shattered. He no longer clung to the role model displayed by Abraham: “For what is it worth, if it ends?” Esav felt. He therefore went astray from Abraham’s values and committed these grave acts. Esav, exhausted, requested the lentils Jacob had cooked. Jacob ‘instantly’ countered with an offer to purchase the birthright from Esav, in exchange for the lentils. Thus, Jacob’s purchase was premeditated. He had already planned to obtain the birthright prior to this event!

We might explain that Jacob’s readiness to obtain the birthright was due to Rivkah’s informing him of her knowledge obtained via that earlier prophecy. Rivkah most probably explained to Jacob what she learned, that the younger – Jacob – was to rule over the older. This is supported by Jacob’s readiness to purchase the birthright.

Later, Rivkah ‘somehow’ overhears that Isaac was about to give the birthright blessings to Esav. This too is mentioned to teach of God’s intervention, that she hear these words. She then urges Jacob to deceive his father and to disguise himself as Esav in front of his blind father. The point here is that Rivkah is not first informing Jacob “that” he must obtain the birthright, but rather, “how” he can accomplish this. Thus, we find proof that Jacob already knew he was to obtain the birthright blessings. This is why he purchased them from Esav at the outset, for Rivkah must have instructed him to do so. Otherwise, without a proper purchase, what right would he have to take them later? Without Rivkah informing Jacob that he should have the blessings, why would Jacob even think to purchase them? It must be as we suggest, that Rivkah learned through prophecy that Jacob – the younger – must obtain the blessings. Therefore, Jacob was prepared at all times for the right moment to purchase them. Then he must act to obtain them even through deceit. For a lie is not absolutely prohibited by God. As we see God told Samuel (*Sam. I, 16:2*) to make believe he was offering a sacrifice, although he was really en route to anoint David in Saul’s place. Samuel feared that Saul would learn of this and would kill Samuel for attempting to replace him with a new king. Thus, God instructed Samuel in a deception. Jacob too did not argue with Rivkah about the deceit here. He was only concerned that his father should not curse him, but he had no concern about the deceit itself as a sin to God. Jacob knew a lie was necessary at this time. And Rivkah as well as many others lied for just reasons. Ibn Ezra teaches there is no harm in lying if it is for a proper motive. (*Gen. 27:13*)

In summary, Rivkah required Divine instruction due to the imbalance between Esav and Jacob, and between her and Isaac. She would have to act with cunning and deceit to bring about the nation of Israel. God orchestrated her abnormal pregnancy precisely to educate her: the issu-

ing nations of Jacob and Esav and how they must be guided through her. Compelled to inquire from a Prophet, Rivkah became equipped with the Divine knowledge, vital to ensure that the blessings are bestowed upon the proper recipient.

There was a need for Rivkah to learn of the different natures of her two sons. She learned through prophecy that Jacob would be the superior. But she also learned through seeing his hand clutching Esav's heel, one more essential lesson. Through this act, Rivkah learned that Jacob possessed the natural tendency to usurp Esav. It was only through this knowledge gained by seeing his hand grabbing his brother's heel that Rivkah thereby learned that she must harness his nature to ensure that the prophecy comes to be. Had she merely received knowledge that Jacob was to be superior, this knowledge alone would not compel her to act through Jacob. Rather, she witnessed Jacob grabbing his brother's heel. She understood she saw this for a reason: their competitive display was a necessary indication to her that her two sons each have different natures by divine intent. Rivkah understood both she, and her son's natures would play vital roles. Working with their natures, Rivkah must ensure Jacob overturns Esav in "status" at the right time.

Rivkah teaches the young Jacob this prophecy so he is ever-prepared from that point to purchase the birthright when the moment presents itself. Rivkah and Jacob strategize a plan that succeeds, but again, only through God's Providence. For we see that "*no sooner that Jacob left, did Esav return.*" This is to teach that God controlled the timing to the second, ensuring Rivkah and Jacob's success (*Gen. 27:30*). And finally, Isaac too attests to Jacob's rightful receipt of the blessings, as he tells Esav, "*and he is surely blessed (ibid 27:33).*" For Isaac realized that since he was able to utter the blessings, it must have been God's will that Jacob receive them.

Isaac's sudden shock (*ibid 27:33*) also explains why Rivkah did not inquire from her husband about her abnormal pregnancy, but only from Abraham or Shem. For she understood that Isaac would reject the idea of Esav's unfit character. That is why Jacob too could not openly ask for the blessings, even though he rightfully purchased them. Until Isaac successfully uttered the blessings, he would not accept Esav as unfit. Rivkah therefore avoided approaching Isaac with her concerns regarding her pregnancy, and when securing the blessings for Jacob. Isaac again confirms to Esav that Jacob was correct in taking the blessings, as Isaac says to Esav, "*your brother came with wisdom and took your blessings.*" Why does Isaac say "with wisdom?" Perhaps to teach Esav that Jacob was correct. The obvious questions and clues to their answers are the true "codes of the Torah." This is God's method of directing us to unlock the Torah's

mysteries, imbuing us with an ever-growing appreciation for His wisdom; thus, developing our minds and souls by understanding the perfection of our Matriarchs and Patriarchs.

Could it be that God prepared Rivkah to be Lavan's sister, so she might learn of his cunning, as a preparation of this necessary deceit of Isaac? And could it be that Rivkah's training of Jacob to use deceit helped to prepare Jacob to deal with Lavan for those 20 years when Lavan tried again and again to deceive Jacob? If so, it ends up that Lavan's cunning came back to haunt him. For he displayed to Rivkah in their childhood home a deceitful nature. Thereby, Rivkah learned to be cunning herself and achieved a good outcome regarding the blessings. Through Rivkah's deceit, Jacob learned how to deal with Lavan. Lavan's cunning came full circle and ended up ruining him.

Part II

Having shared these ideas with a friend, he asked a fine question:

I understand that 'after' Rivkah witnessed Isaac favoring Esau, Rivkah had grounds to omit Isaac from her prophecy and her plans. But before she even had the prophecy, prior to giving birth... she avoided asking Isaac for an explanation of her abnormal pregnancy! She asked either Shem or Abraham. How can you explain this avoidance of Isaac 'before' Isaac ever expressed any favoritism towards Esau?

I recognized the problem and immediately went back to the verses. Reading from the very beginning of the Parasha, I was bothered by the first two verses:

And these are the generations of Isaac son of Abraham; Abraham bore Isaac. And it was when Isaac was forty that he took Rivkah the daughter of Betuel the Arami from Padan Aram, the sister of Lavan the Arami, for a wife.

Think about this: the first verse already says "Isaac son of Abraham." Why then does it repeat "Abraham bore Isaac?" And in verse 2, if we are already told that Betuel – Lavan's father – was an "Arami," why are we told again that Lavan was also an "Arami?" If Lavan's father was an Arami, then we know Lavan his son is also an Arami!

There are no redundancies in God's Torah. I thought about the first question. I realized "Abraham bore Isaac" must indicate something new.

The word “bore” is also a difficulty, since men cannot “bear” children, implying pregnancy. This must mean something akin to “bearing.”

Abraham sought a wife for Isaac. We thereby learn that Isaac was incapable of selecting one for himself. We may suggest, “Abraham bore Isaac” means that Abraham “raised” Isaac. In other words, Isaac – more than any other, was in need of paternal dedication and guidance. He was not as others, who approached marriage independently. His self-sacrifice on the altar had a profound affect on his nature. He was not even allowed to leave the land, as God told him to remain in Gerar and not descend to Egypt. Therefore, this first verse emphasizes Isaac’s dependence upon Abraham.

The second verse contains a redundancy as well. We know Betuel is an Arami, so it is unnecessary to teach that his son Lavan was also an Arami...if that means a nationality. Or Hachaim teaches that Arami in fact is not indicating a nationality, but a character trait. Switching two letters (in Hebrew) “Arami” becomes “Ramai,” meaning a swindler; a liar. In this verse, we are being taught that Isaac married a woman whose father and brother were liars. So even though we are taught that Betuel is a liar (arami), we must also be taught that Lavan too chose this lifestyle, as it is not inherited, as seen from Rivkah’s upright stature. Now the questions.

Why must we learn of Isaac’s dependency on Abraham? Why must we learn that Rivkah’s father and brother were liars? I feel these two verses answer my friend’s question.

We are taught that Rivkah – one who observed the cunning personalities in her father and brother – was able to detect Isaac’s shortcomings in terms of interpersonal issues. This prompted Rivkah to avoid approaching her husband Isaac with matters of her strange pregnancy. The Torah cleverly hints the two reason why Rivkah avoided Isaac: he was not fit, and she was cunning enough to know this from experiencing shrewd human nature in her home. We now understand why she went to Abraham or Shem, not Isaac, when she needed to understand the nature of her pregnancy and how it could affect the establishment of B’nei Yisrael.

These two verses appear at the very start of our Parasha, as they explain the succeeding verses, and Rivkah’s actions. No question in Torah is without an answer. This time, we were fortunate enough to discover it. It is amazing how subtle redundancies can shed light. Again, one of the true codes of Torah.

God's Providence

Esav was born red and unnaturally covered with hair, conveying Divine intent. The only other mention of Esav's exterior is the means which Jacob used to deceive his father, thus tricking Isaac into believing he was Esav. This teaches that God's Providence was at play in the birth of these twins. God ensured that a means existed through which the blessings would be successfully transmitted to Jacob.

First, God provides the impetus (a troubling pregnancy) to direct the righteous towards obtaining greater knowledge. He gave Rivkah Prophetic insight into the future of the Jewish nation that would emanate from Jacob. It is clear from this example that God wishes men and women to engage their intellect. We are not to sit back while God runs the world. The opposite is true: God desires that the path and progress of mankind, be directed by mankind. We are to use all in our power to achieve the best outcome for ourselves and all others. God says this in Genesis 1:28, "*Fill the Earth and conquer it.*" But since man cannot know all variables or control even a few of them, God assists man when necessary. God therefore imparted to Rivkah His plan, and the necessary tools with which to attain success. These "tools" include Rivkah's own cunning personality adopted from her brother and father, Esav's hairy nature, Jacob's personality, which was capable of usurping Esav, and Rivkah's hearing both Isaac's wish to bless Esav, and Esav's wish to kill Jacob. Besides acting on God's clues, Rivkah devised her own methods, such as dressing Jacob in Esav's clothing in anticipation of Isaac smelling the fragrance of the field, and thereby assuming this was Esav before him.

Why were the blessings necessary at all? God can certainly achieve His plan without man! I believe Isaac's blessings were required as a means of silencing those descendants of Esav who would claim rights to his legacy, rejecting Jacob. Talmud Sanhedrin 91a teaches how Ben Pasisa responded to Alexander when the Ishmaelites sought claim of Abraham's legacy. Ben Pasisa responded, "*If a father sends away all his sons and gives them gifts while yet alive, do these sons have any future claim on the father's legacy?*" (*Referring to Abraham's casting of all sons except Isaac, Gen. 25*) This silenced the Ishmaelites. And I believe Isaac's words too were necessary – not as causative of blessings, but as his exclusive selection of Jacob. Future generations of Esav can no longer justly claim Abraham's legacy through Isaac, now that Isaac declared Jacob his sole inheritor through these blessings.

THE QUAIL

In Numbers, 11:4, we read that the mixed multitude that attached themselves to the Jewish Exodus, committed a sin when they lusted. They cried out, “*who will feed us meat?*” Even the Jews joined them. They cried, “*we remember the fish we ate in Egypt for free,*” and they recalled other delicacies. In passage 6 they state, “*And now our souls are dried, all we see is the manna.*” Interesting are the following, detailed, positive qualities of the manna. Rashi states this description are God’s words, contrasting the previous complaint of the people. The account continues with a description of Moses hearing the people “*crying by the household.*” Rashi states they were crying for the matters of “households,” referring to the newly received sexual prohibitions of family members. There are many facets to this story. I will focus on how God addresses their cry for meat.

In verse 11:13, Moses says:

Where shall I get meat to give to this entire people that cry upon me, saying, give us meat that we may eat?

God responds:

(18) Ready yourselves tomorrow, and you will eat meat, because you cry in the ears of God saying, ‘who will feed us meat, because it was better for us in Egypt’, God will give you meat and you will eat. (19) Not one day will you eat, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days. (20) Until thirty days, until it comes out of your noses, and it be a vile thing, on account that you despised God Who was in your midst and you cried before Him saying ‘why have we come out of Egypt.’ (21) Moses responds: ‘600,000 by foot that I am amidst, and You say ‘I will give meat to them and they will eat 30 days?’. (22) If the sheep and cattle be slaughtered, would there be found sufficient? If all the fish of the sea be gathered, would there be sufficient?

What an amazing response Moses uttered! God says, “God will give you meat and you will eat until thirty days,” and Moses questions this? Didn’t Moses see God’s miracles first hand? In light of God’s abilities displayed by the Ten Plagues, what can possibly be questionable to Moses regarding God’s promise to provide meat for thirty days? God’s response to Moses emphasizes this point, “Is God’s hand short? You will see if this occurs.” This rare type of response requires understanding. Let us list the questions:

- 1) What did the Jews mean by “Who” will feed us meat?
- 2) What was their complaint? Why mock the manna if it was good?

3) Why respond to their request and feed them quail, as they seem to be in the wrong?

4) What is meant that they ate fish “free?” Rashi says (11:5) “even straw was not given to them free, how then fish?”

5) What is the purpose of “Until the quail exits your noses?” Who is making it come out of their nostrils?

6) Rashi (11:10) on “crying by the household” states “they cried concerning the sexual prohibitions on family members.” How does this relate to our story?

7) On “K’misson’nim” Rashi (11:2) states “they were seeking a pretense to escape from following God.” The question is why did they need to escape, and why at this time?

8) What is Moses’ argument about the cattle and fish being insufficient?

9) What is God’s response to Moses, “Hayad Hashem tiksar,” “Is God’s hand short?”

As a first step in answering these questions, I will note that many times we remain ignorant of truth due to our own, incorrect assumptions. We must be sensitive, not to overlook, assume, or project. We must focus on the Torah’s words, which are an exact science. The Torah’s words lead us to the questions, and those very same words also answer those very issues. This idea is derived from these verses stated by King Solomon:

If you dig for it like silver, and search it out like a buried treasure, then you will understand the fear of God, and the knowledge of God will you find. Because God gives wisdom, from His mouth come knowledge and understanding. (Proverbs, 2:4-6).

What is meant by the two statements in this passage, “Because God gives wisdom, from His mouth come knowledge and understanding?” It teaches a fine point – two reasons Torah will yield great insights into truths:

1) “God gives wisdom” meaning, the Source of our studies is God – an infinitely wise Creator. This is one reason why we must dig for knowledge with such vigor. Our outlook must be, “there is tremendous knowledge to behold.” A sense of adventure must overcome us as we part from daily affairs and step into the endless sea of enlightening thought and ideas. This excitement must present itself each day we embark upon new studies.

2) The second idea: not only is the Source of wisdom remarkable, but the actual structure of each passage is a great study in itself. This is what is meant by “from His mouth...” meaning God’s articulated words and verses are of utmost precision. Only a refined sensitivity will drive a To-

rah student to examine the Torah with such exactitude, thereby uncovering deeper ideas. Let us return to the topic.

What did the Jews say? “Who” will feed us meat. Why was this joined together with the ridicule of the manna? The first idea we notice is the Jews’ degradation of God. They saw all the miracles and still said, “Who will give us meat?” A later verse alerts us that they addressed God with the statement of “Who.” 11:20 reads, “(God said) on account that you despised God Who was in your midst and you cried before Him saying ‘why have we come out of Egypt?’” Here, God identifies their crime as an act of degradation. But why were they despising Him now? They recalled the “free” fish eaten in Egypt, which Rashi denies was factual. Rashi is teaching us that they meant free in another sense, meaning free from mitzvos. A picture starts to emerge. We begin to witness not only an attack on God, but on the Torah system.

The core issue is the Jews’ aversion to the Torah. Now, a new, binding, and prohibitive demand on their formerly “free” lifestyle, albeit as slaves. They remembered (imagined) the fish they ate “free.” Yes, “free” of commandments. The Jews rebelled against the Giver of this Torah, but they could not do so directly, as they only said, “Who” would give us meat. Therefore, God clearly identifies for the Jews, that it was God who they despised.

Why did they attack the manna? The answer is “displacement.” When someone cannot vent his emotion towards the real object, he attacks an associated replacement. Such was the case of the ridiculing the manna. The Jews disliked the Torah system, but they witnessed Revelation at Sinai, and they could not deny reality: the Torah is true, God is real. Therefore, they selected that which represented God’s system, the manna, which He provided miraculously. They attacked manna, instead of the commands, as they could not deny the reality of Torah. They said, “we want meat,” meaning, we don’t want this manna. In truth, they had no problem with the manna. The verses teach us how great it was. (Perhaps this is why the Torah interrupts the story with verses 11:7-9 describing how good the manna really was.) What the Jews meant to say is “we don’t want the Torah.” This is what Rashi again alludes to when he explains, “crying by the household.” Rashi stated they were “crying about the matters of the household,” they wished to once again have relations with those now prohibited by Torah law. Rashi (11:2) states, “they were seeking a pretense to escape from following God.”

Let’s also be mindful of a strange statement. Moses said that if all the sheep, cattle, and fish were supplied to the Jews, it wouldn’t be sufficient.

This is impossible! There were only 2-3 million Jews, and the entire oceanic population most assuredly would feed them forever! How can Moses say this? Examine God's resolve: God says He will comply with the Jews' request, and provide quail for 30 days, until it exits their nostrils. Why comply? The Jews' were in error. God said so, "you despised God Who was in your midst." What reason can there be for compliance with an ill request? Imagine you are faced with such a scenario, would you comply with a poor or sinful request? What grounds would there be for compliance? (Keep in mind, compliance means you really prefer another recourse.)

What are the possibilities? Either there are, or there aren't alternatives. If there are none, one may comply because he has no other recourse, or cannot think of one right now. However, these explanations cannot apply to God. If there are alternatives, compliance is not needed. But there is one reason compliance may be engaged: not so much to give the person his request, but perhaps for an ulterior motive...

God in no way intended that the quail could satisfy the Jews' desire for meat. Moses also understood that the issue was not a problem with food. In his wisdom, Moses knew they were rebelling against God. This is what caused Moses to respond to God's promise of quail as he did. Moses did not doubt that God could provide any amount of food. What Moses meant was, "food is not the answer." Moses knew the seas contained enough, if food is the issue. But the waters cannot be sufficient if the problem is a rebellion against God. Moses asked of God, "food is not the issue, so why give them quail?"

What God was doing, was complying, but for an ulterior purpose. That is, that the Jews should see for themselves that their complaint for meat is a displaced attack on God. The only way for them to realize this is getting them past their lust for meat. Only after they realize their attachment to meat is an unnatural one, will they be able to stop, reflect, and recognize their problem is truly with God, and the Torah they wish to abandon. This is why God says the quail will exit their nostrils. Not that God is the cause of this, but that their own unnatural desire for meat would propel them into an eating frenzy, until they cause the food to exit their nostrils. As they ate their true underlying emotion would not be satisfied. The removal of their new, Torah obligations is what they really wanted. They would continue eating under the false pretense that meat is the issue. This was God's plan. To move them past their blinding emotion that meat is their real problem. Sferno actually says this: (11:23) "*Is God's hand incapable of*

finding a method for them to despise all foods? They will eat the meat with their own free will, even after the enjoyment is gone, until it exists their nostrils, and they will despise it without any control on their free will at all, and thereby they will repent with a repentance of love.” God saw that the only way to show the Jews their true mistake was to first show them that their assumed complaint was baseless.

Moses said to God, “*600,000 by foot that I am amidst, and You say ‘I will give meat to them and they will eat 30 days?’ If the sheep and cattle be slaughtered, would there be found sufficient? If all the fish of the sea be gathered, would there be sufficient?’*” God responds, “*Is the hand of God short?’*” What was Moses’ mistake, which demanded this response? It would seem that Moses was not of the opinion that the method of addressing the Jews’ error was to satisfy the displaced emotion. Moses felt that the method must be to address the true, underlying emotion – their wish to abandon the commandments. Why didn’t God choose this approach? We may suggest that an open attack on the true emotion would end in the Jews’ further denial.

What was Moses’ equation? Did he not see that there are times when a direct assault on an emotion will not prove fruitful? Did Moses think this case was different than others, that an open attack on the very emotion to abandon God would be fatal? This point requires further study.

FORTY YEARS AND THE MANNA

In order to understand God’s objective in creating and providing the manna, we must review the events immediately prior. The Jews traveled to Israel, as God promised its inheritance. No doubt was presented to them regarding their ability to conquer the land. While treading Israel’s borders, the people desired to send spies to evaluate the land. God and Moses did not command this. Moses consented to this, he desired that they see there is nothing to hide. Moses hoped the Jews would abandon their wish to spy out the land upon seeing Moses’ full compliance to all their requests (Rashi). However, the Jews insisted on spying out the land. After their return forty days later, ten of the twelve spies incited a riot. They terrified the people with a defeatist attitude; they felt the inhabitants were invincible, thereby denying God’s word. Along with their heretic opinions and projections, they decided not to take on the conquest.

Due to the Jew's own fears instigated by the spies, they rebelled against God. This rebellion clearly demonstrated their disbelief in God's age old promise to Abraham that they would receive the land. The Jews were then sentenced to roam the desert for forty years until the last of the rebellious people perished.

If the Jews simply did not deserve Israel, why didn't God allow them to reach another land until the sinners died out? What was the reason God desired that the Jews roam the desert for forty years?

I believe the answer is that the crime of the Jews was very base: they trusted their own abilities, and nothing else. Not even God. What is amazing is that after witnessing tremendous miracles in Egypt and at the Reed Sea, the Jews still harbored disbelief in God. They felt God wanted to "kill them in the desert." This confirms Maimonides' words that miracles leave doubt in one's heart. The Jews didn't believe Moses because of miracles. The reason being, miracles lose their significance with increased frequency. God desired to address the Jews' disbelief. The method God utilized shows the level of intricacy and depth in God's system of justice.

God forced the Jews into a situation (in the desert) where they were solely dependent upon Him for their very existence. He desired to train them in the ways of believing His word. God chose to raise the Jews above a simplistic existence. He wished to address their problem by raising them from a reality of self sufficiency (where God plays little or no role) to the true reality where God's existence is primary in all equations – a reality where God's word is 'more real' than the physical reality the Jews currently trusted in exclusively. God accomplished this in a number of ways.

God sustained the appearance of the miraculous manna

The aspect of a miraculous food removed 'understanding' from the Jews, regarding the manna's properties. Had God fed them vegetation or animal products there would be a feeling of familiarity and reliance on the natural procurement of these foods. This would afford security and detract from God's goal of forcing the nation to rely on Him alone. Therefore He created a "miracle food" which, by its very name "manna" (meaning "what is it") the Jews could not sense any security. It is also something with which "their fathers were unfamiliar." (Deut. 8:3) This alien feeling about the manna contributed to their own feelings of insecurity, a prerequisite for developing a security in God. We learn from the words in Deuteronomy that people are comfortable with that, which their forefathers spoke of. The manna did not provide this comfort.

God limited the manna's "shelf life" to one day

This was done to remove any security in the manna itself. Therefore, the essence of the manna must include a temporary shelf life. No emotional security could be attached to it. God decreed the manna would rot on the following day.

God caused it to melt each day as the sun warmed it

Seeing the manna lying on the ground all day would provide the feeling of security; "it is here all the time." This is another area in which the Jews would have sought security. Therefore, God caused it to vanish after its daily gathering. Security in the physical was their weakness, which until this point caused them to sin. Their need for physical security would have to be redirected to security in God alone.

God doubled the manna's volume once it was in their homes Friday evening

On Friday, the Jews were commanded to gather enough for that day. Although the manna did not fall on Shabbos, they would have sustenance through the Shabbos. When they did as they were commanded, gathering a days measure on Fridays, they found that the manna miraculously doubled in size, to sustain them on Shabbos in addition to Friday. (*Exod. 16:5 Rashi*) Their complete confidence would be in God's word. The manna fell each of the six weekdays with just enough for each day, as God promised. Left over manna would become wormy and rot, to combat self-sufficiency. Not so on Shabbos. Manna left over from Friday through Shabbos remained fresh. The purpose of this was to force the Jews to believe more in God's word than in physical reality and their own security. All the miracles of the manna described above were to engender faith in the word of God. This integral concept of faith in God's word applies today. We demonstrate this idea by our abstinence in all work on the Shabbos. By doing so, we demonstrate conviction that abstention from work on one day does not threaten our existence and livelihood. God will take care of us, however He does so, even though we may not understand how.

In Deuteronomy 8:3, we read:

He (God) afflicted you and hungered you and fed you the manna, which you didn't know and your fathers didn't know, to show you that not on bread alone does man live, but by all that comes from God's mouth does man live.

The word “alone” teaches us that man should live primarily in accordance with natural law. The purpose of the manna was to show that man’s reality – the way for “man to live” – is in the reality of God’s word, “but by all that comes from God’s mouth does man live.” It is clear from this verse that man’s existence in the wilderness for forty years was meant to direct his dependency on God alone. The Rashbam also states this when he says, “. . .you had no “bread in your basket” but your lives were dependent upon Heaven each day.”

We see that God’s multifaceted manna-plan was required to first strip the Jews of their securities placed in the physical and in their own might, and to primarily permeate the Jews with belief in God. The manna was used to address those areas where man seeks security. Living in the desert for forty years gave the Jews an opportunity to abandon their flawed emotion of self-trust. This was a great blessing. Their initial corrupt desire to follow only that which was intelligible was replaced with trust in God: His word, and His system of Divine Providence.

THE PLAGUE OF HAIL

In Parashas Vaeyra, at the end of the ninth chapter, we find Moses not only responding to Pharaoh’s plea to halt the plague of hail, but also giving Pharaoh rebuke: Exod. 9:30, “*And you and your servants, I know that you have yet to fear God.*” Why during the plague of hail, unlike other plagues does Moses suddenly rebuke Pharaoh? Is there something we may derive from this story that may explain Moses’ behavior? It doesn’t appear that God instructed Moses to rebuke Pharaoh, so Moses’ words recorded here could be his own. What did Moses see in this plague, and what was his purpose in this dialogue?

We must understand that each plague was not randomly selected, but God carefully designed them all. Each one contained some unique idea. Moses understood better than any man, the depth that can be discovered by studying God’s creations, including these plagues. I am certain Moses pondered each plague, and saw something unique in hail demanding his rebuke accompany the plague.

After Moses says “And you and your servants, I know that you have yet to fear God,” these two verses follow:

The flax and the barley were struck, for the barley was ripe and the flax was in its stalk. And the wheat and the spelt were not struck for they ripen later.

There is a question as to who said these two verses. Ramban says Moses spoke these words. I agree, and offer an interpretation, based on Ramban. God intended to awaken the Egyptians and Pharaoh to His unique distinction as the Creator of heaven and Earth, Exod 9:16, (God instructing Moses what to tell Pharaoh) *“However because of this have I sustained you, on account that I shall show you My strength, and that you shall declare My name throughout the land.”*

God desired not only to show His might, but also to counter obstacles in this society’s corrupt nature so they may arrive at the truth. What obstacle did Pharaoh have? Moses said, “You and your servants have yet to fear God.” Pharaoh’s obstacle was obstinacy. Moses was first telling Pharaoh his exact flaw in recognizing God. Moses then viewed the hail, and pondered the different affects it had on various crops. Moses saw that stiff plants broke, while flexible ones survived. He then thought to himself why God created a plague with such a characteristic of affecting plants in two ways. Perhaps Moses gained insight into this specific plague and into God’s approach in reprimanding the Egyptians. God designed the specifics of each plague. But we may question whether these specific plagues were pre-designed from the outset, or did God design each plague depending on Pharaoh’s current response.

Pharaoh was now being obstinate, as Moses pointed out to him “you have yet to fear God.” Obstinacy had to be pointed out to Pharaoh if he was to understand Moses’ next statement, which was in direct response to his character. Stripping Pharaoh of his defenses would be the best method for him to finally recognize God. Perhaps God included other messages in the plagues for Moses to derive through his own keen analysis of their unique properties. Moses therefore intimated to Pharaoh his character flaw via a parallel: “The flax and the barley were struck, for the barley was ripe and the flax was in its stalk.” Meaning, “you Pharaoh are going to be broken” as you are stiff like the flax and barley. “And the wheat and the spelt were not struck for they ripen later.” Again a parallel, “you Pharaoh would be spared if you were flexible,” as are the wheat and spelt.

Moses attempted to teach Pharaoh this: “This current plague was designed as a parallel to you.” The goal being that Pharaoh repent and follow God, as God wishes this for all mankind, *“For I do not desire the death of the dead (the wicked) says God, but (in his) repentance and in his living.”* (Ezek. 18:32) Moses was teaching Pharaoh that there is in fact a God Who knows

all man's thoughts. Hopefully Pharaoh would be impressed and acknowledge the Creator.

This taught Pharaoh an essential lesson about God: He not only recognizes man's thoughts and actions, but He "interacts" with man. How else could God design a plague to address a single man's (Pharaoh) specific nature? This is a great lesson.

The proof that this was a central theme in God's plagues is Moses' and Aaron's initial address to Pharaoh. In Exodus 5:1-3, Moses and Aaron approach Pharaoh for the first time:

1) So says God, the God of Israel, send My people that they may celebrate Me in the desert. 2) And Pharaoh said, 'Who is God that I should listen to His voice, to send Israel, I do not know God, and Israel I will not send.' 3) And they (Moses and Aaron) said, 'The God of the Hebrews called unto us, let us go a journey of three days in the desert and we will sacrifice to God our God, lest we be afflicted with plague or the sword.'

Pharaoh responds in verse 2, and then in verse 3, Moses and Aaron attempt to clarify something to Pharaoh. What point is repeated in verse 3? They now state "The God of the Hebrews called unto us..." This reiterates their initial address of "So says God, the God of Israel." Moses and Aaron wished to communicate a new idea to Pharaoh: the Jewish God "calls" to man. He is unique, and far above the lifeless Egyptian gods. However, Moses and Aaron saw that their initial attempt to deliver this novel concept to Pharaoh was ignored. They repeated their words, but now with more clarity, "God called to us." This time, in verse 3, they did not use the passive "God said" as in verse 1, but the active "(God) called to us." The God of Israel actually communicates with man. Moses and Aaron wished to impress upon the leader of a culture, whose idols were stone and metal. A "knowing" and "powerful" God was Moses and Aaron's message. Thus, if they disobeyed, this "powerful" God would bring plague or death (sword). Moses and Aaron wished to teach Pharaoh the two most primary concepts that distinguish God from all other deities: He is omniscient and omnipotent, all-knowing and all-powerful. God's system of reward and punishment is also based on this idea, and Pharaoh was taught reward and punishment through God's distinction between the Jewish and Egyptian livestock. The latter were plagued and we see a theme permeating the plagues.

Returning to the metaphor used by Moses about the stiff and soft crops, why did Moses tell Pharaoh this through metaphor, and not directly?

When someone is faced with a self-realization that conflicts with his ego, he will not be able to tolerate such a stark reality, and he will deny it in defense. To allow Pharaoh a path to accept this idea, Moses used a method, which does not evoke a strong defensive response, but one where the listener may ponder. Moses used a metaphor which can, after some time, appeal to the person more casually, thereby avoiding a direct attack on the person's self image. A direct approach would only result in Pharaoh's reluctance to hear God's message, and the loss of any good outcome for Pharaoh.

We see a clear proof that self-righteous Jews falsely assume they have more purpose than Gentiles. If this were so, God would not be so concerned with Pharaoh and the Egyptians, that they obtain knowledge of God. God warned Moses at the outset that Pharaoh would not hearken to him. Yet, God instructs Moses to bring on the plagues, "on account that I shall show you My strength, and that you shall declare My name throughout the land." God's concern is that all nations recognize the truth of His existence.

PASSOVER: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BREAD

When studying Passover in (*Exod. 11*) we note its distinction from the other holidays. Passover was celebrated in Egypt – there were "commands" prior to the giving of the Torah. Today, we reenact those commands in the form of the shank bone, the matzah, the bitter herbs, and other laws. Succos and Shavuot are commemorations of God's kindness to us. Passover is as well, but it differs from the other holidays with our pre-Torah, Passover observance in Egypt. Additionally, our adherence to God's commands in Egypt contributed to the festival's structure. There is only one Succos holiday and one Shavuot. But there are two Passovers; the Passover of Egypt, and all subsequent Passovers. What can we learn from its distinction of the other two holidays? What differences exist between these the Passover of Egypt, and our Passover?

Reading the Haggadah, we note a conflict in the identity of the matzah. The Haggadah commences by describing the matzah as "lachma anya," poor man's bread. The Jews were fed this during their Egyptian bondage. However, later on the Haggadah quotes the Talmud (*Pesachim 116b*) and says that matzah is commanded in memory of the dough which did not rise due to the Egyptians swift, panic-stricken oust of the Jews. We

are obligated by Torah law to recall God's swift salvation by eating the matzah. The Jews were ousted from the Egyptian city of Raamses, and arrived at Succot. When the Jews arrived, they were only able to bake the dough into matzah, not bread. The matzah serves as a barometer, the speed by which God freed the Jews. Was this matzah part of God's orchestrated events?

We should note at this point that the Jews in Egypt observed only one day of Passover, according to Rabbi Yossi HaGalili (*Jerusalem Talmud 14a*). The Torah laws describing those Jews' obligation, appear to exclude any restriction of eating leaven. Certainly on the morrow of the Paschal Lamb slaughter, the Jews were permitted the leaven. Rabbeinu Nissim comments that it was only due to the rush of the Egyptians that their loaves were retarded in the leavening process. Had the Egyptians not rushed them, the Jews would have created bread. There was no law not to have bread at that point.

For which reason are we "commanded" in matzah? The Haggadah text clearly states it is based on the dough, which did not rise during the Exodus. This matzah demonstrates salvation; the focus of the Passover holiday. This poses a serious problem: not only do later generations have the command of eating matzah, but the Jews in Egypt were also commanded in eating the Lamb with matzah (and maror). While still in Egypt, when there was no 'swift salvation', why were those Jews commanded in this matzah? How can Jews in Egypt, not yet redeemed, "commemorate" a Redemption, which had not happened? (It is true; the Jews ate matzah while slaves. However, the Haggadah says the "command" of eating matzah was only due to speedy salvation. This implies the Jews in Egypt who had the command of matzah, were obligated for the same reason, which is incomprehensible.)

Lastly, Rashi praises the Jews for not taking any provisions when they left: (*Exod., 12:39*)

And they baked the loaf they took out of Egypt into cakes of matzah, because it did not leaven, because they were driven from Egypt, and they could not tarry, and also provisions they did not make for themselves.

Rashi says the fact they did not take provisions demonstrated their trust that God would provide. If so, why does the very same verse indicate the Jews did bake the dough? This implies the exact opposite of Rashi's intent, that the Jews did in fact distrust God! It is startling that a contra-

diction to Rashi is derived from the every same verse. A Rabbi suggested that the Jews correctly did not rely on miracles, so they took the dough as food. Their act of following Moses into the desert also displayed their trust in God, but this trust does not mean they should not take what they can for now. In a different manner, I wish to answer why the Jews took this dough.

In order to answer these questions, some background information is necessary. The Egyptians originated bread. Certainly, as they tortured the Jews, the Egyptian taskmasters ate their bread, as their Jewish slaves gaped with open mouths, breaking their teeth on dry matzah, or “poor man’s bread.” The title of “poor man’s bread” is a relative term – “poor” is always in comparison to something richer. “Poor man’s bread” teaches that there was a “richer bread” in Egypt, i.e. soft bread. The Egyptians enjoyed soft bread, while they fed their Jewish slaves matzah.

Let us now understand Rashi’s comment. He said the Jews were praiseworthy, as they did not take food with them upon the Exodus, thereby displaying a trust in God’s ability to provide. We noted that in the very same verse, Rashi derives praise for the Jews. Rashi says they took no food, yet, it clearly states they in fact took the loaves! Rashi’s source seems contradictory.

I suggest that a new attitude prevailed among the Jews. I do not think the Jews took that loaf from Egypt for the purpose of consumption (or consumption alone). This is Rashi’s point. The Jews took the loaf because of what it represented: ‘freedom.’ They were fed matzah for the duration of their bondage. They were now free. They cherished this freedom and longed to express it. Making bread, instead of dry, poor man’s matzah, was their expression of freedom. They now wished to be like their previous taskmasters: ‘bread eaters,’ free people. Baking and eating bread was the very distinction between slave and master in Egypt. The Jews wished to shed their identity as slaves and don an image of a free people. Baking and eating bread would actualize this. The Jews valued such an identification with the free Egyptians, and Rashi comments that when the Jews despoiled the Egyptians of their silver, gold and clothing as Moses commanded, they valued the Egyptian clothing more than the silver and gold (*Exod. 12:35*).

However, the Jews had the wrong idea. Their new found freedom was not unrestricted. They were free, but for a new purpose: following God. Had they been allowed to indulge freedom unrestrained, expressed by eating leavened bread, this would distort God’s plan that they serve Him. Freedom, and servitude to God, are mutually exclusive. God therefore did not allow the dough to rise. They trusted God, they saw all the miracles.

They needed no food for their journey, as God would provide. But they took the dough in hopes of making that “free man’s food,” leavened bread. The cakes of dough were not taken for sustenance, but to symbolize their freedom. They hoped upon reaching their destination, to bake bread and express their own idea of freedom. However, the verse says the dough only became matzah, not fluffy bread. Matzah was a result of the hurried exodus. Matzah was so significant, that the Torah recorded the “event” of their failed bread making. They planned to bake bread, but it ended up as matzah. The Torah teaches that matzah was not the Jews’ plan. It points out through inference that they desired leavened bread. It also teaches that bread was not desired so much for subsistence, as the verse ends, (Exod. 12:39) “and provisions they made not for themselves.” They did not prepare food, they relied on God for that. This is Rashi’s point. The dough they took was not for provision alone; it was to express their desire for unrestricted freedom. This unrestricted freedom is a direct contradiction to God’s plan, that they serve Him.

The Jews were now excited at the prospect of complete freedom. God’s plan could not accommodate the Jews’ wish. God desired the Jews to go from Egyptian servitude, to another servitude: adherence to God. He did not wish the Jews to enjoy unrestricted freedom, as they wished. To demonstrate this, God prevented the dough from leavening. The matzah they baked at Succot was not an accident, but God’s purposeful plan that any expression of unrestricted freedom be thwarted.

Matzah not only recalls God’s swift salvation, but also represents Egyptian servitude. The exact activity the Jews wished to express was unrestricted freedom. By baking bread, God stepped in with one action serving two major objectives: 1) By causing a swift ousting of the Jews, God did not allow the dough to rise. God did not allow the Jews to enjoy leavened bread, which would embody unrestricted freedom. 2) Even more amazing is with one act of a speedy redemption, God not only restricted the dough’s process, but He also “saved” the Jews: God became “the Jews’ savior.” He replaced the Jews’ intended, unrestricted freedom with the correct purpose of their salvation; to be indebted to God. The one act – God’s swift Exodus – prevented the wrong idea of freedom from being realized, and also instilled in the Jews the right idea: they were now indebted to God, their Savior. They were not left to unrestricted freedom, but they were now bound to God by His new act of kindness. An astonishing point.

We return to the command to eat matzah in Egypt. This command could not be to commemorate an event, which did not yet happen. This doesn’t make sense. I think God commanded them to eat the matzah for

what it represents: servitude. While in Egypt, why did God wish them to be mindful of servitude? Here we arrive at another basic theme of the Passover holiday: the contrast of servitude and freedom. In Pesachim 116a, the Talmud records a Mishna, which states that our transmission of the Haggadah must commence with our degradation, and conclude with praise. We therefore discuss our servitude or our ancestor's idolatrous practices, and conclude with our salvation and praise for God. Such a contrast engenders our true appreciation for God's salvation. A central goal of Passover is the appreciation for God's kindness. A contrast between our Egyptian Passover and today's Passover will best engender such appreciation. It compares our previous 'bondage' to our current 'freedom.' Perhaps for this reason we are also commanded to view ourselves as if we left Egypt.

In Egypt, we ate matzah representing Egyptian servitude. Today we eat it to recall the swift salvation, which prevented the leavening process, resulting in matzah. The emergence of the Jewish people was on Passover. We have two Passovers; one of servitude and one of salvation. Together they convey a transition, a before and an after.

An interesting and subtle point is that God mimicked the matzah of servitude. He orchestrated salvation around matzah. Why? Perhaps, since matzah in its original form in Egypt represented servitude, God wished that servitude be the continued theme of Passover. He therefore made the Jews' loaves which became matzah a central event; thereby teaching that we are slaves to God. "You are my slaves, and not slaves to man," (*Baba Metzia 10a*) is God's sentiment addressing a Jewish slave who wishes to remain eternally subservient to his mortal master. The Torah clearly views man's relationship to God as a servant.

God's plan in creating man was to direct us to understand and delight in the truth of God, His role as the exclusive Creator, the One who manages man's affairs, and Who is omnipotent. (*Ramban, Exod. 13:16*) Our purpose in being created is not to be free and live as we wish. Our purpose is to engage the unique faculty granted to us – our intellect. The primary use of the intellect is forfeited when we do not recognize God. Therefore, God freed us that we may enter His new servitude. This service of God should not be viewed as negative, as in serving man. Serving God is achieved by studying His Torah and creation – a truly happy and beautiful life. We could equate the enjoyment and benefit of serving God, to serving a human master who gives us gold if we simply look for it. We need not "physically" dig for it, seeking the gold is rewarded by our master giving us abundant treasures; so too is the service of God. Just learning and seeking new ideas, He will open new doors of wisdom. I am always amazed at how fortunate we are.

Finally, what is the significance of chametz, leaven? Once leavened bread took on the role of freedom independent of God, its character opposed salvation, demonstrated by the matzah. This now explains that leaven was not mentioned in connection with the instructions pertaining to the original Paschal lamb. The Jews had not yet displayed any attachment to bread. Only subsequent to the first Passover celebration do we see the Jews' tie to leaven. Therefore only afterwards is bread prohibited.

THE SPLITTING OF THE REED SEA

Parashas Beshalach commences with the Jews' journey immediately following their Egyptian exodus, (*Exod. 13:17*) "*God did not guide them via the path of the land of the Philistines, as it was near, lest the people repent when they see war and return to Egypt.*" As Maimonides teaches in his great work (*The Guide for the Perplexed, Book III, Chap. XXXII*) God's initial plan was not to lead the Jews towards the Reed Sea, rather towards the Philistines. A separate consideration demanded that this route be avoided. We also wonder, why would the Jews return to the very place they were now fleeing? Nonetheless, we are taught to prevent the Jews' return to Egypt, God circumvented their route.

We then read that God clearly orchestrated events to make the Jews appear as easy prey for Pharaoh, enticing him to recapture his fleeing slaves. God told Moses to encamp by the sea. What was the purpose? (*Exod. 4:3*) "*And Pharaoh will say about the Children of Israel that they are confused in the land, the desert has closed around them.*" The purpose of not traveling by way of the Philistines, but towards the Reed Sea now appears to have a different objective; to lure Pharaoh and his army into the Reed Sea, ultimately to be drowned. It does not appear this was the original plan. Had it been, God would not have expressed His consideration regarding the Philistines, and that nation's war would not have entered into the equation.

The ultimate purpose in the death of Pharaoh and his army is stated in Exodus 14:4: "*And I will strengthen Pharaoh's heart, and he will chase after them, and I will gain honor through Pharaoh and his entire army, and Egypt will know that I am God...*" God sought to gain honor by leading the Jews to the Reed Sea, luring Pharaoh, and creating the miraculous partition of waters. We are confused: did God lead the Jews to the Reed Sea to circumvent the Philistines, or to lure Egypt to their death and gain honor? Furthermore, does God seek to "gain honor" for Himself?

Upon their arrival at the Reed Sea, the Jews soon see Pharaoh and his army in pursuit. Moses prays to God, and God responds, “*Why do you cry unto Me?*” This is a surprising response. A basic principle in Judaism is to beseech God’s help when in need, and the Jews most certainly were. So why does God seem to oppose such a principle at this specific juncture?

Another question apropos to this section is, what was the goal of the Ten Plagues. Is this in contrast to the parting of the Reed Sea? If the Reed Sea parting was merely to save the Jews and kill Pharaoh and his army, God could have easily spared this miracle and wiped out the Egyptians during one of the Ten Plagues. God prefers fewer miracles: this is why there are ‘natural’ laws. Our question suggests that the destruction of Pharaoh and his army had a different objective, other than mere destruction of the Egyptians. What was that objective?

There is also an interesting Rashi, which states a metaphor taken from Medrash Tanchumah. Rashi cites that when the Jews “*lifted their eyes and saw the Egyptian army traveling after them, they saw the ‘officer of Egypt’ traveling from heaven to strengthen Egypt.*” (*Exod. 14:10*) What is the meaning of this metaphor?

Looking deeper into the actual miracle of the Reed Sea splitting (*Exod. 14:28-29*) we read, “*And the waters returned and they covered the chariots and the horsemen and the entire army of Pharaoh coming after him in the sea, and there was not left of them even one. And the Children of Israel traveled on dry land in the midst of the sea and the water was to them walls on their right and on their left.*” Ibn Ezra states that Pharaoh and his army were being drowned simultaneously with the Jews’ crossing through on dry land. This is derived from the Torah first stating that Pharaoh was drowned, followed by the statement that the Jews traveled on dry land. Meaning, although one section of the sea turbulently tossed and submerged the Egyptian army, “...and God churned Egypt in the midst of the sea,” the adjoining section contained calm waters parted in two, with walls on both sides of the Jews, creating the dry seabed. Ibn Ezra calls this a “wonder inside a wonder.”

We must ask why God deemed it essential to combine salvation and destruction in one act. God could have allowed the Jews to exit completely, before allowing the Egyptians to enter into the sea. What is learned from God’s plan of Jewish salvation with Egyptian destruction occurring simultaneously?

Moses pondered an unavoidable question: Why were the Jews subjected to Egyptian bondage? To recap, Moses once saved the life of a Jew, beaten by an Egyptian. Moses carefully investigated the scene, he saw no one present, and killed the Egyptian taskmaster and buried him in the sand.

The next day, Moses sought to settle an argument between the infamous, rebellious duo, Dathan and Aviram. They responded to Moses, “*will you kill us as you killed the Egyptian?*” Moses feared that the matter was known. But how was this matter made public? The Torah described the scene just before Moses killed the taskmaster (*Exod. 2:12*), “*And he turned this way and that way, and there was no man (present)...*” So if there was clearly no one present, who exposed Moses? A wise Rabbi once taught there is only one possible answer: the Jew who Moses saved exposed Moses. We are astounded that one whose life was saved, would be the informer of his savior. What caused such unappreciative behavior? The Torah’s literal words describing Moses’ astonishment are “(Moses said) therefore the matter is known,” referring to the disclosure of Moses’ murder of the Egyptian. Rashi quotes a Medrash on the words “the matter was known,” paraphrasing Moses’ own thoughts, (Rashi on *Exod. 2:14*) “*The matter has been made known to me on which I used to ponder; ‘What is the sin of the Jews from all the seventy nations that they should be subjugated to back-breaking labor? But now I see they are fit for this.’*”

Moses now understood why the Jews were deserving of Egyptian bondage. This ungrateful Jew’s backstabbing answered Moses’ question. This ungrateful nature is not its own trait, but a result of another trait: the inability to question Egyptian authority. “Even if my Jewish brother saves me, Egypt is still the authority I must respect.” It wasn’t aggression against Moses, but an unconditional allegiance to Egypt. The Jews’ minds were emotionally crippled by their decades of servitude. The famous Patty Hearst case teaches us of the Stockholm Syndrome, where victims sympathize with their captors. Israel too sympathized with Egypt. Such identification would cause one to betray his own friend, even his own savior Moses. Moses witnessed this corrupt character trait firsthand and realized that Israel justly received the Egyptian bondage. But how does the punishment fit the crime? (You may think that this is reverse reasoning, their ungrateful nature came after bondage, not before. But I answer that Moses too knew this, yet Moses saw something in this ungrateful act which he knew predated Egyptian bondage, answering Moses’ question why Israel deserved this punishment.) So what was Moses’ understanding of the justice behind Israel’s bondage? Seeing that the Jew turned on him even after saving his life, Moses said, “the matter is known,” meaning, “I understand why the Jews deserve bondage.”

In approaching an answer, our very first question highlights the central issue: the cause for the splitting of the Reed Sea. The two reasons God redirected the Jews’ journey are not unrelated. The drowning of Pharaoh and God’s gaining honor was in fact a response to the former: the Jews’

security in Egypt fostered by their extended stay. I suggest that God wished to take the Jews directly to Sinai. This is His response to Moses' question of the merit of the Jews to be saved: "they are to serve Me on this mountain." Meaning, their merit deserving the Exodus is their future Torah acceptance at Sinai and their adherence. But due to a peripheral concern of the Philistines, a new route was required. Not just a ground route, but a route that also addressed their inclination to return to Egypt. God initially wanted only to bring Israel to Sinai, but now He sought to address the Jews' attachment to Egypt. God drowned Pharaoh and his army in response to the Jews' current mentality. The Jews preferred Egyptian bondage rather than going to war against the Philistines to maintain freedom. This was unacceptable to God. God enacted the miracle of the Splitting of the Reed Sea primarily to remove the security Egypt provided these former slaves. Destruction of the Egyptian empire was a necessary step in Israel's development.

This answers why God responded to Moses' prayer when the Egyptian army drew near, "*Why do you cry unto Me?*" In other words, God was telling Moses that prayer is inappropriate right now. The very act of traveling to the Reed Sea was in fact the solution to Moses' prayer; the destruction of Egypt. God was informing Moses that what you pray for is already in the works, and therefore your prayer is unnecessary.

Egypt's destruction was not an end in itself. It had a greater goal; to replace Egypt's authority with the True Authority: God. This dual 'motive' is displayed in the specific formulation of the Reed Sea miracle. Moses tells the Jews "as you see Egypt today, you will never again see them. God will war for you, and you will be silent." There are two ideas here. The first is the termination of the Egyptians. The Jews had to escape from the Egyptian 'crutch.' Seeing them dead on the seashore emancipated them psychologically: there were no more Egyptian taskmasters to direct their lives. The phenomena of a slave can be created by nature, or nurture. In Egypt, the Jews were nurtured into a slave mentality, with dependency on the dominating authority. This mind set actually affords some psychological comfort, despite the physical pain. When one prefers slavery, he prefers not to make decisions, and relies heavily on a leader. Perhaps for this reason, the very first laws given (in Parashas Mishpatim) address slavery. They outline this institution as a simple, monetary reality. One has no money, so he pays his debt via servitude. In no way is human respect compromised when he is a slave. The master must give his slave his only pillow and suffer a loss of comfort himself to accommodate another human. The slave remains equal to the master in all areas and deserves respect as any other man. Slavery is simply an institution under the heading of monetary laws. This taught the Jews that the slavery they experienced was not a way of life, but a tempo-

rary status. God does not prefer slavery for man and He states that “you are servants to Me and not to man.” The Torah law of boring a slave’s ear physically brands him of his corruption of not “listening” to God’s command at Sinai, “servants to Me are you, and not servants to servants (man) (*Rashi on Exod. 21:6*)”

The second idea derived from “God will war for you, and you will be silent,” is that God alone delivers salvation. Your “silence” means God alone will bring salvation. Another cause cannot share God’s role as the “Go’ale Yisrael” – the Redeemer of the Jews is God alone. Why is this necessary? This underlines the primary concept of the miracle of the sea. The goal was to instill in the Children of Israel an appreciation for God, and an acceptance of His authority. This authority would remain compromised, had Egypt survived. Respecting God’s exclusive authority is also a prerequisite for the Jews’ impending acceptance of the Torah at Sinai. For this reason, many of God’s commands are “remembrances of the Exodus” with the goal of engendering appreciation for the Creator’s kindness. When man’s relationship to God is based on appreciating Him – as guided by the commands – man is thereby reminded that God desires the good for him. As man acts to fulfill his Torah obligations, he will not view them as inexplicable burdens, he will seek to understand God’s intended perfection in each command. Man will then arrive at his true purpose, and find the most fulfillment in his life. Man will be guided in all areas by Divine, rational and pleasing laws which conform perfectly to man’s mind. All conflicts will be removed.

The males and females of the Children of Israel verbalized identical, Prophetic responses to God’s triumph, “*God is greatly exalted, the horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea.*” God’s objective of not only eliminating Egypt’s authority, but gaining honor for Himself was achieved. This identical song of praise (Az Yashir) of both the male and female Jews displayed the newly instilled appreciation for their victorious God. The destruction of the Egyptians and the acceptance of God were the two primary issues that were addressed successfully. This explains why the Jewish salvation and the Egyptian destruction happened simultaneously. They formed one goal. Had God desired simple destruction of the Egyptians as an end, He could have done so in Egypt. It was only in response to the Jew’s overestimation of Egypt, that God destroyed them in the Reed Sea, together with the Jewish salvation. The death of the Egyptians was a means for the acceptance of God, not obscured by any other master. Subsequent to the parting of the sea, the Jews in fact attested to God’s success in His plan, as it is said, “*and they believed in God and in Moses His servant.*”

Additionally, God's desire that the Jews glorify Him, is not "for" God. Nothing man can do may benefit God, nor does God share man's nature of "need," as in needing to gain honor for Himself. All that God does to man, benefits man. This is most clearly witnessed in the great holiday of Passover, where the Creator of the universe educates man (both Jew and Egyptian) with the hopes that they conform with reality, with monotheism. Only after the Egyptians disobeyed and ignored the fundamentals taught through the Ten Plagues, did God have no recourse but to destroy them. God then continued His acts of mercy towards man, and delivered the Jews to freedom so they could accept the Torah.

How do we explain the Medrash regarding the "officer of Egypt?" It now fits precisely with our theory: the Jews felt unconditionally bound to Egypt as inferiors. At the shores, they did not actually see any "officer of Egypt traveling from heaven." This metaphor means they viewed Egypt as "invincible," as if some heavenly force defended Egypt over which they could not prevail. This is the meaning of the Medrash. It is a metaphor for Israel's vanquished state of mind.

In summary, the plagues of Egypt served to spread God's name, "And you will speak of My name throughout the land." The splitting of the Reed Sea had a different purpose, "And I will gain honor through Pharaoh and his entire army." The honor God acquired is for the good of Israel, not just Egypt. The Jews will view God, as One who is incomparable, the true Creator, and the One who takes notice of man and manages his affairs. (*Ramban, Exod. 13:16*) The Reed Sea miracle was executed as a response to the crippled mentality of the Jews, as God stated, "*lest they repent when they see war and return to Egypt.*" The circumvention from Philistine to the Reed Sea was to avoid an inevitable return to Egypt, and to also correct that dependent mindset by the Jews witnessing God's triumph over Egypt, simultaneously instilling tremendous appreciation for God. In one act, the corruption of Israel's mentality was removed and a new faith in God was born, "*and they believed in God and in Moses His servant.*" This simultaneous termination of Egypt and salvation for themselves was reiterated twice in the Az Yashir song, "*God is greatly exalted, the horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea.*" This response displayed how effected the Jews were by God's miraculous wonders and His salvation.

In all honesty, the Jews do revert to "fond" recollections of Egypt not too long after these events, and in the Book of Numbers. However, we cannot judge any acts of God as failures, even if His subjects err later by their free choice. God's method and perfection offers man the best solution at a given time. This is a tremendous kindness. Man has free will and can revert back to his primitive state even after God steps in to assist him. This human re-

version in no way diminishes God's perfect actions. Our appreciation of His Divine wisdom and His precise actions remains firm. All of God's actions display His perfection and honor are not for Him. He does not need mortal praise. He does it for us, so we may learn new truths and perfect ourselves in our one chance on Earth.

IS GOD RUNNING MY LIFE, OR AM I?

Some people suggest that literally all we experience our entire lives is by Divine design. God makes everything happen every moment. This theory claims for example that if John verbally abuses Abe, it was necessary that Abe be abused at that moment. Perhaps it was not decreed that John cause the abuse (for this would oppose "free will") but for some perfection or "grand design," God deemed that Abe receive verbal abuse at that moment from someone.

Truth means "conformity with fact or reality." Truth equates to what is real. The world is real, so we say "It is true that the world exists." Objects are real, as are laws that govern all objects. These are truths too. Therefore, anything other than what we perceive, cannot be called "true." Rather, things that we do not perceive are called "imagination." Imagination is the corrupt method of idolatry. For although idolaters never witness "powers" of stone gods, they accept what their culture teaches, that stone gods are powerful.

If the reality of the physical universe does not conform to the beliefs of idolaters, why do they hold on to their false views? There is only one other area from which this view might originate: imagination. And what fuels our imagination is our desires.

We notice that the views of idolaters and anyone for that matter, not supported by fact, share a certain character. These baseless beliefs cater to some wish. Primarily, man seeks security regarding his future and happiness. Man desires wealth, shelter, food, love, fame, friends, approval, and longevity.

Idolaters tend to fear their unknown future more than others. This explains why many idolatrous practices promise a secure future, or set dates or prescribe odd actions that ensure one's security. In the long range, they fear the afterlife, so they consult the dead. Short range, they fear failure at business and relationships, so they read horoscopes and hire palm readers. In all cases, their fear allows them to blindly accept baseless lies regarding

their future. Their emotional need overpowers their understanding of reality.

However, in the present, we find the popular notion we originally cited: all our experiences are not accidental, but occur based on God's grand plan. However, we have no corroboration in reality that this is so.

There is but one source that teaches absolute truth: God's Torah. God warns us not to verbally abuse others (*Lev. 25:17*). Now, had John not abused Abe, John would be following God's real wish. That is, God wishes we follow His commands; He commanded us not to verbally abuse others. Thus, when John does not abuse Abe, only then is God's will being carrying out.

Thereby, we refute the original theory: Abe's receipt of verbal abuse is not God's will. It actually opposes God's will. We conclude that since God desires John not to abuse Abe, it is not true that Abe must experience that abuse as God's grand plan. So if reality does not support the original theory of a "grand plan" that Abe be abused, and furthermore, the Torah rejects it, how did such a theory come to be? We already answered this regarding idolaters. Man projects his wishes onto reality, regardless of any corroboration. Man desires security in the present, so he feels good when believing (without proof) that all he experiences is for "some reason"...it had to happen. Emotionally he feels guided, and not left steering his life alone. This theory also caters to a powerful sense of ego, since he is so important that God must interact at each moment of his life. The primary motivation used to accept this theory is as we said: man follows his own wishes more than external reality, like idolaters. One must be careful not to mimic any idolatrous emotions.

Another problem with this false theory is regarding Reward and Punishment, which is undoubtedly God's system. If all events must take place, it follows that my actions are not truly my doings. I must then be exempt from punishment and reward. But this violates Torah fundamentals. Furthermore, I have no need to repent for my sins, since all is God's doing.

Additionally, Parasha Kitzetze warns against crossbreeding, "perhaps" the different species will mix (*Deut. 22:9*). Think about this: How can one suggest that all events "must" occur, while God says some events "might" occur? Clearly, nature operates, there are chance events, and all we experience is not predetermined. We might cause crossbreeding, and then again, we might not. It all depends if the two plants take to each other. Its is even due to the "possibility" of crossbreeding, that we must not plant different seeds too close. It need not be a definite result.

Natural law exists. Nature also causes human feelings to operate a certain way, and we can hurt others with our speech. We are therefore warned against doing so. We must comply with human "nature." The point is that

all is not decreed by God. Nature is a system. It is this very independent function and design of the universe that impresses us. However, if we say God wills that every leaf fall from every tree and every drop of rain to fall a certain distance, etc... then there is no design, it is God, and not nature. We discredit God as having the ability to create this amazing natural system.

Of course, we fully accept God's ability to intervene with man. But when and where He does is a tremendous science. One cannot simply talk about God and how He acts, without years of study. Similarly, we cannot talk about any science without years of study.

If we find ourselves agreeing with what a Rabbi or scientist said, having not studied what they have, it is foolish to say "I agree with his position." Furthermore, it is wrong to agree with anything, when reason and reality indicate otherwise.

THE AGE OF THE UNIVERSE

After quoting a Rabbi who taught through scientific proof that the universe must truly be billions of years old, I received the following letter:

While I do not necessarily disagree with your hypothesis on the age of the universe, I do not believe the proof you attributed to the other Rabbi to be bullet proof. You said, "For light to reach Earth from a star 10,000,000 light years away, the universe must have existed that long, in order that the light traveled this distance." Who said the light in fact traveled that distance? Perhaps God created the star together with a "10,000,000 light year long light stream" thereby allowing it to be immediately visible; despite the fact that nowhere nearly enough time had elapsed to allow the light to travel that distance on its own. I do not posit this as to what actually happened, only to suggest that this particular proof is not "irrefutable."

My response: You posit that God could have created the light stream "already in travel and reaching Earth." According to you, even the wisest of men like Einstein viewing this star's light and using reasoning will miscalculate its distance, and thus its age. God is really fooling us about the age of the universe, according to you. Your theory imputes a deception to God. That's problem number one. But as we know, fabrication is of human origin, and cannot be ascribed to a perfect Creator, whose Torah says "From

a falsehood, distance yourself?”

Furthermore, you contradict yourself. On the one hand, you accept that the star is in fact 10,000,000 miles away, since you say its beam reaches us only by way of God’s unnatural manipulation. Thus, you trust your senses regarding the star’s location, but not for its “age,” a calculation based on your accepted location would date it at 10,000,000 years old.

Following the verse that God despises fallacy, we accept that He is not fooling us: the stars we see prove that the universe is billions of years old. And this does not mean Adam didn’t live 5771 years ago. We mean to date the beginning of the universe, not Adam, thereby following the theory that the first 5.x “days” refer not to 24-hour periods, but an epoch of billions of years. However, once Adam was created on day 6, until today, we count 5771 years.

GOD ISN’T EVERYWHERE

Some believe God “fills” all of creation, that He is literally “everywhere.” Worse, since He is not limited (they think) and permeates everything, He must be “inside sin” too. Some Chassidic sects use this thought to rationalize descending into sin (it’s not so bad, God is there) by a “Tzaddik,” only to “bounce” him back higher to greater heights of righteousness. An utter stupidity. In addition, it is heresy, pantheism and a denial of Torah principles.

However, the Rabbis have already addressed this: “*God is the makom (lit. “place”) of the universe, but the universe is not His place.*” This means that just as place or location is essential for anything to exist, the Rabbis described that God is essentiality for the existence of the universe. But He does not occupy space. An intelligent person will agree: as God created the physical universe, He is not part of it. . .He cannot be the Creator, and the created.

Part VI

MITZVAH & PERFECTION

Gods commands intend to grant man understanding of his human nature, truths, justice and of God's moral system. Grasping the underlying truth of each command is the goal of Mitzvah. However, theoretical acceptance is not the full human expression of what we value. Man must act in order to reflect his conviction. By fulfilling God's commands with understanding, man controls and tempers his emotional outlets properly, freeing his mind to pursue the highest occupation of Torah study and adherence.

FOLLOWING GOD PERFECTLY

When you come into the land which Hashem your God gives you, do not learn to do like the errors of those nations (Deut. 18:9).

The Torah lists many idolatrous prohibitions: setting signs or accepting omens (Nichush), passing children through fire (Molech), forecasting using objects (Kosame), fortune telling and horoscopes (Mi'onane), witchcraft (Kishuf), consulting the dead and others. These practices are not based on truth or knowledge and therefore they are false.

But this Torah section concludes with a statement not found at the end of other sections: "Perfect (tamim) shall you be with Hashem your God (ibid 18:13)." Why isn't this statement found at the conclusion of dietary laws, sexual prohibitions, or monetary laws? Why is the statement of "Perfect shall you be..." mentioned here alone? What does "perfect" mean?

We must say that only regarding idolatrous violations is one "imperfect" with Hashem. If one were to eat non kosher foods, he would not violate this command to be perfect. What specific value does "perfect" with God target?

Each of the aforementioned idolatrous practices is an attempt in some way to procure information or to secure oneself. A few examples will help to illustrate this point. Molech was a practice through which a parent would pass his child through two flames: not burning the infant, at least according to Maimonides. What was this objective? Let us consider. Fire is the one element which opposes all biological existence. In all elements an organism may survive, except in fire. Passing the child through fire unharmed, the father imagines that just as the child is shielded from flames, he will be shielded from all other mishaps during his life. It makes sense that the parent/child relationship forms the prohibition, as the parental instinct is strong for the survival of their children. However, this parent has a distorted notion that this action is fortuitous and actually protects his child.

Kosame and Nichush were two practices which "foretold" the future. So too was the practice of consulting the dead. The goal is to obtain knowledge.

What common thread runs through all these practices? The answer is "knowledge." In each of these violations the inquirer seeks security through some imagined source of knowledge, via a warlock, an enchant-er, or the dead. He assumes there is a source of knowledge out there, besides God. This is precisely where one removes his self from following God perfectly, or rather, "exclusively." To assume sources of knowledge

other than God, is to not follow God “perfectly.” It is a dilution of God’s unique and exclusive position. Therefore, the command to “be perfect with God” demands that we deny all imagined sources of knowledge or forces. Rashi explains this topic in this same manner: “Follow Him perfectly and look to Him, and do not chase after the future. Rather, all that comes upon you accept it wholly, and then you will be with God and in His portion (Deut. 18:13).”

The followers of these practices assume that besides God, there are other means through which the universe operates. They assume that outside of natural law, other powers exist. This is of course baseless. But their insecurities propel them to seek forecasts for their actions, so they need not think for themselves and they are no longer insecure about the future, which scares them. Relying on another person’s advice or assuming to know the future removes their need to make decisions and provides a false sense of safety. This is the opposite of God’s plan that man engage the gift of the intellect and approach each new day intelligently.

Similar to these idolatrous practitioners are present day Jews who check a Mezuzah when household members fall sick, or those who don red bendels to ward off evil, place keys in challas for luck, use prayer books as protection, and those who ascribe powers to Rebbes and Kabbalists. I recently heard of a Meir bal Hanase practice where individuals believe that by giving charity one can locate a lost object. How damaging are such notions. What is “created” cannot function outside of the “Creator’s” plan for that thing. It is clear. Just as God set boundaries for the sea, “*You set a boundary, they cannot overstep (Psalms 104:9)*” so too, all of creation follows the laws governing its matter and behavior. Man’s act of giving charity has no natural relationship to finding objects. Thus, Meir bal Hanase practices are ineffective. Just as a parchment and ink Mezuzah burns when ignited and cannot protect itself, it cannot protect man. And wearing red threads cannot withstand God’s punishments. This practice is a direct violation of God’s system of Reward and Punishment: sins yield punishment and creations are ineffective against God’s will. (Tosefta Sabbath chapter seven prohibits this act.)

All practices assuming forces aside from God are idolatrous. It makes no difference if we see “religious” Jews practicing such foolishness, if we read about them in a book, even if authored by a Rabbi. The truth is only that which we perceive, or that which we reason to be true, or what God wrote in His Torah. He created and controls the universe; therefore, He alone determines reality. Not people, and not objects. “Perfect shall you be with God” means we must not deviate from following God alone. God is the sole Cause of all that exists. This excludes anything else from af-

fecting reality outside its range of laws.

Having shown that the term “perfect” (*tamim*) refers to man’s requirement not to assume knowledge or powers outside of God, we have a question. In Genesis 17:1 regarding circumcision, God instructed Abraham to “Walk before Me and be perfect.” God again uses the term “perfect.” How does this fit in with our theory? Ibn Ezra says the following commentary on this command to Abraham to “be perfect”: “You should not ask why (to) perform circumcision (*ibid.*)”

On the surface, Ibn Ezra appears to defy all he stands for, i.e. a life of understanding. How can he make such a statement?

Ibn Ezra is not saying we should abandon our minds. Rather, he is teaching us that Abraham should not make his performance of Divine decrees depend on his own intelligence as a prerequisite for his fulfillment. Ibn Ezra teaches that man can fall prey to this erroneous notion: “Only when I understand the reasons will I perform Torah laws, but not before.” To this Ibn Ezra teaches, “Do not inquire why to perform circumcision” i.e., “Do not let your inquiry determine your acts.” Meaning, perform the commands despite your lack of comprehension. Of course, continue to strive for the reasons behind this and all commands.

This is Ibn Ezra’s teaching, and why the term “perfect” is also used here. In this case too, man can go so far as to think of himself as a source of knowledge outside of God, considering himself on the level to vie with God and His commands. God says to Abraham “be perfect” – follow Me even when your mind does not yet grasp with complete understanding.

Thus, man is not “perfect with God” in two ways: when he makes imaginary forces, or himself, vie with God.

We see Abraham does follow this concept, as he did not second-guess God when he was commanded to kill his son Isaac. A wise Rabbi once asked why Abraham inquired of God’s decision to destroy Sodom but not regarding Isaac’s slaughter. The Rabbi suggested that Abraham realized he could learn about God’s justice. But regarding perfection via commands, Abraham felt he could not necessarily understand how a command would perfect him, although it did. He therefore did not ask about the killing Isaac – a Divine command – but he did inquire about God’s justice for Sodom.

Finally, what about circumcision poses a greater problem than other commands? Perhaps, as God’s works must be perfect, asking man to surgically alter the body poses a question. No other command tampers with God’s design.

SHIMA AND ITS BLESSINGS

We are commanded to recite the Shima and its blessings twice daily. Thus, they must contain concepts indispensable to our daily thoughts, and our very existence.

Unfortunately, many commands, when repeatedly performed, carry the danger of becoming rote activities. This loss is compounded if we rush through our prayers, rendering them a burden. The Talmud teaches that this is not a sincere supplication to God. If we would stop for a moment and recognize the opportunity given by these prayers, we would take our time, and even look forward to their recital.

In general, we look to prayer as an opportunity to formulate our requests before God, with the true conviction that He responds. By thinking into our lives, we can construct a plan with the goal of our perfection as outlined in the Torah. We present this plan to God by our requests, even adding our own words. God can assist us when our plan follows Torah ideals, as witnessed in His Providence over the Patriarchs and Matriarchs.

Prayer offers man this great opportunity where the Creator of the universe responds to our needs. When God responds positively, we learn that our requests are in line with His Torah. And conversely, when our requests go unanswered, we learn that our requests do not form part of God's plan, or perhaps, not yet. We are thereby forced to reflect on our wants and needs (our values) studying them carefully, to detect our deviation from God. In this case, God's silence is a great blessing. For we learn through such silence that we are possibly incorrect in one area or more. We are then driven to realign ourselves with God's Torah system – which is for our ultimate good. The Hebrew word for prayer is “*Tefilah*,” which means to “judge,” as in judging our values. Thereby, prayer perfects our values.

From this opportunity, to request our needs and then judge our values according to the response, we are directed to the second and more primary focus of our daily blessings and prayers: God's knowledge.

Aside from moral and ethical perfection, man partakes of intelligence. Knowledge of God's truths is not only the driving force behind aforementioned perfection, but a world unto itself. Man's knowledge of good, and of truth, need not be put into action, for man to appreciate the Source of this knowledge. This in no way means that we are exempt from Torah obligations. Maimonides taught that the commands are meant to preoccupy ourselves when we are not engaged in the highest pursuit: Torah study.

The Shima and its blessings are not requests, they are a formulation of central Torah concepts. These very ideas teach us most important truths,

and guide us in both spheres: concepts and moral behavior. But as the Shema contains no requests, it acts to inculcate truths. It is these truths discussed in Talmud Brachos 11a–12b that I would like to highlight.

The Shema Yisrael

The Shema Yisrael must be recited twice daily, as it is written:

Listen Israel, God is our God, God is one. And you shall love your God, with all of your heart, with all of your soul, and with all of your possessions. And it will be that these words which I command you today shall be upon your hearts, and you shall teach them to your sons, and you shall speak them when you sit in your house, and when you go on your way, when you lie down and when you rise up. And you shall bind them as a sign on your arm, and they shall be Tefillin between your eyes. And you shall write them upon the door posts of your house and your gates. (Deut. 6:4-9)

We learn that the Shema is actually a reference to the entire corpus of Torah, as this command to recite “these words” refers to that which is “commanded.” If so, how does the imperative to recite “them” when we lie down and rise, refer to the Shema? The answer must be this: the Torah’s commands to recite “them,” means that the Shema fulfills the obligation to discuss the commands. We learn that the Shema contains central Torah themes.

The Talmud states that originally, the Ten Commandments formed part of the morning prayers. But according to Rashi, due to the slanderous idolatrous nations, who rumored that all that exists are the Ten Commandments, the Rabbis on at least four occasions denied many communities the right to include the Ten Commandments. They feared the Jews would fall prey to the distorted opinion of those nations, who claimed no more than the Ten Commandments were uttered by God.

Rabbi Simone and Rabbi Levi disputed the reason for reading the Shema. Is it recited because it contains the ideas of lying down and when you arise, or because it contains references to the Ten Commandments? What is their disagreement?

Internal vs. External Worlds

The Talmud teaches, one should relieve himself at night, as he does during the day. The book of Joshua also teaches, “*This book of the Torah shall not be removed from your mouth, and you shall engage it day and night, in order that you shall guard to do as all that is written in it, for then your way*

will be successful, and then will you understand.” (Joshua, 1:8) The Shima as well says we must recite it when lying down and rising. What concept do all of these cases point to?

Regarding man relieving himself, we learn that man has an inclination to be less modest at night, thus, relieving himself in a less modest fashion. Joshua’s command also addresses the night, as does the Shima. In all of these cases, we learn that man tends to act at nighttime, in a different manner than he does during the day. Nighttime is dark; something which affects man’s mood. He feels less stress as the workday is over – it’s relaxation time. He also feels more isolated, not in a negative sense, but of being “alone.” Thus, we are warned by the Talmud that modesty has nothing to do with who is watching, but with one’s perfection. One must not be less modest at night, for this means his modesty is not true modesty – he is in fact only fearful of onlookers – not of adhering to Torah modesty. One who is truly modest is this way at all times, as it is an expression of his inner values. As far as relaxing goes, Joshua teaches that one should not satisfy the desire to remove himself from his Torah obligations at night, due to an emotion of relaxation. This does not mean man should not relax, but that night should not be man’s excuse to abandon study. In fact, Maimonides teaches that one who wishes to earn the “Crown of Torah” (become truly wise) will not forfeit any of his evenings in sleep. The Talmud also teaches that any house in which the sound of Torah is not heard at night, will be destroyed. Joshua said, “*for then your way will be successful, and then will you understand.*” This means that if someone looks to a certain time frame as “recreation time,” it reflects his true value not to engage in Torah study. If one earnestly toils in his study, he will find it quite enjoyable. He will not look to escape. His free time will be spent in study and then will he become wise because all of his energies will be absorbed by study. One can truly come to a stage where he anticipates learning as an adventure: he excitedly awaits what new ideas he will discover today!

We can answer one side, that the Shima is recited “lying down and rising.” It reminds us of our much-needed perfection and align our emotions with the Torah prescription. Not to seek fantasy and pleasure, when those emotions are aroused in the evenings is perfection. Therefore, this side of the argument suggests that the Shima is recited for the purpose of strengthening man’s “internal world.” We recite it equally at night without exemption.

How do we explain the Rabbi who says that the Shima is recited because it refers to the Ten Commandments? I believe his view is that we must reiterate and be mindful of the Torah system – as a whole. According to Saadia Gaon, the Ten Commandments are the head categories for the

remaining 603 commands. As such, the Shema, which refers to the Ten, in fact, makes us mindful each day, of the entire body of Torah. This Rabbi understands the Shema as addressing man's need to be cognizant of the entire Torah system on a daily basis. Man must recognize the "external world" of wisdom. According to this Rabbi, the Shema is not so much to correct his emotional weaknesses and digressions, as it is to remind him of a complete Torah system. Accordingly, it is insufficient that man performs only those commands required each day, even if he learns all day, while not acknowledging the greater, complete Torah system. So the argument may be defined as whether Shema addresses our "internal world," perfecting our values, or the "external world" reminding us of a complete system of wisdom.

But I wonder, according to this latter view, why must we be so Torah-cognizant to such a degree? What do we lack by not recognizing the system of Torah as a whole, each day? It would appear that by viewing the daily commands isolated from the rest of the Torah, and certainly, by not acknowledging Judaism's tenets daily, such individual performances will be compromised. But in what manner?

Maimonides outlines certain fundamentals in his 13 Principles, which will perhaps shed some light on this question.

Principle VIII. That the Torah is from Heaven

And on this our sages of blessed memory said, "he who believes that the Torah is from heaven, except this verse, that God did not say it, but rather Moses himself did [he is a denier of all the Torah]."

Principle IX. The Completeness of the Torah

And this is that the Torah is from God and is not lacking. That to it you cannot add or take away from - not from the Written Torah or from the Oral Torah. As it says "Do not add to it and do not take away from it."

Perhaps we learn from here, that to obtain a true appreciation of each command, we must be cognizant of its place in the complete, Torah system. To deny any part of the Torah of its Divine origin, one denies the entire Torah. Precision is demanded in this area. Similarly, if one does not realize the individual laws are part of the greater whole, he also errs, although his error is nowhere as grave.

What is our loss when we do not realize that every law forms part of the whole? A popular corruption is the practice of those individuals, vigilant in a few commands, but forfeit the perfection that can only come through

fulfillment of the whole Torah system. These individuals assume a singular command is some kind of panacea – a command takes on a life of its own. An example would be Tehillim groups, who believe that by their recital, some good comes to others. The group recites Tehillim diligently, however, the Torah demands a different approach: those in need must reflect, repent, pray to God, and give charity. Isolating singular activities, and certainly new practices not commanded by the Torah, carries with it a danger. One forfeits the philosophy of Torah, only afforded by accepting and being mindful of all the commands, and only that which is commanded. And even if one were to perform something actually commanded, with the thought that it affords some good of its own, this in no way improves the situation. Commands are indispensable, but not an end unto themselves. The Torah prescription is to follow God, by not creating new activities, or favoring one command over any other, unless we are so instructed. For this reason, the Torah does not disclose a reward for the commands. We must be vigilant of each one, as this is the only way to follow God, and not our excited emotions.

This flaw is generated out of man's nature to attach himself to particulars, for this is how the emotions operate. We notice in general that people get excited about "specific things," like cars, homes, clothing, etc. Emotions latch onto individual objects. Surprisingly, this emotional flaw also extends to the commands, and must be corrected. The Talmud states that when a command comes to your hand, you may not pass it up, even for the sake of a greater command. There is one condition that would allow one to pass up a lesser command: when another person is available to perform the lesser command. In this case, one should fulfill the greater command. How do we reckon this with our view? The answer is that in the latter case, one does not discount the entire Torah system. He embraces all of the commands. However, when one dismisses other commands, he has erred.

This idea, that we must be mindful of the entire system of Torah, was the very concern expressed by the Rabbis who prohibited the Ten Commandments from being recited in the morning service. As we said earlier, the idolaters wished to impose their view that Torah is simply the Ten Commandments, and nothing more. Conversely, the Shima's recital counters this problem, by calling to mind the *entire* system of Torah. Perhaps for this very reason, we are informed of the idolater's slander in this same section of the Talmud that contributes to the primary focus of the Shima.

It is interesting that unlike the Shima, which is a Torah law, the blessings of the Shima are based on the words of King David, "*Seven by day I have praised You for Your righteous statutes (Psalms 119:164).*" The Talmud teaches that this

verse obligates us to recite the seven blessings over the Shema. King David teaches that it is insufficient to simply “respond,” and merely fulfill the commands. King David formulates an additional obligation to praise God for giving us the Torah’s statutes. Man must feel a great sense of appreciation for God, who bestowed upon us such kindness by designing and granting mankind a means for appreciating His existence. We may learn wonderful truths and follow His commands that perfect us. It is befitting that praising God for the system received by man, is based on a man’s (King David) appreciation. The very philosophy of this command is embodied in its source.

King David teaches that one fulfills “praising God for His righteous statutes” by reciting the Shema’s blessings. We learn thereby that the Shema satisfies the role of “His righteous statutes.” The Shema, then, is a concentrated formulation of the Torah’s primary statutes and philosophy.

In addition to commands, the Shema includes the fundamentals of God’s existence, His unity, the Exodus, and Reward and Punishment, seen in the promises of agricultural prosperity or drought, in response to our Torah adherence or idolatrous practices, respectively. So vital are these ideas, that we are commanded in the Shema to post its words as a sign on our door posts (as Mezuzahs), and to wear them as Tefillin. Tzitzis are also included as its own paragraph in the Shema, as it states therein, *“and you will see them (Tzitzis) and you shall remember all the commands of God, and you shall do them, and you shall not go astray after your hearts and after your eyes.”* Tzitzis too reference the entire body of Torah.

The Rabbis teach, he who wears Tzitzis, dons Tefillin and posts Mezuzahs, will not sin. Why is this? It is due to what these three items address: man’s securities. Tzitzis reminds one that his outer appearance cannot improve him, despite society’s glorified fashions. One’s body cannot shield from God’s punishments, as Tefillin remind him, as they are worn on the body. And Mezuzah places in check our greatest feeling of security: our home. In all three areas, body, clothing, and home, man is reminded not to project his feelings of security, but to be mindful of God’s ultimate security. This is stated in the Shema and contained in the Mezuzah and Tefillin.

But how do these items prevent sin? Sin is generated from the ego and from emotions. The person thinks he is far more correct than God’s commands, and therefore feels secure enough to violate them. What normalizes such a disease is man’s recognition of God’s security. Man is now faced with the realization that God ultimately is in charge of his fate. With this knowledge, man will not sin.

Tangentially, how can the form of Tzitzis – strings – be the appropriate method of “remembering?” Perhaps their movement when we walk, catches our attention. To alert us, it must be distinguished, and the Tzitzis’

motion is distinguished from our rigid body. A woman's hair is also the one feature that catches a man's eye due to its motion. Therefore, this is the precise feature that women are commanded to conceal, demonstrating that gaining attention from others after marriage is not appropriate, or modest behavior.

The Shima's Blessings

What exactly do we praise God for with these seven blessings? The first blessing praises God for His creation. We describe His constant guidance over the luminaries, and we describe the day and the night, in both our morning and evening Shima blessings. The Talmud states this is done so no one would erroneously assume that God controls only one half of the day. This was believed by idolatrous peoples who had both, sun and moon gods. Praising God in both parts of the day, for both aspects of the day, prevents this error. Also, in both evening and morning prayers, we refer to God as "King." This teaches us that even prior to man's creation, God's role is the One King. "King" is thereby defined as Creator, and this role is not dependent on man's proclamation of His greatness. Man's creation took place after the luminaries and stars. In our blessings of the luminaries we refer to God as King, teaching that God's Kingship is independent of mankind. Without man, God is still King. This makes sense, because a human king has conditional kingship; if his subjects abandon him, he loses his role. However, God's Kingship is unconditional, based on His role as Creator. Furthermore, He who grants man's very existence is the ultimate King. But he whose kingship is limited to ruling others, and did not create his subjects, is a far lesser king by comparison. "Creator" is the most defining role of God. It is for this reason that we commence with this praise.

But God did not only create the physical world, He also created that which is not physical, which includes angels. These angels are intelligent beings that praise God, as stated in our blessings. To omit part of God's creation in our praises would be an error. When praising God, the praise must be as complete as humanly possible. Now if this was so, why don't we simply refer to angels, and nothing more? We do find much more discussed, such as the angels' praising God. How do we understand this? Why is this included? We may also ask why there is no reference to the angels in our evening blessings.

I would suggest that angels "praising" God teaches an important lesson: even the greatest of all creations, and those which partake of the greatest realization (intelligence) of God, are completely involved in one thing: realizing God's greatness, and praising Him. In contrast, we should

be humbled that if those greater intelligences recognize God, so should we.

An important feature of this first blessing is these angels are occupied with a specific praise that God is unknowable. The angels recite “*Holy, Holy, Holy, God of hosts, the entire universe is filled with His honor,*” and “*Blessed is God from His place.*” “Holy” is better translated as “distinct” as in “distinct from what the angels know.” In other words, the angels witness creation (“the entire universe is filled with His honor”) and praise God, simultaneously stating that they are completely ignorant of what God is. Other angels then say, “*Blessed is God from His place,*” declaring His unknowable nature.

Also stated in this praise is, “they all accept the yoke of Heaven (God’s greatness) from each other.” What does this mean? I believe it teaches that although not commanded in Torah, of their own accord, the angels are completely immersed in praising God. This embellishes the concept we stated that the greatest created intelligences relate to God as their only focus. Recognizing and praising God is the ultimate purpose of all creation. Perhaps, the fact that our blessing states that the angels bless God on two occasions teaches that this is not a one-time activity. The angels are all-consumed in praising God’s creation.

How do we answer our last question? Why is there no reference to the angels in our evening blessings? If we carefully analyze, we will find the answer. What is the distinction between creation, stated in the morning and evening Shema blessings? The morning blessing refers to creation, that which God “made” or “formed.” In contrast, the evening blessing does not mention these words. Instead, it describes God as “changing” the times (of day), “arranging” the stars and that He “brings” day and night. The distinction is clear: the morning blessing discusses God’s creation of “objects,” while the evening blessing describes the “laws” of creation. We thereby learn that God made two creations: 1) existences, and 2) properties. Therefore, when describing the existences, angels are included, as they form part of the creation. However, we know nothing of “how” angels exist or what they are. We cannot include them in the evening blessing, as this blessing describes what man knows about creations’ “behavior.” Compare Genesis chapter I to Genesis chapter II, and you will discover this very same distinction.

Love: God for Man / Man for God

The next blessing refers to man – another aspect of creation. In this blessing, we do not simply refer to man as creation, but to his purpose: Torah study and love of God. God provided what is good through His love of the Patriarchs, and His gift of the Torah system to His nation Israel. We ask God to teach us and imbue us with a love of Torah. And in the evening

again we make mention of our previously stated idea that Torah study must be embraced in all parts of the day: nighttime and daytime. This is properly mentioned in the nighttime blessing, for as we said, night carries the danger when man's emotions overcome him.

This blessing of God's love for us by His giving us the Torah, and our love for Him and Torah, immediately precedes the Shima's recital, as the Shima refers to the Torah's tenets making this blessing an introduction to Shima.

Redemption: Past Conviction & Future Trust

The next blessing comes after the Shima, and is referred to as "Geula," or redemption. We describe God's Exodus, the destruction of Egypt and all their firstborn, the parting of the Reed Sea, and the triumph at its shores. This is where the Jews unanimously proclaimed God's great, unmatched salvation. God is our One and only Savior. In the evening version, we add the request that he save us each day and in the future. We thereby demonstrate our conviction in God's having saved us, and trust in His future redemption. (*Rashi and Tosfos, Brachos 12a*) This is based on another verse, "*To speak of His kindness in the mornings, and His trust at night (Psalms 92:3).*" The Hashkivenu blessing continues this theme.

The Talmud states that anyone who does not mention these two versions of the Geula, does not fulfill his requirement of the Shima blessings. Why is this statement reserved for the Geula blessings alone? Perhaps, it is "conviction in God" that demonstrates man's perfection, where man lives in accord with Torah truths. This is the ultimate goal for mankind and without express conviction, man falls short of his perfection, and does not fulfill his Shima blessings.

Summary

We conclude, that these blessings were initially generated from King David's intense appreciation for the Torah, as is embodied in the Shima. This receipt of Torah and our appreciation requires our additional praises. God created man with the ability to obtain true knowledge through Torah, and this requires our praise. Creation is the ultimate expression of God's greatness, including luminaries, angels and mankind. We praise this great gift of Torah, God's love for us, and our love for God as our purpose. We then culminate by describing our praise of His salvation, and our complete trust in His continued Providence over Israel. It is only through Torah that we merit His salvation. Let it be soon, that the Torah will be recognized as the only true religion. It is a reasonable and beautiful system that all inhabitants on Earth can embrace with love.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Ibn Ezra explains our relationship to God is primarily based on our intellect and intent, than on our actions. Regarding man however, our relationship is primarily action, not so much what we think. It is for this reason that in the Ten Commandments, the first five commands which address man's relationship to God commence with thought, proceed to speech and end with action. It is the exact reverse with the second set. The second set of five commands – laws between man – commence with action, then progress to speech, and finalize with thought.

Each set commences with what is most crucial in that relationship. In relationship to God, our first command is intellectual recognition of Him and denial of idolatry. Then it moves to speech (swearing) and action, (keeping the Sabbath and honoring parents). With regard to our relationship to man, most important is our actions. Therefore, the first in this set of five is murder, adultery and kidnapping. Then speech (false witness) and finally thought (desiring another's property).

All of man's actions fall into one of three categories; thought, speech or action. When we say that man's relationship to God is primarily based in thought, I mean to say that we cannot physically interact with Him. Rather, our relationship is one of reason, intelligence and conviction. When we arrive at new truths, this is how we relate to God, by accepting these truths, and of course ultimately following His commands. But most primary, is our concept of God. Thus, idolatry is the second command.

Conversely, our relationship to man is primarily physical. Therefore, the worst crimes are those when bodily harm occurs. Murder is therefore listed in position one. What one thinks with regard to another is less critical regarding interpersonal laws, provided that such harmful thoughts do not result in action.

The Ten Commandments teach us important concepts. They also teach us the level of importance regarding the category of action, relative to our relationship to God and man.

Ibn Ezra quotes Saadia Gaon as stating that the Ten Commandments are the main categories of the rest of the Torah's 603 commands. Perhaps this is why there is an entity of the Ten Commandments. People need validation that all commands were Divine. Therefore, proof was required that the commandments did not stem from Moses' own thinking. That proof would be that the future commands fit into a framework given by God – the Ten Commandments.

“NAASEH V’NISHMAH” – A CROWNING MOMENT

Prior to the Jews’ receipt of the Torah and the Ten Commandments, Moses read the “Book of the Treaty” to the nation. (*Exod. 24:7*) Rashi (*ibid*) says this book refers to the Torah that transpired up to that point in history – namely, from Genesis through Parashas Yisro.

Moses read this book to the Jews, apparently for good reason: the imminent acceptance of Torah must not be accepted blindly. Man is not expected to accept the Torah, without knowing its fundamentals. There is no merit through blind acceptance, as demanded by false religions with no reason. But God’s Torah reflects His wisdom, therefore, God gifted mankind with intelligence to perceive the Torah’s wisdom. Wisdom is to be applied in all areas, starting with religious life.

Subsequent to hearing this book read, the Jews unanimously said they would “perform and listen” to all it contained. Their famous words “Naaseh v’Nishmah” are a testament to their great level. Based on what they had heard, they even accepted what they had not yet heard. In other words, they said “We will do what we have heard, and we will listen and perform all what we have not yet heard.” Based on what they had heard, they were convinced that all else must be of the same perfected character... a lifestyle that was to be cherished. On this verbal acceptance, Talmud Sabbath 88a records a metaphor:

R. Simai lectured: “At that time, when Israel preempted “We will do” to “and we will listen,” there came six hundred thousand ministering angels to each and every Jew, binding two crowns: one corresponding to “we will do,” and one corresponding to “and we will listen.” Thereafter when Israel sinned [with the Golden Calf] twelve hundred thousand destroying angels descended and took them away; as it is written [Exod. xxxiii. 6]: “The children of Israel then stripped themselves of their ornaments (they wore) from (the time they were at) Mount Horeb.” R. Chama b. R. Chanina said: “At Sinai they received the crowns and at Sinai they lost them,” as it is written “The children of Israel then stripped themselves.” Said R. Johanan: “All of them Moses merited and he took them, as immediately after the verse cited it is written, “And Moses took the tent and pitched it outside the camp of the Jews.” Said Resh Lakish: “In the future God will eventually return them to us, as it is written [Isaiab, xxxv. 10]: “And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with song, with everlasting joy upon their head.” The expression everlasting means that it was already upon their heads at the time of reception of the Torah.”

This Talmudic section refers to the verses below in Exodus 33:4-7 where after the sin of the Gold Calf, God instructed the Jews to “take down” their adornments:

When the people heard this bad news they mourned and no man wore his ornaments [crowns]. God said to Moses, “Say to the B’nei Yisrael, ‘You are a stiff-necked people. Were I to go up among you for one moment, I would destroy you. And now remove your ornaments and I know what to do with you.’ The B’nei Yisrael took off their ornaments that they had [worn] at Mount Sinai. And Moses took the tent and set it up outside the camp, a distance from the camp, and he called it [the] Tent of Meeting. Everyone who sought God would go out to the Tent of Meeting that was outside the camp.

The Talmud refers to the adornments as crowns, while according to other Rabbis, there are disparate views. One Rabbi says they were crowns, another says they were select garments worn at Sinai, still another (*Onkelos*) says they were military objects, one adding they were “gold” military objects (*Yonasan ben Uzziel*). On that mention, Yonasan ben Uzziel adds that when Moses removed the tent out of the camp, Moses placed in it those adornments. (*Exod. 33:7*) What does he mean? And Sforno is most distinct in his view, saying the adornments were the Jews’ “spiritual preparedness.”

What caused such divergent opinions is that the term used in the actual verses is “edyo,” which simply refers to the “affect” of being adorned, not a crown or an object per se. Since the Torah verse is not addressing what the adornment was, this leaves interpretation wide open.

Questions

What is significant about the Torah from Genesis to Yisro, that it became the “Book of the Treaty?” How are the words “Naaseh v’Nishmah” so unique, that here alone the Jews merited “crowns?” What exactly are these “crowns?” Why does the Torah use an ambiguous term of edyo, in place of a clearly described “crown?” How are we to understand these angels and the entire Talmudic metaphor? How does the Gold Calf sin cause the crowns to be removed?

Step One

The first place to seek clues always lies in the most unique aspects of a given account. Do the Jews receive crowns, or adornments? Is this due to something they did? So we must uncover the greatness of their act. They

said they would accept and perform what they heard, and also all that they had not yet heard. We can now define their greatness. First, they used their intellect to realize how great the Torah was. But they also accepted that whatever God will eventually command, they would do.

We can say that human perfection is expressed in man's use of his intellect. He gains knowledge of what God is and that His commands are correct and true. This was expressed when the Jews said "Naaseh," "we will do." They admitted what they heard was true. But when they said "Nishmah," "we will listen," they admitted to "human limitation." They accepted that their understanding couldn't be the litmus test for what man accepts. In other words, they said, "We have conviction in God and His commands based on what we heard already; all that He commands must be good and true. And even what man cannot comprehend, we will accept."

Here is the key:

If man follows only the Torah laws that please his mind, he fails to confirm that God is superior to himself. His view of God is now compromised. Man must defer to God. If he doesn't, his emotional component is faulty. His ego has distorted his view of God.

Thus, when the Jews said both Naaseh v'Nishmah, mankind reached the optimum level, 1) following reason, and 2) accepting to follow all he could not know. If man thinks he can know all, then in the areas that he is ignorant, he will come to faulty conclusions, and even destroy himself.

Here, man actualized the purpose in creation of Earth, as a unique event, and why only here "crowns" are received.

Angels

It was these two areas of perfections that the Talmud hinted, with the first set of angels. The ministering angels refer to man's intellect, that earned him "crowns." "Crowns" simply mean *merit* – exactly as Sforno stated. When man follows intelligence, God equates this human perfection to "adornments." God intended to elevate an intangible state of perfection, with something tangible and priceless. When man reads the Torah he can relate to this idea with ease. King Solomon also refers to man following a life of wisdom as "*head adornments and necklaces (Proverbs 1:9).*" So the placing of these crowns by angels, signifies that man's intellect (angels) earned him an elevated status (crowns).

Both crowns represent two intellectual perfections: man's allegiance to wisdom, and his admission of human limitation.

The Gold Calf

The sin of Gold Calf portrayed man's inability to accept human limitation. Those Jews gave in to their psychological need by relating tangibly to God. Like Christianity's inventors, the Jews fabricated a leader based solely on their physical and psychological terms. They ignored the truth, that human intelligence is limited, and it cannot comprehend a metaphysical God. The Jews said, "*Moses the man who took us up from Egypt, we know not what has become of him... (Exod. 32:1).*" They craved the tangible "man" of Moses, as Christians crave the physical Jesus.

The Jews lost their "crowns" due to their great desire for a tangible, physical leader with which they could relate. This danger that existed at Sinai is why God commanded Moses to announce the prohibition of ascending the mountain, and rope it off. The Jews would have ascended, since they sought some sensual connection with God. And when they miscalculated Moses' day of descent, they quickly created a physical replacement. With their creation of the Gold Calf, they no longer accepted human limitation, although previously accepted when they said "We will listen."

The Jews committed two sins: 1) they abandoned a life led solely by intellect, and catered to their psychological and emotional needs, and 2) they no longer accepted the limitation of their intellect, and assumed their fabricated god was correct. Thus, the Talmud says two angels of destruction removed their two crowns. This means that to earn the crowns, only one "ministering" angel was needed – ministering being a positive phenomenon, referring to the intellect's ministering to every Jew. (Each man has but one intellect, or one "ministering angel.") But to lose their merit of Naaseh v'Nishmah, two "destructive" angels, or two emotions, were responsible, as we stated above. There were two, distinct instinctual flaws.

*R. Chanina said: "At Sinai they received the crowns,
and at Sinai they lost them."*

Rabbi Chanina means that the very event of Revelation was a double-edged sword. God's revelation endangered the Jews into the heightened emotional and religious state, and this excitement arouses dangerous, religious emotions.

Why the ambiguity?

God uses a term that could be understood as a literal crown. He does so in order to convey how real and prized is the state of man when he lives in line with reason. When man 1) realizes the perfected wisdom in Torah,

and 2) accepts limitation of his human knowledge, he exemplifies man's highest state... a state worthy of being "crowned." God alludes to the reality of this non-physical perfection, by equating it to a real physical and prized object: a crown. Man is thereby taught that although intangible, human perfection is what God values most. So the "Torah speaks like human language," as the Rabbis said, "*Dibra Torah kilasbon bnei adam.*" Man views the physical as most real, so God equated what is truly most real – human perfection – with something physical in the language of man. But God does not call that perfected state a literal crown, for that would be false. Therefore, "adornment" is used to confirm its positive nature while alluding to its intangible state. Indeed, a clever distinction.

To reiterate, mankind's perfection lies in his intellectual life. And when man expresses complete satisfaction with the Torah, he demonstrates this perfection. But this perfection of "We will do" must be accompanied by "We will listen." Meaning, man must simultaneously accept his intellectual limitations. Admitting what we know, and what we can't know, both are equally important beliefs.

God's Response

Although God does not exist in physical space or in the Temple, God corrected man's flaw with the Holy of Holies – the central focus of the Temple, where man must never enter. Thereby, God instituted the fundamental that man's knowledge is limited. Man cannot enter this room, as a demonstration that he cannot approach any understanding of God. Additionally, man must not make his obedience to God dependent on his knowledge. God created everything, and as the source of all, He alone determines what is true...what is real. When man argues with God, man denies the absolute and exclusive authority God holds as Creator.

Said R. Jobanan: "All of them [the crowns] Moses merited and he took them, as immediately after the verse cited it is written, "And Moses took the tent and pitched it outside the camp of the Jews."

Yonasan ben Uzziel adds that when Moses removed the tent from the camp, Moses placed in it those removed adornments. This is our previous point...

The Tent of Meeting was where God communicated with Moses, as seen by the cloud pillar miracle. Moses now intended to teach the Jews that only through searching out God and living intelligently, would they merit that perfection. That is what Yonasan ben Uzziel means by "Moses placing the crowns in the tent." Since we are subscribing to Sforno's interpretation of "edyo," meaning there were no literal crowns, they repre-

sented the Jews' perfection. Thus, to repossess that perfection (crown) the Jews had to seek out God at His Tent of Meeting. Therefore, saying that "Moses placed the crowns there" means Moses directed the Jews' perfection to that tent, meaning that they seek out God.

Said Resh Lakish: "In the future God will eventually return them to us"

This refers to the future when God will teach the whole world His undeniable truth. At that time, we will once again enjoy those "crowns," or rather, a state of perfection. May it come soon!

As a final note, my friend added that the reason the Jews accepted the entire Torah based only on what they heard read from Genesis through Yisro, is for good cause. That portion of the Torah describes the perfections of Adam, Noah, Abraham, the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, and the tribes. As well, it includes God's providence over those perfected people. This portion includes accounts of people who possessed the perfection of the Torah, even without having the Torah. These accounts depict man at his finest. Without Torah direction, one's mind alone directed him and her to the service of God. This really is the service of the self, as a wise Rabbi once stated. When the Jews heard Moses read these accounts, they were filled with a deep contentment hearing about the lives of the righteous, including God's fulfillment of His promises to them, and His providence. They understood the fundamentals of rejecting false gods and idolatry. Being honest, not chasing wealth, observing modesty, and embodying morality; they valued at the cost of life itself. Grasping these fundamentals, the Jews unanimously accepted all that God said, and all He would ever say.

The Jews at Sinai recognized the greatness of earlier generations who lived by truth, using intellect alone. The Jews at Sinai cherished the response of Divine Providence that guided the lives of those great Patriarchs and Matriarchs. They deserved their two crowns subscribing to intelligence, and accepting the limit of that intelligence. This is Naaseh v'Nishmah.

TEFILLIN

The Tefillin are a positive, Torah command. According to its original law, they are to be worn all day. Presently man is not on the level to keep his focus on Tefillin, therefore we limit wearing them to the duration of the morning prayers.

The Tefillin contain four portions of the Torah, commencing with these verses: Exodus 13:1, Exodus 13:11, Deuteronomy 6:4, and Deuteronomy 11:13. One Tefillin is placed on the head, and the other tied on the arm. The Tefillin of the head contain four portions written on four separate skins – placed in four separate housings. The Tefillin of the arm contain these same four portions, written on one skin, placed in one housing.

In each of these four Torah portions, we read the command to wear Tefillin, with insight into their purpose. I will record the single verse of each of the four portions which contains the command, paraphrasing the context of each, and suggesting the distinction of these portions:

Portion 1 *“And it will be to you a sign upon your hand, and a remembrance between your eyes, so that God’s Torah will be in your mouth, for with a mighty hand did God take you out of Egypt (Exod. 13:9).”* This portion addresses the command to designate to God, all firstborn males and animals, as God killed all first born males and animals in the final Plague. Our dedication to this is a command, for our recognition of God’s kindness, that He spared the firstborn of the Jews. This portion also includes the command to observe the Passover, to eat Matzah and not leaven. The Exodus is thereby recalled, and our appreciation of God’s redemption is never forgotten.

Portion 2 *“And it will be a sign upon your hand, and as Tefillin between your eyes for with a mighty hand did God take you out of Egypt (Exod. 13:16).”* This portion includes the command to redeem the firstborn males and dedicating all firstborn male animals. We are commanded to respond to our sons’ questioning of this redemptive practice, by explaining the designation assigned to the Israelite firstborns. All Israelite firstborns too were to be slain by God’s plague. Due to the commands we obeyed in Egypt, they were spared for the future designation and dedication to God’s service. However, this law of redeeming the firstborn allows them to engage in mundane activity, like the rest of their fellow Jews, who work for a living.

Portion 3 *“And you shall tie them as a sign upon your arm, and they will be Tefillin between your eyes (Deut. 6:8).”* This portion we are all familiar with,

it is the first paragraph of the Shema Yisrael prayer. We enunciate our conviction to absolute oneness of the Creator, and the complete direction of our actions to His service, *“And you shall love your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might (ibid 4:5).”*

Portion 4 *“And you shall place these words on your heart and on your soul, and you shall tie them as a sign upon your arms, and they shall be Tefillin between your eyes (Deut. 11:18).”* This portion addresses the concept of reward and punishment, as rain is promised or withheld, depending on our fulfillment or abandonment of His commands. We are also warned against idolatry, and that we are driven from Israel as a punishment. This is the second paragraph of the Shema Yisrael.

We can abbreviate these four portions. Besides commanding us in Tefillin, they cover the following ideas:

The Portion's Theme & Related Concepts:

Portion 1: Sanctifying Firstborns: 10th Plague (Firstborns); the Exodus; Transmission to Sons. (*Exod. 13:8*)

Portion 2: Redeeming Firstborns: Recalling Exodus via Animal Dedication and Human Redemption; Transmission to Sons. (*Exod. 13:14*)

Portion 3: Unity and Love of God: Complete Devotion to God; Preoccupation with Torah; Transmission to Sons. (*Deut. 6:7*)

Portion 4: Reward and Punishment: Warning Against Idolatry; Loss of food; Exile; Transmission to Sons. (*Deut. 11:19*)

(By the inclusion of the command to “transmit to sons” contained in all four portions, we learn of God's concern that future generations be raised with these concepts.)

We must ask a few questions to understand this command:

- 1) What is the concept of placing Torah portions on our bodies? (Tefillin)
- 2) Why in these two specific locations?
- 3) Why does the Tefillin of the head contain these four portions in individual compartments, on individual skins, while the arm has all four in one compartment, and written on one skin?
- 4) The order of the head's portions is the reverse of what we would think. Although the portions are in the order of the Torah, commencing with Exodus 13:1 and ending with Deut. 11:13, this order is arranged so if another person would view our own Tefillin, it would be in the correct order of *his* reading. Why must the head's portions be in order for a viewer, and not for us?
- 5) Regarding the arm's Tefillin, we read above that it is always referred to as a “sign.” What does this mean?

6) The head's Tefillin is referred to as Totafos ("Tefillin" according to Onkelos) in all cases, except in the first portion, where it is referred to as a "remembrance." Why this deviation in this one case?

7) Only regarding the arm's Tefillin, do we read that it must be "tied." In all cases, the head's Tefillin is merely "to be" – no command exists to "tie" it on our heads. Maimonides supports this distinction in his *Yad HaChazakah*, Laws of Tefillin, Chapter 1:1 in his *Kesser*, ("Crown") which is the opening, succinct classification of all commands in that portion. He writes: "1. *There should be Tefillin on the head*, 2. *To tie them on the arm*." No law exists to tie the Tefillin of the head. How do we understand this command that this one Tefillin should just "be" on the head? What is the fulfillment of this command?

8) Maimonides records many similarities in the laws governing the procedures and substances for creating a Torah, Mezuzah and Tefillin. What is the similarity of all three, taught through these laws?

9) Maimonides states (*ibid*, 3:17) that one is not allowed to convert the Tefillin of the head into the Tefillin of the arm, but vice versa is permitted. The reasoning is the Torah principle, "One may ascend in sanctity, but not descend." What "higher" sanctity exists in the Tefillin of the head?

10) Mezuzah and Tefillin contain Torah portions. Why must we not only learn Torah, but also place Torah portions on our homes and our bodies? What is the difference between Tefillin and Mezuzah, that the Mezuzah contains only two of these four portions, the two paragraphs of the Shema?

As Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch explains, the term "Tefillin" is a derivative of the word "pilale," as in "Tefila," to "judge." We are to judge our actions when we pray to God, analyzing ourselves, and presenting to God our requests that He will assist in our intelligent, life-plan. Tefillin too are meant to assist us in understanding correct ideas and our actions that follow. The four "*individualized*" portions are separated on our heads. We must review each concept *individually*, if we are to apprehend each portion's significance. We must then follow through with *unified* activity, as demonstrated by all four portions, *united* in one parchment, in the arm's Tefillin. Thoughts without appropriate action display a disjointed being. We are deviant, if we study, but lack the application of these ideas. Action is the result and the true barometer of a person convinced of what he learned. If one fails to act, he displays a lack of conviction. Tefillin straddle both man's thoughts and his actions. There cannot be any separation. The whole being comes under the service of God, as displayed by the law to have the name of God displayed in the knots and boxes of the Tefillin. But in addition to action, the Tefillin of the arm are to be set facing the heart. This demonstrates that just as one's thoughts (Tefillin of

the head) are devoted to God, so too are one's emotions. The High Priest wears a gold, forehead plate (Tzitz) with "Holy to God" written upon it, and a breastplate with the twelve tribes' names engraved therein. These two objects also teach these concepts; the most perfected of the Jewish nation, the High Priest displays the most perfect attitude: one's mind must be devoted to God's law, while one's heart goes out to his brothers and sisters. This is true perfection. The Ten Commandments too, are divided into these two categories: laws between man and God, and laws between man and his fellow.

Why Place Tefillin on Our Bodies?

Perhaps one must realize that the human being, as a physical entity, is incomplete. The Talmud teaches a parable; (paraphrased) "one is likened to a sickly being, and there is a bandage. If he keeps the bandage on, he survives; if he removes it he dies. This bandage is Torah." Wearing the Tefillin, a person demonstrates that Torah is essential to his very being. He is not complete without the Tefillin. The Torah is likened to a vital organ. This would support the law of wearing Tefillin the entire day. There is no part of the day where man can exist without adhering to the Torah laws. This is vital to our existence as "man," a God fearing being.

Torah is insufficient for man's perfection, while remaining in the scroll. Portions must be "worn" as Tefillin and also "posted" as a Mezuzah. Both man's body and his home must have a concrete display of Torah portions. But why are they not the same portions? The Mezuzah omits the first two portions included in the Tefillin. Why? The Tefillin's first two portions bear one common theme: man's existence. They refer to our freedom from Egypt, and the redemption of the firstborn. I believe this indicates the dual roles of man's existence. Freedom from Egypt addresses man's "actions," he is now free to "do" as he wills, and that must be the adherence to Torah. However, redemption of firstborns does not address his actions, but man's physical "self." Our very lives were spared by God's mercy. The Jews were also to be killed, had it not been for God's commands in which we merited life. Since the two first portions in the Tefillin address man as a being, his actions and his very life they are not included in Mezuzah. Mezuzah is on the door posts of our homes. What is a home? It represents man's life on Earth; his abode, where he eats, sleeps, and raises his family. Man must acknowledge that his stay here on Earth has a purpose, his realization of the Creator, that he must devote himself to Him. Man is also accountable for his actions. The two portions of the Shema we post on our homes contain these two principles.

Man requires physical reminders of basic truths. He must view his very self as incomplete without Torah (Tefillin), and his home, as targeting

God's goals, not his own securities (Mezuzah). These concepts must reflect the entire Torah. Therefore, when creating Tefillin and Mezuzah, many of the same laws of a Torah scroll apply.

There is an additional benefit to placing Tefillin on our bodies. By nature, man identifies with his appearance. We often refer to a loss of communication as "I haven't 'seen' you in so long," or "It's good to 'see' you." Clothing is so diverse in style, as each person dresses with some fashion identity. Man's appearance plays a role in self image, and how we view others. By placing Tefillin on our bodies, we authentically identify the self to one synonymous with Torah, as we wear portions of Torah.

Tefillin - An Item to be "Read"

The Talmud (*Minachos 35b*) teaches according to Rabbi Eliezer the Great, that the following verse refers to the Tefillin of the head, "*And all the nations of the Earth will see that God's name is called upon you, and they will fear you (Deut. 28:10).*" We said earlier, the order of the Torah portions in the head Tefillin must be in the Torah's sequence from the vantage point of another person viewing you, not the one wearing it. (If the order is reversed, such Tefillin are unfit for use.) This is in line with our verse, that the Tefillin of the head are for the onlooker, be he Jew or Gentile. What do we learn from this verse, and our law?

It would appear that the Tefillin must possess the status of a "read" object. Although no one can see through the external, black leather casings, the Tefillin serve a purpose of "study," or rather, understanding. Tefillin are essentially "written" objects, just as the Torah. Torah, Tefillin and Mezuzah share the common goal of "study." One must contemplate the portions contained in the Tefillin and Mezuzah, if he is to truly fulfill these commands. This is the purpose of a written object. To demonstrate this essential feature, the Tefillin must be arranged so that one who can see these four portions, (the "reader" facing one wearing Tefillin) "reads" them in the order in which they appear in the Torah. The order of the portions reflects the complete Torah. Tefillin thereby achieve their goal of reflecting the Torah scroll, both, through their legibility for the "reader," and through reflecting the Torah's order.

One who wears Tefillin is not doing so for the "reader," but as a fulfillment of the command. Even if there was no one present, one must wear Tefillin each day.

Tefillin - A "Sign"

In all four portions, we are told that Tefillin are a "sign." We also learn (*Minachos 36b*) that Tefillin are not worn on the Sabbath and holidays, as

these days are inherently a sign. What is this concept? A sign of what?

We have already defined Tefillin as portions of the Torah. The Torah is synonymous with God. The Sabbath recalls the Creation, but in specific, the day in which work is prohibited, and wisdom is pursued, unhindered by physical labor. The holidays recall God's miracles performed throughout history. All three, Tefillin, Sabbath, and holidays, are signs of God's involvement in man's existence. Sabbath defines the purpose of Creation, the pursuit of wisdom. Holidays recall God's relationship with the Jewish nation, and Tefillin are a sign of God's Torah, commanded to the Jews. Therefore, a "sign" is that which attests to God's involvement with man. God's "signs" underline these two basic principles; 1) the purpose of Creation is God's display of wisdom in the universe, 2) the purpose of man is to pursue God's wisdom through Torah.

Wearing Tefillin, we are set apart from other nations – a people commanded in Torah – signified through Tefillin, a miniature Torah. Inactivity on the Sabbath and holidays is also a physical deviation from other nations. But here, we deviate in activity, not in our physical presence, as done through Tefillin.

We now learn something new; these signs are to set the Jew apart in a visible fashion. We are different both in physical appearance by wearing black boxes all day, and we are different by not working, as all other peoples do on specified days. We must now ask, "why must we deviate?"

It would appear that our deviation visibly displays God's Torah to all nations. As we said, Rabbi Eliezer the Great taught, "And all the nations of the Earth will see that God's name is called upon you, and they will fear you" refers to the Tefillin of the head. This is our goal: we must make ourselves visually distinct, and avail ourselves to others desirous of inquiring of God, and His laws. If other nations cannot detect the Jew, we cause them a great disservice by such concealment. We sever their connection to the recipients and teachers of God's Torah.

Summary

Tefillin cause us to never forget the following:

- 1) God's Exodus: we are continually thankful to Him for our freedom to follow Torah.
- 2) God's sole responsibility for our lives: redeeming our firstborn sons, and dedicating the firstborn animals to Temple service.
- 3) God is One: our goal in life is to approach God in all our actions, there is no other god.
- 4) God is the only Ruler: our actions – good or bad – meet with a response from God alone.

We may deduce that if Tefillin are to function as “daily reminders” of these concepts, that man’s natural disposition is not in line with these themes, and therefore requires constant subordination. Man possesses many components to his being, such as pride, independence, the desire for unbridled activity, and psychological security. I suggest that Tefillin essentially teaches us the Torah’s basic tenets, while we simultaneously subordinate natural emotions to intelligent truths:

Tefillin’s Themes and Human Perfection

Portion 1: Sanctifying Firstborns: addresses human pride by our thanks to God for freeing us from Egyptian Bondage.

Portion 2: Redeeming Firstborns: the emotion of independence is tempered via realization that our lives are in God’s hands.

Portion 3: Unity and Love of God: our desire for an unbridled life is replaced with a desire for Torah through our realization that approaching God is our sole purpose.

Portion 4: Reward and Punishment: human “false security” is broken down, as all comes from Him. We are accountable, as only He exists to hold us accountable.

THE TEMPLE

The Tabernacle and Temple have always been the focus of the world both during its existence during the great kings, and even today, as we all await it’s final reconstruction. But why? What is so important about this structure? What was God’s objective in it’s creation and design? As we study it, we will find that it’s form is very specific, aiming towards crucial ideas.

The object of this article is to shed light on the Tabernacle’s requirements: the purpose of the two rooms (the Holy, and the Holy of Holies), the various vessels found therein, and the restriction of entering the Holy of Holies except for the high priest on the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur.

The form of the Tabernacle is rectangular, 30 cubits long by 10 cubits wide. A cubit measuring approximately 1.5 feet. It’s only entrance is on the eastern side. The first ten cubits upon entering are called the Ulam. No articles are placed in this area. In the next ten cubits are found the Menorah, the Table and the Inner Altar. Together the Ulam’s 10 cubits

and these additional ten cubits form a room called the Kodesh, the Holies. The remaining ten cubits is called the Kodesh Kodashim, the Holy of Holies, separated from the Kodesh by a curtain called the Paroches. In this Kodesh Kodashim is placed the Ark, which contains the Tablets of the Law (the Ten Commandments), the staff of Aaron, the canister of oil used for anointing the kings of Israel, and the jar of the Manna – the food, which God fed the Jewish people in the desert forty years. What are the ideas behind these laws?

There is one command with regard to the High Priest which I believe begins to shed some light. The High Priest, and certainly other priests can never enter into the Kodesh Kodashim, except on Yom Kippur. On this day, the Jews are forgiven for their transgressions. Only the High Priest enters on this day. He brings in the incense from the inner altar, places it in front of the Ark in a fire pan, and causes it to cloud that room. He leaves and enters only one more time to remove the fire pan with its ashes. What objective is there that none should enter into this room?

Interestingly, a peculiarity of this room is that God says that He causes a voice to emanate from this room, from between the two cherubs which are above the ark. This implies that God is commanding us not to approach the point from which He causes this voice to project. This demonstrates the idea that one cannot approach God with one's limited understanding. As God had told Moses, "*For man cannot see Me while alive (Exod. 33:20).*" We can only "go so far." Therefore, abstaining from entering this room demonstrates that we cannot understand God in our present, human state.

This explains the relevance of the vessels in this room. The Ark contains the Divine Law which man could have never developed on his own; ideas which must be of Divine origin – thus belonging to God's realm. The oil was used to anoint the kings of Israel who were chosen only by God – man has no knowledge as to who will be king. When Samuel thought to select King Saul's successor, Samuel said of Eliav (David's brother), "*This is God's anointed,*" whereby God replied to Samuel, "*Look not on his countenance nor on the height of his stature because I have refused him (Sam. I.XV, 1:7).*" This taught Samuel that he had assumed he was God's chosen one, and therefore this flaw had to be corrected. Perhaps this is precisely why God did not originally instruct Samuel as to which son was to be king. God wished Samuel's error be brought out into the open so Samuel might perfect this flaw.

The staff of Aaron was placed in this room as well. This was the staff which miraculously blossomed into almonds during the revolt of Korach. Korach was claiming the Priesthood for his family, assuming that Aaron (already chosen by God) had erred in acting as the priest. Thus, Korach

approached Divine Wisdom. This staff was also placed in this Holy of Holies, as it too testifies to God's supreme, unknowable wisdom. The Manna is also a demonstration of Divine Wisdom: it is food, but does not produce human waste. Its appearance was miraculous, and the Jews wondered "what is it?"

All of the articles found in the Kodesh Kodashim share a common distinction: they represent that which man cannot approach. In Samuel I, 1:19, a passage occurs which concurs with this idea: "*And God had smote the men of Bet Shemesh because they had looked into the Ark of the Lord.*" The sin of these people was that they were expressing the heretical notion that they could 'see' something about God by looking into the Ark. Their error was generated by a need to make God tangible somehow, which is the worst of philosophical crimes. We must – above all else – possess the correct ideas concerning God.

Now that we have posited that the Kodesh Kodashim – the room behind the curtain – houses that which we cannot approach, we may suggest that the Kodesh deals with concepts that are humanly attainable. We should not guess what those concepts are, for they are already familiar to us.

If we review the High Holiday prayers, we see that there are two praises of God. 1) He is Omnipotent 2) He is Omniscient. That is, God is all-powerful and all-knowing. There are only these two categories, for all acts which God performs are understood by us to be a display of either His Power or His Knowledge. In order for us to be constantly aware of this, God commanded Moses to create the Table, upon which there would always exist the twelve loaves of bread. Twelve signifying the twelve tribes, and bread to signify God's ability to provide sustenance. God also commanded Moses to build the inner altar. Upon the Altar the priests would offer the incense, a relationship between man and God, demonstrating that God is aware of man's actions. The Table reminds us of God's Omnipotence, while the Altar reminds us of God's Omniscience.

What is the purpose of the Menorah? If we look at the daily prayers, we begin every morning with "*Blessed be the One Who spoke and the world came into being, blessed be He.*" In Daniel's blessing of God after God had granted his request to be informed of Nevuchadnetzar's dream and its interpretation, (*Dan. II:19, 20*) Daniel said, "*To the One Whose name is Eloka, blessed is He forever and ever.*" In both cases, God is defined first, before any praise is made. This is to say that when one relates to God, it is essential that he is aware of whom he directs his thoughts, and to whom we direct our praises each day. Daniel did the same, and perhaps the Menorah serves this very purpose. Namely, to define that the God who we relate to in the Temple is the God who created the world and rested on the seventh day.

We are reminded of this by seeing the Menorah which is composed of seven branches, six branches emanating from the seventh, as there were six days of creation and a seventh of rest. The six branches pay homage to the seventh as their wicks must all be directed to the center seventh. The seventh, center branch conveys the seventh day as the purpose of creation. Contrary to the popular view that physical creation was an end in itself, Judaism claims that the six days of creation have a goal: a day of physical abstention, enabling man time to ponder the world of wisdom. Finally, the command to create the Menorah from one solid block of gold (not made through soldering segments) serves to remind us of the concept of the Unity of the Creator.

Thus, we have three main concepts derived from the Kodesh:

1) We must understand that we are relating to the God who created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. We define who we are praising. This is what the Menorah represents.

2) God is Omnipotent – all powerful. This is represented by the Table.

3) God is Omniscient – all knowing. This is represented by the Inner Altar. An altar only makes sense if the Recipient – God – is aware of human beings and their attempts to draw near to Him. These are the categories knowable to man and therefore what we are reminded of by the Temple's vessels.

However, if we cannot approach God directly, how is it that the High Priest can enter the Kodesh Kodashim, the Holy of Holies, and why with incense? Why is he commanded to cloud the room (*Leviticus 16:13*) “*that he die not,*” and why on Yom Kippur?

The answer is that as we have said, the incense represents approaching God. The High Priest's entrance into the Holy of Holies shows us that there is a “closer relation” to God on this day, due to God's act of forgiveness. That which represents our prayer (incense) is figuratively brought “closer” to God. The same idea is represented with the levels of restriction at Sinai: Moses alone drew to the top of the mountain, Joshua lower, and others still lower. Various levels of physical proximity even on Sinai indicates the various levels of perfection possessed by those allowed to ascend. The purpose of the priest smoking up the room is to remind him that his understanding of God is still blocked, represented by the smoke. God knows that even a person on the highest level who enters the Holy of Holies is still in danger of forming erroneous ideas about God. Smoking up the room physically demonstrates that there is a veil between him and God...even in this room. Similarly, when God revealed Himself to the Jews on Mount Sinai, the Torah tells us that there was “darkness, cloud, and thick darkness (fog).” This was done to demonstrate that there is a

constant veil between man and God.

Why is there is a specific arrangement of the vessels in the Kodesh? Both the Menorah and the Table are placed close to the dividing curtain to represent that these two concepts are closer to perfection (closer to the Holy of Holies) than is the altar. The altar, being man's approach, is not always perfect, and is thus removed further from the Paroches than are the Table which represents God's Power and the Menorah which defines the God to whom we relate. These two being undoubtedly perfect as they emanate from God.

In summary, the Tabernacle is a structure which represents our limited understanding of God, but also informs us of truths. It is a vehicle for us to be aware of our relationship to God on the different days of the year, as we offer various sacrifices on different days. And conversely, when we witness the absence of the Tabernacle, we are made aware of a severed relationship.

Addendum

The priest wore 8 special garments; 2 of which point to interesting ideas: The gold head plate, the "Tzitz" had "Holy to God" inscribed upon it. He also wore a breastplate which had 12 stones, corresponding to the 12 tribes. I believe these relate to two aspects of a person living on the highest level: The head plate denotes that one's thoughts, his intellect, should be used primarily for understanding God. This is why it is placed on the head, the figurative location of the soul. The breastplate is placed upon the heart, demonstrating that one's heart, the seat of the emotions, should be devoted to his brethren, the 12 tribes. Thus, both aspects of man, his intellect and his emotions are subjugated to the correct areas. Our Tefillin demonstrate the same.

TEMPLE & CHANUKAH: ONE THEME

There are a few instances in Jewish history concerning the building and rededication of the Temple. They include David's desire to build the first Temple; Zerubabel's rebuilding of the second Temple; and the rededication of the Temple during Chanukah. There is an underlying theme, which permeates all three cases. Let us review a previous lesson concerning the first Temple.

Samuel II, 7:1-17

[1] *And it was as the king dwelled in his house, and God gave him respite from all around, from all of his enemies. [2] And the king said to Nathan the Prophet, "See how I dwell and a house of cedar and the ark of God dwells inside of curtains." [3] And Nathan said to the king, "All that is in your heart do, for God is with you."*

[4] *And it was on that night, and it was that the word of God was to Nathan saying: [5] "Go and say to David saying, 'So says God; Will you indeed build me a house that I will dwell?' [6] For I have not dwelled in a house since the day I took the Children of Israel up from Egypt, and until this day, and I traveled in a tent and a Tabernacle. [7] In all that I traveled, in all the Children of Israel, was the matter ever spoken by Me to even one of the tribes of Israel, of whom I commanded (judges) to herd My people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?'*

[8] *And now, so shall you say to my servant David, "So says the Lord of Hosts, I have take you from the shepherds' huts, from following after sheep, to become a ruler over my people Israel. [9] And I was with you with all that you went and I cut off all your enemies from before you and I made for you a great name like the name of the great ones that are in the land. [10] And I shall yet establish a place for My people, for Israel, I shall plant it there and it shall dwell in its place so that it shall be disturbed no more; crooked people shall no longer afflict it as in earlier times. [11] And also from the day that I appointed judges over My people Israel, and I shall give you respite from all your enemies; and God informs you that God will make for you a house. [12] When your days will be complete and you will lie with your fathers and I will establish your seed after you that come from your loins and I shall make his kingdom firm. [13] He shall build a house to My name and I will establish his seat of kingdom eternally. [14] I will be to him a father, and he will be to Me a son so when he sins I will chastise him with the rod of men and with afflictions of human beings. [15] But my kindness will not be removed from him as I removed it from Saul, whom I removed before you. [16] Your dynasty and your kingdom will remain steadfast before for all time; your throne will remain firm forever." [17] In accordance with these words and in accord with this vision, so spoke Nathan to David.*

The first thing that strikes me is God's use of a rhetorical question, "Will you indeed build me a house that I will dwell?" And again in the next

verse, “*was the matter ever spoken by Me...why have you not built Me a house of cedar?*” This is to say that God rejected David’s sentiment. God says that He never requested a house of cedar to replace the Tabernacle, making David’s sentiment to build a house to God, somehow a wrong idea. When God uses a rhetorical question, He means to indicate that He never requested this Temple, i.e., it is clearly man’s wish “and not Mine.” However, God says David’s son Solomon will build that house. So is it wrong or right to build a house? One may simply answer that it was David who could not build the house – the Temple – but Solomon could. So the idea of Temple per se is acceptable, but it is with the ‘builder’ that God takes issue. We must understand why.

But God goes on in verses 8 and 9, describing how He made David king, and how He made his name great like those famous in the land. Why does God mention this here? What does God’s elevation of David have to do with His disagreement that David builds a Temple? We also must understand why David must die, and only then his son will build a Temple. Additionally, what purpose is there in the relationship God describes that He will be a “father” to Solomon, and Solomon will be as His “son?” Was this relationship absent with regard to David? If so, why?

God clearly states that He never requested a house. Simultaneously, He says Solomon will build it. Therefore, the house or Temple, is not an evil, but simply something God “never requested.” Therefore, we cannot understand why God rebukes David, that Temple is an evil. What then is the rebuke? And I do not mean rebuke in the sense that David sinned, as the Talmud states David did not sin. I mean rebuke, in the sense that David’s proposed building cannot take place for good reason, but not that the reason implies sin. So what is this reason that David cannot build the Temple, but Solomon can? Where do we look for the answer? We look right here. . . God continued with His response to David through Nathan, describing how He made David a king, and made his name great. Think for a moment. . . what might this have to do with David building the Temple?

The Temple’s Purpose

There is a primary question, which must be asked before answering our other questions: What is the purpose of the Temple? What did David say? He was bothered that God’s ark was housed in simple curtains while he dwelled in a cedar wood home. What was his sentiment? His words are, “*See how I dwell and a house of cedar and the ark of God dwells inside of curtains.*” David equates his dwelling with God’s dwelling. Here is another clue. David meant to say that greater honor was due to God, over himself. He wished to give God’s ark greater honor than the simple

curtain in which it currently dwelled. But for some reason, God did not approve: David cannot build this Temple. God says, “*Will you indeed build me a house that I will dwell? For I have not dwelled in a house since the day I took the Children of Israel up from Egypt.*” God’s response focuses on the concept of “dwelling.” With His rhetorical words, “Will you indeed build me a house that I will dwell?” I believe God is indicating that David’s offer exemplified two errors.

The first error (not sin) is David’s attempt to beautify the ark’s dwelling. God said, “*Was the matter ever spoken by Me to even one of the tribes of Israel, why have you not built Me a house of cedar?*” Meaning, God never asked for something, so man should not attempt any enhancement. God goes on, reminding David of the real truth, “God does good for man” as he cites how He made David so great. Now, just as God bestowed good on David making him so great, this Temple too is “for man,” not for God. This is precisely why God reminds David of all the good He bestowed on David; to call to David’s mind the real relationship; that God benefits man, and not the reverse. This is the central idea.

While in other areas, the Torah’s injunction “*Zeh Aylee v’Anvayhu*” (“*This is my God and I will adorn Him*”) allows man to beautify the commands, God’s message here is that one who attempts “enhancement” in relation to Temple alone, is overstepping the line: he misinterprets Temple.

Temple is the one area in Torah where God must initiate change. Perhaps the reason being, that regarding Temple, man may err, feeling he is “offering to God” somehow. Sacrifice, incense and the like are subject to misinterpretation of this kind. However, the opposite is true: Temple is God’s gift to man, not man’s glorification of God. When we glorify God in Temple, it is for *our* good that we concentrate on the proper ideals: we offer God absolutely nothing. However, David’s sentiment was that he should not “dwell” in beautiful cedar wood, while the ark dwells in curtains. He felt that he would be improving the idea of Tabernacle with a Temple, when Temple is in fact for man, and not for God. God reiterates this theme by reminding David that He made David who he is today. It is God who benefited David in the past making him great, and it is God who benefits man in Temple. Perhaps David erred in this matter. We also note that at the very beginning David says to Nathan, “See how I dwell and a house of cedar and the ark of God dwells inside of curtains.” It appears David is unsure about building a Temple, and seeks Nathan’s counsel. This may teach that David was not certain of his idea at the very outset.

Allowing Error to Surface

Perhaps we may go one step further and suggest that this was the precise sentiment God desired to draw out from David into the open, for David to recognize, and come to terms with. Surely Temple is a good, provided God initiates its activities and enhancements, but God refrained from requesting it of man, until after David had this opportunity to express his thought and God could respond. Now that David was corrected, Temple may be built, but by David's son. Why his son? Perhaps, since David had the correct idea that Temple should exist, he would impart this to his son who could build it with the proper ideas. And, there was no longer any need to delay its building.

"Structure for God": An Oxymoron

But there is a more profound error and lesson here. Improving the Tabernacle into a Temple acceptable to God does not occur structurally alone. Rather, the Temple's very definition as a 'good' depends on it being initiated by God, and not man. What is lacking in Temple when man initiates it, or what is added to Temple when God requests it of man?

It is impossible that man should suggest a structure, without expressing the frailties of humans in that structure. Meaning, once David suggested making a Temple from a more 'durable' cedar and not curtains, for God's "dwelling," he was using "human terms" for a building that is exclusively identified with God. This may very well explain why the original Tabernacle had no ceiling, as it is not a "dwelling," but a location on which to focus on God. This being the case, such a structure would be marred, had it any semblance of a shelter, which a roof indicates by its very definition. God needs no shelter, He needs no roof, and a structure man envisions, even dedicated to God, is inherently flawed. Thus, the original Tabernacle could not possibly have a roof. Now, David suggests creating a more permanent "building" of cedar? This violated the very concept of the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle was to remind man of ideas about God. Had the Tabernacle a roof, it would convey an incorrect and heretical idea, that God shares the frail, human need for protection from the elements. Of course this was not David's thought, but perhaps other Jews might be misled. Thus, Tabernacle can have no roof. Additionally, if man initiates the idea to create a structure to God, this is equal to suggesting a roof be placed on the Tabernacle. For what difference is there, if I place a roof on the Tabernacle, or create a new structure to God with a roof, now replacing the Tabernacle? There is no difference. Therefore, God refused David's offer to create the Temple. In such a Temple, there would be no

way to remove man's identity from it. Thereby, it would eternally reflect man's concept of a "shelter," not true ideas.

It is contrary to the true ideas of God that a building is made to Him, as "building" carries with it the notion that it is for man's purposes; a building is a human structure. However, if God initiates such a structure, as he did with the Tabernacle, then it is no longer "man's" idea of building. In that case, it may look like a shelter, but it is more akin to a museum which contains prized objects, and does not function as a haven for dwellers. And when God initiates such a structure, man is then building the structure due to a command, without motive, traceable to the human frailty that requires shelter. Therefore, Solomon was able to build the Temple, as it was now God's wish, and not David's.

How does this relate to Chanukah and Zerubabel's construction of the Temple, that we read on Shabbos/Chanukah?

David, Zerubabel and Chanukah

The Prophet Zechariah, in the Haftorah of Shabbos/Chanukah, concludes with the words "*Not by army, and not by strength, but with My spirit.*" This refers to Zerubabel's Temple construction that it would be accomplished, but not through succeeding over the enemies or by human might. Its construction would be achieved through God's creation of peace under Darius' reign, where this Divine backdrop would enable Zerubabel's successful and easy construction.

On Chanukah as well, God created the miracle of the oil as a lesson that God orchestrated those entire events. That rededication was not accomplished by the Maccabees, but by God's intervention on behalf of those five sons of Mattisyahu; "*and the many [God handed] into the hands of the few,*" "*the wicked into the hands of the righteous.*"

Rededication and building of the Temple require God's involvement, in order that man's fame does not overshadow the true purpose of Temple: "knowledge of God." God's fame must be the exclusive identity of Temple, and in all three cases, God insured this to be so. God did not allow David to be credited with Temple; He did not allow Zerubabel to be credited with it; and God insured that Chanukah's rededication was accomplished only through His miraculous intervention.

We should come away with a deeper appreciation for the precision of Torah. In all three cases, the Torah discloses precise wording that uncovers the underlying messages: messages, which lead to truly happy lives, and truly make sense. If we are discerning, and patient in our studies, "the words will speak to us," as a wise Rabbi once taught.

This is truly the design of the Torah: its messages and lessons run deep,

but are available if we approach each area with the appreciation that the words are Divinely written. With careful study under wise Rabbis, we too will see these lessons.

God's Torah "words" must be our focus in Torah study...in contrast to those who seek to startle ignorant Jews with mystical fabrications. God did not seek to teach mankind using mystical, and inexplicable stories. Too many Jews miss out on learning "how" to learn Torah, because too many classes seek large audiences, which they lure with eye-stopping lecture titles, and with fantastic stories which the educators themselves cannot explain. What good is it to render Judaism into a religion like the others, where metaphors are taught as literal fact, and where incomprehensible mysticism overrules sensible thought? The Rabbis spoke against this type of an approach, since such classes teach nothing that engenders any appreciation for God's wisdom. What these classes do is dupe the attendees into believing that the lecturer is superior to them, since he can quote matters they cannot comprehend. But should not a class leave its attendees with "greater" knowledge? If you attend such classes, cease from doing so, for it is a waste of your time. It matters none if such a teacher is called "Rabbi." It is the path of reason that we are to follow, not reputations, since this is the only distinction we possess over animals. Believing magical and fantastic stories, is akin to a dog believing his master will feed him...no intelligence is required. God gave us each the Tzelem Elohim, "intellect." Failure to engage your intellect in Torah, *"you fall short in the fulfilment of what you owe your Creator (Rabbi Bachya, Introduction to Duties of the Heart)."*

God did not formulate His Torah to astound people with inexplicable and grand stories. God taught us a system that makes sense. His system opens our eyes and minds to matters that resonate truth within us. And the Talmudic Sages clearly warned in numerous cases not to understand metaphor as literal, and not to even approach such areas, until one has mastered the basics. Can you open a Talmud and explain Tosfos and Rashi? Can you make sense of Talmudic argumentation? Can you explain a series of verses in any area of the Five Books, Prophets, or Writings? If not, then seek a teacher who can train you in the basics. And decades later once you have reached a level of proficiency, seek a Rabbi who can explain the metaphors of King David, King Solomon, Maimonides, and others who held fast to the true path of Torah...the path that makes sense to human minds.

All other religions are based on belief and blind faith. They have no proofs. Judaism offers the indisputable proof of Sinai. Judaism is different, where we do not simply accept anything that anyone teaches. But

where our commands are viewed by the other nations as “righteous statutes” as God said in Deuteronomy.

Why is the Torah written so cryptically? Well, if it were not, then our knowledge would end with the concluding pages of each work. But since God’s wisdom is infinite, and He desires man to pursue wisdom from birth through death, He designed the Torah to yield new insights throughout our lives. Weaving the Torah’s words with His wisdom, in a cryptic but rational manner, God did not only give us words, but also the “keys” to unlock far greater wisdom. As we learn truths, we also acquire a unique methodology of God’s instruction; our minds become sharper, and we become more independent in our studies. We can unlock new doors.

Chanukah celebrates God’s salvation and the reestablishment of a Torah culture. This culture is one of intelligence. This should be our path.

PRAYER AND SACRIFICE

Talmud Brachos 26b records a dispute between Rabbi Yossi son of Rabbi Chanina and Rabbi Joshua. Rabbi Yossi claimed that our prayers today (Shmoneh Esray) were established based on the prayers of our three forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Rabbi Joshua claims that prayer was established based on sacrifice. Each Rabbi explained his reasoning: Rabbi Yossi cited three verses:

Abraham established morning prayers, as it says, ‘And Abraham arose in the morning to the place where he stood’, and ‘standing’ refers only to the act of prayer. Isaac established afternoon prayers as it says, ‘And Isaac went out to converse in the field, at evening’, and ‘speaking’ refers only to prayer. Jacob established evening prayer, as it says, ‘And he reached the place, and he slept there’, and ‘reaching’ only refers to prayer.

It was also taught in accordance with Rabbi Joshua; ‘for what reason is the Morning Prayer said only until midday? It is because the morning sacrifice was offered only until then. For what reason is the afternoon prayer said only until evening? It is because the afternoon sacrifice was brought only until the evening. Why does the evening prayer have no limit? It is because the (sacrificial) limbs were brought throughout the entire night.

We must understand what these two Rabbis were disputing. On the surface, it appears obvious that we pray based on the identical activity performed by the forefathers. Is it not a difficulty according to Rabbi Joshua, to suggest that prayer, is derived from a completely different activity, from sacrifice? Furthermore, our forefathers offered sacrifices in addition to praying. Is Rabbi Joshua saying that our act of prayer today, is not a repetition of our forefather's prayers? Is this truly what Rabbi Joshua holds, that were it not for sacrifice, we would not pray, as our forefathers? There are a few other questions that occurred to me as I pondered this Talmudic section. I wish you to also have the opportunity to detect additional issues, so pause here. Think about the quotes above, or better yet, study this page in the Talmud itself. See what questions arise in your mind, and then continue. To advance in learning, simply reading what someone else writes eliminates your act of analysis, and removes another opportunity to train your mind.

I will now continue with my questions.

1) Why did Abraham not establish all three prayers? Why did he apparently pray just once each day, in the morning? Do we say that Jacob followed his father and grandfather, praying all three prayers, or, did Jacob pray only once, i.e., the nighttime prayer, which he instituted? In this case, why would he omit what his father and grandfather instituted?

2) What is significant that each of our forefathers established a new, succeeding prayer? May we derive anything from the opening words in our prayer, "God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob?"

3) How does Rabbi Joshua claim that prayer is modeled after sacrifice, since he knew the verses quoted above teaching of the prayer of the Patriarchs?

4) Furthermore, what may we derive from each of the verses above in connection with each Patriarch's blessing? Are three, distinct ideas in prayer being conveyed in each of these verses?

5) And why did the forefathers stop at three blessings a day? Why no more than three: simply because there were only three forefathers? That seems quite arbitrary.

6) Why did our forefathers both pray, and sacrifice? What does each not accomplish, in that the other is required as an additional and essential act of perfection?

Sacrifice Defined

To commence, we must first define our terms: sacrifice and prayer. We learn that the very first sacrifice was Adam's, offered immediately upon his creation. Thereby Adam taught that our existence demands recognition of the Creator. And this recognition is in terms of our "life." Meaning,

we recognize that our very lives are due to God. We therefore sacrifice “life,” so as to underline this sentiment. Sacrificing life is to say by proxy, “I should not exist, but I do solely because God willed it. But otherwise, I would not be.” Sacrificing an animal enables man to express through action, the state he should be in without God’s kindness.

Such an act of kindness by God, to create us, demands not simply an intellectual acknowledgement, but real action. Activity is the barometer through which man’s convictions and perfection are measured. This is our nature, to act out what we are convinced of. And if one does not act, then he displays a lack of conviction. If Adam had not sacrificed, he would have displayed a disregard for his very life. If man does not recognize the good bestowed upon him by another through action, then he lacks a true recognition of that good, or, he has a severe character flaw where he does not show his thanks to that other person.

Prayer Defined

What is prayer? This is the act of praising God for His works, His kindness, His marvels and wisdom, and all the good we see emanating from His will. Another theme is that act of beseeching Him alone for our needs. For as we recognize and praise Him as the sole source of everything, it follows that it is to Him alone that we make requests, and before Whom we judge ourselves and arrive at what we need.

We may then state that sacrifice is offered in recognition that our very “existence” is due to God. Prayer addresses what comes subsequent to our existence, i.e., our “continued life” as we approach God to praise Him, having acknowledged His magnificence. And we continue to reach out to Him for the assistance, that only He can provide. Sacrifice recognizes God’s creation of our very being, and prayer initiates our continued relationship subsequent to our creation.

According to Rabbi Yossi, we pray today just as the forefathers, by demonstrating this act as a perfection. Rabbi Joshua does not deny history. He too acknowledges the forefathers’ prayers, but says our prayer today in part borrows from sacrifice. In truth, there is no argument: Rabbi Joshua states that our “time frame” for prayer is derived from sacrifices in the Temple. He does not suggest that prayer originated from sacrifice. Prayer is taken from prayer, of the Patriarchs. These two Rabbis are addressing two separate points in prayer: Rabbi Yossi says prayer is “derived” from the prayer of the forefathers, while Rabbi Joshua only addresses prayer’s “time frame” as restricted by the same parameters as were the Temple’s sacrifices.

Combining Sacrifice with Prayer

We must now ask why Rabbi Joshua felt sacrifice had to be incorporated into our performance of prayer. Why must our prayers embody the time frame of Temple sacrifice, according to Rabbi Joshua? We are forced to say that prayer and sacrifice have a common quality. Otherwise, it's senseless to mix two separate actions. This quality is man's "approach to God." In these two actions alone, man is either offering something "before God," or man is "addressing God" as a dialogue of sorts exists also in sacrifice. Prayer is not the only act possessing a "verbal" character. A friend reminded me of the verse in Hosea (14:3), "*and we shall repay sacrifices [with] our lips.*" This means that sacrifice is somewhat replaced by verbal prayers, there is a relationship. Perhaps the Men of the Great Assembly desired that since Temple sacrifice was no longer, and sacrifice is essential to man's existence, then we should have some representation of sacrifice. Thus, now, the time frame of the sacrifices guides our prayers. This translates as prayer having sacrifice as its "guide." Prayer is to be guided towards the objective of sacrifice: recognition of God as our Creator. While it is true that we have needs, and prayer addresses them, these needs serve a higher goal: to enable us the life where we may remove our attention from temporal needs, and ponder God and His works. The greatest mitzvah – command – is Torah study. The greatest objective in our lives is to be involved in recognizing new truths. Thus, Rabbi Joshua wished that our prayer not lack this ultimate objective. Let us now return to our questions.

The Patriarchs

Why did Abraham not establish all three prayers? Perhaps in Abraham's perfection he included the idea that prayer, as an institution, should form part of man's day. This is achieved with a single, daily prayer. Abraham made prayer the first part of his day, the morning, as it states, "*And Abraham arose in the morning to the place where he stood (Gen. 19:27).*" This verse teaches that prayer was on his mind as soon as he awoke. Perhaps, it even teaches that Abraham's purpose in awaking was to come close to God, as is expressed with prayer.

Isaac and Jacob were also unique individuals in their own right. They did not simply follow the God of Abraham because they were taught to do so, but they both arrived at the truth of God's existence independent of Abraham. This is what the Rabbis mean with their formulation: "*The God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob.*" The Rabbis could have simply written in our opening prayer, "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." But they did not, to teach that God was the God of "each" of the Patriarchs.

Each Patriarch made God his God through their own efforts in the study of reality, and each finally realized with their own minds the true meaning of God. And as they came to this realization independently, each one used this independent thought to arrive at new truths. Thus, Isaac saw that afternoon time deserved a prayer, and Jacob saw something about nighttime, which too deserved prayer.

I would suggest that there are in fact only three parts of the day to which man relates: its beginning – daytime, its end – nighttime, and the transitional part of dusk. Abraham instituted the Morning Prayer, teaching that man's first thoughts should be those about God. Jacob prayed at night, teaching that again, the last thing on our minds is God. Both Abraham and Jacob demonstrated the central focus God had in their lives, as the first and last things on our minds are representative of what matters to us most. Why did Isaac pray towards the evening? Perhaps this indicates another phenomena in our psyches. As we turn from our daily activities, we remove our thoughts from the day's sufficient accomplishments. But when we remove our thoughts from one area, to where do we redirect them: to another involvement, or to God? Perhaps Isaac's afternoon prayer teaches that whenever man removes his energies from an area, if he turns back to God, he is living properly. But if he turns from one involvement to another, this means God is not his focus throughout the day. For Isaac to have prayed in the afternoon, we learn that when he removed his energies from his task of herding for example, his attention naturally returned to pondering God. Thus, each activity should have as its objective, a return to God, as we say in the Shima, "to love God with all our hearts." Meaning, we reflect on an activity as it relates to loving God. There are, therefore, only three main prayers, as there are only three relationships to reality: when man reenters life in the morning, when he leaves it just prior to sleep, and during the day when man's thoughts turn from one area to another. If man is cognizant of God in all three phases of the day, then man has achieved a certain perfection.

I cannot answer why Abraham or any of the Patriarchs did not pray at all three intervals. It may simply be that Abraham did not see the idea that Jacob saw, and therefore did not pray at evening. No one man sees all of God's knowledge. However, as a Rabbi stated, we learn from Maimonides Laws of Kings 1:1, that each succeeding Patriarch added to the previous one. Therefore, Isaac prayed twice, and Jacob did in fact pray three times.

We end up with a deep appreciation for the structure of the Talmud. Through patient study, we may be fortunate to uncover new ideas in Talmudic thought, Jewish law, Scripture, and Torah philosophy. As Rava said, "*The reward [objective] of study is the concepts.*" Rashi says on this, "*One should weary, labor, think, and understand the reasons for a matter (Brachos 6b).*"

TEMPLE & ALTAR: TWO STRUCTURES – ONE GOAL

Parashas Vayikra commences the Torah's laws of sacrifices. When studying Maimonides' laws of the Selected House (the Temple) we come across many astounding findings and much philosophy, not usually found in his formulations of Jewish law:

Law 1:1:

It is a positive command to make a House to God, prepared to offer the sacrifices in it.

Law 1:3:

Once there was built the Temple in Jerusalem, all other places became completely prohibited to build a House to God, and to sacrifice in them sacrifices. And there is no House for all generations except in Jerusalem alone, and on Mount Moriah that is there, as it states, 'And David said, this is the House of God and this is the altar of sacrifice to Israel.'

Law 2:1:

The Altar's place is exceedingly precise, and it may not be exchanged from its place forever, as it states, 'this is the Altar of sacrifice to Israel.' And in the Temple (here, Maimonides exchanges Altar for "Temple"), Isaac our father was bound (for sacrifice by Abraham) as it states, 'and go for yourself to the land of Moriah', and it says in Chronicles, 'and Solomon commenced to build the House of God in Jerusalem in Mount Moriah that was shown to David his father, that was prepared in the place of David, in the threshing floor of Arnan the Jebusite.'

Law 2:2:

And the transmission is in the hands of all, the place where David and Solomon built the Altar in the threshing floor of Arnan, it is the (same) place that Abraham built the altar and bound on it Isaac. And it is the (same) place that Noah built (his altar) when he exited the Ark. And it is the (same) Altar that Cain and Ebel sacrificed upon. And on it Adam the First sacrificed a sacrifice when he was created, and from there, was he created. The Rabbis stated, 'Adam, from the place of his atonement was he created.'

Gen. 28:17, 19:

(Jacob fled from his brother Esau who sought his life for taking the birthright. Jacob arrived at a place where he slept. After Jacob awoke from his famous dream of the ladder with ascending and descending angels, he made this statement)

And he was afraid and he said, 'How awesome is this place. This is no other than the House of God, and this is the gate to heaven.' And he called the name of that place Beth El (God's House)...

Gen., 35:1: (Many years after the previous quote) And God said to Jacob, 'Arise and ascend to Beth El, and dwell there, and make there an altar to the God Who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau.' (After Jacob's troubles were terminated, God commanded him to return to the House of God (Beth El) and offer a sacrifice.)

Chron. I, 22:1:

And David said, 'This is the House of God and this is the altar of sacrifice to Israel.'

Immediately, a distinct and clear theme forces itself upon us: God's House (Temple) and the Altar are inseparable. From Maimonides' formulations, to the very Scriptural verses, in every case, the Temple is tied to the Altar! What is this relationship?

Let us outline all our questions, as there are many:

1) What is the concept of each, the Temple and the Altar?
 2) What is the relationship between Temple and Altar? Is one more 'primary'? Does one precede the other, as a basis for the other? We notice Maimonides' formulation of Temple as "a place prepared to offer sacrifice. And they celebrate to Him three times a year, as it says, 'And make for Me a Temple...'" Temple and Altar are clearly bound up with each other. How? (Maimonides includes "celebrate to Him three times a year" perhaps to focus on the significance of a location, to visit.)

3) Maimonides' formulation seems out of order: In chapter one, he discusses the laws of the Temple, and even describes some of the Temple's vessels, such as the Menorah. We would assume that he would complete his laws of the Temple (Menorah and other vessels) prior to discussing the Altar. But he does not. After commencing chapter one with laws of the Temple, he introduces his laws of the Altar in chapter two. In chapter

three, he picks up with the Menorah, which should follow Temple, as it is housed therein. It would seem that laws of the Altar interrupt an unfinished discussion of the Temple and its vessels. Why does Maimonides discuss Temple, then prioritize Altar by positioning its laws right after laws of the Temple, and then return to the Temple's vessels?

4) In law 1:2 Maimonides describes the historical sites of the Temple and the Altar. In law 1:3, Maimonides teaches that once the Temple was built in Jerusalem, no other place was fit for it, or for sacrifice. What is the reason behind this law?

5) Once I know from law 1:3 that both the Temple and sacrifice can never be relocated from Jerusalem, why does Maimonides seemingly repeat in law 2:1 that we can never change the Altar's location?

6) One point astonishes us: While discussing the Altar in law 2:1, Maimonides teaches that the Altar can never be relocated. But he brings a proof from the location of the Temple! How is the Temple's location a proof that the Altar cannot be relocated? Proof for the Altar's location should be from a source relating to the Altar, not the Temple! Why are the two interchanged?

7) What is significant about the location of our forefathers' sacrifices, all offered at the identical location, and that Adam was actually created from that very spot? This is truly amazing, but what is the idea?

8) When Jacob arose from his Prophetic dream, what is the concept of his referring to that place as the "House of God" and the "gates of heaven?" What do these two terms mean?

9) Why did God command Jacob to return to Beth El, the House of God, to offer a sacrifice? Why was this required?

10) A question that underlies all we have asked this far is the following: Why is "location" so integral to the Temple and the Altar? Isn't the act of sacrifice i.e., Temple worship, more essential than 'where' they are performed?

Defining the Temple

Let us begin to answer these questions. However, before moving further, we require a definition for both, the Temple and the Altar. What is the distinction between the two?

Temple is a fixed location for the sacrifices of the Altar, as Maimonides stated, "It is a positive command to make a House to God, prepared to offer the sacrifices in it." We learn that Temple is subordinated to Altar, as it modifies sacrificial practice by confining it to a set locale. Why is such a confinement necessary? Perhaps in part, this addresses the unbridled, religious emotion in man, seen rampant in the sin of the Golden Calf.

Sforno teaches that Temple was in fact a response to the sin of that Calf. A delineated “location” for sacrifice, contains man’s religious emotion. As stated by the Rabbis, the Temple or “religious expression” is the primary avenue where man’s emotions lead him furthest from the truth, furthest from God.

But the main reason is found in the fact that Adam, his sons, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, David and Solomon sacrificed at the same exact location: they testified to the significance that this place held. But significance of a location must recall an initial event. What happened here? As Maimonides taught, its initial significance is that God created Adam there. From that point forward, all of these great individuals recognized the role of God, as man’s Creator – their primary focus. By sacrificing to God at this location, they emphasized the importance of this concept. Each sacrifice on this Altar highlighted and reiterated the fundamental of God’s existence, and His position as the Creator of the universe – the Creator of man. Adam’s original sacrifice at this location underlined his place of creation, and the act of sacrifice, as recognition of the Creator. Therefore, we may define Temple as the fixed location whose identification with fundamental truths properly directs man’s approach to God. As the central focus of Temple is the Ark that houses the Torah, the Temple functions to embody truth.

Sacrifice had always been associated with a “significant location.” Man’s “approach to God” is not free, religious expression. It must be guided by precise, fundamental concepts, primarily the correct notion of God, i.e., the Creator. Sacrificing at the same location of Adam’s creation reiterated this idea. We reflect that we are “created”...a humbling truth.

Defining the Altar

Altar is man’s approach to God. That is, man sacrifices in order to draw near to his Maker. We learn from Maimonides that Altar and sacrifice existed from the time of Adam. Altar preceded Temple. (But as you will see from the next paragraph, this is true only in structure.) After he was created, Adam responded to his Maker with sacrifice. Adam was also “created from the place of his atonement,” from the place of his sacrifice. What does this mean? It means that even before Adam was created, there was a “place” for his sacrifice. Euphemistically, this means that inherent in man’s design, is the need for sacrifice – atonement. So, we can speak of Adam’s place of atonement predating him in this respect: sacrifice is integral to man’s existence. This means that man has no option; he requires atonement, via sacrifice. Why does man require atonement? It is due to his very nature, as a being that possesses free will and instincts. It

is impossible that man never sin: “*For man is not righteous in the land who does good and does not sin (Ecclesiastes 7:20).*” Therefore, we say that Adam was created with an inescapable need for atonement, or “man was created from the place of his atonement.”

But not all sacrifice was for atonement. Some were for thanks, as in Noah’s case, being saved from the Flood. Some were out of recognition for God, as is the case with Adam, upon his creation, prior to sin. Even without sin, sacrifice is part of man’s required function. We derive from this that man’s existence must include approaching God, i.e., sacrifice. Man does not have an option in this respect. As a created entity, possessing intelligence and instincts, God designed man with the purpose of studying the works of his Creator. It is in this pursuit that man will achieve the most profound fulfillment, awed by his studies of God. If man does not seek out his Maker, he will live unfulfilled and never approach his purpose or true happiness. His central faculty of intelligence will go unused – his purpose, lost. No other being was offered this gift of intelligence. And as a Rabbi taught, it is such a precious gift, that man’s soul is stamped with God’s name, the “Tzelem Elohim,” “Form of God.”

We arrive at a dual nature contained in sacrifice: personal atonement, and recognition of God. However, both share equally in man’s approaching God, man’s purpose.

Temple and Altar – Ancient Partners

Earlier, we asked what is the relationship between Temple and Altar, and is one more primary. Even before the Temple existed, Jacob said, “*How awesome is this place. This is no other than the house of God, and this is the gate to heaven.*” Before the Temple existed, Jacob already understood the fundamentals underlying these two structures-to-be: “House of God” refers to a “significant location,” and “Gates of heaven” mean man’s approach to God, or sacrifice as stated by Ramban. Even before our two structures existed in the Law, the concepts of an “instructional location” (Temple) and “approaching God” (Altar) already existed, as all true ideas are eternal. (Torah is a formalization of eternal truths into a system for man. *Proverbs*)

Jacob’s Prophetic event is a paramount model for Temple and Sacrifice. It embodies both institutions, while also teaching of their complimentary natures. It is a remarkable find. Jacob was awed by the realization of alighting upon a location wherein God’s Providence “resided.” Arriving at such a place demands that man call out to God. Perhaps this is why God commanded Jacob to return to this place, named Beth El at that time, and offer a sacrifice. Jacob had not sacrificed there on his first visit, so perhaps

he was lacking a perfection realized only through sacrifice at Beth El.

Can we derive any lesson from the very nature of Jacob's dream? Genesis 28:12 describes the dream as a ladder based on the ground reaching heaven, with angels of God ascending and descending, and God standing at the top. I would humbly suggest that the ladder's position and connection between Earth and heaven teaches a relationship between man and God. This relationship also has God at its "destination," or goal. This is man's purpose, to "approach God." The relationship between man and God can only exist via knowledge, i.e., the angels. Cherubim are affixed to the Ark that houses Torah knowledge for the same reason; the relationship between man and God is based on man's knowledge of God, the system of knowledge is conveyed by the cherubim. With no accurate knowledge of God and His Torah, man has no relationship with God; he has no means by which to comprehend God. We may suggest, based on this interpretation, that the very concepts verbalized by Jacob, i.e., "House of God" (Temple) and "gates of heaven" (Altar) are derived from the nature of the dream. Jacob's words are in fact a response to this dream.

The Temple and the Altar go hand in hand. For this reason, Maimonides discussed the Temple in chapter one, and then the Altar in chapter two, before completing all the details of the Temple's vessels. This teaches that Temple exists on par with the Altar. And for this reason, Maimonides formulates his very first law, as "*It is a positive command to make a House to God, prepared to offer the sacrifices in it.*"

We now come to Question 4. "Once the Temple was built in Jerusalem, no other place was fit for it, or for sacrifice." Perhaps a Temple, built on Mount Moriah, the location of our forefathers' sacrifices, now embodies what all previous Temples did not: man's perfected approach to God, prior to the Golden Calf sin. Our forefathers' sacrifices were untainted with improper, religious expression. Ironically, perhaps the Temple on Mount Moriah reaches its zenith of perfection: it reminds us of the era in which a formal Temple was not required, an era prior to sinful religious expression. On Mount Moriah, the Temple carried with it a never-before achieved status. A new, halachic designation was achieved which could not tolerate relocation. Therefore, relocation is prohibited, as sacrifice now reflected its initial, undiluted form displayed by our forefathers. Temple was now synonymous with sacrifice of the most perfected status. It must be retained. Keeping the Temple on Mount Moriah means retaining the significance of approaching God out of a pure recognition of His role as Creator, and not from a subsequent concession to man's Gold Calf sin.

This complimentary relationship of Temple and Altar explains why Maimonides exchanges their terms. Both function together as one unit.

Temple has no meaning without Altar, and without the words of the Prophet (law 2:4) Altar cannot exist without Temple. This complimentary relationship is also seen by the specific location of the Altar: it must be lined up with the opening of the Temple. This close proximity and alignment conveys their close relationship.

A Rabbi quoted the famous Talmudic saying that today, although we do not have the Altar, and the Temple does not stand, “prayer replaces sacrifice,” “Tefila bimkome karban” (*Talmud Brachos, 26a*) The Rabbi added that even without a quorum, man benefits more when praying in Temple. My friend told me of a Gemara where two Rabbis selected to pray where they learned. What do these two Talmudic sections teach? They teach us this very idea that our approach to God must be associated with, and directed by truth, which both our Temples and places of learning represent. Just as our ancient Temple and Altar worked together to purify our approach to God, basing it on truths, so too today, our prayers in place of sacrifice are to be directed by our Temples, and our Torah study halls.

As Sforno taught, Temple is a concession to man, and his need to relate to life as a physical being. It is strictly prohibited to have any physical relationship with God, as God is not physical. A physical relationship with God via practices like the Golden Calf is both prohibited, and impossible. However, man is a sentient being requiring physical expression. The concession? Temple and Altar are created as the vehicles by which man uses the physical to obtain true ideas, and express his attachment to God. Unguided, with no sacrifice or location of significance, man created the Golden Calf. However, via the Temple and Altar, man is directed by God’s wisdom with precise laws that guide man to true concepts.

The fact that God revealed a prophecy to Jacob, and that He gives prophecy in general, teaches the most primary lesson of our existence: man’s purpose goes unrealized without God’s intervention, God’s instruction. Man makes a most grave error when assuming he is autonomous. Without Temple to define the vital fundamentals of truth, and Altar to relate to our Creator, man will most probably fail.

Postscript

Temple and Altar are codependent: the knowledge of God acquired through Temple demands that man relate to God, and this is via Altar. Conversely, Altar, as a means to relate to God, requires that our thoughts are refined, and our knowledge of God, true. Temple is a prerequisite for Altar, and Altar is an expression of our perfection obtained via Temple.

AFFLICTIONS

A friend wrote the following:

I was wondering if you had any thoughts about this:

As I recall, Maimonides teaches that Divine Providence is in direct proportion with one's level of perfection. In light of that, how do we reconcile the comments of Chazal in Archin 16b regarding one who puts his hand in his pocket intending to pull up three coins and pulls up two...and the Talmud states this is an "affliction"; and Chullin 7b that states that man doesn't stub his toe unless it was decreed in heaven?

If all is as Maimonides states, that in many cases an individual is not under any Divine Providence due to his lack of perfection, how are these Talmudic areas understood, which both imply that everyone suffers Divine afflictions, and in even the most inconsequential matters? Any help would be appreciated.

I replied as follows: You are correct. Maimonides states the following in Book III Chap. XVIII of his "Guide":

...the greater the share of which a person has obtained this Divine influence, on account of both his physical predisposition and his training, the greater must also be the effect of Divine Providence upon him, for the action of Divine Providence is proportional to the endowment of intellect, as has been mentioned above. The relation of Divine Providence is therefore not the same to all men; the greater the human perfection a person has attained, the greater the benefit he derives from Divine Providence. This benefit is very great in the case of Prophets, and varies according to the degree of their Prophetic faculty: as it varies in the case of pious and good men according to their piety and uprightness. For it is the intensity of the Divine intellectual influence that has inspired the Prophets, guided the good in their actions, and perfected the wisdom of the pious. In the same proportion as ignorant and disobedient persons are deficient in that Divine influence, their condition is inferior, and their rank equal to that of irrational beings: and they are "like unto the beasts" (Ps. xlix. 21). For this reason it was not only considered a light thing to slay them, but it was even directly commanded for the benefit of mankind. This belief that God provides for every individual human being in accordance with his merits is one of the fundamental principles on which the Law is founded.

Those who approach Him are best protected, “and He will keep the feet of his saints”; but those who keep far away from Him are left exposed to what may befall them; there is nothing that could protect them from what might happen; they are like those who walk in darkness, and are certain to stumble. The protection of the pious by Providence is also expressed in the following passages: “He keepeth all his bones,” etc. (PS. xxxiv. 21): “The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous” (ibid. ver. 16): “He shall call upon me and I shall answer him” (ibid. xci. 15). There are in Scripture many more passages expressing the principle that men enjoy Divine protection in proportion to their perfection and piety.

I wish to mention that I base my words on a lecture given by a wise Rabbi many years ago, as he addressed this case in Archin. Now let us examine those words of the Talmud. But first, we must define our term “affliction.” In Torah contexts, this refers to pain or suffering intended to correct a person, or people. But many times, people err in assuming that an affliction is ordained by God at a specific time and intended for an individual. I intend to show this is not necessarily the case. It is vital that we do not simply read, but “study” the words of the Rabbis. Talmud Archin 16b states:

What is the most minimal form of affliction? Rabbi Eliezer says, ‘One who wove a garment, but it doesn’t properly fit.’ Zeyerah or some say Rav Shmuel stated, ‘Greater than this first case, is one who wished to mix a hot drink but erred and used cold water, or the opposite.’ Mar said, ‘Even if one put on his shirt inside-out.’ Rabbi Isaac said, ‘Even if one reached into his pocket for three coins and only pulled up two. But if he desired two and pulled out three, this is not an affliction to place back the extra coin.’ [The Talmud then asks] “But what is the relevance of all this? [The answer as learned in a braissa] It was taught in the house of Rabbi Ishmael, ‘Anyone who goes 40 days without any affliction, he has received his reward [on Earth]. And in the West they said of such a person, ‘Punishment awaits him’ [in the next world].’

Let’s first understand the opening question of “What is the most minimal form of affliction?” Evidently, the Rabbis were of the opinion that not all negative events are to be viewed as “afflictions.” Meaning, they felt that some events are too miniscule in their negativity to be viewed as afflictions. So they wished to draw the line, and therefore discussed what criteria determine some negative experiences to be afflictions.

What strikes us next is that in none of these cases, do we find evidence of any “Divine” intervention. The person caused each affliction in every case. Either he was careless when measuring his shirt size in the first case; or grabbed the wrong water container in case 2; in case 3 he put his shirt on inside-out; or he didn’t properly feel for the desired number of coins in case 4. Now, if the person erred in all cases, how can the Talmud call all these cases “afflictions?” Therein lies the answer...“affliction” does not apply to “Divine” matters alone.

The Talmud is teaching us that there is such a thing as natural inconveniences, annoyances or frustrations – matters that God does not directly will, but are part of natural laws. We get stuck in traffic; we cross the street and get splashed; and all the cases above. But if these are all natural, why do they safeguard our afterlife? As we read, one who experiences no afflictions in 40 days, has been given his reward on Earth, and he will not receive the afterlife! The explanation is as follows.

God created the physical universe in a manner that is perfectly imperfect. I mean, that it is a perfect plan, that the physical is imperfect. For if man could find 100% satisfaction in the physical pursuits, lusts and enjoyments, he would never seek out the greater existence of pursuing wisdom. In order to frustrate man from total immersion in physical gratification, God purposefully created the physical world with shortcomings. For example: we don’t have perfect sensation in our fingertips, so when we grab for coins, we might come up short. And that frustration – how ever miniscule – is an “affliction.” Meaning, it serves to limit how far we indulge in the physical. We rush to make a drink, and unintentionally grab the hot water and not the cold. Again, our own shortcomings, i.e., carelessness is part of God’s design. We cannot measure perfectly, so we weave garments that do not fit exactly. As we go through life, we are conditioned day-by-day, year-by-year, to remove our energies from the expectation of complete fulfillment in the physical...so we might redirect our energies, and find wisdom a joy.

However, there is one Divine element cited in the Talmudic portion: the man who goes 40 days without any affliction. It is impossible that during 40 days, someone won’t get a splinter, never miss a train, never spill food on his clothing, make every green light, catch every elevator, etc. When one does find that he has experienced no afflictions at all for 40 days, this is Divine. It is impossible to avoid. Thus, the Rabbis teach that this person is evil, and is receiving his reward on Earth in the form of perfect, physical serenity where literally all works in his favor. This is God’s justice: even a wicked person who performed some good, receives reward for that good. But at the cost of his afterlife; his *Olam Haba* is lost.

The Talmud also follows a sequence of cases to illustrate a progression. These Rabbis debate what qualifies as afflictions. Weaving a shirt that doesn't fit is no catastrophe, but it is irreparable. That's the first definition of affliction. Pouring hot water instead of the desired cold water can easily be redone, but something is lost, the first glass is wasted. So even something that can be repaired is affliction, provided one suffers some waste or loss. The next case is not irreparable and there is no waste, he simply takes off his shirt, turns it outside-out, and puts it back on again. It's an "inconvenience." Finally, pulling up 2 and not the desired 3 coins is so easy to correct, there is no waste, and it takes less time than the previous case. Nonetheless, there is some psychological anguish in the disappointment of not grabbing what he desired. The cases progress from greater loss to lesser, to inconvenience, and then simple anguish. Each provides insight into a lesser level of frustration or affliction, but also teaches us wherein precisely lies the frustration, be it irreparable, waste, time or minor anguish.

The intentionally, imperfect physical world – in combination with unavoidable human error – helps deter us from seeking physical satisfactions alone as a sole means towards happiness, which it cannot provide. Through these natural frustrations – although not Divinely "targeted" at anyone at anytime – God redirects us to another area so we might attain true happiness: to His wisdom. I would add that the mitzvah of circumcision targets this very notion: it demonstrates that physical gratification is not God's plan. Therefore we are commanded to minimize the pleasure from sexual intercourse for both parties through this command. (*Maimonides*)

You also cited Chullin 7b:

Rabbi Chaninah said, 'Man doesn't stub his toe below [on Earth] unless it was decreed above [in heaven] as it says, 'From God are man's steps, and man does not understand his path.' (Mishley 20:24)

On the surface, this appears it might be a similar lesson. However, let's examine the clues.

This lesson centers only on one's toe, or foot, in contrast to the first Talmudic portion that addressed woven garments, drinks, and coins. And the quote too deals only with man's "steps," the path of his foot. Now, is Rabbi Chanina truly saying that matters of the foot alone are decreed? That would be quite odd! In truth, "foot" here, is used to connote man's

“path” in life. And the verse states, man’s “steps.” So what this portion addresses according to Rabbi Chanina, is man’s plans, his steps towards an objective or the next road he travels.

We are taught that God will guide man’s plans. Why? Because in this area – the future – man is blind. Regarding choosing sin or mitzvah, man has all the knowledge he needs to act, and God does not interfere with free will. But regarding the future, man cannot predict or plan for all that will befall him, if he were to take a certain route, accept a certain job, or marry a certain woman. God alone knows what will befall him years down the road. And King Solomon teaches us here that God in His kindness will step in to protect man from a poor decision. Malbim teaches that man might feel frustrated as he “stubs his toe” (labors in vain) which is what these words mean; “man does not understand his path.” When God foils our plans, it is because He knows that another course will prove beneficial.

We conclude that these two portions address two separate concepts. Talmud Archin addresses how God designed the natural order to cause metal to rust, people to age, man to measure inaccurately, things to break, and all other phenomena that frustrate us...all in order to redirect man away from physical gratification and towards wisdom. And these frustrations are not Divinely intended for “Jack” or “John,” but are part of nature, whether these two people lived or not. Nature follows God’s design of imperfection. Talmud Chullin address a single area of man’s plans, that God kindly steers us away from future harm, which we cannot predict or avert, and towards paths of success.

Applying Maimonides’s lesson above to Chullin, God will only assist man in his path, provided he or she is on the level to deserve such Providence. *“For those who God loves, does He rebuke.” (Mishley 3:12)* However, regardless of man’s perfection or sin, Archin teaches that God has already created the world with imperfections as lessons for those who wish to follow God. And this design occurred before the first man lived. Imperfection in nature is unrelated to individuals. In either case, Maimonides and the two Talmudic portions are in harmony.

GOD'S LAND WITHOUT GOD?

Upon their initial conquest of Israel, Moses taught the Jews that a path devoid of Torah results in a wasteful life. This was exemplified by Mt. Ayval's barren state. If one chooses a Torah lifestyle, it results in all forms of success and happiness, as in Mt. Grizim's lush quality. Two goats are to be offered in the Temple each Yom Kippur. A Rabbi once explained that these goats represented two opposing lifestyles: one can follow a life dedicated to God, as one goat was slaughtered to His name, or a life devoid of God, destined to fatality. This was displayed by the scapegoat being lead through a desert to its certain death over the cliffs of Azazel.

Observant Jews view Israel as the land given to us by God: a haven secure for following His laws. To the observant Jew, God is essential to our land's objective. God created the Earth and gave us Israel. The existence of the world and following the Torah are both God's will. There is no separation. The non-observant Jew sees Israel purely as nationalistic, similar to any people's land. God is not essential, as all decisions concerning the state are decided politically.

Both positions cannot be correct.

Just as Moses taught the example of two mountains, and as the Torah teaches via the two goats, you must choose a path and decide why.

In all areas of life, observant or not, we act as rational as possible – making decisions based on reason and proof...choosing the right school, from which doctor to accept treatment, and which business decisions to follow.

Unfortunately, people are not rational when it comes to selecting a theology. Observant Jews follow Torah either by understanding the proofs of God's existence and the perfection of Torah, or without proofs. But not a single non-observant Jew has decided his path based on reason or proof.

Each Jew owes it to him and herself to determine whether or not God exists, and whether He gave us Israel and the Torah. If we prove that God does exist, then we know he gave us Israel. We can determine through His Prophets' teachings how to live and to keep our land, and deal with our enemies. We need not battle them alone, and history teaches us that He will step in, when we are worthy. Mordechai and Esther did not succumb, they followed the Torah even in the face of great danger. On Purim, God saved Mordechai, Esther, and the entire Jewish nation because they followed God's Torah ideals. The Maccabees did the same. We must do the same.

You, who have learned the proofs of God's existence and the beautiful perfection and illuminating insights of Torah, must share this with others.

Give another Jew the opportunity to explore the tenets of Judaism. We are responsible for one another.

If you are non-observant, ask yourself one question: "Am I following what is true or what is false? Does God exist or not?" If this question does not matter to you, there's nothing more to be said. If however, you honestly seek answers to these question, read on.

The contradiction any non-observant, Zionistic Jew must face is: "Why do I desire Israel as my land?" What makes us a nation? Our history is accurate, we received the land and our nationhood from God who communicated with Abraham. This same God gave us the Torah for our own benefit. Yet, you fail to observe the commands. You wrongfully view them as inconvenient and of no benefit...without a mature analysis. With the proper teachers, and with some time invested, you will see that no better life awaits you than the life the Creator said was best. He created us all, he knows what will best fulfill us to the highest degree.

Just as we make decisions in other areas, using analytic and objective criteria, let us decide rationally regarding Torah observance. The Torah specifies a lifestyle that is most enjoyable and beneficial to man. A lifestyle that Moses and King Solomon chose for themselves. These leaders transmitted the Torah truths they wished to be recognized by future generations. Wouldn't you like to actually *know* whether our Torah is authentic? You owe it to yourself to finally prove it. If one believes in God and desires the land He promised exclusively by the words of the Torah, it is a contradiction to ignore the other parts of Torah...His commands. Resolve your contradiction.

Why is there so much tragedy today? God determines the fate of the Jewish nation based on our adherence to Torah. If we abandon Him, He abandons us.

The Jewish people do not deserve God's land and His protection, unless they follow God's Torah. We do not rely on God's intervention alone, but in the intelligent combination of well-guided politics, action, prayer, and Torah adherence as exemplified by Jacob when he was hunted by his twin brother.

Don't live blind to what you can actually prove to yourself. Determine if God exists, and gave the Torah for our benefit. If you arrive at the truth that He does exist, and gave us His Torah, you must agree with all stated therein. We will have success in Israel, only through adhering to His direction. The Shema Yisrael says this. God is a better advisor than any human ruler. Let us follow Him.

CHARITY – TZEDAKA

The Torah saw it necessary to record two accounts of tzedaka. I believe there are two primary concepts.

One story is about Abraham, after he defeated the five kings, where Malkitzedek brought out bread and wine to nourish Abraham, and Abraham gave a tenth of his possessions to Malkitzedek. The second account, describes Jacob, upon fleeing from his brother Esav, and where God, in the famous dream of the ladder assured Jacob of His Divine Providence. Here we find Jacob swore to give a tenth. We learn two ideas about tzedaka from these two accounts.

Regarding Abraham, as Malkitzedek greeted him with the bread and wine, it says that Malkitzedek blessed Abraham. However, Abraham did not respond. But in the next passage, Malkitzedek blessed again, only in this blessing, he is blessing God, not Abraham. In this very same sentence, it records that Abraham then gave Malkitzedek a tenth of all that he had. Why did Abraham wait for the second blessing? I believe that the Torah is indicating here that there must be a proper recipient for tzedaka. Once Malkitzedek blessed God, he defined himself as that proper recipient.

In connection with Jacob, there is a different lesson. Here, I believe the focus is not on the recipient, but on the benefactor, namely Jacob. Jacob's tenth displayed 2 objectives: 1) he wanted to demonstrate that all which he received was directly from God. Therefore the concept of returning possessions to God made sense. 2) He had no fear that by being charitable, he was in any way placing himself in monetary risk. He was certain that God would continually provide.

The gain that one receives by giving tzedaka is that he is constantly affirming his belief that God provides, and will provide for him. The charitable person has no problem parting with his money. Firstly, riches is not his central value system, the pursuit of wisdom is. Secondly, he does not look at this as a loss. We learn in Malachi (3:10) that God tells the Jews that charity is the one area a person is allowed to "test" God to see if He will return to us financial success. God states, *"...and test Me please with this, says the Master of Hosts, (see) if I do not open up the storehouses of heaven, and empty out (for you) a blessing until you have more than enough."* God is guaranteeing that by giving tzedaka, we assure for ourselves financial security, and not an average income, but "until we have more than enough."

We learn from Abraham and Jacob that one must give to a worthwhile recipient. One affirms his conviction in God's kindness and generosity towards man when we are charitable. We lose nothing in the process, but rather, we secure God's blessings. We also affirm our conviction that the

very monies we give, are in fact from God, by giving to those who follow God. One might listen to these words with a bit of disbelief and ask, “How will God accomplish that? I give tzedaka, and God will give me financial success?”

To this person I would ask, Did not God create the heavens and earth? The sun and moon, the innumerable stars? It is then a small thing for Him to give financial increase. Recognition of those who have less than us is commanded many times in the Torah. There are many reasons for us to adhere to this command. As Maimonides states in the Mishneh Torah, *“This commands must be followed more carefully than all other positive commands.”* One who thinks this through will arrive at the truth, that he should experience no sense of risk when he gives his tzedaka.

Tzedaka is not defined merely as giving money. The obligation of tzedaka when giving to the poor is to restore one’s sense of self esteem so he may function in line with Torah. Therefore, as Jewish law states, if one had a high level of living, where, for example he had a servant-pulled horse, and became impoverished, one’s obligation is to restore him with a servant and a horse. Even if the one giving doesn’t live this high, it is irrelevant, as the goal is to restore one to a state where he feels his self image is once again intact where he can function and achieve the lifestyle outlined by the Torah. When we give to the poor, Halacha says we must commiserate with him, and our intent must not be to simply provide finances, but to raise this person’s state of mind to a level of self-sufficiency and happiness, so he feels well enough to realign himself with the Torah lifestyle. The Shulchan Aruch states that the highest level of charity is 20% of ones profit. Not the commonly assumed 10%. 10% is mentioned as an average person’s tzedaka. But those exceedingly rich may give more than a 20%

The 8 Levels of Charity (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Dayah 249:6-13)

- 1) Assisting the poor person so he no longer requires charity, i.e., giving him a job.
- 2) The donor and recipient do not know each other (this removes ego from the donor, and embarrassment from the recipient).
- 3) The donor alone knows the recipient, but not vice versa.
- 4) The poor person knows the donor, but not vice versa.
- 5) Both know each other, and the donor gives prior to being asked.
- 6) You give the poor person what he asks, only after he asks.
- 7) You give the poor person less than what he asks, but with a pleasant countenance.
- 8) You give the poor person begrudgingly.

DISHONEST WEIGHTS

Leviticus 19:35-37:

Do not perform falsehood in justice, in length, in weight, and in volume. Righteous (accurate) scales, righteous stones, righteous dry measures and righteous liquid measures there shall be to you, I am Hashem your God Who took you out of the land of Egypt. And you shall guard all My statutes and all My judgments, and you shall do them, I am Hashem.

Later, in In Deuteronomy, 25:13-16 the Torah commands us again regarding these weights:

You shall not have to yourself in your pocket, stone (weight) and (another) stone, a larger and smaller. You shall not have to yourself in your house, dry measure weight, and (another) dry measure weight, a larger and smaller. A complete and righteous stone weight you shall have to yourself, a complete and righteous dry measure weight you shall have to yourself, in order that your days be lengthened on the land that Hashem your God gives to you. For it is an abomination of Hashem your God all who make these, all who perform falsehood.

We must understand the crime of dishonest weights. Crooked individuals care only for their own wealth, and cheat to obtain it. Let us take the example of produce which is bought and sold by weight. Let's make the buyer our swindler. The buyer wishes to purchase one pound of rice. He then proceeds to take out his own "1 pound" weight and weighs what the store owner placed on the scale. However, the buyer is crooked and uses what only 'seems' to be a pound weight. In fact, that weight is larger. So the buyer obtains more than a pound of rice, but actually pays the price of a single pound. He has cheated the store owner the cost of the excess. This same swindler also sells his own produce and is approached by a buyer seeking two pounds of apples. The swindler now uses a different weight – one which is less than a pound; he hollowed out the bottom, so the buyer is unaware. The swindler proceeds to weigh the two pounds of apples. The buyer, unknowingly, receives less than two pounds, although the swindler charged him for two pounds. Again, the swindler cheated someone. We now understand why the Torah formulates the prohibition against both types of weights, a lesser and a larger. (*Kli Yakar*)

The reason the Torah records the same law multiple times, with differences in each case, is for our detection of additional facets, and implica-

tions of that law. What are some differences between the laws of dishonest weights recorded in Leviticus, and in Deuteronomy? I will list each question by number, and at the very end, offer possible answers correlating to these numbers:

1) Leviticus grouped weights together with the command not to oppress the convert. What is the connection between dishonest weights and oppressing converts, and why is it mentioned only in Leviticus?

2) In Deuteronomy, why are we not commanded against ‘using’ these weights? Isn’t this the true corruption, when we use them to cheat another? Deuteronomy does not seem to forbid ‘use’, addressing only their possession and creation. Why?

3) In general, why aren’t dishonest weights subsumed under “stealing?” How are dishonest weights different than stealing or robbery; why did the Torah create a separate command against them? Is the crime equal, less, or a more grave sin? It would appear that dishonest weights are worse, as the Torah does not call stealing an abomination.

4) Why is the term “abomination” referred to only in Deuteronomy?

5) Deuteronomy commands that one may not have these weights in his pocket or in his house. What is significant about these two areas?

6) What is Maimonides’ principle that one who uses dishonest weights is “likened to one who denies the Egyptian Exodus?”

7) Why divide the laws regarding weights into two Torah locations, Leviticus and Deuteronomy?

Do the verses provide any indications? Certainly, by categorizing our two Torah examples of dishonest weights, we create a framework which offers answers.

Leviticus - Prohibiting Action

It appears from Leviticus that this section addresses the prohibition of ‘action’, “Do not perform falsehood in justice.” Here we find the prohibition not to swindle, in action. However, these words are not found in Deuteronomy. Abusing another person’s innocence for the purpose of stealing is prohibited only in Leviticus. Here, we are warned against the “act” of swindling. Perhaps this also explains why Leviticus grouped dishonest weights with the laws of abusing the convert. In both cases, a person is forbidden to take advantage of another individual’s vulnerability; a convert may be mistreated because of his faulty past, and a neighbor ignorant of my deceptive weights might be robbed. Rashi explains why the words “*I am Hashem your God Who took you out of the land of Egypt*” follow these laws of dishonest weights in Leviticus. Rashi says, “*to indicate that just as*

in Egypt, God discerned between a drop of semen which was a firstborn and which was not, so too God will discern and punish one who cheats with dishonest weights."

What else is Rashi teaching us? The one who uses dishonest weights denies that God sees his covert swindling, performed without the victim's knowledge. Rashi says a response is necessary for the swindler to hear. He must be reminded of God's "Seeing Eye." However, we may ask, in Ethics of the Fathers, 2:1, we are told that by "*pondering three matters, man refrains from sin; a Seeing Eye, a Hearing Ear, and that all our actions are recorded in a book.*" One who swindles does not care about the Seeing Eye. He cares about man's eye, but not God's eye. But it does not appear that this denial of the Seeing Eye (God) exists here alone. So wherein does this sin differ? And what makes the use of dishonest weights an "abomination?" Onkelos was praised for his precise translations. He translates "abomination" as "distanced from God." How is this applicable here, more than in other sins?

I believe the answer lies in the difference between robbers and thieves. A robber is not considered as corrupt as a thief. The robber steals in daylight, even confronting the victim. His fear of God is as minimal as his fear of man. He has no reservation about confrontation. His fear of man is absent, just as is his fear of God's commands. However, a thief steals by night, or covertly. Why? His fear of man is greater than his fear of God. He wishes not to confront man and God's laws are of no concern to him. Man is higher than God. For this reason, Rashi states that a swindler needs the rebuke of denying God's "Seeing Eye." The swindler disregards God's knowledge of his sin, but not man's. So it is the swindler who requires this specific rebuke.

One may say a thief also raises his fear of man above God, so why isn't he considered an "abomination?" We now make recourse to our section in Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy – Prohibiting a Philosophy

We asked in Deuteronomy, why there is no prohibition on the swindling act per se. I believe it is because in Deuteronomy, the violation described is not the "act." What then is the additional prohibition? The prohibition in Deuteronomy is to possess or create these dishonest weights:

You shall not have to yourself in your pocket, stone (weight) and (another) stone, a larger and smaller," and "For it is an abomination of Hasbem your God all who make these.

Even without actual “use” of these weights, we are in violation. What infraction is there? The answer is that the Torah’s laws do not guide our actions alone, but also our philosophies. We are commanded in Deuteronomy not to subscribe to cheating and swindling. Here, it is the “philosophy” that we are commanded against, not the action. The Torah’s words bear this out, as we find no prohibition of any ‘act’ of swindling in Deuteronomy. In Leviticus we find the prohibition on the action: not so in Deuteronomy. Here, God is teaching us of a separate violation where one wishes to cheat. No actual cheating need be committed to violate this second aspect of dishonest weights. The mere possession of these weights in your pocket, in your house, or their creation, is in fact the violation. Thus, it says above not to “have” and it is an abomination to “make” these weights, even without usage.

A Corruption of Mind

Why is the possession or creation of dishonest weights worse than theft, and that “abomination” is applied to dishonest weights and not theft? The difference is a thief may steal once or twice, but this does not prove his philosophy of life. He may steal out of desperation. But one who manufactures or possesses these weights proves that this is an acceptable “way of life.” Subscribing to a life-long philosophy of corruption is an “abomination,” and a distancing from God, whereas an isolated act is not. Man sins until he dies, he cannot escape. His emotions overcome him at times. This is our nature, “*For man is not righteous in the land who does good and does not sin (Ecclesiastes, 7:20).*” But premeditated corruption is something far worse – one’s mind has now been compromised. Thus, one who possesses or creates dishonest weights legitimizes swindling a fellow man, despite God’s commands. “God’s wrath is of no concern, but man’s wrath must be avoided.” Here, man commits himself to an unjust philosophy, and corrupts his thinking. His very essence as a Tzelem Elohim – an intelligent being, he has forfeited. Here, man sacrifices his soul.

Thief and swindler alike share one common corruption: they deny God’s laws and they deny God. This denial is not one of uncontrolled emotion, like eating non-Kosher food on an occasion, or an illicit, sexual encounter. The corruption is a distortion of God; they replace God with man as the one to be feared. Gratifying an emotional urge does not permanently distort God’s place in our minds. Thievery and swindling do. Although there are common aspects, “abomination” is a distinct distortion of one’s mind, i.e., the swindler. Onkelos translates abomination as “distancing” oneself from God. Here, man distorts the very Kingship of God.

Maimonides on Dishonest Weights

Maimonides makes an astounding comment in his Hilchos G'neva (Laws of Stealing), 7:12:

More harsh is the punishment for dishonest weights, than the punishment for illicit sexual relations. For this one (weights) is between him and God, where as this one (illicit sexual relations) is between him and man. And anyone who denies the laws of dishonest weights, is likened to one who denies the Egyptian exodus, as it is the commencement of this command. And anyone who accepts the laws of dishonest weights, this one admits to the Exodus, as it is the cause of all commands.

I understand Maimonides' first statement: corruption in matters pertaining to God as more severe. Man denies God more in the area of dishonest weights, than in sexual prohibitions. But what is meant, that not abiding by these laws regarding weights is likened to a denial of the Exodus? Why a denial of the Exodus, any more than a denial of Sinai, or anything else? And what aspect of the Exodus is being denied? Its historical truth? This doesn't make sense. Why would someone deny accepted history? Maimonides must refer to a denial of another facet of the Exodus. What facet? Another question is, how is the Exodus the "commencement of this command," as Maimonides states? Sinai is where we received the Torah! Sinai is the "commencement of the command."

We are forced to ask: how does the Exodus differ from Sinai? The Exodus granted us freedom. Sinai is where we received the Torah laws. But the goal of the Egyptian Exodus was not for 'freedom' per se. Freedom was granted with our adherence to the Torah, soon to be received.

The first laws, which God gave us at Sinai, were the laws addressing slavery. Why? We were just released from slavery. These laws addressed the very state in man that is despicable in God's eyes, human servitude. The end of human servitude is essential for the fulfillment of God's laws. Human servitude eclipses servitude to God. Removal from slavery is not the good in itself. Our release from bondage was so that we would be free to follow the Torah, but more essentially, to serve God and not man. Human servitude directly obscures man's relationship to God. The very institution of slavery is the antithesis of Torah. Slavery epitomizes man's psychological dependence on another, like the state of a child. One who yearns for a human master has not matured from the infantile state of dependency. Such a Jew has his ear bored. For the ear is what heard at Sinai, "*My servants are you, and not servants to servants.*" Man was designed

to outgrow infantile dependency; not make it his destination. Ultimately, man must see others as equals; only God maintains the position as “Master.” When God freed us, this was the “commencement of the commands.” Now we understand Maimonides latter statement.

But why does Maimonides explain the use of dishonest weights as a “denial of the Exodus?” We said, Maimonides must have not been referring to the denial of the historical truth of the Exodus. To what does he refer? I believe he refers to the feature of “emancipation.” The Exodus alone – and no other event – granted man freedom from human oppression. It rendered man capable of exercising his free will unconditionally.

Now, besides slavery, there is one other institution that retrains our freedom: dishonest weights. However, it is not like one might initially think. Dishonest weights limits freedom, not for the victim, but for the swindler. How do we understand this?

In slavery, one is psychologically bound to another. The slave prefers to have a person directing his life. He is insecure and requires constant direction. In dishonest weights, here too one is psychologically bound. But here, the one bound is the swindler. The swindler desires to manipulate man and he “tricks man’s mind.” This manipulation gives man the feeling of dominance, when in fact, he should be subservient to God. The swindler prefers man as his focus, although the swindler is dominant, unlike the slave who is subservient. It makes no difference whether a slave or swindler, both wish to abandon the freedom granted by the Exodus. God intended the Exodus to free man to focus on Him, not people. The slave’s insecurity removes God as his Master. The swindler too has removed God from his focus, not from insecurity, but from the opposite emotion; the need to manipulate man. A slave is subservient, the swindler is dominant. Both individuals distance themselves from God: man becomes their primary relationship in life.

Maimonides teaches a principle: slaves and swindlers opt for a relationship with man over a relationship with God. They deny the “goal” (not the historical truth) of the Exodus: that man be free to relate to God through His Torah system.

In another location, Maimonides makes a philosophical point, much in line with our command against dishonest weights. In his Commentary on the Mishna, Maimonides states that in business dealings, one should seek transactions where one’s client or customer obtains equal profit for himself. We must not be self-centered vultures seeking to devour our clients wealth. Our clients’ possessions are no less important in God’s eyes, than our own. The very fact that man is one of many within a species teaches the concept of “equality.” One should observe and take to heart, “God

doesn't will my existence alone, but all members of mankind. God's will extends to all humans, equally." But if this truth is not apparent enough, Leviticus teaches that we should not oppress the convert, nor use dishonest weights. Justice is God's will.

The truth is, greed is a counter-productive goal: it creates a society wherein those wishing to accumulate unjustly, will have their own wealth robbed by other greedy individuals, who follow. How ironically just.

Summary

Many salient principles are discovered through studying the laws regarding dishonest weights:

1) Leviticus teaches we may not use these weights, as they are acts of oppression, just like oppressing converts.

2) Deuteronomy teaches that dishonest weights are distinct from other commands, that mere possession is a violation. Mere "possession" (or active creation) is the violation. Making or possessing such weights expresses a corrupt philosophy.

3) Possession of these weights displays a severe distortion in man; God's word is devalued. Rashi taught us that as God discerned the firstborns, He too discerns our acts, which tragically we feel are hidden from God's "eyes." The violator who uses these weights replaces God with man, as one to be feared most.

4) We also understand why "abomination" is used only in Deuteronomy: here alone the Torah outlines who has subscribed to a corrupt philosophy by mere possession of these weights. In Leviticus, only the 'use' of dishonest weights is prohibited. But 'use' is a one-time event, not deserving of the term "abomination." It is only he who creates or possesses these weights, corrupts his mind and morality in a permanent way.

5) What is the reason for the prohibition against possessing these weights in one's pocket or house? In one's pocket means he is ready to use them at any point: it is his philosophy. But not only in actual business is he corrupt. Perhaps keeping these weights at home shows that his entire philosophy of life and his home is permeated with the greed and propels one into such selfish behavior.

6) Maimonides' Laws of Stealing teaches that whether one is a slave or a swindler, he errs by opting for a relationship with man rather than God. The slave serves man, while the swindler manipulates man. In both cases, man denies the goal of the Exodus, to be detached from co-dependent relationships, free to relate to God through His Torah system.

7) Why the division of the laws regarding weights into two locations, Leviticus and Deuteronomy? Is this to teach that "dishonest weights" is

not the essential institution; otherwise, all aspects would be located in one part of the Torah? Perhaps the division of these laws, as is done with other laws, indicates that other features are more essential to Torah, than the specific parameters of a given command. What I mean is, had we seen all laws of dishonest weights centrally located in one Torah portion, our attention would not be directed away from this institution. But as we see the “action” (Leviticus) separated from the “philosophical subscription to corruption” (Deuteronomy), we focus on these two categories, that otherwise could possibly go undetected. We learn from this that these two categories dominate the institution. Meaning, the smaller institution of dishonest weights is not as central, as is the ‘greater’ lesson of not corrupting our philosophy. Unjust weights are merely an example of the greater, categorical corruption of distorting one’s philosophy. Possession of these weights is a sampling of how one can philosophically err. By the Torah separating out this aspect of these weights, we are driven to identify this category: that we must be philosophically sound, even if we don’t “act” corruptly.

Having come this far, discussing “scales of justice,” let us be cognizant that God weighs our merits and sins, judging us with ultimate truth. We must comprehend that all is known before Him. “All is written in a book.” Take this to heart and follow the right path. Understand the perfections granted to us by God through His Torah system. We must examine our ways, abandon sinful acts and improve our character traits. The we can align ourselves on the correct path and lead a life of truth, and a true life.

TEHILLIM & MEZUZAH: PROTECTION VS. HEALING

Many false beliefs are popular in Jewish communities today. Torah demands that we adhere to truth and not fool ourselves. We are to follow only those ideas based in reality, and Torah alone is the exclusive authority on what is real. When instructing us in Torah, our great Rabbis quoted Torah verses or Talmudic sources.

To ensure that the Judaism we follow is authentic, and not based on human fabrication, we too must follow the Rabbis’ lead, and only practice and believe those ideas and acts that are found in the Torah, or in the Talmud. If however, we observe other religious Jews practicing that which is not located in these sources, we must realize that such practices are not from the Torah, but from man. It must not matter to us if the practitio-

ner is a great leader, or a Rabbi, for all humans err[1], including Moses. Therefore, assuming any leader today is infallible, or that what is found in any book or “sefer” must be true, one subscribes to false beliefs. We must adhere to the Torah’s words, or to sources in the Talmud as being the exclusive and final word.

Having made that introduction, it behooves us to further examine our Torah’s opinion regarding a series of topics. I have attempted to communicate the fallacy of amulets, segulas, and all Nichush (sorcery) practices prohibited by the Torah. I have cited Maimonides – one of our greatest minds – as clearly prohibiting any act, which claims that unrelated causes will generate some desired effect. For this reason, Torah prohibits good luck charms as they are unrelated to the desired result of success or wealth. Similarly, chamisas, red bendels, challas baked with keys or lucky pennies, are all permutations of the same prohibition. None of these items possess properties that affect success, health, wealth, or pregnancy...or any other imagined benefit. And if one uses these objects in practice, then this person violates a Torah prohibition of Nichush – not to practice sorcery. Sorcery falls under the larger heading of idolatry, the very antithesis to Torah and One God, that is prohibited precisely because it is false. As beings granted with intelligence, we are to live by wisdom and proofs, of what our minds determine is true. We are not to perform an act that is baseless, based on blind faith, or is simply accepted by peoples.

Tehillim

What has become popular today is the recitation of Tehillim (Psalms) when a person falls sick. Although well meaning, practitioners must ask honestly, “Is this condoned by the Torah?” Certainly, we must ask if Tehillim’s author – King David – endorsed this practice of recitation as a means for bodily healing. From reading Tehillim, we learn that King David offered praises to God for His multiple manifestations of salvation, and for His works in nature. This is what we refer to as “Hashgacha Pratiyos” and “Hashgacha Klaliyos,” or individual and general (natural) Providence. But we do not read that King David engaged in Tehillim recitation when his son fell sick, or for any other tragedy or mishap. King David’s response was Tefila – prayer. This is what our Rabbis have instructed us to do when we are sick, or if we are in any need of God’s assistance for ourselves, or others. We certainly do not find that recitation, with the understanding that it “automatically cures” is an acceptable practice. “Studying” Tehillim – not mere recitation – is another matter, and is admirable just like all Torah study. But reciting Tehillim alone without connection to prayer is not the Torah’s method of seeking God’s help.

It is appropriate to reprint a Jewish law:

The Prohibition Against Employing Charms (Sefer Chinuch, Mitzvah 512)

[That] We were restricted not to make incantations about any matter. In substance, this refers to a man who will say words, then tell people that those words helped or caused harm in any particular matter. About this it is stated, "There shall not be found among you...a charmer (Deuteronomy 18:10-11)." In the language of the Medrash Sifre: It is all the same thing, whether a person casts a charm on a snake or casts a charm on a scorpion — in other words, he says words over them so that they won't bite him, according to his opinion. So too if one says words over a wound in order to be relieved of the pain (i.e. recites a pasuk to cure a wound).

Now perhaps, my son, you might pose a question to me from what we read in the Talmud Shevuos 15b: The Psalm against evil occurrences is with lutes and lyres (Psalms 91), and then he says Psalm 3. In other words, the recital of these Psalms is of use to provide protection from harm. And it says in tractate Brachos 3a: R. Joshua b. Levi would say these verses and go to bed.

However, this matter is not similar (perish the thought) to the business of a charmer that we mentioned. Long ago, the Sages of blessed memory said in this regard (Shevuos 15b): It is forbidden to heal oneself with words of Torah. Yet they mentioned to say these Psalms, since they contain words that inspire the soul that knows them, to shelter in the Eternal Lord, place all his trust in Him, establish a reverent fear of Him firmly in his heart, and rely on His kindness and goodness. As a result of his awareness about this, he will be protected, without any doubt from every harm. This is what was answered in the Talmud in this regard. For it was asked there, but how could R. Joshua do this? Here R. Joshua said it was forbidden to heal oneself with words of Torah! And the reply was given: To secure protection, it is a different matter. In other words, the Torah did not forbid a man to say words of Torah so as to arouse his soul in a good direction, so that this merit should shield him to protect him. (End of translation)

Note: Recitation without understanding cannot possibly be considered something that helps a person focus on the concepts of bitachon, fear of Hashem, and reliance on His kindness. A person's merit protects him, not the words of Psalms. He gains merit when he ponders the words of

Psalms and they become real to him, not when he recites them without understanding them.

Accordingly, what truly protects us is God alone, and only for those of us who come close to Him in study. So if one “studies” Tehillim, he or she brings him/herself closer to God, and God will surely protect them. But mere recitation is not condoned here. Additionally, the Talmud teaches that one may only practice this if he is healthy, but if one is sick and desires the removal of an illness based on reciting Tehillim, this is prohibited. We must understand this distinction.

The Mishna and Talmud state that one, who recites Torah verses intending to heal a wound, loses his share in the World to Come. One source is found in Talmud Shavuot mentioned above. The Talmud describes how certain Torah verses were recited in connection with sacrifices and with afflictions. Rabbi Yehoshua then asks:

How is it permissible for one to recite Torah verses to heal an illness, for Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi stated [elsewhere] ‘It is prohibited to heal one’s self with words of Torah.’ [The Talmud answers,] ‘To shield one’s self is different [permitted]. But when we said it is prohibited, applies only to a case where one has a wound: if one has a wound, it is prohibited, but if he has no wound, it is permissible.’ [The Talmud then asks,] ‘It is only prohibited, and nothing worse? But have we not learned, ‘One who recites verses over his wound has no share in the World to Come?’[2]’ Rabbi Yochanan answered, ‘This applies to one who spat[3] on his wound and then recited a verse, for one must not recite God’s name [in a Torah verse] next to spittle.’

Rabbi Yochanan clarified that one loses his share in the World to Come only when he recited God’s name (a verse) over a wound where he spat. But if he did not spit, although he does not forfeit the World to Come, the recitation over a wound is still a prohibition. It must be clear: no view supports any recitation to remove an illness. The distinction made by Rabbi Yochanan is that to forfeit the World to come, one must recite a verse next to spittle, whereas others claim this forfeiture happens regardless of the presence of spittle. But all views – with or without spittle present – make clear that reciting a verse for healing purposes is prohibited.

Maimonides teaches:

One who whispers over a wound, or recites a Torah verse, and also one who reads for an infant so it should not be worried, and

on who places a Sefer Torah or Tefillin on a minors so they might sleep, it is insufficient for them that they are considered enchanters (Nachashim) and Diviners (Chovrim), but they are in the category of deniers of the Torah – Kofrim – rendering Torah as a bodily remedy, when the Torah is truly only a remedy for the soul.

Maimonides teaches that Torah has one purpose: to benefit our soul, not our body. This makes sense, since Torah is “ideas” and not a medicinal substance. Assuming that healing will occur by recitations is as idolatrous as any other practice, like rubbing a rabbit’s foot for good luck. It matters none that the object of the idolatrous practice is, in one case, an animal’s limb, or in another, a Torah object. If Torah does not sanction the goal, then one is projecting magical, false beliefs, and this is the prohibition. Similarly, a Mezuzah does not protect the body, and if one believes so, he forfeits his share in the World to Come. There is no reason to distinguish between a Mezuzah and Tehillim.

Protection vs. Healing

But we must now return to what the Talmud does permit: recitation of Torah verses to “shield” us is permitted, not “heal” us. What is the difference? Gilyon M’harsha writes[4]:

If one affixes the Mezuzah for the reason of fulfilling the command, one may consider that as reward for doing so he will be watched by God. But, if one affixes the Mezuzah solely for protective reasons, it in fact has no guidance, and the Mezuzah will be as knives in his eyes.

These are very strong words. But what is his lesson? He is teaching us that God is the only source of protection, and that physical objects have no power. Rather, if one thinks they do, these objects, even a Mezuzah, will become the opposite, “knives in his eyes” – something destructive. We say every day, “*He (God) alone is the master of wonders.*” This means that nothing but God can affect our lives negatively, or positively. Maimonides also teaches that one who is healthy may recite songs or Tehillim, and assume that in the merit of such a recital, he will be shielded from mishaps. So why are we allowed to recite Tehillim to shield us, but not to cure us, or others?

Reciting Tehillim to heal a sick person assumes a baseless notion that a direct cause and effect relationship exists between Torah words, and health. However, there is no truth to this assumption. Again, the “ideas” of Torah are intended to benefit our “souls.”

The Rabbis unanimously agree: if one “studies” the Torah’s words and is inspired by these truths, or if one performs mitzvahs, then he or she can rest assured that God will protect from all mishap. But we must stress that this applies only to the “performer” of these correct acts, not another person. So even if one correctly studies Tehillim, this cannot benefit another person, unless the other person also participates in perfected acts. Of course, we must always pray for others, for we must love our neighbor as we love ourself.

Summary

In the end, we find no source or reasoning that the mere recital of Tehillim, or any words will benefit anyone. The opposite is true: it is prohibited if one is sick. While it is praiseworthy that many Tehillim groups exist, any act we perform must come under the direction of Torah law, which we have elaborated upon here. Reciting Tehillim to remove illness is prohibited. Studying Torah and performing mitzvahs will earn us God’s protection, if we are healthy and not seeking a cure. For if we think we can cure existing illnesses with Torah’s words, we thereby attribute false healing powers to something incapable of healing; as the Rabbis taught, *“It is prohibited to heal one’s self with words of Torah.”*

Practically, what shall we do moving forward? This must be answered in two parts: 1) how do we help ourselves, and 2) how do we help others? For ourselves, we have the answers: we follow Torah law, and continue to study. And if we are ill, the Talmud suggests: (*Tal. Baba Basra, 116b*) *“Rabbi Pinchas said, ‘If one has a sick person in his house, he shall travel to a wise person who shall seek mercy for him, as it is said, ‘The anger of a king is the angel of death, but a wise person will atone.’”*[5] Why should one seek a “wise person” as opposed to another? The answer is because the matter of the sick person requires investigation, only possible through a wise person who can uncover our faults, and hopefully enlighten us to a path of repentance. But we cannot recite Torah words assuming any healing powers, nor did the Talmud suggest this. And for others who need healing, we should pray for them, and advise them of a wise person who can investigate them, and enlighten them to their flaws. But again, reciting Torah words or Tehillim is not the Torah’s prescribed remedy.

A Rabbi recently recalled, *“It could be due to the merit of another more perfected person, that I will obtain God’s favor: God might save me, since my death could negatively impact another person.”* This however does not remove the prohibition to recite Tehillim for any sickness, for anyone. This concept means – as the Torah taught – that God will intercede on behalf of one person, due to the perfection of another. Thus, God saved the Jews

during the Golden Calf, due to Moses' prayer. God may also save my friend today, if his illness negatively impacts me, and, if God is that concerned for me based on my level or perfection. But who am I to say that God will save my friend based on my prayer? Surely, the correct approach is that the sick person gains contact with a wise person. And even in the case where God saved the Jews due to Moses, Moses was the most perfected person, and even then, it was only due to God's instructing Moses to pray, that Moses did so, and that it was effective. But until instructed by God, Moses did not feel he could do anything for the Jews. Rashi said he was weak and was not going to pray. So we are not at liberty to determine when prayer is effective, although we must pray in any case, for it might be.

Since Moses did not feel his actions could save the Jews, how can we be certain that our actions will save our friends, or the sick? I am not sure, but we could "study" Tehillim, gain more knowledge about God, and perhaps as God would protect us due to the merit of Torah study and our mitzvahs, God "may" save another person for whom we pray, if we find favor in His sight through our proper performances.

The certain path we must take is what the Torah prescribes. So we must all follow the Torah meticulously, and not continue practicing what is simply "popular." We must be concerned for others, and again, it is admirable that so many Tehillim groups exist. But we must reevaluate such groups in light of the Torah's sources. We will surely not gain God's favor, if we think Tehillim itself is a cure. It is truly harmful to the sick, and ourselves if we recite Tehillim, assuming ideas rejected by Torah.

May we all continue to reevaluate our ways, and abandon false beliefs not found in Torah, that actions or objects remove illnesses. May we instead, ensure we are on God's path outlined in His Torah, and in that merit, may we earn His future protection. Sharing these ideas with the sick is what appears to be the proper course of action. For if the sick do not increase their knowledge of Torah, mitzvahs and themselves, and repent, why shall God cure them? This was the entire lesson of Job.

[1] "For man is not righteous in the land who does good and does not sin." (Ecclesiastes, 7:20)

[2] Mishna Sanhedrin 11:1 / Talmud Sanhedrin 90a

[3] Apparently to soothe his sore

[4] Yoreh Dayah, 289 (page 113 on the bottom)

[5] Proverbs, 16:14

IDOLATRY'S "REAL" INFLUENCE

And the settlement of the Jews which they lived in Egypt was 430 years. And it was at the end of 430 years, in that very day there departed all of God's troops from the land of Egypt. A night of watching was it to God to bring them out from the land of Egypt. That was this night to God: watched for all the Children of Israel for their generations (Exod. 12:40-42).

The problem is obvious, the Jews did not dwell in Egypt for 430 years. They dwelled there 210 years. The Torah cannot contradict facts. Therefore, we must discover the true intent of this time frame, as it is not literal. Then, we must understand why God saw it necessary to formulate this lesson in a non-literal manner.

Sforno and Ibn Ezra teach that 430 years earlier marks the date of Abraham's exit from Ur Kasdim. But they don't go further to explain the correlation between his departure 430 years earlier, and the Egyptian exodus. They merely give us the significance of that date. To be clear, an accurate verse would state that Abraham left Ur Kasdim 430 years earlier, or the Jews lived in Egypt 210 years. But our verse combines elements from two, disparate historical accounts: Abraham's departure from Ur, and of the Jews' departure from Egypt. Thereby, the Torah scripts a duration of the Jews' Egyptian settlement 220 years longer than reality. Let's review God's earlier communication with Abraham concerning the impending bondage:

After these matters, the word of God came to Abraham in a vision saying, "Do not fear Abraham, I am your shield; your reward is very great." And Abraham said to God, "God, Governor, what shall you give me, and behold I go childless, and the steward of my house is the Damascene Eliezer." And Abraham said, "Behold to me you have not given seed, and behold the houseman will inherit me." And behold, the word of God was to him saying, "This one will not inherit you, rather, one who comes from your innards, he will inherit you." And He took him outside and He said, "Gaze at the heavens and count the stars. If you are capable of counting them, so too shall your seed be." And he believed God, and God considered it a righteousness [to Abraham]. And He said to him, "I am God who took you out of Ur Kasdim to give to you this land as an inheritance." And Abraham said, "God, Elohim, with what shall I know that I shall inherit it?" And He said, "Take Me three heifers, three goats, three rams, a turtledove and a young dove." He took all these,

he cut them in them in the center and placed each piece opposite its counterpart...(Gen. 15:1-9).

And He said to Abraham, "Know with certainty that your offspring shall be aliens in a land not their own, and they will serve them, and they will oppress them, 400 years. But also the nation they will serve, I will judge...(ibid 15:13,14)."

This 400-year forecast in Genesis commences from Isaac's birth and ends with the Egyptian exodus. These 400 years overlap "*And the settlement of the Jews which they lived in Egypt was 430 years*" stated in Exodus, and commence 30 years prior to Isaac's birth. In Genesis, the 400 years is not specified as limited exclusively to "dwelling in Egypt." The Jews' lived as aliens in foreign lands long before their stay in Egypt. Thus, Egypt is merely one of many foreign lands in which the Jews would be aliens. This starts to answer the problem: the Jews didn't actually live in Egypt for 430 years. The total 430-year period intends to highlight a period of some "form" of subjugation. Only 210 of those years were spent in Egyptian servitude. So what was the "subjugation" of the previous 220 years? And we must explain why the verse in Exodus gives the impression that the Jews quite literally resided in Egypt that long.

Let us examine Abraham's vision and line-up the questions:

1) Primarily, why did the Jews deserve this forecasted oppression? What sin demanded this punishment? We know the Jews sinned, as God says, "*But also the nation they will serve, I will judge*" – emphasis on "also," to include God's judgment of the Jews too. This judgment must teach of some sin. And how does oppression correct or atone for the sin?

2) Why did Abraham desire his own seed promulgate his monotheistic teachings, rendering Eliezer insufficient for this role?

3) Why did Abraham accept without question, the promise of numerous offspring and the forecast of oppression of his seed...but he does question the basis that his seed would inherit the land?

4) Why is Abraham satisfied with God's "answer" for the basis for this inheritance: dividing a few animals?

5) God does not always tell His Prophets the future of the nation. Why does He do so here?

6) Why does God wait to identify Himself, only upon announcing the land as an inheritance, and not at the very commencement of this prophecy?

7) What is the term "night of watching" to teach us?

8) Finally, how do we interpret the 430 years and what is the relationship to the Egyptian exodus?

Sforno (*Gen. 15:13*) says the Prophet Ezekiel blamed the Jews' idolatry, causing the bondage in Egypt: "*But they rebelled against me and would not hearken to Me; they did not – every man – cast away the detestable things of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt; then I said I would pour out My fury upon them in the midst of the land of Egypt (Ezek. 20:8).*" Sforno adds (*ibid*) that as long as the tribes (Jacob's sons) were alive, no servitude began, as they were righteous individuals. Thus, the Jews lived in Egypt freely and without sin, for a while. Eventually they were attracted to the Egyptian idolatry, as Ezekiel teaches, and were oppressed due to God's will, as punishment.

Idolatry is one of the worst sins. It rejects the most primary idea – God's existence – the sole reason that all else exists. Idolatry fails to recognize that the universe has a Creator and Governor, that He is one, and non-physical.

Maimonides commences his great work, the Mishneh Torah, with the words "*Fundamental of fundamentals, and pillar of all wisdom: to know there is a First Existence.*" (He actually spells-out God's name with the first letters of the first four words) Knowledge of God – He who caused all else – must precede all other knowledge. For without knowledge of God, we have no knowledge at all. We may see a universe, study its laws and learn to harness its resources to create marvels in technology. But if this universe offers man no reflection of the Creator, his knowledge is purposeless. "*The fear of God is the beginning of knowledge... (Proverbs 1:7).*" "*The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God... (Psalms 111:10).*" Kings Solomon and David make this clear.

We now appreciate that the Jews' idolatry required a response, if they were to deserve continued existence. God caused our slavery, and we finally cried out to Him. We returned to the Creator, and renounced idolatry. The Paschal Lamb was required for the Jews' redemption. This is in consonance with the dividing of the animals that God commanded Abraham in the vision. Meaning, the denouncing of animals as deities earned the Jews God's Providence. Abraham did not inquire about God's promise to make the Jews as numerous as stars. God can perform His will. He also did not ask why the Jews would be oppressed, since man too can perform his will, including sin, and he will deserve punishment. What Abraham did inquire about, was the basis for God's redeeming the Jews. What would they do to deserve salvation? God's answer was to kill the animals. Abraham understood this response, and asked nothing further. This made sense as a basis for their redemption, that the Jews would kill the very deities they once worshipped.

The reason God says the Exodus was a "night of watching," is, as Ram-

ban teaches, because God “awaited” this great day. It was the goal that the Jews leave Egypt and idolatry, and become a nation unto God. Such a momentous occasion is termed as waited for, or “watched.”

In the vision, God identifies Himself as the one who took Abraham out of Ur Kasdim, only as He is about to promise the inheritance of Israel. For this was the reason He gave Abraham the land: that Abraham’s monotheism could flourish. Only in connection with his monotheistic teachings is there relevance of Ur Kasdim.

And Sferno teaches that God revealed the future oppression in that vision, so years later, the Jews might not view it as happenstance, but as God’s will. Only through a received, Prophetic transmission that the bondage was an act of Providence, could the Jews know they were enslaved by God’s will, and repent.

We also asked why Eliezer was not Abraham’s choice to carry on monotheism. Abraham understood that his teachings would have greater effect on his descendants, if taught by his own seed. Human nature is to favor one’s familial ties and culture, as opposed to notions of alien origin.

Now, how do we answer the main question?

By stating the Jews dwelled in Egypt 430 years when in fact they did not, God associates the Jewish settlement in Egypt with Abraham’s exodus from Ur Kasdim 430 years earlier. There is a relationship: Ur Kasdim was a hotbed of idolatry, and the Jews were enslaved due to idolatry – the identity of Ur Kasdim – and ultimately expressed on a national level in Egypt. The Jews did not literally live in Egypt 430 years. It was only 210 years. However, God wishes to warn mankind of the greatest of dangers. Therefore, He referred to the idolatrous influence in tangible terms. Stating that the Jews “lived” in Egypt 430 years, God equated the psychological influence of idolatry that spread from Ur Kasdim prior to Egypt, to actually living in an idolatrous Egypt. This is the main point. Those 220 years prior to Egypt, plus the 210 years in Egypt, were all the same... totaling 430 under idolatrous influence. The 220 years prior to Egypt are viewed as if the Jews were already immersed in Egypt’s physical environment, permeated with idolatry. It didn’t matter that they were not in Egypt, since the idolatrous trends were all around.

This equation is well-founded. For it is the psychological effect of idolatry that damages man; not the mere existence of idols and idolaters. In order to teach man that regarding idolatry, it is the internal, psychological world that is most real, God talks about these internal effects, as if they are externally experienced, as if living in Egypt. So it can be said metaphorically that the Jews “lived in Egypt 430 years.” However, this

case of metaphor is different than most, since idolatrous influence is truly internal, and did exist 430 years.

We learn that God communicates with man in a manner that the primary lesson is delivered in the most effective way. Since man initially views physical reality as more real than internal and psychological forces, the Torah depicts idolatry in spatial terms. Additionally, such an overt historical “error” of the Jews settlement in Egypt causes the Torah student to spend more time delving into the matter to resolve the glaring problem. This in turn creates a greater impression on the Torah student regarding this vital matter of God’s exclusive role as Creator, and the rejection of idolatry.

“One who denies idolatry, is as if he affirms the entire Torah. One who affirms idolatry is as if he denies the entire Torah (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Idolatry 2:7).”

GOD JUST WANTS ME TO BE A GOOD PERSON

What appeals to human emotion is naturally most popular. Certainly that’s the case when the matter is appealing in a primary sense. Take this notion for example: “All God wants is that I am a good person.” This appeals to us, as it fulfills our religious emotion – a core need. However, being good (which requires definition) is not “all God wants” as people imagine. Being good is but one component of a larger list of Torah obligations. For had God only desired that we are good, and nothing more, the Torah would not be so large. Furthermore, God never says “All I want is that people are good.”

We must also be honest about our motives. Many times, one says this catch phrase in defense of abandoning Torah obligation. This statement alleviates our guilt for not fulfilling laws like Tefillin, tzitzis, Torah study, patient prayer, sexual restrictions, modesty, courtesy, honesty, Lashon Hara, and Shabbos observance.

The number of laws found in the entire Torah is 613. And this does not include Rabbinic laws. One must be honest and dismiss this false notion that all God wants are “good people.” What God wants is that men and women perfect themselves – in all areas. This includes how we treat others, but it does not end there. We must also be good to ourselves.

What is included in being good to others? This covers vast areas, from monetary matters, speech, deeds, war, courts, and under each of these there

are dozens of issues that are guided by many Torah laws. So being good is not a simple matter. The French doctors who treated Arafat thought they were being good. Can you explain to them why they were not good? Do you have the true definitions and precise rules for deciding when we allow people to die, and when we save them? If you don't, then you do not know what "good" means. Only God can determine this question, which explains why abortion remains a debated topic. This is because man has no means to objectify morality. Morality – good and evil – are authoritative in nature, they are not intellectual "truths," like the question if a ball is in motion or not. Morality is not subject to facts, senses and reason. It is God's determination alone, Who is the creator of life. Therefore, we cannot answer such questions without consulting His Torah. Any question about morality must be defined by God – not our subjective guesses.

Most of us are in no position to make determinations about what is good or bad, unless we have studied all of God's words on this matter, and His words fill volumes. And not only are we greatly ignorant about how we are to be truly good to others, but we're also ignorant about how to be good to ourselves. In fact, this is more important. For we are not always in the company of others, but we are always in our own company. Being good to ourselves is obligatory 100% of the time. So how does God command that we be good to ourselves?

First and foremost, God desires that we are honest. Living a lie is a wasted life. Thus, God gave us five senses so we might attain accurate perception of the natural world. Studying this universe, we arrive at new insights and truths about the Creator. God created the universe to offer intelligent beings a means by which we may all realize the immense brilliance of the Creator. But God also gave us intelligence. This is because there is another world: the world of ideas, which drives this world, and is where we end up after this life. Without intelligence, we cannot make sense of this universe, nor will we earn a place in the afterlife, which endures eternally. That existence also offers us far greater enjoyment than the physical life. For there, no frustration or physical limitations exist. God designed humans to find the greatest fulfillment in the pursuit of knowledge. And this is how we can be good to ourselves, by engaging in the study of the universe, and the Torah. The Talmud also teaches that study is the greatest mitzvah of all.

There is so much more to be said, but for now, let us take the first step and admit that what God wants is no simple matter. And it's not just to "be good." He wants the best for us, and that is a lifelong task of Torah study, honesty, and fulfilling *all* of His mitzvos. Just as we would never ignore a doctor's suggestions, all the more true, we must not ignore God, for our own good.

FEAR & LOVE OF GOD – ATTAINING THE AFTERLIFE

The last Mishna in Talmud Makkos ends as follows:

Rabbi Chananya ben Akashya said, “God desired to [bestow] merit on Israel, therefore He increased Torah and mitzvos, as it says, “God desired for the sake of its [Israel’s] righteousness; [therefore] He made Torah great and glorified” (Tal. Makkos 23b).

In his commentary on this Mishna, Maimonides writes:

It is of the fundamentals beliefs in the Torah that when man fulfills a mitzvah of the 613 mitzvos as is fitting and proper, and he does not join with that performance any Earthly [ulterior] motivation in any manner; but he performs it for its own sake, with love as I have explained to you, behold – he has merited eternal life [Olam Haba]. And on this did Rabbi Chananya ben Akashya say, “For the mitzvos, as they are numerous, it is impossible that during his life, man will not perform one of them in its true intent, and completely. And when he performs that mitzvah, his soul will live [eternally].

Rashi comments as follows:

In order that they receive reward with their refrain from sins, therefore God increased [mitzvos] for them. For it was not necessary to command many mitzvos and many warnings regarding [eating] despicable insects and carcasses...for there is no man who doesn’t loathe them. Rather, they were commanded so man receive reward on account of refraining from [eating] them.

On the surface, Maimonides and Rashi appear to agree: observance of mitzvos earns us our reward. But examine their words carefully, what does each Rabbi address? There is quite a difference.

Maimonides

Maimonides addresses “any” command – positive or negative – as he states, “when man fulfills a mitzvah of the 613 mitzvos...” He is also addressing the attitude of the person “and he does not join with that performance any Earthly [ulterior] motivation in any manner.” Finally, he is addressing the attainment of the Afterlife.

Rashi

Rashi appears to be addressing only negative commands, as he writes “refrain from sins,” and the aspect of “reward.” It is not clear if Rashi means that veering from sin earns us the Afterlife, or merely earns another matter he refers to as “reward.” It seems more plausible to suggest the latter. A safe explanation of Rashi would be that he is addressing why Rabbi Chananya felt many prohibitions were given: to insure our increased reward. Meaning, securing the Afterlife is not achieved through adhering to many mitzvos. Rashi is only addressing what “increases” our Afterlife’s reward. For example, one may obtain a ticket to a show, but how good the seat is, is another issue. Obtaining a ticket is akin to attaining the Afterlife through following fundamentals. But the better seat is attained – as Rashi says – through one’s avoidance of more sins. Rashi addresses the nature of the seat – the increase of the reward. It is unreasonable to suggest that man harbors incorrect views of God, but earns the afterlife by avoiding consumption of shrimp, pork, and other non-Kosher animals.

Two Types of Good Acts

Controlling one’s desires is much different than the intellectual activity of pondering God, His will and His laws. The Talmud teaches that Torah study is the greatest mitzvah, for this very reason. When one abstains from a sin, he is involved in controlling his desires. But this act in no way compares to man when he is engaged in intellectual pursuits. It is only when man ponders new ideas and realizes their truths, that his soul is affected by such realization, when substantiated by action. One who values giving tzedaka but doesn’t actually donate, in truth does not value it. Action must follow. But it is the newly learned ‘concept’ that affects our soul, and improves us. Thus, Torah study is the greatest mitzvah, for it alone improves our souls.

To be clear, God created man with the potential for an Afterlife by adhering to His word. Had man simply despised insects, this abstention would not earn him reward. For in such a case, abstention is not akin to fearing God’s word. But now, as God commanded man to abstain, man is conscious of God’s will when he avoids even loathsome things. Regardless of the innate disposition not to eat such vile insects, man earns himself reward, as he is “obeying God.” God increased such commands that are so easy to follow, so man’s reward is increased. Another of God’s numerous, kind acts to us. This explains Rashi.

However, this act of refrain from sin is surpassed by intellectual pursuits, whereby we improve our souls, as Maimonides teaches...

Love & Fear of God

These two views in fact address Love of God, versus Fear of God. Rashi addresses the latter, while Maimonides addresses the former. The Torah commands us in both, as Maimonides discusses in his *Mishneh Torah (Laws of Torah Fundamentals 2:2)*. But it is important to note that although both are commands, Maimonides concludes that law by stating the following:

In accordance with these matters, I explain great principles from the acts of the Master of the Universe, in order that there be an opening [commencing point] for one who understands, to love Hashem. As the wise men have stated on this matter of Love of God, "for due to this you will recognize Who spoke and created the universe."

Maimonides isolates Love of God without mentioning Fear. It appears he is indicating Love as the preferred state. Fear of God is a command, but perhaps this is not man's final objective. The true objective is a higher plain of existence, where we are not simply awestruck with God, but where we move towards a positive relationship with Him. This is called Love of God; the state of one's soul where man is enamored with His creations and Torah. Fear of God is a response to this knowledge, whereas Love of God describes man in the process of attaining greater knowledge. When man's mind is active, his soul is growing in its intensity of Love of God, and man is excelling. Fear of God is a reflective but stagnant status. Furthermore, Fear is not something we can positively generate. It is a "response" to something...to Knowledge of God. Fear is dependent on our Knowledge and Love of God.

We then see that fear is both stagnant, dependent, and not something positive we can at once create. Fear depends on Love, which depends on Knowledge of God. In contrast, Love of God, or study, is a positive search where the mind is in the preferred, active state of probing thought. Certainly, as Maimonides commenced this section in 1:6, he describes the command to "Know God." I feel this command again accentuates the greater level of Love of God over Fear of God. Love of God is synonymous with greater knowledge of God, as Maimonides states, "*in accordance with the knowledge, is one's love of God (Laws of Repentance, 10:10).*"

All or Nothing

Now that we have come this far, let us investigate how man actually earns his share in the World to Come, the Afterlife. For this must be of greater importance than anything else. The Rabbis too desired to focus man on this truth that we are here but for a brief time:

Rabbi Jacob said, "This world is equated to an entry chamber before the next world; fix [prepare] yourself in the entry chamber so you might enter the banquet hall, the Afterlife (Ethics 4:16)."

It is clear; our primary existence is not on Earth, and also true: we forfeit the eternal life, if we don't "fix" ourselves here.

At burials we recite the Tzidduk HaDin (Confirmation of God's Justice):

Man, if a year he is [lived], or one thousand years he lives, of what benefit is it to him? He is as one who never existed. Blessed is the true Judge who kills and revives.

How is a life of 1000 years null and void?! Is there no benefit to all the good he performed for his family and friends? All he did is nothing? The answer is "Yes." The error in this question "All he did is nothing?" is that there is no longer a "he." To suggest "he" gained during his life, "he" must still remain. Otherwise, the reality is that there is no benefit to "him." He is gone, unless he lived a Torah life and his soul continues. This is the meaning of Tzidduk HaDin, "*Man, if a year he is [lived], or one thousand years he lives, of what benefit is it to him? He is as one who never existed.*"

This statement teaches that anything that comes to an end, is worthless. It matters none whether a person lives 1000 years, since after that time, he no longer exists. The only thing of value is that which endures eternally. That is why the verse above ends with "*Blessed is the true Judge who kills and revives.*" We are taught that a life is of value, since God revives us in the next world.

It is therefore vital that we engage only in matters that contribute to our greater portion, as Rashi describes, and more so, to that which enables our very entrance to the next world, as Maimonides describes. Both are required: Fear and Love of God. That is why both are commandments. But we must examine these commandments to understand their roles in our lives. King Solomon wrote, "*Fear of God is the beginning of knowledge... (Prov. 1:7).*" This indicates that Fear is a prerequisite, while Knowledge is the goal. And, "*in accordance with the [level of] knowledge, is the Love of God.*" We must not fear death and the Afterlife. Typically, the human be-

ing fears the unknown. Therefore, we must counter our frail disposition of fear, with the knowledge that all of God's acts are for man's good. We see this in all areas of history, and in God's design of man; pleasant emotions, fulfilling foods, happiness, and friendship. All He created benefits man. We see this most in the enjoyment experienced in studying His wisdom. For with all other pursuits, we experience frustration: plane delays, poor weather, loss of wealth and health, etc. But in study, there is no physical exertion, or pain. As a Rabbi said, even when we realize we made a mistake, that too is learning! God wants us to have the good; these are Rabbi Chananya's words. So the next world, which is a world of wisdom, will be of the greatest good, and most pleasurable. We must remain firm in what our minds know to be true, despite emotions of fearing the unknown. And what is true, is that God desires our good.

Attaining the Afterlife

Maimonides addresses a more fundamental issue. He interprets Rabbi Chananya as explaining "how" man attains the Afterlife. This is a deep idea. Maimonides teaches that if one performs any mitzvah – Tzedaka for example – for an incorrect motive, then he does not attain the Afterlife. Why is this so? How does man attain the Afterlife, and what is Maimonides' reasoning? Let's read his words again:

It is of the fundamentals beliefs in the Torah that when man fulfills a mitzvah of the 613 mitzvos as is fitting and proper, and he does not join with that performance any Earthly [ulterior] motivation in any manner; but he performs it for its own sake, with love as I have explained to you, behold...he has merited eternal life [Olam Haba]. And on this did Rabbi Chananya ben Akashya say, "For the mitzvos, as they are numerous, it is impossible that during his life, man will not perform one of them in its true intent, and completely. And when he performs that mitzvah, his soul will live [eternally]."

It is when man performs God's commands in their true intent, that man is in line with God's will. At this moment, man's soul mirrors those eternal truths contained in the mitzvos. Somehow, this human value of a mitzvah's true ideal gives life to our souls, and thereby, earns for us an eternity, the Afterlife. The soul exists in man. It has a potential, but it can go unrealized, and will then expire with his Earthly death. But, if we study the commands, and seek to grasp the underlying values and truths in each one, our soul then partakes of those eternal truths, rendering itself eternal.

The True Reward

In his tenth chapter of the Commentary on the Mishna (Talmud Sanhedrin) Maimonides describes five groups of Torah observers, characterized by their imagined, conflicting and erroneous views of the “reward” received for our Torah adherence, and the evil meted out for its rejection. Many assume our reward is sensual, or involves rejoining our departed family members. Maimonides singles out a common flaw: all these Torah observant Jews “pain” themselves with performance of mitzvos, since they would rather be doing something else, like travel, earning more money, and other temporal activities. They all assume there is “something else” which is the “reward.” So they are tolerantly observant. Here is their flaw.

Maimonides teaches here, what he initially refers to as a core idea. There is nothing better than the involvement in the Torah’s ideas. To suggest to someone that you will reward him if they win one billion dollars is ludicrous. The billion dollars itself is the desired object! They would not be motivated by something extraneous. Similarly, all those Jews who seek something extraneous to Torah wisdom as a reward, harbor an incorrect view of Torah. Had they truly understood the joy of the process of study and the realization of knowledge, they would not perform mitzvos or study except for the very act itself, with no ulterior motive. A person does not climb a mountain for the view, just so someone gives him a reward. It is the view itself that compelled this climber in such exertion. And when he sees that vista after weeks of hiking, he wants nothing else but to enjoy that vision. One who has reached perfection is similar. He too studies and performs mitzvahs as nothing else is more intriguing or of value. Newton, Einstein and others would go for weeks in study, as it was the most captivating experience. You could not lure them outside their labs with any enticement. As Maimonides says here, “*one seeks the truth for the truth.*” He has no other motive. God designed us to enjoy knowledge of Him and His creations more than any other enjoyment. There is no “reward” as the masses think. God gave us a great pleasure here, wisdom. And it is in wisdom that we engage in the Afterlife, if we prepare ourselves here. “*One who prepares for Shabbos will eat on Shabbos*” is a metaphor, teaching that one who prepares here for the next world, will receive the next world. But if one does not prepare, he cannot attain the Afterlife, just as one cannot enjoy Shabbos without prior preparation.

Maimonides contrasts the pleasure of a king’s rule, to that of a child playing with a ball. The child knows nothing of the joy the king experiences when he successfully rules. We are as the child, immersed in physical pleasures. We have no idea of the metaphysical pleasure we will expe-

rience in the next world, but it far surpasses any temporal enjoyment here. Maimonides quotes the Rabbis in Ethics describing the righteous in the next world as “*wearing their crowns on their heads and enjoying the splendor of God.*” “Crowns” refers to their level of intellectual perfection, which earned them this eternal enjoyment of God’s wisdom.

We learn a vital lesson. In order to earn the world to come we must examine whether our view of that reward is anything other than an intellectual pursuit. For if we pain ourselves with mitzvos, not knowing their true worth, all for some imagined good...we do not raise our souls to the level to earn the next world. In this case, we imagine it is something, which it is not. And following any imagination cannot lead to anything real. Primarily, we have not reached the realization of Torah’s true nature: something so great and unparalleled, I need no incentive or reward, but I study it as it alone is my greatest yearning.

If we abandon unproved assumptions about the reward of the next world, and we study our wise Rabbis we will open our minds to a truth that will impact our temporal Earthly lives, and our eternal lives.

Maimonides is actually saving your life. He is unveiling the fallacy of all assumed views of reward and punishment. He quotes our Rabbis in Ethics of the Fathers. He explains the unanimous view of our greatest educators. The Afterlife is a reality. We must prepare for it. It can be enjoyable beyond compare. But the only way to earn it is by removing all false motivations for Torah observance, and devoting ourselves to study for no other reason than to uncover new truths. As we proceed, we will start to see great new insights. We will be amazed. We will find greater satisfaction in study than any other pursuit. If this sounds odd, it shows you how far from this you might be. But at the same time, if those Sages far greater than us held this as true, isn’t it worth your while to investigate it? Take a look at any child. “Why” is their favorite word...since questioning is naturally our favorite activity. Faulty schools and Yeshivas are to blame for turning learning into a pain of rote memorization. Instead, learning should be intriguing questions, field trips to natural wonders, museums, and the exciting discovery of the Torah’s hints and brilliant answers. I personally taught youngsters in this approach. They found great excitement and pleasure when trained to develop questions that lead to answers. Once they acquired this skill, and were able to detect the questions and arrive at the answers independent of my assistance, their sense of accomplishment was rewarding beyond compare. I would say “thrilling” described their engagement in questions. If a child is encouraged and properly directed to develop as God intends, he will be as overjoyed to learn as he is to play. In fact, a “plaything” is how King David referred to learning.

If we view the Afterlife as an imagined thing and better than Torah, this reveals an incorrect view of Torah. We will obtain neither one. However, if we study our great Rabbis, and comprehend their words, we will realize that the Torah is the end, not a means. There is nothing greater. There is no imagined “reward.” If we pursue the wisdom in Torah with no ulterior motive, but to learn more about God, we will enjoy this life thoroughly and we will thereby inherit the next world. For the next world is a continuation of one’s joy of wisdom. Therefore, we must live for this life – Torah study for its beauty – if we desire the next life.

“Prepare yourself here so you might receive the next world” can be interpreted as “Enjoy yourself most here, so you inherit and enjoy the next life.” I urge you to study all the sources quoted herein.

THE MEANING OF LIFE: A LIFE OF MEANING

My friend puzzled me with an intriguing question: why did Adam, or for that matter any man, require commands, “mitzvahs?” Yes, we may offer a simple answer that we require mitzvahs to perfect ourselves. But I feel this question goes deeper. He mentioned that Adam was a perfect creation, and Ibn Ezra supports him, he was a “chacham Gadol,” a “great intellect”[1]. Nonetheless, God decreed that Adam possess a command. And this applies to all subsequent giants, such as Abraham, who received the command of circumcision. Interestingly, the prohibition of the Tree of Knowledge was commanded immediately upon Adam’s creation:

And God, Elohim, took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to guard it. And God, Elohim commanded upon the man saying, ‘From all the tress you may eat. And from the Tree of Knowledge [of] good and evil you may not eat, for on the day you eat from it, you shall surely die.’ [2]

Death is quite a deterrent, yet Adam succumbed. What was so difficult about this command, and why did God select this specific command? Why does man require commands? This is an important question.

We wonder about the meaning of “*God took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to guard it.*” Of what significance is this? Why did God require man to work and watch the Garden? Additionally, we find no “command” to work and watch the Garden... simply that God

did so without a command, and man did not reject this obligation. Evidently, a command is unnecessary in connection with procuring food, but man does require a command concerning human “restraint.” We must understand the distinction. And we must explain the severe punishment of death. Furthermore, we note that God commanded man prior to creating woman. Evidently, man cannot exist, even briefly, without God’s commands. Why? Strong questions, but as always, God places the answer “at the side” of the questions.

Let’s take one question: why did God “*take the man and place him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to guard it?*” Doesn’t something about this verse sound familiar? It does to me. This verse immediately precedes the prohibition of eating from the Tree of Knowledge. We are drawn to God’s ‘purposeful’ contrast: in both cases, God made something obligatory on man: in the first verse, working the Garden; and in the next, restraint.

What occurs to me is that God wishes us to observe a parallel between man’s toil in the physical and his ability to observe God’s command: the metaphysical or spiritual. In both spheres of our lives God planned our existences to be “dependent.” We depend on food, but we also depend on something greater: God’s commands. Why must this be?

This is the core idea: man must know his existence is “conditional.” Man must further appreciate that the physical world and his life on Earth are not as important as the metaphysical world, meaning wisdom and his soul. I feel this is a central lesson in our receipt of commands and why God created us as “dependent” beings. For with no commands and no obligation to secure our food, man might erroneously assume his existence is necessary. But as we know that God needs nothing, the universe too can go on without us.

Gratifying emotions of ambition, success, ego and a host of others are required, human assets. However, man is susceptible to abusing these psychological gifts. He may become so self-absorbed, that he lives without regard for his Tzelem Elohim, his intellect. So important is a life of wisdom, for it enables us to appreciate the Creator, that a Rabbi taught that God labeled our intellects with His name, Tzelem “Elohim.” The Rabbi taught that this naming was to direct our attention to the great importance of engaging our intelligence.

Adam denied the damage caused by deviating from God’s word, but not the damage caused by denying bodily needs. And Adam was a “great intellect” as we mentioned. Even with the deterrent of death, this great person sinned. And the command was not so difficult: simply restrain from one, single fruit...all others were permissible. This teaches that man’s imagination can get the best of him. Even at the risk of his very life,

man will seek that which is unnecessary. Why? It is because the fruit of the Tree of Life contained a lure which man did not even apprehend. Yet, the ‘unknown’ was so enticing; man’s imagination caused his downfall.

God gave man one command, as an indication that the physical world, in all its splendor, is merely a “means.” Our true objective is to approach God. This is “mitzvah.” If we violate God’s word to procure more physical pleasures, this will in fact be counterproductive and we will lose them, as Adam proved. Following God’s commands secures life and happiness, not like Adam imagined. *“For on the day you eat from it, you shall surely die”* underscores this very idea, that man’s existence is conditional. Man must appreciate this. One purpose of commands is to teach that our existence is dependent: *“not on bread alone does man live, but by all that comes from God’s mouth does man live [3].”*

My friend also mentioned the Rabbis’ lesson on Tzitzis: in our physical needs such as clothing, we are reminded of the commands: *“And you shall see them [Tzitzis], and you shall remember all God’s commands, and you shall perform them. And you shall not go astray after your hearts and after your eyes, that you are estranged after them [4].”* Tzedaka too teaches the lesson that we must not be convinced that wealth is acquired by monetary retention, but the opposite is true: God promises this: *“And I will open up the storehouses of heaven and empty out a blessing for you until there is more than enough [5].”*

And one of our greatest mitzvahs – the Sabbath – is also to direct us away from the physical, towards a day engaged in Torah when physical activity is greatly curbed. Our Licha Dodi prayer states, “Last in creation, but first in His thoughts” regarding the Sabbath. Although the last day, Sabbath was the goal of creation. God created the universe – or at least Earth – as a laboratory for man to recognize God’s wisdom, for our own good and happiness. The life of wisdom far exceeds any other lifestyle, as we learn from one of the wisest men, King Solomon, in his book of Ecclesiastes.

Adam required a deterrent of such gravity, since man’s imagination and ability to deny God is strong. Man overemphasized the physical and required a threat to awake him to the tenuous nature of Earthly life. God wished to impress upon Adam that just as food is required, he should adhere to God’s word with an equal sense of need. But God knows man’s nature and therefore formed a mitzvah to redirect him from overindulgence. From the very first human, God wished to educate us on what is primary in life. We appreciate the wisdom in God’s formulation and arrangement of Torah verses. The very verses and their order, create questions, and provide answers.

If we appreciate and become convinced of our temporal, Earthly stay; if we consider the sublime lessons derived from analyzing the Torah's words, we will live without the damaging fantasies embodied in our society that promotes man, over God. We will enjoy what is true and abandon our plans of grandeur, since we realize this world is a means for us to study, to approach the Creator, and not abuse for selfish goals. If we truly wish to live a peaceful and satisfying life as the Creator decreed, then we will enjoy not only individual mitzvahs and their respective benefits, but we will appreciate that the very institution of mitzvah has a powerful lesson: our existence is conditional. This further embellishes the primary ideal of focusing on God. This is the meaning of life.

[1] Gen. 2:17

[2] Gen. 2:15-17

[3] Deut. 8:3

[4] The Shema Prayer, Deut. 15:39

[5] Malachi 3:10, Deut. 16:10

HONESTY'S FORTUNE – LASHON HARA

I was discussing Lashon Hara (destructive speech) with a friend. She said she could not truthfully commit to refraining from Lashon Hara, and wondered if she could recite Maimonides' formulation of repentance:

Please God, I have erred, I have been crooked and wanton, [speaking Lashon Hara], I regret my act, and I am embarrassed, and I will never again return to this matter.

I told her it would be a lie to say she would refrain, if she knew she could not yet control herself.

I then realized this is fortunate. Adhering to honesty and not reciting the above formula, one remains confronted with their flaw. However, if one were to enunciate the Teshuvah formula without conviction in their ability to refrain, they simply seek to alleviate guilt, lying to themselves that they're back on the proper path. Therefore, although well intended, one must not lie and say he or she will commit when the truth is known to be otherwise. By refraining from this worthy act of repenting, since one cannot do so properly, one is faced with his or her flaw, which they can now reflect on, and make real change.

Another observation I made is Maimonides' inclusion of the term "embarrassed" in his repentance formulation. I wondered, if we are already stating we "regret" our act, what more is gained by stating we are embarrassed? I believe this causes us to compare our need of approval from man, to that of God. Who should we fear more? Of course it is God. But do we? My sense is that we don't, as we are naturally social, and unnaturally philosophical. Thus, we are naturally inclined to fear man, and desire his approval, while God is absent from our thoughts all day. Therefore, if one does not feel embarrassed for a sin, he is again afforded the opportunity to ask himself why. He can strive to remove his need for approval from man, and come to a realization that he denies God's presence when he sinned. For if he was convinced that God exists, as much as man, he could not sin. Each sin carries with it some denial of God. Certainly, if while sinning he were caught by man, he would feel embarrassed.

With this word "embarrassed" included in the formulation repentance, one gains the opportunity to determine if he truly views God as real as he views man. If he senses he is not embarrassed before God when reciting his repentance, he now learned his overestimation of man: an opportunity to improve. Honesty affords us opportunity.

With Maimonides' example, we learn that the Rabbis' formulations of blessings, prayers and repentance are quite deep, availing us to methods of perfection, for which we must feel fortunate.

LASHON HARA – EVIL SPEECH

From the ease of violation to the profound words of our Rabbis and Sages addressing our human nature, there's much to discuss regarding the prohibition and appeal of Lashon Hara. What is so wrong with Lashon Hara? What is the appeal? Why does Maimonides say it equates to sexual immorality, idolatry and murder: three sins causing punishment here, and the loss of Olam Haba? As God structured all laws, there must be great insight; far surpassing our simple understanding of "degrading others." Hopefully the sources quoted herein will sensitize us to the damage we cause others, and ourselves.

The Torah Prohibition

A Rabbi once taught that the source for any Torah law is derived from the Five Books – the Chumash. Prophets and Writings may elaborate that

law, but these other books cannot add a new law to the 613.

Leviticus 19:16 says, “*Do not go as a talebearer in your people, and do not stand by the blood of your friend, I am God.*” In Hilchos Dayos 7:1 Maimonides explains why the talebearer is placed in the same verse as a murderer: from the tales we spread, we can cause many deaths. Maimonides cites the example of Doeg the Edomite whose words – although not negative in themselves – caused the murders of many innocents. We may also add that slander is an act of assassination; character assassination. When we slander, on some level we wish the demise of the personality we attack. King Solomon said one has “thrown arrows” at another.

Maimonides states that this case of Doeg is an example of the head category, “Richiluss.” Richiluss is the act transferring private information from one to another; that which is not yet public knowledge. The Rabbinis argue whether this information must be negative, or as Maimonides teaches, even neutral information. But all agree that the violation is in spreading gossip. Maimonides already explained what is so negative about this: many can die. But is there something negative lurking inside the “one who spreads” gossip, inside this instigator? Let’s first list the other three subcategories of Richiluss. And they are subcategories, since they are only quantitatively different from Richiluss.

Richiluss is spreading information, but the “manner” in which we do so may come under one of the three other headings. Maimonides then formulates the second category:

There is yet another sin much greater than this, in this category, and it is called Lashon Hara. It is the act of speaking of the negative aspects of one’s friend, even though he speaks the truth.

Maimonides’ third category is Motzei Shame Ra, or character assassination. This refers to one who spreads lies about others. But quite interesting is Maimonides’ fourth and final category, “Bal Lashon Hara,” or the “a frequenter of Lashon Hara.” Why is this its own category? Maimonides defines this infraction:

One who sits and recites matters about another, that his forefathers were such and such people, and that he heard certain matters concerning him, and all he says are matters of derision. On this [case] does the Torah say, “God should cut off all those with smooth lips, tongues that speak grandiose matters (Psalms 12:4).”

Let’s start to understand Lashon Hara...

King David on Lashon Hara

God should cut off all those with smooth lips, tongues that speak grandiose matters (Psalms 12:4).

This verse in Psalms commences with “God.” Why is this so? Many verses in the Torah that cite evildoers merely address the evil; God is not mentioned in the verse. God is included here since man wishes self-aggrandizement. Our egos are very powerful, always seeking satisfaction. And when we encounter someone we estimate (correctly or not) is superior to ourselves, our egos sense a threat and go into defense mode... unless we have come to learn that such competition is against the goals of the Torah. Therefore, King David carefully wrote, “*God should cut off all those with smooth lips, tongues that speak grandiose matters.*” God is mentioned in purposeful contrast to the sinful objective of the talebearer, whom King David says wishes to “speak grandiose matters.” The speaker is attempting to elevate himself. Therefore, King David pits God against man in this verse to highlight the issue. Man should not seek competitive advantage, but rather, he should be cognizant God, who is superior to you. Contemplating this, man will hopefully humble himself.

The next verse in Psalms continues this theme:

That they say, “With our tongues we shall become powerful; our lips are with us, who will rule over us!”

Maimonides states that these people deny God, as they say, “Who will rule over us!” What additional aspects of the sin are highlighted in this verse?

The ego senses that with the power of speech, we may project a grandiose image of ourselves: we can manipulate how others see reality...how we see reality. We can cause much damage. That is the first lesson of “with our tongues we will become powerful.”

Then they say something strange, “*our lips are with us...*” This unveils a deep emotion. Man feels that what is in his control, is his to do with as he pleases. Another aspect of the ego is thereby unveiled: total domination. The ego rejects opposition and restraint.

I once witnessed a lecturer in his fifties go into an intolerant, screaming frenzy when someone much younger than himself corrected him during his class. Egomaniacs do not seek truth, but rather, a platform for projecting their “greatness.” The last words embody their goal, “Who will rule over us!” That is not a question. They are saying, “no one will rule over us!” Lashon Hara seeks unrivaled expression, and pity the person who stands in opposition. We must realize this unruly part of human nature. “Sin” wears

many masks: mistake, crookedness, and wantonness. This last one is called “peshah,” and what we address here: the unruly tendency.

Why So Many Types?

Why must a person ridicule others? This stems from one’s own insecurities. If man realizes that his life’s goal is to study God and His creations, and not compete, he would not need to reduce others to elevate himself. His insecurity is generated from allowing his social status to dominate all concerns. Therefore, the gossiper is an insecure person. The gossiper also unloads his or her news on others due to this insecurity, and seeks out others who might side with them.

But we can violate gossip in four ways. Richiluss is when we contribute to defaming others, although we do not necessarily utter negative words, like the case of Doeg above. We are instigators. But our corruption is present. We are merely distributors of what we hear. Lashon Hara is when we actually talk negatively, originating the content and citing truths. And Motzei Sham Ra is when we lie.

But what is the difference between Lashon Hara, and “Bal” Lashon Hara – a “frequent speaker” of Lashon Hara? Maimonides tells us that the Bal Lashon Hara talks about the person’s forefathers. That seems quite odd. What does this have to do with the slanderer’s attempt to destroy another person?

The Bal Lashon Hara is clever. He doesn’t mean to merely tarnish one’s reputation; he wants to throw a knockout blow. This is a different type of viciousness. The other party must be removed. And he accomplishes this by saying that his very “inception” was evil: “Look at who his parents were!” With such a statement, he gives the listeners no chance to view him in a good light. “He came from bad blood” as they say. “He is essentially no good.” The Bal Lashon Hara most closely approximates the act of murder, as he seeks to utterly destroy another human being.

Viciousness

We noted that viciousness is part of the sin. Talmud Archin 15b cites a metaphor:

In the future, all beasts will approach the snake and ask, ‘The lion tramples and eats, the wolf tears and eats...of what benefit then is there to you snake, that you bite, and do not eat? The snake will reply, ‘And of what benefit is there to man who speaks evil?’

A Rabbi once lectured on this metaphor. He taught, just as the snake has no motive in biting and does so by nature alone, so too, man is vicious

by nature. There is no need for any ulterior motive. Just as the snake bites merely to afflict, man's nature is to be vicious. In that Talmudic portion, God metaphorically says:

What more can I do to prevent Lashon Hara? I created the limbs upright, but the tongue lying down [to keep it dormant]. All limbs are external, but the tongue is inside (to restrain it). I created around the tongue, a wall of bones [teeth] and a wall of flesh [lips] [to halt Lashon Hara].

The Rabbi said this teaches that speaking Lashon Hara is practically unavoidable, as if "God did all He can do, with no success." Of course, since we receive great punishment for Lashon Hara, we are to blame. But this portion has one message: Lashon Hara caters to strong impulses. Therefore, we must be stronger, and more knowledgeable so as to fight it.

Most Severe

Why does Maimonides say Lashon Hara equates to sexual immorality, idolatry and murder: three sins causing punishment here, and the loss of Olam Haba? What is murder? It is the attempt to eliminate another from one's reality. Lashon Hara does the same; one reduces another with speech. Sexual immorality is man's unbridled instinctual expression. Lashon Hara too is man fully expressing his instinctual drives of aggression, ego. But how is Lashon Hara akin to idolatry?

What is idolatry? It is not the mere prostration to statues. Idolatry is an attempt to twist reality and conform it to how we wish it to be. Although an idolater never sees a stone god perform acts, he accepts that it does. He distorts reality. He denies what natural law indicates, and follows imagination. When one speaks Lashon Hara, he uses speech to delude himself. In reality, John is a great guy, and helps others genuinely. But in "my world," he has surpassed me, I feel threatened since I concern myself with competition. I need to "correct" this. I assume my speech has a reductive quality on John's value. So I say things that are true about him, but only to those who will resent him too. His downfall is soon at hand. I now feel the world is good again.

Summary

We live in a fantasy world; we desire to hurt others who do not deserve it, and we outlet base emotions without thinking. We reject God's plan to abandon petty issues and strive towards perfection. Lashon Hara also seems to go unnoticed; as we speak so much, and we deny we did any-

thing wrong with those few words about John. Because of its subtleties, we must be all the more sensitive to our motives when we talk. We can correct our tongues, but only after we correct our hearts. And the competitive emotion that drives us to seek fame and honor is at the root of this sin. The Torah teaches the proper attitude: *“And the man Moses was exceedingly humble from all men that are on face of the Earth (Num. 12:3).”*

PRAYERS OF THE TZADDIK

Is the prayer of a Tzaddik more effective than our prayers? It is clear: a Tzaddik does not know God’s mind. He cannot guarantee his prayer will achieve any result.

There were times when God answered Moses’ prayers (Gold Calf), and times it appears He didn’t (Miriam). There are considerations of the individual, and those affecting all of Israel. There are sincere prayers, and those through which a person rushes, like unburdening a load. Many considerations affect a response from God. Thus, we don’t know when God will answer someone, even as righteous as Moses, or if action is also needed.

But we do know that God is just. So if a person truly needs something from God, and he or she is on a level deserving of it, God can answer, without a Tzaddik praying for us. God will not hold back goodness from a deserving person, simply because he didn’t have a Tzaddik requesting it from God.

Of course, we cannot know all God’s considerations. Rashi said God answered Isaac and not Rebecca, since Isaac was a Tzaddik whose father was also a Tzaddik, while Rebecca was a Tzaddekas whose father was evil. And the Talmud has a case where rain was needed so the people approached a Tzaddik to pray, although this does not mean God will answer. But this does teach that it is not incorrect to request a righteous individual’s prayers. Evidently, he or she can play a role in effectuating a positive outcome.

A wise Rabbi taught that the prayer of the person in need is the most important prayer before God. This makes sense, since the person in need will see whether his prayer goes unanswered. He then realizes he is undeserving. And as he sees his requests go unfulfilled, he alone is in the position to perfect himself. In this case only, when one selects to improve himself, does prayer reach its optimal purpose. But if the person doesn’t

improve, why should a Tzaddik's prayers have any effect? If the person is a sinner, he doesn't deserve God's help, so a Tzaddik's prayer will be ineffective.

To arrive at true principles we must know all cases and factors, which we do not. The best we can do is to continue our study, follow Torah principles and abandon evil and falsehood. We must analyze our desires and determine if they are part of God's will. We must consult with wise Rabbis to gain insight into ourselves. In this manner, we are doing all we can to deserve God's answer to our prayers.

And many times, we will find that it is not God that must change His response, but it is we who must change, to conform to God's will. This is one lesson of Job.

SEXUAL PROHIBITIONS

Like the acts of the land of Egypt where you dwelled, do not perform, and like the acts of the land of Canaan where I bring you there, do not perform, and in their statutes, do not walk (Lev. 18:3).

God commands us to refrain from these cultures' harmful activities. Their corruption stems from nowhere else than human drives. But refraining from an action without understanding why, does not perfect us. In such a case, our minds are absent and we merely go through the motions. Perfection must include a refinement of our ideas. Our actions are expressions of an ideal, so the ideal is primary.

Each and every man, to all those closely related in flesh, do not draw near to uncover (their) nakedness, I am God (ibid 18:6).

What is problematic with sexual relations with a relative? Rashi states that when Shimone and Levi destroyed the city of Shechem and rescued their sister Dinah, she said to Shimone she would not leave Shechem unless he married her. Additionally, Adam's children must have wed their own sisters. If regarding such righteous people marriage to family members was not viewed as corrupt, for what reason does God command us to refrain from such unions? We also notice that the term "shi-air" (close relative) is reserved for only three cases, out of the dozen or so cases enumerated here. If the introductory verse commands "to all those closely

related (“shi-air”) in flesh, do not draw near to uncover (their) nakedness,” we would assume that the reference of shi-air applies without exception. Why then is it only in connection with our parents’ sisters, or the taking of a woman and her daughter together, do we find the term shi-air, but all other sexual deviations are not considered shi-air, a close relative?

Guide for the Perplexed, Book III, Chap. XLIX

The law about forbidden sexual intercourse seeks in all its parts to inculcate the lesson that we ought to limit sexual intercourse altogether, hold it in contempt, and only desire it very rarely. The prohibition of pederasty (Lev. xviii. 22) and carnal intercourse with beasts (ibid. 73) is very clear. If in the natural way the act is too base to be performed except when needed, how much more base is it if performed in an unnatural manner, and only for the sake of pleasure.

Here, Maimonides lays the foundation that sexual pleasure has its place, but it should not be a central focus. Holding it in “contempt” does not mean to deny the importance God saw in procreation being pleasurable. He means that it we must not overindulge. We must not compromise our true objective of the pursuit of knowledge, regardless of how sensually enjoyable another activity may be. Maimonides continues:

The female relatives whom a man may not marry are alike in this respect that as a rule they are constantly together with him in his house: they would easily listen to him, and do what he desires; they are near at hand, and he would have no difficulty in procuring them. No judge could blame him if found in their company. If to these relatives the same law applied as to all other unmarried women, if we were allowed to marry any of them, and were only precluded from sexual intercourse with them without marriage, most people would constantly have become guilty of misconduct with them. But as they are entirely forbidden to us, and sexual intercourse with them is most emphatically denounced unto us as a capital crime, or a sin punishable with extinction (karet), and as there is no means of ever legalizing such intercourse, there is reason to expect that people will not seek it, and will not think of it. That the persons included in that prohibition are, as we have stated, at hand and easily accessible, is evident. For as a rule, the mother of the wife, the grandmother, the daughter, the granddaughter, and the sister-in-law, are mostly with her; the husband meets them always

when he goes out, when he comes in, and when he is at his work. The wife stays also frequently in the house of her husband's brother, father, or son. It is also well known that we are often in the company of our sisters, our aunts, and the wife of our uncle, and are frequently brought up together with them. These are all the relatives, which we must not marry. This is one of the reasons why intermarriage with a near relative is forbidden.

We must distinguish between a nation, and the perfected, individual Biblical personalities. As mankind commenced with just one male and one female, marriage to sisters could not be avoided in God's plan of populating the world. In Jacob's case (his marriage to two sisters) and Jacob's children Shimone and Dinah, no sexual promiscuity, deviation or excess existed. These individuals were highly perfected; they obtained God's favor, and his prophecy. We must not make the age-old error of projecting our emotional makeup onto God's selected leaders, psychoanalyzing the pillars of Judaism. However, when guiding a nation where morality is not naturally at its optimum (for no nation is comprised exclusively of perfected individuals), laws must govern man's sexuality. Maimonides taught:

If to these relatives the same law applied as to all other unmarried women, if we were allowed to marry any of them, and were only precluded from sexual intercourse with them without marriage, most people would constantly have become guilty of misconduct with them.

Maimonides teaches that constant contact with family members will most definitely lead to sexual misconduct, had the Torah not categorically barred these relationships. This also teaches that such relationships are not abhorrent, but prohibited. The Jews were actually recorded as "crying by the household" (*Num. 11:10*) upon receipt of the Torah. On this verse, Rashi interprets "by the household" to mean "about the household," or rather matters of the house, i.e., the laws forbidden sexual relations with household relatives. We learn that the Jews had relations with immediate family members prior to the Torah. There was yet no prohibition. Once the Jews received the Torah, they had great difficulty and sadness about the prohibition of sexuality with those family members.

Unrepressed vs. Unrestrained Sexuality

Growing up with such prohibitions, we harbor sexual repugnance towards these relatives. However true this is, the Torah and the Rabbis do not fall prey to human repression, and both praise those who dream of intercourse with his mother or sister. Talmud Berachos 57a teaches:

If in a dream, one has intercourse with his mother, he should anticipate understanding, as it says, "If to understanding you call out (Proverbs 2:3)."

The word "if" in Hebrew is spelled exactly like mother, implying a relationship between one's mother and understanding.

If one has intercourse in his dream with his sister, he should anticipate wisdom, as it says, "Say to wisdom, thou art my sister (Proverbs 7:4)."

This Talmudic portion teaches an important lesson. One who dreams of intercourse with these close relatives is an uninhibited and unrepressed personality. His dreams do not censor his natural desire for those females first encountered in life, who are most frequented by him. Due to this lack of repressions, he is able to ponder all areas of life and Torah without any restraint. He will most certainly uncover great insights, as his mind is unbridled. Dreaming these thoughts means that he is on, or has now reached a new level of objectivity; he should anticipate wisdom and understanding to a greater level than before. Do not understand this Talmudic portion mystically, as if the dream is causative. This Talmudic portion is describing the perfection of one who has such dreams. Such perfection must lead to greater knowledge. It is natural that when one perfects his mind and his emotions, that he will have such dreams. It is not the dream which causes new insight, but the reverse; the perfection that this person achieved produces such dreams, indicative of a mind able to penetrate any topic. He will therefore grow in wisdom. But do not to confuse unrepressed individuals with unrestrained sexuality: the former is limited to thought alone; the latter is physical overindulgence.

“Root and Branch”

Maimonides now continues, now offering his understanding, referring to a “root and branch:”

But according to my opinion the prohibition serves another object, namely, to inculcate chastity into our hearts. License between the ‘root’ and the ‘branch’, between a man and his mother, or his daughter, is insolent (“chutzpah gedolah”). The intercourse between root and branch is forbidden, and it makes no difference whether the male element is the root or the branch, or both root and branch combine in the intercourse with a third person, so that the same individual cohabits with the root and with the branch (i.e., man cohabiting with a woman and her daughter). On this account it is prohibited to marry a woman and her mother, the wife of the father or of the son; for in all these cases there is the intercourse between one and the same person on the one side and root and branch on the other.

The law concerning brothers is like the law concerning root and branch. The sister is forbidden, and so is also the sister of the wife and the wife of the brother; because in the latter cases two persons, who are considered like root and branch, cohabit with the same person. But in these prohibitions brothers and sisters are partly considered as root and branch and partly as one body; the sister of the mother is therefore like the mother, and the sister of the father like the father, and both are prohibited.

What is this “root and branch?” We may ask, “What is the relationship between the root of a tree, and its branch?” The root causes the generation of the branch by supplying water and nutrients. But how does this help us understand Maimonides’ cryptic words?

With his term “root and branch” Maimonides is referring to the parent/child relationship. He distinguishes between sexual activity between parent and child, and all others. He refers to the former as “insolent,” meaning audaciously rude or disrespectful. (Note that the Biblical personalities never had intercourse one’s mother or daughter. Although we read of Lote’s two daughters who did so, even in their case, it was not for lustful reasons but to sustain the world, in their opinion.) What is so much more “insolent” when man sleeps with his mother or daughter, over the sleeping with his sister? What does “inculcating chastity into our hearts” target as its goal?

Intercourse between parent and child, and also, intercourse with two partners who are parent and child, carry an addition corruption. What is this additional corruption?

Root and Branch Defined

The root creates the branch. The branch depends on the root for its very existence. This parallels the parent that generates the child.

Intercourse creates a sense of equality between partners. And corrupt sexual acts create a false equality between the parent and child. There are barriers that must be preserved, but are violated in such a union. One's act of procreation with the "branch" or the "root" (child or parent) denies the significance of our individual roles. When a man has intercourse with his mother, he confuses what brought him into existence, with an object of pleasure. He confuses God's system of procreation wherein his life was made possible, mistaking that very institution as a sexual object. Lusts are not man's goal. Understanding God's plan is.

Perhaps this is the "audacity" Maimonides refers to, when man does not maintain the correct position his parent holds, and is so overcome by his sexual desires, that they overshadow the normal relationship between parent and child. He is audacious towards God by denying the essential institutions of parent and child. Instead of preserving these institutions necessary for society, he uses them for pleasure. And the reverse is also true, i.e., when a parent has intercourse with a child. Here, the parent is the cause of the harm we just mentioned. Additionally, the parent corrupts his own view of a caretaker and guardian/teacher of his own child. Engaging in such relations, one allows the sexual to gain prominence over the reality of God's plan for man. Instead of subduing one's emotions so as to achieve metaphysical perfection, he inverts this equation, subduing the intelligence in favor of lusts. Sexual activity distorts the institutions of parents and children. The correct focus of life is lost.

The superior role of the parent is also seen in God's grouping of "Honor thy Parents" together with the first five of the Ten Commandments, addressing God. The latter five Commandments are between man and his fellow, where we would assume Honor thy Parents belongs. But God's placement in the first five Commandments between man and God teaches us that honoring parents targets the recognition of God. Through our acceptance of these two authority figures from youth, we learn to recognize "authority" in general, essential for application to God. God's creation of a system of birth and parenthood is not accidental. Through such a system, God desires that man learns the concept of "authority," to be latter transferred onto God Himself. Thus, through these sexual violations between parent and child, the child is prevented from viewing the parent as an authority, severely compromising the child's opportunity to eventually transpose his acceptance of parental authority, onto God.

Curbing our Desire

Maimonides concludes:

The reason why it is prohibited to cohabit with a menstrual woman (Lev. xviii. 19) or with another man's wife (ibid. 20), is obvious, and requires no further explanation.

It is well known that we must not indulge in any sensual enjoyment whatever with the persons included in the above prohibitions: we must not even look at them if we intend to derive pleasure there from. We have explained this in "The laws about forbidden sexual intercourse" (Laws of Forbidden Relations, xxi. 1-2), and shown that according to the Law we must not even engage our thoughts with the act of cohabitation (ibid. 19) or irritate the organ of generation; and when we find ourselves unintentionally in a state of irritation, we must turn our mind to other thoughts, and reflect on some other thing till we are relieved. Our Sages (B.T. Kidd. 30b), in their moral lessons, which give perfection to the virtuous, say as follows: "My son, if that monster meets you, drag it to the house of study. It will melt if it is of iron; it will break in pieces if it is of stone: as is said in Scripture, 'Is not my word like a fire?' saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces (Jer. xxiii. 29)?" The author of this saying thus exhorts his son to go to the house of study when he finds his organ of generation in an irritated state. By reading, disputing, asking, and listening to questions, the irritation will certainly cease. See how properly the term monster is employed, for that irritation is indeed like a monster. Not only religion teaches this lesson, the philosophers teach the same. I have already quoted verbatim the words of Aristotle. He says: "The sense of touch which is a disgrace to us, leads us to indulge in eating and sensuality," etc. He calls people degraded who seek carnal pleasures and devote themselves to gastronomy: he denounces in extenso their low and objectionable conduct, and ridicules them. This passage occurs in his Ethics and in his Rhetoric.

Ramban on Sexual Prohibitions

On verse 18:6 Ramban questions Maimonides' reasoning of prohibiting those who man is with regularly. Ramban states, "*And what damage is there if man marries his daughter as was the practice of the children of Noah? Or marry two sisters as was done by our Patriarch Jacob?*" Ramban calls this a weak reason. Ramban open states, "*A person could not do better than to*

give his daughter in marriage to his elder son, and they would inherit his possessions and multiply and increase in his house.” In the end, Ramban states, “*We have no reason for the tradition of forbidden relationships,*” but it has to do with the success of the seed, according to Ramban. He states that marriage between close relatives will not succeed in seed, which will prosper.

On verse 18:17 Ramban addresses one of our questions, that of “*shi-air*” and the term “*zimah*” – why the Torah uses this specific term in connection with a man who married a mother and her daughter, and one who married his father’s sister. After demonstrating by example that “*zimah*” refers to “*thought,*” Ramban states:

In my opinion, Scripture states it is ‘zimah’, in the case [of sexual relationships with] a woman and her daughter, and also a woman and her mother, in order to condemn the matter, saying that when one lies with the one, who is his wife, he thinks of the other one on account of their relationship and likeness, and thus lying with both of them is a cause of lewdness in him.

It is for this reason that Scripture states here that, ‘the nakedness of a woman and her daughter etc.’ and similarly it says, “And if a man take with his wife also her mother, it is lewdness.”

He states ‘shi-air’ meaning to say that they are also forbidden because they are near of flesh to each other, and lying with both of them would be lewdness, as I have explained. Similarly, Scripture states, ‘and each that has lewdly defiled his daughter-in-law’ meaning that he defiled her to her husband, because even when she will be with her husband, she will think of his father because of their likeness.

Ramban introduces a new facet to the corruption contained in the sexual prohibitions. What is this “*thinking of the other because of their likeness*” which Ramban mentions twice? What is wrong with such thoughts?

Until the decree of Rabbeinu Gershon to wed only one woman, man was permitted to wed more than one wife. A Rabbi taught that nonetheless, many of our Torah leaders wed only one wife. Those who had more, like Abraham and Jacob, did not wed more than one wife without the consent of their first wife. This teaches a certain morality and perfection possessed by he who marries just one woman. According to Ramban, marrying more than one woman was not a problem, as there was no similarity between two people, unless they were mother and daughter, or sisters. He thereby isolates the exact union containing a specific problem. So what is the problem in marrying two people of similarity? What is problematic in

“thinking of the other,” as Ramban states? What is the “lewdness?”

It would appear that in such a marriage, to two siblings or two consecutive generations, man is preoccupied with the “person” of his sexual activity. This is why he wants an “additional” instance of his first partner – he desires “two” of that person, and not one. He seeks to gratify an emotion of sexual lust, of “lewdness.” The Rabbis agree: intercourse is to serve the purpose of procreation. So essential to sustaining humanity, it was made pleasurable. But to chase the pleasure is to be preoccupied with the means, and not the ends. When marrying two similar individuals, man attempts to gratify a means, the pleasurable component, and not the procreative goal. However, when man used to marry two unrelated people, he was not in violation of this specific corruption. In this latter union, marriage to one did not promote the thinking of the other. This also assists in removing rivalry.

In the end, the Torah’s sexual laws display great honesty and tremendous psychological insight that help man train his Earthly desires so he might focus on his eternal soul.

DESPERATION & TRUST IN GOD

Why does one become desperate? Does Torah validate this emotion? Individuals become desperate in many areas of life. Perhaps they cannot find work or a spouse. They continuously fail to secure the object of their desire. Most times this failure is self inflicted. They may seek the impossible as a disguise to ensure they don’t have to endure change. They might be trapped by any one of a number of emotions such as insecurity, which prospective employers and mates detect, and repel. But this unfortunate person keeps failing, and does not reflect on his actions to undo his misery. He blames the world, God, or other causes for his misfortune. The self is rarely accused.

God did not make man so he should be unhappy. Our very design teaches this, as does history’s lessons of God’s Providence over His faithful servants. God is aware of every soul He created. He desires that each of us reach our potential, and experience the utmost happiness. If someone strives for the good life in accordance with Torah values, he can be certain he will be assisted by God. Maimonides teaches (*Laws of Shmita and Yovale 13:12*) that the tribe of Levi was set apart from the other tribes to serve God. They did not inherit land, go to war, or acquire anything

through the work of their hands. Their position was to study Torah and teach the rest of the world. God was their inheritance. God provided for them. But Maimonides continues in the next law:

And not the tribe of Levi alone, but every single man from any one who enters the world (Jew or Gentile) that his spirit freely moves him, and he understands from his own wisdom to separate himself, to stand before God, to minister to Him, to serve Him, to know God, and he leads an upright life as God created him (to do), and he removes from his neck the yoke of the public's calculations (the 'normal' life of the monetary) that men seek out, this man is sanctified, as Kodesh Kadashim (most separated) and it will be that God is his portion forever (on Earth) and eternally (in the next world) and he will merit (from God) in this world a (monetary) portion that will sustain him, as do the priests and the Levites. Behold, as King David said, peace be upon him, "God, You are my portion and my cup, You support my lot." (Laws of Shmita and Yovale 13:13)

Maimonides teaches regarding a person who devotes himself to studying and teaching God's wisdom, that God responds by supporting this person with all of his needs. This means that God both desires and endorses through His Providence, the one who lives in accord with the Torah. This does not include only living the Torah's life of study, but also, all that forms part of such a life. God will certainly assist this person in finding a spouse (as seen with Rebecca), a livelihood (as seen with Jacob, Joseph, Moses and others), and all else necessary that sustains a life of Torah. This person will be seeking his needs based on Torah parameters, and therefore will be blessed with them, as this is God's plan for each and every man who "enters the world," Jew or Gentile. These are Maimonides' words, and deserve much consideration.

God desires man to partake of His wisdom, over all else. When one devotes himself in such a fashion, where he forgoes a life of competition, he abandons the materialistic culture around him, "separating" himself from others who chase and hoard temporal wealth. Instead, he prefers not to be distracted by such strife and calculations which clutter life. When a person dedicates himself to Torah wisdom, God certainly provides.

Why does Maimonides state that this one "separates" himself from others? What is the significance of this word? Why is it necessary that he separate, in order that God provide for him? Man can live only one of two lifestyles: 1) he follows mankind and seeks the approval of others, or

2) he lives independently, following God's lifestyle, thinking for himself and this leads him to "separate" from his society. This does not mean he physically moves from his town. Rather, he does not follow the ways of his neighbors but acts in accord with his intelligence. He does not chase after the material lifestyle as do most of his peers, nor societal approval, but he seeks a quiet life, where personal study and teaching his family forms the majority of his day.

This person also lives a simple life monetarily, where his needs are quite small in comparison to those seeking wealth. With such reduced expenses he has even more time to devote to study. He experiences far less times of want. His needs are little, so they are met easily as compared to others, whose fantasies propel them into debt after debt. Such a person is never desperate, as God provides for him.

Was King David ever desperate? Surely his life was replete with troubles. But he was never desperate. This is because his security in God's word as absolute truth entertained no possibility that he, a God fearing man, would be abandoned by God. King David must be an example for us, that even in the worst of situations, God is aware, and has every capability to remove our distress instantly. If we remain in pain, this is also God's method of pointing us towards that which requires our reflection. Sickness, poverty, tragic events, or even discomfort may be a message from God that we need correction. As Talmud Brachos states, we must examine our ways when we experience something negative. The Prophet Jeremiah states in Eicha 3:40, "*Let us search our ways and examine, and return to God.*" Notice Jeremiah says "Let us search." Why "search?" Why not simply "examine" without searching? This is because our true natures are quite hidden from how we view ourselves. A search is necessary if we are to understand our emotions. Only with this approach of searching, examining, and then returning to God, will we be successful. We should also note that although the devastation in Jerusalem was horrific, Jeremiah's mornings did not end in despair, but in hope. The conviction in God's truth and Torah as the best life was not mitigated by this tragedy. The converse is true: the tragedy was due to an abandonment of Torah, thereby substantiating the truths of God's curses, and Torah.

God wishes we use the minds. Thus, we recognize His indications of our flaws through reflection. How many of our Matriarchs were barren? Initially they perceived this as a negative. But upon reflection, which was God's plan all along, they conformed their desire for children to God's goals, to the point where God gave them children. Channa prayed to God for children, and when she finally dedicated a child she would conceive to God's Temple service, she became pregnant.

Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed, Book III, Chap. XVIII:

Hence it follows, in accordance with what I have mentioned in the preceding chapter, that the greater the share is which a person has obtained of this Divine influence, on account of both his physical predisposition and his training, the greater must also be the effect of Divine Providence upon him, for the action of Divine Providence is proportional to the endowment of intellect, as has been mentioned above. The relation of Divine Providence is therefore not the same to all men; the greater the human perfection a person has attained, the greater the benefit he derives from Divine Providence. This benefit is very great in the case of Prophets, and varies according to the degree of their Prophetic faculty: as it varies in the case of pious and good men according to their piety and uprightness. For it is the intensity of the Divine intellectual influence that has inspired the Prophets, guided the good in their actions, and perfected the wisdom of the pious. In the same proportion as ignorant and disobedient persons are deficient in that Divine influence, their condition is inferior, and their rank equal to that of irrational beings: and they are "like unto the beasts" (Ps. xlix. 21). For this reason it was not only considered a light thing to slay them, but it was even directly commanded for the benefit of mankind. This belief that God provides for every individual human being in accordance with his merits is one of the fundamental principles on which the Law is founded.

God's intervention is proportionate to our perfection. Perfection requires reflection, admission of guilt, resignation of wrong, and adherence to what is true and good. All men sin, "For man is not righteous in the land, who does good and does not sin (Ecclesiastes 7:20)." Therefore we all require correction. We must welcome opportunities to correct ourselves, and not act defensively to preserve our egos: "Better to hear the chastisement of the wise man, than to be a man hearing the songs of fools (Kobele's 7:5)."

People forfeit self awareness and improvement referring to hard times as a "losing streak." But "losing streaks" are not real. It is a projection onto reality when one experiences many setbacks. Many times people fabricate a "losing streak" line of defense, attributing unwanted realities to some imagined bad luck, as if something actually exists which overrides reality, victimizing them as an innocent target. One must realize these difficulties are not external occurrences, but are caused by the inner workings of human psychology. Maimonides teaches that most of man's sufferings are self-inflicted. (*Guide for the Perplexed, Book III, Chap. XII*) Man's sufferings may stem from a lack of confidence, a lack of resource-

fulness, poor judgment, the list goes on. But most times, this list is of internal, crippling emotions. One who experiences consistent losses may be crying out for his parent by rendering himself helpless, requiring assistance from another. If someone else is capable, he must analyze why he is not. His abilities are no weaker. “Streaks” do not exist in reality, whether one is winning or losing. In fact, what one perceives as a “negative” experience, may in fact be a positive. If his wishes are not in line with reality and he fails to achieve his desires, he should question his pursuits. Similarly, the successful individual might be forfeiting his perfection, since he does not question his lifestyle as long as he is at the top. His success can actually derail him from reflection and inner perfection.

Creating phantom scapegoats will not correct emotional crutches that cripple us. We can plan strategies that will emancipate us from a troubled state. We must have a two pronged approach: 1) become aware of our emotions so as to deal with them head on, and not give in to them, and 2) we must use our minds to first seek council and then apply this wisdom to free ourselves and start enjoying a life as an independent, healthy, and fully capable human being.

“Go to the ant lazy one; look at its ways and become wise. That (it) has no chief, overseer or ruler. She provides her bread in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest (Proverbs 6:6-8).” King Solomon says that all the more so, securing a livelihood cannot be more difficult for man – a far greater creature. He wishes the lazy one to end his laziness, and live. So he uses the ant to offer the lazy one a chance at gaining a sense of capability, by applying this lesson of “the lesser to the greater” (*a fortiori*). Additionally, if we live in accord with God’s will, i.e., a life where Torah study is the majority if our day, as is teaching our children and fulfilling His commands, then God will most certainly assist us.

King David was not desperate; he knew God’s capabilities. He endured many troubles, yet, his convictions kept him secure in the truth. His son and student King Solomon remained steadfast to the Torah’s truths, and he too imbues us with remedies for our flawed thinking.

Until now we have addressed negative events. However, this must not be our main focus in life. Even the righteous experience troubles, but it is not magnified in their eyes. Life’s troubles are dealt with, and they do so wisely without harping on inconveniences and bad tidings, so they may resume attending what truly captures their interest. And what we deem a tragedy, to them might have been mere inconvenience. We must not think they react as we do. What was their perspective which also contributes to true happiness? *“I am elated on Your words (Torah) like one who has found a great treasure (Psalms 119:162).”* Although we seek happiness according to

our own agendas, this statement reflects what man finds as his true happiness, i.e., enlightenment through seeing marvelous insights into God's wisdom. King David actually refers to Torah as his "plaything." An endearing term, mirroring that youthful excitement we all experienced upon receiving a new toy.

In summary, despair is not a attitude found in a Torah personality. Despair is the product of ignorance, whereas the Torah personality possesses convictions that teach him that God is above any trouble thrown his way. He trusts in God fully. Most assuredly, this Torah personality finds complete peace and fulfillment in the knowledge that God's Providence exists, "*God is my shepherd, I shall not want (Psalms 23:1).*" He does not despair, as God's good life is absolutely true, so he is happy with his life, and deals with troubles intelligently, courageously, and confident that his Torah knowledge will guide him with an intelligent plan of his own design.

Nothing can prevent his study of God's works. The true Torah Jew retains wisdom and Torah pursuits as his primary focus. Thereby, mishaps that upset others are not matters that upset him. He finds little, if any disturbance in loss of money or what people say of him. And as the majority of his time is spent in wisdom, he only finds happiness throughout the day, as wisdom is an endless sea of amazing discovery.

JEW & GENTILE: PERFECTLY EQUAL

God created one human pair: Adam and Eve. Noah and all others down to you and I descend from this couple. No one since Noah was created anew: no one possesses a different design or nature than any one else. Therefore, it is incorrect to suggest there exists different types of humans. Thus, Jew and gentile are identical in design. Where we differ is not in our design or potential, but in our Torah obligations.

The Haftorah read on public fasts is Isaiah 55:6-56:8. A friend questioned this portion: "Isaiah appears to suggest that a gentile must observe the Sabbath. While we know Sabbath observance is prohibited for gentiles, how do we understand this?" This portion indicates that without Sabbath observance and following all of Torah, the gentile will not share in the future good to be granted to the Jew. Is this so? And if it is, why isn't the gentile obligated in all of Torah? Is God playing favorites with the Jew, purposely excluding gentile from living the greatest possible life? Let's review the text, and then offer an explanation:

Isaiah 55

"6. Seek God when He can be found; call Him when He is near. 7. Let the wicked person forsake his path and the man of sin [forsake] his thoughts and return to God and He will have mercy on him, [return] unto our God for He is abundant in forgiveness. 8. 'For My thoughts are not like your thoughts and your ways are not like My ways'; says God. 9. As the heaven as are higher than the land, so are My ways higher than yours and My thoughts from your thoughts. 10. For as the rain and snow descend from the heavens and to there [heaven] they do not return; rather they moisten the land giving birth and sprouting, giving seed to the planter and food to eat. 11. So will be the word that leaves My mouth, it will no return to Me empty: for it will do that which I desire, and it will be successful where I sent it. 12. For in joy you will go out and in peace you will arrive; the mountains and valleys will break forth before you in song and the trees of the field will clap hands. 13. In the place of the thorn bush a cypress will rise; and in the place of the nettle a myrtle will rise and this will be a monument to God, an eternal sign never to cease.

Isaiah 56

1. Thus says God; observe justice and perform righteousness for My salvation is soon to come and My righteousness to be revealed. 2. Happy is the human who does this, and the son of Adam who seizes it; observing the Sabbath rather than profaning it and guarding his hand from doing all evil. 3. And let not the son of the stranger who attached himself to God say, 'God will surely separate me from His people and let not the barren one say 'Behold, I am a dry tree.' 4. For so says God to the barren who guard My Sabbaths and select which I desire and seize My covenant. 5. And I will give them a place and fame within My house and within My walls, better than sons and daughters and an eternal name I will give them that will never cease. 6. And the son of the stranger that attaches to God to serve Him and to love the name of God and to be to Him servants; all who observe the Sabbath instead of profaning it and seize My covenant. 7. And I will bring them to My holy mountain and I will gladden them in My house of prayer, their elevation offerings and peace offerings will find favor on My altar for My house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples. 8. The word of God, Who gathers the dispersed of Israel; 'I shall gather to him even more than those gathered to him.'"

Radak and others who understand the “*son of the stranger*” (56:3) to be Israelites, do not address here the distinction between Jew and Noahide. Rashi and Metsudas David understand “*son of the stranger*” to be the gentile. Following these two Rabbis let us understand these verses.

Isaiab's Message

We are first told to seek God when He is near and can be found. This is a call to Jews sinning in action and in thought, to return to God...to reestablish a relationship with Him. Repentance is thereby defined as not simply ceasing from sin, but reconnecting with God. The Rabbis teach that God is “found” only when we are earnest in our desire to draw close and do not practice Torah in a rote fashion. Alternatively, He is “found” during our judgment (on Rosh Hashanna or before death). For in these times, reality hits us most, we are genuine. God is also found (He responds) and we can repent, only during life, for we are taught that after life we cannot repent.

But man has a hurdle: he feels that perhaps his sins are not worthy of forgiveness. Therefore God tells us that His ways are different than man's ways. For man will at times guard his hatred for others and never forgive. We project this onto God, but wrongly. God assures us that He is far above our ways and He fully forgives, recalling nothing of our sins, if we are sincere. His promise is secure: as the rains and snow never return upwards, but successfully descend and water the Earth. So too, God's word is fulfilled, assuring us success in our repentance. Not only success, but also God says we become “an eternal sign never to cease.”

Isaiab then addresses gentiles. For they too have a chance at the same life as the Jew. A new address is made, “*Thus says God... (56:1)*” indicating the audience is now shifted from the previous Jews. God invites all to enjoy His “salvation” referring to the redemption. God clearly identifies this new audience of “humans” and “sons of Adam” to include all mankind. God teaches that true happiness is only achieved through the adherence to His entire system of 613 commands, termed as Sabbath and covenant.

While it is true that a Noahide is not permitted to observe the Sabbath without conversion, at the same time, his happiness and ultimate perfection relies on fulfilling all 613 commands. All will agree: with increased Torah observance comes increase perfection.

Jew and gentile are equal. Just as the wicked Jew must return, forsaking sinful acts and thoughts and adhere to the 613 to enjoy “an eternal sign never to cease,” so too a gentile is taught here to observe Sabbath and the covenant (i.e., all of Torah) if he too wishes the identical “*eternal name that will never cease (56:5)*.”

All Men are Created Equal

Isaiah exposes the same concern in the gentile as in the Jew: “*God will surely separate me from His people.*” Meaning, as Rashi states, the gentile feels he will not enjoy the reward of the Jew, “So why should I convert?” the gentile feels (*Rashi*). Therefore God corrects the gentile’s false assumption as He corrected the Jews, promising the identical reward: “*And I will give them a place and fame within My house and within My walls, better than sons and daughters and an eternal name I will give them that will never cease.*”

God concludes, “*their [the gentile’s] elevation offerings and peace offerings will find favor on My altar for My house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples. The word of God, Who gathers the dispersed of Israel; I shall gather to him even more than those gathered to him.*” God refers to His house as a house of “all people,” and further, He says he will gather to Him peoples, in addition to the Jews.

God created all members of mankind with identical souls and thus, identical potential. The only difference is that the Jew was not given the choice to observe the 613 commands, while the gentile has this option. As the gentiles’ Noahide system is not a system of perfection, but an entitlement to his right to life, he must abide by a bare minimum of laws. But the 613 does not simply offer a right to life. Rather, it is a system of perfection.

The gentile has the opportunity that equals that of the Jew. Both Jew and gentile require actions to ensure their identical reward; the Jew must forsake sin and follow his obligation of 613 commands, and the gentile too can select this life. These are the two addresses in this portion.

As a final thought, why is the Sabbath singled out, if the entire 613 commands must be followed? This is because Sabbath recalls Creation, and it is Creation that bestowed equality on all men and women, who God created as descendants of a single couple. Isaiah’s words underscore a theme of human equality throughout all of these verses.

As this portion is read on public fasts, its intent is to assist in repentance, so we learn of God’s appreciation of the hurdles blocking man’s repentance, and how He assists our return to Him by assuaging our concerns: the same concerns shared by Jew and gentile, and assuring our success.

God’s “equation” here of the Jew and the gentile is evidenced not only in the identical rewards enjoyed by both, but also in the identical concerns for the hurdles towards repentance we both share, seeking to reestablish our relationship with God.

HONORING PARENTS AND LOVING GOD

Maimonides writes, *“Honoring one’s father and mother is a great positive command, as is fearing them (Mamrim 6:1).”* In Yesodei HaTorah 2:1 when he defines the law of fearing God, Maimonides simply writes, *“This honored and feared God, it is a command to love and fear Him.”* No mention of the terms “great” or “positive.” Why is the language of a “great positive” command reserved exclusively for parents, and absent in connection with God?

In Hilchos Mamrim we note that Maimonides classifies cursing and honoring/fearing parents in separate chapters, as they are two distinct commands. Taking an independent position on the derivation of cursing, Maimonides says cursing parents is learned from *“Don’t curse the deaf,”* and honoring, from the unanimously accepted *“Honor thy father and thy mother.”* The Scriptural obligation to honor refers specifically to “father” and “mother” by name. Not so the institution of cursing; the punishment alone specifies parents: *“His father and mother did he curse, his blood is on him,”* but the warning is generic, *“Don’t curse the deaf.”* (“Mother” and “father” are not specified, and are subsumed under “deaf,” referring to regular Jews, i.e., not judges or princes.) This question is strengthened by the following verse, *“Judges you shall not curse and a prince among your people you shall not accurse (Lev. 22:27).”* If judges and princes are specified by name, what prevented the Torah from clearly warning against cursing one’s “father” and “mother?” (Also, What is so severe about cursing parents, that one is stoned for its violation?)

In Mamrim 5:4 and again in 5:8, it is interesting that Maimonides includes the Talmudic phrase *“Onesh shamanu, azhara minayin?”* (“The punishment we learned, but from where is the warning?”) Maimonides could have simply written the final derivation, without including this Talmudic phraseology. But more startling is that this phrase is never used throughout his entire Mishneh Torah except in these two occurrences: once regarding cursing parents, and the other, regarding smiting parents. A priceless gem is waiting to be discovered here.

Laws concerning the cursing of one’s parents precede the laws of honoring them, the reverse of what one might intuit. Cursing is certainly a violation of honor, but the lack of honor does not qualify as cursing. So why does Maimonides codify laws of cursing before the category of honor, which can contain it? Maimonides gives purposeful sequence in his codifications. What is his reasoning?

Mamrim 6:2: Maimonides revisits cursing parents, stating that both the curser and the reviler are equally stoned. The reviler here is one who

reviles God. This is proved in Hilchos Sanhedrin 15:10 where all those requiring the punishment of stoning are 18 in number. There, Maimonides lists a Migadafe; one who reviles God. Revisiting the curser in the laws of honor seems out of place, as he already concluded the chapter on cursing. Why the reappearance? Furthermore, in that very same halacha, he includes the law that one's fear and love of both parents must be equal. How are these two statements related, explaining why Maimonides groups them in one halacha?

Mamrim 6:7: Maimonides describes the extent of one's required parental fear:

Even if one was wearing precious garments, sitting at the head in front of the congregation, and his father and mother came and tore his garments, hit him on the head, and spat in front of him; Do not shame them, but be silent, and fear and tremble from the King, King of all kings, that commanded you in this. Because if a flesh and blood king commanded on you a matter more painful than this, you would not be able to refuse the matter. Certainly (the command) of the One Who spoke and the world came into being as is His will.

Do we not have to perform all commands with such diligence and care? What is this emphasis, and the mention of “the One Who spoke and the world came into being?”

Maimonides records the Talmud's words from Kiddushin 30b:

The Torah equated honoring (one's) father and mother to honoring God.

The Talmud then says:

Three partners are involved in the creation of man; God, the father and the mother. When man honors his father and mother, God says, 'I consider it as though I dwell between them, and he (the child) honors Me.'

For what purpose does the Talmud record this philosophy? Furthermore, if there is an equation, why do we find Maimonides subsuming the laws of cursing and honoring parents in his chapters on Hilchos Mamrim, Laws of Rebellion? If it is equated to the honor and fear of God, shouldn't he have grouped these laws together with Yesodei HaTorah?

Following the Talmud's license to introduce philosophy into this area, I wish to broaden our appreciation of these commands with one further question. We find the Ten Commandments are split into two sections: The first five deal with man's relationship with God, the second deal with man's relationship with his fellow man. The one problem is that "Honoring Parents" is included not in the second five, but in the first five dealing with our relationship with God. This appears out of place. What aspect of Honoring Parents qualifies it for inclusion in the laws relating to God – not man, and what is the Talmud driving at with its philosophy in Kiddushin?

The Talmud wishes man to trace back the cause of his very existence, and contemplate the greater objective of honoring parents. The Talmud feels such reflection is essential to fulfilling this command. Man is not created today as Adam was, fully grown. Man enters the world as a dependent infant. He grows through various processes: losing and regaining his teeth, acne, becoming more full with hair, adolescence, graying, old age, and death. This is part of God's design. To cover each stage would be too lengthy. Let us focus on childhood; and in particular, our dependency on parents.

As a child, we learn early on the concept of "authority." Parents are taller, stronger, and more capable. They punish us, and they nurture us. They are the source of our good and evil. We turn to them for all our fears and desires. In short, God designed mankind in a manner where he must learn the concept of an 'authority figure.' Had man not been born, but created as Adam, complete, tall, and independent, with all the knowledge needed to survive, he would have no need for parents, and he would miss the lesson of authority. But it is vital that this lesson be learned, as it is essential for the greatest objective: Love of God. It is only through our state as feeble and dependent infants that the role of authority may be successfully permeated into our being. We must acquire some concept of authority, if we are to accept God as an ultimate authority. Without learning what authority is in our youth, we cannot approach our fear and love of God. Once we accept the Creator's authority, we may then excel to a true appreciation of His majesty.

The Rash writes that fear and honor of parents surpasses that of God, based on, "Honor God with your wealth." Wealth determines our level of honoring God, while honoring parents is not limited by wealth. Regardless of monetary considerations, we must honor our parents. Perhaps based on our reasoning, we can understand the Rash. In order to arrive at honor of God, honoring parents is of vital importance. There is no exemption. Not even monetary considerations.

“The Torah equated honoring one’s father and mother to honoring God.”

The equation is that fear and honor of God commence with our initial fear and honor of our parents. For this reason, in the Ten Commandments, the command to fear and honor parents is rightfully placed in the section dealing with our approach to God, not our fellow man. When the Talmud, cited by Maimonides, equated fear and honor of parents to that of God, the equation is not one of commonality. It is an equation of dependency. The fear of God depends on man’s inculcation of parental fear and honor.

The Talmud included philosophy into its halachic discourse on these laws to engender our deeper appreciation, and thus, performance. We learn that our very existence is due to God, and our parents. An appreciation of our biological existence must be highlighted, and fear and love finally redirected to God, but this first requires parental fear and honor. The Talmud discusses our creation – our existence – that which we treasure over all else. The Talmud’s philosophical discussion of three partners is truly halachic. Our goal in parental honor and fear aims at God’s honor and fear. It is not an ends in itself. The Talmud is underlining the significant element of the command to fear and honor parents: God is central to this command. The focus is the Creator. This now explains why Maimonides gives a lengthy description of the measure of our tolerance, even through great humiliation. Our goal is the recognition and love of the “One Who spoke and the world came into being.” It makes sense that in Mamrim, Maimonides records the phrase “The One Who spoke and the world came into being,” and he does so again in the primary command of love of God in Yesodei HaTorah. There too he records “The One Who spoke and the world came into being.” The connection is clear.

It now follows why honor and fear of parents is subsumed under Laws of Rebellion, and why cursing precedes honor and fear. Honor and fear of parents targets a goal far greater than human honor. Maimonides commences this section outlining the authority of the court system. This is the main heading under which honoring parents plays a role. The goal is a respect of Bes Din, the law, but ultimately, the love of God.

In Hilchos Mamrim, why is cursing placed before honor? It is cursing – not honor – that forms the violation of authority. Secondary is honoring parents, as this merely supports the primary protection against rebellion. Why does Maimonides later revisit cursing in his laws pertaining to honor? Here, (*Mamrim 6:2*), cursing is not mentioned for its own sake. Cursing is mentioned only to equate the punishment of cursing, with one who is a Migadafe – one who reviles God. Maimonides places cursing here to display the severity of the lack of man’s honor for his father. Just as in the first halacha of the chapter on “Cursing,” Maimonides describes

the obligation, and in the second halacha, the punishment, here too in the laws of “Honor and Fear” Maimonides follows this formulation: the first halacha describes the obligation, and in the second halacha Maimonides outlines – by association – the severity for lack of honor. He mentions cursing, even though he already concluded it in the previous chapter, to teach that honor/fear is a derivative of the broader category of cursing. The punishment of stoning for both a Migadafe and one who curses parents is identical, as the corruption is equal. This is placed in the laws of honor/fear to teach that the lack of honor/fear shares a corruption that is punishable with stoning. Once he equates the punishment of cursing to reviling, he further clarifies in that very halacha that this applies equally to both parents.

With this explanation, we can explain the generic warnings applied to both cursing and smiting parents, in contrast to judges and princes who are explicitly stated in the Scriptural prohibitions. Perhaps by the Torah specifying judges and princes, and not specifying father and mother, we are directed to the concept that rebellion against the system (judges and princes) maintains prominence over rebellion against parents. Cursing “judges and princes” by name appears in the Torah’s warnings, but not cursing our “father and mother” by name. The parent is rightfully obscured by the proper focus on the authorities of the Torah system. Judges and princes are those most closely associated with the Torah’s principles and commandments. The Torah must never share the limelight, not even with our parents. This explains why Maimonides quotes the phraseology “*onesh shamanu, azhara minayun*” in only two places in his entire *Mishneh Torah*. Although the Talmud concluded the Torah’s source for cursing parents – “*lo sikalale charashe*” – nonetheless, Maimonides wishes to express that there is no explicit prohibition of “father” and “mother” by quoting the Talmudic “*onesh shamanu, azhara minayun*.” His reiteration of the entire Talmudic question and answer is central to our understanding that the primary prohibition of rebellion does not find its goal in parents, but in judges and princes – the central characters of our Torah system. (Talmud Sanhedrin 66a states regarding judges and princes, “*gidulasam garma law-hem*,” their elevated status causes their distinction.)

There is a balance to be struck regarding our relationship to our parents: we must fear and honor them, but not give them central importance. Thus, they are not specified in the Scriptural prohibition of cursing. Cursing is the primary institution protecting against rebellion, therefore, it is properly codified prior to laws of honor and fear.

How does one love God? As we stated, Maimonides does not refer to it as a “positive” or “great” command. Perhaps because a ‘command’ has a formulated ma-aseh, a precise act. But this cannot apply to the love of God. Maimonides states, *“And what is the path to His love and His fear?”* Note that he says “path:” meaning a full process is required for the fulfillment of this command, not a discrete, technical act. Maimonides describes this path as two-staged; 1) man must behold God’s wisdom, that “there is no measure nor end,” and 2) man must contrast himself to God, seeing what a lowly creation man is, standing before One of perfect knowledge.” Maimonides then quotes King David (*Psalms 8:4-5*):

*When I see Your heavens, the works of Your fingers, what is man
that You should be mindful of him?*

A formulation is seen, and derived from King David’s words:

1) Knowledge must be acquired, and 2) the self must be viewed as little.

Perhaps King David’s two-part formulation echoes the two stages in man’s approach to loving God. There is the ultimate goal of appreciating God’s wisdom, “When I see Your heavens, the works of Your fingers,” and this, later in life, replaces the initial attachment to God based on authority. The abandonment of this initial view is expressed by, “what is man that You should be mindful of him.” After seeing the marvels of the world and God’s endless wisdom, King David abandons his view of life where the self was a concern.

Love of God is impossible without much understanding, as Maimonides says at the end of that halacha, “I will explain these great categories from the acts of the Master of the world, in order that there be an opening to understand and love Hashem.” To “understand,” and only then, to “love Hashem.” The command is only fulfilled through a process of understanding, where one eventuates naturally at his love for God, and where the self loses prominence. This being so, Maimonides does not refer to the command as “great,” as he does with honoring parents. In connection with parents, since there are discrete acts, the term “great” is applicable. But the actual love of God is the result of a lengthy process. No single action brings about the result, so there is no one act to label “great.” Maimonides teaches that one’s fear and honor of his Rabbi must surpass that of his parents. Maimonides quotes Chazal who state that fear of one’s Rabbi must equate to the fear of God. He says further – each based on Scripture – that one who differs with his Rabbi, argues on him, shouts at him, or places him under suspicion, is as one who did so with God. This does not apply to parents, as they only gave us physical life, but our Rabbis gave us eternal life.

OXYMORON: “RELIGIOUS” DRESS

Another of our nations’ errors is in following this notion: “The suit makes the man.” This means society is impressed more with man’s appearance, than with his values, thoughts or actions. While Judaism includes laws of dress, they must be understood. Other than modesty, honor, cross-dressing, and dressing as idolaters (as they dress in their religious rites) God did not include a dress code as a Torah law.

Dress & Appearances

Dressing for Sabbath and holidays is not to “make the man,” but to give honor to the day. In this fashion, man develops respect for God’s chosen days and focuses on God’s acts which we commemorate at those times. It’s all about God. In no manner is this dressing up to honor man. No one would suggest that by changing one’s external garments, that he has perfected his internal ideas and values. Prohibitions on cross-dressing eliminate lewdness; prohibitions of idolatrous dress break our identification with this idolaters’ practices, and modest dress removes the focus from ourselves so we focus on God. This is all reasonable. Thus, dress carries no inherent value. But within Jewish communities, this is not the case.

Today, Jews categorize their own brothers and sisters into superficial categories. “Does he wear a black jacket or hat?” “What type of yarmulke does he wear?” “Does she wear jeans skirts?” “Does he have a beard?” These questions are asked to determine the “hashkafa” or outlook of the person. But I ask, what type of “outlook” is related in any way to one’s garments? This is truly superficial. In fact, it is the flaw of insecurity that propels individuals to associate with only those who appear like them. If however, one was firm in his or her Jewish values, such a person would care nothing about what others say. They would associate with upright Jews, regardless of their dress. They would disassociate with corrupt Jews, again regardless of their dress. Further, one violates a halacha d’oraisa (positive command) of “*Viabavta l’ra-acha comocha*” (*Lev. 19:18*) – “thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself” – when one passes these judgments or prevents a shidduch (a match) if one is a convert, divorced, black, not Sephardic or Ashkenaz, and the like. This is a despicable trait, which must be removed from one’s value system.

As always, when one desires to follow what is in accord with the Torah, one must look into the sources, not to what people say, or what is popularly believed or performed.

Jacob gave a gift of a coat of striped colors (*Radak, Gen. 37:3*) to his son Joseph. Joseph as well didn’t abstain from wearing that garment. Both

Jacob and Joseph realized that wearing a colored garment is not a “religious” issue. Had Jacob known the tragic outcome of demonstrating his favoritism towards Joseph in this manner, perhaps he would not have expressed it. But this does not mean that Jacob felt that the garment per se was a problem; the reaction of the brothers was unforeseen. The priests as well are commanded to wear colored garments. We find in Exodus 12:35 the Jews following Moses’ command to ask the Egyptian’s for their garments. Rashi points out that the clothing was valued by the Jews more than the gold and silver vessels. It is clear: there is no law concerning wearing types of garments, even those of other nations (as long as the garments are not of religious practice). And we are not to add to the Torah by opposing these sources and wearing specific clothing as a “sign of religiosity.” In fact, clothing cannot affect our perfection.

The conscious act of wearing “specific” clothing to distinguish one’s self, is a violation, and is not part of Torah. One who is truly righteous, is humble, and does not seek an audience or applause for his good deeds: *“And humbly shall you walk before God (Micha 6:8).”* God is his only concern, for only God determines truth and what is of value. His sense of reality is not human applause, but God’s word alone. Zephania 1:8 records certain Jews who were punished by God due to their wearing of “malbish nachri” (foreign or strange garments). In his final interpretation, Radak describes the sin of those Jews:

These men made themselves to look separate and righteous, and they wore strange garments, unlike the rest of their brethren, so that they should be recognized through their clothing as distinct individuals, but their ways are evil.

Radak states that one is evil when parading his righteousness. In Samuel I, 1:16, God tells Samuel to go to Jesse, for *“He (God) has seen a king for Himself among his sons.”* Interestingly, God does not tell Samuel which son. Why? God desired that Samuel learn a lesson simultaneously with God’s selection of the new king. Upon Samuel’s arrival at the house of Jesse, Samuel admires Eliav. God tells Samuel,

Do not look at his appearance or his height, for he is despised, for it is not as man sees. Mans sees with his eyes, but God sees what’s in the heart.

God is teaching us not to pay attention to the superficial information quickly assumed with the eyes. This is not the real person. The person, as God says, is what is in the heart.

Lineage

Kings David and Solomon descended from Ruth the Moabite. Joshua married Rachav the harlot. Moses married Zippora – a woman whose father previously practiced every form of idolatry. Ruth partook of greatness, as she exemplified modesty to such a high degree. God therefore selected her to be the mother of our greatest kings. God never rebuked Moses or Joshua for marrying people with such backgrounds. At the time of marriage, these individuals were living the correct philosophy. That is all God is concerned with.

Imagine how much more peace there would be if we studied the Torah and kept to the teachings without distortion or projection, instead of operating out of false, destructive notions. We would have more ahava (love) towards one another. Remember why God destroyed Noah's generation, and sustained the generation of the dispersion. As Rashi stated, "great is love, and hated is argument." We must stop fabricating false categories about our own brothers and sisters. Instead of looking for reasons to degrade a Jew, look for reasons to love someone and appreciate their real worth. Certainly, we must all abandon false notions regarding dress.

God knows the perfect system for man, and included in the Torah only those commands which, if followed exactly, will yield the only perfect life. Any addition or subtraction is a defect in the system. Did the Creator of the heavens and Earth, who designed every aspect of the human personality, miss a point? Did He forget to include something in the Torah? Of course this is absurd. As there is no command to wear specific garments, it must be a destructive practice, as Radak teaches.

A person is what's inside, not what's outside.

THE 7TH DAY – A MESSIANIC FORECAST

A Rabbi once quoted Nachmanides (Ramban) on Leviticus 25:2. This verse refers to the law concerning our rest from working the land; the Sabbatical Year. The Torah verse says this year must be a "Sabbath unto God"[1]. Nachmanides teaches that this term "Sabbath unto God" appears only twice in Torah: once here, and once in Exodus 20:10 (in the Ten Commandments) addressing the seventh day. Both the Sabbath, and the seventh, Sabbatical Year share the same design, and by the words "*Sabbath unto God*," a similar objective. Why must years duplicate the first seven days?

Later in his commentary, Nachmanides says these words:

Behold, the days allude to that which was created in the act of Creation; and the years allude to that which will be in the creation of all the days of the world.

He means to say that the days – working six days and resting on the seventh – remind us of God’s act of Creation. The past. We require a weekly reminder of this fundamental, that all exists only due to God alone. But what does Nachmanides mean by “the years allude that which will be in the creation of all the days of the world?” I believe Nachmanides is teaching us an amazing idea.

When God created the world in six days, our focus tends to remain on those days, and not the seventh. This is because the universe is magnificent, replete with marvels at every turn. We focus on physical objects and laws that captivate our thoughts. But when reading Genesis 2:2, we wonder at the apparent duplication: “*And God completed His work that He did on the seventh day; and He rested on the seventh day from all the work that He performed.*” The question is glaring: if it already states that God “completed” His work, how can he do another act of “resting?” He is already at rest! The answer is as follows...

Suppose I am drinking water, and then I place the cup down and stop drinking. There are a few possibilities why I stop drinking: 1) no water remains; or 2) I commence a fast at that moment. In the latter case, my abstention from drinking is due to a “positive” act of fasting in which I now engage. My inactivity is not a passive act due to a lack of water, but a positive commitment to some ideal.

When God “completed” Creation, it was due to the fact that all that He wished to exist, now existed. Nothing was left to create. But when God “rested,” He gave rest a “positive” designation. God was designating Sabbath as the objective of creation, not merely a day with nothing to do since all was created. The Licha Dodi recited Friday night says, “*The last in creation, but first in His thought.*” Although Sabbath came after all else was formed, it was first in God’s thought. Meaning, it was the ‘purpose’ of Creation. What is the purpose of Sabbath?

Sabbath is a day when man cannot engage in creative labor. He is freed from all physical preoccupation in Earthly establishment (issur melacha); he is commanded to partake of physical pleasures (oneg Shabbat), but mostly, he is to immerse himself in Torah and all thoughts about God’s

creation. This is what the refrain from the physical targets as its objective.

The universe is truly a laboratory for man to witness and experiment with God's creation, for the purpose of arriving at new observations and learning God's wisdom as far as humanly possible. Therefore, Sabbath is the choicest of days, since God desired man to engage a life of wisdom, over a life of physical toil.

Why then wasn't Adam commanded in the Sabbath? This is because Adam was not yet sentenced to work for his needs (Gen. 3:17). Adam had all of his needs prepared. He enjoyed that preferred state where he could devote all his energies to wisdom. He lived a truly "sabbatical" existence. A command of Sabbath would have produced no change in his activities. But once sentenced to labor after the sin, Sabbath entered the picture when Torah was given. But the Sabbath is not to remain eternally as a "weekly" event...

Messianic Times: the Final Sabbatical Era

The Rabbis refer to the Messianic era as a time that is "entirely Sabbath." In the future, man will once again enjoy the state where he works minimally and engages the pursuit of wisdom as his main focus. In other words, and here's Nachmanides' point: the original Sabbath was a model for man's ultimate state. Adam (mankind) was originally meant to be fully immersed in a life of wisdom and this is why man alone received the gift of intelligence. Although we are temporarily distracted by the need to work, God will finally usher in an era where mankind will recognize Him, "*v'kol bnei bassar, yikru b'shimecha*": "*And all sons of flesh will call in Your name.*" Sabbath is the choicest of days, as it is the state where man lives as originally planned: immersed in studying God. This future, Messianic era will be enduring; not a discrete event. (Of course, the law of Sabbath remains, as the Torah will never change.)

Perhaps this is what Nachmanides means when he says, "the years allude to that which will be in the creation of all the days of the world." The years refers to the Sabbatical Year. By receiving this command to rest for an entire year, God teaches that man's state can in fact tolerate an elongated state of preoccupation with Torah, without physical toil. We don't need to labor to be happy. Just the opposite is true. The Sabbatical year points to the ability in man to enjoy thought on a prolonged basis. And then we have the Jubilee, where after a period of seven cycles of seven years, we again must rest the land. This time, we enjoy two consecutive years of rest: the 49th and the 50th. We see an even longer period that carries the original design of Sabbath. This continually protracted approach – 6 days + 1 rest day; 6 years + 1 rest year; 7 x 7 years + 2 rest years – all point to

the next span of time in this continually increasing pattern: the Messianic Era, which will not end.

It is amazing that the first seven days serve the purpose of bringing creation into existence, but also allude to all the “days” of the world. We may rightfully say that the millennium from Adam until the Messiah are the “first six days” of mankind, and from the Messiah and onward is a “seventh day,” a “day” of Sabbath, that lasts forever. The first seven days thereby foretell the entire history of mankind, based on the objective that man engage intelligence over all else. That is something.

Perhaps too this is one reason for Resurrection of the Dead; that all those who have passed will yet enjoy the preferred human state.

[1] “Sabbath unto God” means a time frame where man is dedicated to knowledge of God, not a day that God needs. For God has no needs. All God’s commands are for human benefit.

Part VII

REFERENCE

Following are the precious words of our Rabbis – our brilliant leaders who expounded crucial, intellectual and moral truths.

THE 13 FOUNDATIONS OF JUDAISM

These 13 Principles compiled by Maimonides outline Judaism's tenets, which one must acknowledge as truths in order to be considered a Jew, and to partake in the World to Come. (To read the original Hebrew, see the end of Talmud Sanbedrin, Maimonides' commentary on the Mishna.)

Principle I. To know the existence of the Creator

To believe in the existence of the Creator, and this Creator is perfect in all manner of existence. He is the cause of all existence. He causes them to exist and they exist only because of Him. And if you could contemplate a case, such that He was not to exist...then all things would cease to exist and there would remain nothing. And if you were to contemplate a case, such that all things would cease to exist aside from the Creator, His existence would not cease. And He would lose nothing; and oneness and kingship is His alone. Hashem of strength is His name because He is sufficient with His own existence, and sufficient [is] just Him alone, and needs no other. And the existences of the angels, and the celestial bodies, and all that is in them and that which is below them...all need Him for their existence. And this is the first pillar and is attested to by the verse, "I am Hashem your God."

Principle II. The unity of God

Meaning to say to accept that this is the quintessential idea of Oneness. It is not like the oneness of a pair (i.e. pair of shoes - one group) and not one like a species. And not like man that has many individual (members) nor like a body that divides into many different parts until no end (every part being divisible). Rather, God is one and there is no other oneness like His. This is the second principle and is taught in what it says, "Hear Israel, Hashem is Our God, Hashem is one."

Principle III. The denial of physicality in connection with God

This is to accept that this Oneness that we have mentioned above (Principle II) is not a body and has no strength in the body, and has no shape or image or relationship to a body or parts thereof. This is why the Sages of blessed memory said with regards to heaven there is no sitting, nor standing, no awakensness, nor tiredness. This is all to say that He does not partake of any physical actions or qualities. And if He were to be a body

then He would be like any other body and would not be God. And all that is written in the holy books regarding descriptions of God, they are all anthropomorphic. Thus said our great Rabbis of blessed memory, “The Torah speaketh in man’s language” (i.e. using human terms to offer some understanding). And the Rabbis have already spoken at length on this issue. This is the third pillar and is attested to by the verse, “For you saw no image” meaning that you did not see an image or any form when you stood at Sinai because as we have just said, He has no body, nor power of the body.

Principle IV. God’s Antiquity

This is that God existed prior to everything, and exists after everything. This is proved many times throughout scripture and is attested to by the verse, “Meuna Elokei kedem.”

Principle V. That God, blessed be He is worthy that we serve Him, to glorify Him, to make known His greatness, and to do His commands

But not to do this to those that are below Him in the creation. Not to the angels or to the stars or the planets or anything else, for they are all created things in nature and in their functioning, there is no choice or judgment except by God Himself. Also it is not fitting to serve them as intermediaries to God. Only to God should you incline your thoughts and your actions. This is the fifth principle and it warns against idolatry and most of the Torah speaks out against this.

Principle VI. Prophecy

And this is that it is known to man that this (Prophet) is a type of man who are created beings of great stature and perfection of the character traits. Who have tremendous knowledge until a different intelligence attaches to them when the intelligence of the person clings to the intelligence of God and it rests upon him. And these are the Prophets; and this is prophecy; and the idea of it. The explanation of it is very long and the intention is not to bring a sign for every fundamental and to explain it all, encompassing of all knowledge (i.e. God’s knowledge) but it is mentioned to us in a story form and all of the Torah attests to this.

Principle VII. The Prophetic capacity of Moses our Teacher, peace be upon him

And this is that we accept that he was the father of all Prophets that were before him and that will be after him. He was on a qualitatively dif-

ferent level than any other, and he is chosen from all other people before and after him of any that have any knowledge of God; for his was the greatest. And he, peace be upon him, rose to the levels of the angels. He was granted all areas of knowledge and prophecy and his physical attributes did not diminish. His knowledge was different and it is through this difference that it is ascribed to him that he spoke to God without any intermediary or angel.

My intention was to explain this puzzling concept and to open up the sealed areas in the Torah regarding the verses of “face to face” and other similar references, but its length would be tremendous and it would require numerous proofs from the Torah and other sources and encompass many areas. Even to write it the briefest of briefest it would require 100 pages, so I will save it and write it in another book. I will now return to the intent of this seventh fundamental that the prophecy of Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, was different from all others in 4 ways:

1) Regarding all other Prophets, God spoke to them through intermediaries. Regarding Moses, it was without one, as it says, “face to face I spoke to him.”

2) Regarding all other Prophets, prophecy came to them at night while they were asleep in a dream as it says, “in a dream of the night” and other such references; or in the day but only after a deep sleep-like state came over them, and all their senses were shut off except their thoughts. Not so by Moses. Moses would receive a prophecy any time when he would stand between the two figures [fixed] on the ark, as God attests to it, “and I will make it known to you there” and “not so my servant Moses. Face to face I speak to him.”

3) When a Prophet would receive prophecy he would not be able to stand the intense effect and he would shake and not be able to stand, as it relates regarding Daniel in his encounter with the angel Gabriel. Regarding Moses, he did not suffer from this. As it says, “Face to face do I speak to him as a person speaks to his friend.” And even though this is the greatest connection to God, still, he did not suffer.

4) All other Prophets could not receive prophecy at their will, [but] only when God desired to tell them. Some would go days or months without prophecy. Even if they wanted or needed something, sometimes it would be days or months or years or even never that they would be told [a prophecy]. Some would have people play music to put them in a good mood such as Elisha. But Moses, peace be upon him, received prophecy whenever he wanted, as it says, “Stand here and listen to what God will tell you what to do” and “God said to Moses tell Aaron your brother that he can’t come to the holy of holies at any time [he wants].” Our Rabbis said, “Aaron was prohibited to come whenever he wanted, but not Moses.

Principle VIII. That the Torah is from heaven [God]

And this is that you believe that all of this Torah that was given by Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, that it is all from the mouth of God. Meaning that it was received by him entirely from God. And it is not known how Moses received it except by Moses himself, peace be upon him, that it came to him. That he was like a stenographer that you read to him and he writes all that is told to him: all the events and dates, the stories, and all the commandments. There is no difference between “And the sons of Cham were Kush, and Mitzraim, and his wife was Mehatbe’el” and “Timnah was his concubine” and “I am Hashem your God” and “Hear Israel [Hashem your God, Hashem is one]” for it was all given by God. And it is all Hashem’s perfect Torah; pure, holy, and true. And he who says that these verses or stories, Moses made them up, he is a denier of our sages and Prophets worse than all other types of deniers [form of heretic] for he thinks that what is in the Torah is from man’s flawed heart and the questions and statements and the dates and stories are of no value for they are from Moses our teacher, peace be upon him. And this area is that he believes the Torah is not from heaven. And on this our sages of blessed memory said, “he who believes that the Torah is from heaven except this verse that God did not say it but rather Moses himself did [he is a denier of all the Torah].” And this that God spoke this and that, each and every statement in the Torah, is from God and it is full of wisdom (each statement) and benefit to those who understand them. And its depth of knowledge is greater than all of the land and wider than all the seas and a person can only go in the path of David, the anointed of the God of Jacob who prayed and said “Open my eyes so that I may glance upon the wonders of Your Torah” (Psalms 119). And similarly the explanation of the Torah was also received from God and this is what we use today to know the appearance and structure of the sukkah and the lulav and the shofar, tzitzis, Tefillin and their usage. And all this God said to Moses and Moses told to us. And he is trustworthy in his role as the messenger and the verse that teaches of this fundamental is what is written (Numbers 16) “And Moses said, with this shall you know that Hashem sent me to do all these actions (wonders) for they are not from my heart.”

Principle IX. The completeness of the Torah

And this is that the Torah is from God and is not lacking. That to it you can’t add or take away from. Not from the written Torah or from the oral Torah, as it says, “Do not add to it and do not take away from it.” (Deut. 3). And we already explained what needs to be explained about this fundamental at the beginning of this essay.

*Principle X. That God knows man's actions
and does not remove His eye from them*

His knowledge is not like someone who says God abandoned the land but rather like it says (Jer. 32) "Great in council and mighty in deed, Your eyes are cognizant to all the ways of mankind." "And God saw for the evil of man on the land had grown greatly." (Gen. 6) And it says, "The disgust of Sodom and Amorrhah is great" and this demonstrates the 10th principle.

Principle XI. That God gives reward to he who does the commandments of the Torah and punishes those that transgress its admonishments and warnings

And the great reward is the life of the world to come and the punishment is the cutting off of the soul [in the world to come]. And we already said regarding this topic what these are. And the verse that attests to this principle is (*Exod. 32:32*) "And now if You would but forgive their sins - and if not erase me from this book that You have written." And God answered him, "He who sinned against Me I will erase from My book." This is a proof that God knows the sinner and the fulfiller in order to mete out reward to one and punishment to the other.

Principle XII. The era of the Messiah

And this is to believe that in truth that he will come and that you should be waiting for him even though he delays in coming. And you should not calculate times for him to come, or to look in the verses of Tanach to see when he should come. The sages say: The wisdom of those who calculate times [of his coming] is small and that you should believe that he will be greater and more honored than all of the kings of Israel since the beginning of time as it is prophesied by all the Prophets from Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, until Malachi, peace be upon him. And he who doubts or diminishes the greatness of the Messiah is a denier in all the Torah for it testifies to the Messiah explicitly in the portion of Bilam and the portion of "You are gathered (towards the end of Deut.)." And part of this principle that there is no king of Israel except from the house of David and from the seed of Solomon alone. And anyone who disputes this regarding this family is a denier of the name of God and in all the words of the Prophets.

Principle XIII. Resurrection of the dead

And we have already explained it. And when the person will believe all these fundamentals and his faith will be clear in them he enters into the nation of Israel and it is a mitzvah to love him and to have mercy on

him and to act to him according to all the ways in which God commanded us regarding loving your neighbor. And even if he did all of the sins in the Torah due to desire of the emotions, and from his physical aspect's conquering him, he will be punished for his sins, but he still has a share in the world to come and is among the sinners of Israel. However if he rejects one of these fundamentals he leaves the nation and is a denier of the fundamentals and is called a heretic, a denier, etc., and it is a mitzvah to hate him and to destroy him (financially - not physically to kill him. And not to steal either). And regarding him it is said (Psalms 139) "Behold will not the enemy of God be my enemy?"

I have expounded at length many things and I have left the topic of my composition but I have done it for I saw a need in the dealings of the fundamentals of faith and I have gathered together many different and spread out areas Therefore know them and succeed in understanding them and review them many times and know them very well [i.e. not just memorization but to understand fully and to be able to support them and know their proofs]. Therefore if after one or ten times you think you have understood them, God knows that you are just involved in falsehood. Therefore do not read them quickly because I have not written them as it suddenly entered into my mind. But rather, after a deep and careful study of the whole area and after I have seen many clear and true ideas and I have seen what is proper to believe of them [as the fundamentals] and I have brought proofs and logical demonstrations for each and every one of them. May it be God's will that I have been correct that He helped me through this area on the good path and now I will return to my explanation of this chapter [in the Talmud].

“LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY OF MARSEILLE”
(LETTER ON ASTROLOGY)

Maimonides

I perceive in this inquiry that although its boughs are many, they are all branches of a single tree, which is their common root: namely, all the statements of “the astrologers, the stargazers” (Is. 47:13). It is evident that the compilation we have made of the statutes of the Torah, which we entitled *Mishneh Torah*, has not reached you. If it had, you would have known directly my opinion regarding all those things of which you have inquired; for we have made this entire matter clear in (the section of that work called) *Laws Concerning Idolatry and the Ordinances of the Nations*. It seems to me that it will come to you before this reply, since it is already widespread on the island of Sicily, as well as in the West and in the East and in the South. In any case, I myself need to make this clear to you.

Know, my masters, that it is not proper for a man to accept as trustworthy anything other than one of these three things. The first is a thing for which there is a clear proof deriving from man’s reasoning—such as arithmetic’ geometry, and astronomy. The second is a thing that a man perceives through one of the five senses—such as when he knows with certainty that this is red and this is black and the like through the sight of his eye; or as when he tastes that this is bitter and this is sweet; or as when he feels that this is hot and this is cold; or as when he hears that this sound is clear and this sound is indistinct; or as when he smells that this is a pleasing smell and this is a displeasing smell and the like. The third is a thing that a man receives from the Prophets or from the righteous. Every reasonable man ought to distinguish in his mind and thought all the things that he accepts as trustworthy, and say: “This I accept as trustworthy because of tradition, and this because of sense-perception, and this on grounds of reason.” Anyone who accepts as trustworthy anything that is not of these three species, of him it is said: “The simple believes everything” (Prov. 14:15).

Thus you ought to know that fools have composed thousands of books of nothingness and emptiness. Any number of men, great in years but not in wisdom, wasted all their days in studying these books and imagined that these follies are science. They came to think of themselves as wise men because they knew that science. The thing about which most of the world errs, or all of it—save for a few individuals, “the remnant of whom the Lord shall call” (Joel 3:5)—is that thing of which I am apprising you.

The great sickness and the “grievous evil” (Eccles. 5:12, 15) consist in this: that all the things that man finds written in books, he presumes to think of as true—and all the more so if the books are old. And since many individuals have busied themselves with those books and have engaged in discussions concerning them, the rash fellow’s mind at once leaps to the conclusion that these are words of wisdom, and he says to himself: “Has the pen of the scribes written in vain” (Jer. 8:8), and have they vainly engaged in these things? This is why our kingdom was lost and our Temple was destroyed and why we were brought to this; for our fathers sinned and are no more because they found many books dealing with these themes of the star gazers, these things being the root of idolatry, as we have made clear in *Laws Concerning Idolatry*. They erred and were drawn after them, imagining them to be glorious science and to be of great utility. They did not busy themselves with the art of war or with the conquest of lands, but imagined that those studies would help them. Therefore the Prophets called them “fools and dolts” (Jer. 4:22). And truly fools they were, “for they walked after confused things that do not profit” (I Sam. 12:21 and Jer. 2:8).

Know, my masters, that I myself have investigated much into these matters. The first thing I studied is that science which is called judicial astrology—that is, (the science) by which man may know what will come to pass in the world or in this or that city or kingdom and what will happen to a particular individual all the days of his life. I also have read in all matters concerning all of idolatry, so that it seems to me there does not remain in the world a composition on this subject, having been translated into Arabic from other languages, but that I have read it and have understood its subject matter and have plumbed the depth of its thought. From those books it became clear to me what the reason is for all those commandments that everyone comes to think of as having no reason at all other than the decree of Scripture. I already have a great composition on this subject in the Arabic language (namely, the *Guide of the Perplexed*) with lucid proofs for every single commandment but this is not required of us now. I now return to the subject of your inquiry.

Know, my masters, that every one of those things concerning judicial astrology that (its adherents) maintain—namely, that something will happen one way and not another, and that the constellation under which one is born will draw him on so that he will be of such and such a kind and so that something will happen to him one way and not another—all those assertions are far from being scientific; they are stupidity. There are lucid, faultless proofs refuting all the roots of those assertions. Never did one of those genuinely wise men of the nations busy himself with this matter

or write on it, no (nation) wrote such compositions or committed the error of calling it a science, other than the Chasdeans, Chaldeans, Canaanites, and Egyptians, for that was their religion in those days. But the wise men of Greece—and they are the philosophers who wrote on science and busied themselves with all the species of science—mock and scorn and ridicule these four nations that I have mentioned to you, and they rally proofs to refute their entire position “root and branch” (Mal. 3:19). The wise men of Persia also recognized and understood that all that science which the Chasdeans, Chaldeans, Egyptians, and Canaanites produced is a falsehood and a lie. Do not imagine that those refutations are mere assertions and that we therefore should not put our trust in them; rather there are lucid and correct, faultless proofs to refute that entire position, and the only one who would cling to it would be “a simple one who believes everything” (Prov. 14:15), or one who wishes to deceive others.

And know, my masters, that the science of the stars that is genuine science is knowledge of the form of the spheres, their number, their measure, the course they follow, each one’s period of revolution, their declination to the north or to the south, their revolving to the east or to the west, and the orbit of every star and what its course is. On all this and the like, the wise men of Greece, Persia, and India wrote compositions. This is an exceedingly glorious science. By means of it the onset of the eclipses of luminaries may be known and when they will be eclipsed at any given place; by means of it there may be known the cause for the moon’s (yareah) appearing just like a bow, then waxing great until it is full, and then gradually waning; by means of it there may be known when the moon (levanah) will or will not be seen; and the reason why one day will be long and another day short; and the reason why two stars will rise as one, but not set together; and the reason why a given day at a given place is thirteen hours long and in another place fifteen or sixteen or twenty hours long, yet being a single day. (In one place the day and the night will be of equal duration; in another place the day will be like a month or two months or three—so that a place may be found where the entire year is a single day, six months daytime and six months nighttime.) How many amazing conditions are made intelligible by this science, all of which is undoubtedly true. It is this calculation of astronomical cycles of which the (Talmudic) sages said that it is wisdom and understanding in the sight of the (Gentile) peoples (Shabbat 75a). But as for these assertions of the stupid astrologers, they are nothing. I am now making clear to you the main points of those matters that are the mystery of the world.

Know, that all the wise men of the Gentile nations—and they are the great philosophers, men of intellect and science—were all in accord that

the world has a Governor; He makes a sphere revolve, the sphere not revolving of itself. They have many books advancing a lucid proof for this; on this point there is no controversy among men of science. There is, however, a great controversy among them regarding this entire world, namely, the sphere and what is beneath it.

(1) Most of them say that it is not subject to generation and corruption, but that as it is now, it was and it will be forever and ever. Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, who was always the same as He is now, is making it revolve, so was He always making it revolve, and it was always being revolved; the two of them were always together, never was one without the other.

(2) Among them there are those who maintain that this sphere has come into being and that the Deity has created it, but that there is a single thing that exists together with the Creator, "like the clay in the potter's hand" (Jer. 18:6). From that thing which exists together with Him, He makes whatever He pleases. Sometimes He will use some of that clay, as it were, to make heaven and some of it to make earth; and sometimes, if He pleases, He takes some of that out of which He has made heaven and makes something else out of it. But to bring forth something out of nothing is impossible.

(3) Among the philosophers there are those who maintain—just as the Prophets maintained—that the Holy One, blessed be He, created all created things out of nothing and that there is no other thing with the Creator aside from the creation that He has brought forth.

Now the great controversy is over this point, and this is the very point that Abraham our Father discerned. A thousand books have already been written on this, with proofs that each and every one of them rallies to support its position. It is the root of the Torah that the Deity alone is primordial and that He has created the whole out of nothing; whoever does not acknowledge this is guilty of radical unbelief and is guilty of heresy. I myself have already written a great composition in Arabic (Guide of the Perplexed) on these matters. I have explained the lucid proofs of the existence of the Creator and that He is one and that He is not a body or corporeal in any respect. I have shattered all those proofs that the philosophers advance as proving that the world was not created. In addition, I have resolved all the great difficulties that they have raised against us on account of our maintaining that the Deity has created everything that exists out of nothing. . . . All these, then, are the three sects into which the wise men of the world fall, from the earliest antiquity down to now.

(1) Those who maintain that the sphere is not a created thing, but that it eternally has been and will be just as it is.

(2) Those who maintain that the Deity has created it out of that matter which always exists by Him.

(3) Those who maintain—just as all the Prophets did—that there is no other thing that is with the Deity, just He Himself, and that when He wished, He brought forth this world out of nothing, in conformity with His will.

All of these three sects are in accord on the following point. Everything that comes into being in this lower world—namely, every “living soul” (Gen. 1:30) and every tree and every species of grass and every one of the species of minerals—the whole has the Deity as its maker, through a power coming from the spheres and the stars. And they are in accord that the power of the Creator flows first upon the spheres and the stars; from the spheres and the stars it flows and spreads through this (lower) world—everything that is, thereby coming into being. Just as we maintain that the Holy One, blessed be He, performs signs and wonders through the angels, so do these philosophers maintain that all these occurrences in the nature of the world come through the spheres and the stars. They maintain that the spheres and the stars possess souls and knowledge. All these things are true. I myself have already made it clear, with proofs, that all these things involve no damage to religion. And not only this, but what is more I have understood from the sayings of the sages in all of the Midrashim that they maintain as the philosophers maintained. There is no controversy whatever between the sages of Israel and the philosophers on these matters, as I have made clear in those chapters [in the *Guide of the Perplexed*, a philosophical treatise].

All three of these sects of the philosophers, which maintain that everything is made by means of the spheres and the stars, also maintain that whatever happens to each and every human being is due to chance; it is not due to any cause coming from above, and neither the constellation under which one is born nor nature will avail against it. There is no difference for them between this individual who was torn to pieces by a lion that happened upon him, or this mouse that was torn to pieces by a cat, or this fly that was torn to pieces by a spider. Neither is there a difference between a roof’s falling upon and killing someone, or a rock’s breaking loose from a mountain and falling upon a tree or upon another rock and breaking it. All this, they maintain, is simply fortuitous. It is said as well of those human beings who are warring with one another over a great kingdom, that they are like a pack of dogs warring over a carcass. This is not due to any cause coming from the stars. Furthermore, this one being poor and that one rich, this one having children and that one being childless—all the philosophers maintain that this is due to chance. The

summary of the matter is that they maintain that what happens to each and every thing—be it man or beast or trees and minerals—is all due to chance. But the being of all the species and the things comprehended in the entire world—in which there is not the activity of a living soul—all of this stems from the power of the spheres whose root, in turn, comes from the Holy One, blessed be He. The controversy lies in this, that the true religionists, and that is the religion of Moses our Teacher, maintain that what happens to individuals is not due to chance, but rather to judgment—as the Torah says: “For all His ways are judgment” (Deut. 32:4). The Prophet explained: “Whose eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men, to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings” (Jer. 32:19). It is regarding this that the Torah warned and bore witness and told Israel: “But if you will not hearken to Me” (Lev. 26:14), I shall bring hardship upon you. If you maintain that hardship is not an affliction brought on by your sins, but rather due to chance and one of those things that happen by chance, why then I Myself shall heap more of that chance upon you—as it is written: “And if you walk with Me in (the way of) chance, I too shall walk with you in the wrath of chance” (Lev. 26:27-28). This is a root of the religion of Moses our Teacher, that everything happening to human beings is a (just) decree and judgment. Hence, the sages maintained: “There is no death without sin and no affliction without transgression” (Shabbat 55a).

And know, my masters, that it is one of the roots of the religion of Moses our Teacher—and one that all the philosophers also acknowledge—that every action of human beings is left to them and that there is nothing to constrain or draw them. Rather, if he so pleases, a man will worship God and become wise and sit in the house of study. And if he so pleases, he will follow the counsel of the wicked and run with thieves and hide with adulterers. There is no influence or constellation under which one is born that will draw him in any manner toward any one of these ways. Hence it was commanded and told to him: “Do this and do not do that.” We have made clear many of the things involved in these matters in most of our Arabic compositions, in the Commentary on the Mishna and in the rest of the compositions. Thus we ought to know that what happens to human beings is not—as the philosophers maintain—like what happens to the beast.

Three disagreements are to be found in these matters. Imagine this situation. Here is Reuben, a tanner, poor, and his children have died in his own lifetime. And here is Simon, a perfumer, rich, and his children stand before him.

(1) The philosopher will maintain that this is due to chance. It is pos-

sible that Reuben could become a perfumer, grow rich, and have children; and it is possible that Simon could become impoverished, turn into a tanner, and witness his children's death. All this is simply fortuitous. There is no nature in the world and no power emanating from a star that caused this individual to be or not to be thus. This is the position of the philosophers.

(2) The second position is that of those who believe in judicial astrology and whose sayings you have heard and whose follies are widespread among you. They maintain that it is impossible that a given thing should ever change. Never will Reuben be anything other than a tanner and poor and childless, for it was thus fixed by the power of the sphere at the time of his birth. Similarly, it is impossible for Simon to be anything other than a perfumer and rich and with surviving children, just as it was fixed by the power of the sphere at the time of his birth.

These two ways, or these two positions, are regarded as falsehoods by us. The position of the astrologers is given the lie by reason, for correct reasoning has already refuted, by means of lucid proofs, all those follies that they have maintained. It also is regarded as a falsehood by us because of the religious tradition, for if the matter stood thus, of what utility would the Torah and the commandment and the Talmud be to a particular individual? For in that event, every single individual would lack the power to do anything he set his mind to, since something else draws him on—against his will—to be this and not to be that; of what use then is the command or the Talmud? The roots of the religion of Moses our Teacher, we find, refute the position of these stupid ones—in addition to reason's doing so with all those proofs that the philosophers maintain to refute the position of the Chaldeans and the Chaldeans and their associates. The position of the philosophers who maintain that these things are due to chance is also regarded as a falsehood by us because of the religious tradition.

(3) The true way upon which we rely and in which we walk is this: We say regarding this Reuben and Simon, that there is nothing that draws on the one to become a perfumer and rich, and the other to become a tanner and poor. It is possible that the situation will change and be reversed, as the philosopher maintains. But the philosopher maintains that this is due to chance. We maintain that it is not due to chance, but rather that this situation depends on the will of "Him who spoke, and (the world) came into being" (Ps. 33:9); all of this is a (just) decree and judgment. We do not know the end of the Holy One's wisdom so as to know by what decree and judgment He required that this should be this way and that should be the other way; "for His ways are not like our ways, neither are His thoughts like our thoughts" (Is. 55:8). We rather are obliged to fix in our minds that if Simon sins, he

will be punished with stripes and impoverished and his children will die and the like. And if Reuben repents and mends his ways and searches his deeds and walks in a straight path, he will grow rich and will succeed in all his undertakings and “see (his) seed and prolong (his) days” (ibid. 55:10). This is a root of the religion. If a man says, “But look, many have acted in this way and yet have not succeeded,” why, this is no proof. [For] either some iniquity of theirs caused this, or they are now afflicted in order to inherit something even better than this. [But not afflicted in the senses that they are sinners, and a subsequent good will be a “reward.” Maimonides means they are dealt a trial through which they will emerge with a greater good. An example is when God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. This was not commanded as a means of suffering so that Abraham might thereby be owed a subsequent good. Rather, it was to actualize Abraham’s potential, for his own good.]

The summary of the matter is that our mind cannot grasp how the decrees of the Holy One, blessed be He, work upon human beings in this world and in the world to come. What we have said about this from the beginning is that the entire position of the stargazers is regarded as a falsehood by all men of science. I know that you may search and find sayings of some individual sages in the Talmud and Midrashim whose words appear to maintain that at the moment of a man’s birth, the stars will cause such and such to happen to him. Do not regard this as a difficulty, for it is not fitting for a man to abandon the prevailing law and raise once again the counter arguments and replies (that preceded its enactment). Similarly it is not proper to abandon matters of reason that have already been verified by proofs, shake loose of them, and depend on the words of a single one of the sages from whom possibly the matter was hidden. Or there may be an allusion in those words; or they may have been said with a view to the times and the business before him. (You surely know how many of the verses of the holy Law are not to be taken literally. Since it is known through proofs of reason that it is impossible for the thing to be literally so, the translator [of the Aramaic Targum] rendered it in a form that reason will abide.) A man should never cast his reason behind him, for the eyes are set in front, not in back.

Do not censure me, my masters, for the brevity of these remarks, for the writing makes it clear that I wrote it to fill a present need. For I was very busy with many Gentile affairs. The Deity knows that if Rabbi Pinchas had not sent a messenger who “urged me till I was ashamed” (II Kings 2:17) and did not leave my presence until I had written it, I would not be replying now since I have no leisure. On this account, judge in my favor. Farewell, my brothers, friends, and masters; may you increase and be exalted forever. Amen.

MAIMONIDES' EIGHT CHAPTERS: CHAPTER EIGHT

Concerning the Natural Disposition of Man

Translation by, Rabbi Dr. Isadore Twersky

Introduction by Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

Introduction

We must note that just as God's created world exists and operates through many complex laws, where we grasp but a fraction, God's relationship with man in no way functions on a lesser plane: His Providence over us also operates by a precise system. Perhaps this explains why God included in His Torah so many accounts of His relationship with man and the Prophets. The Torah is not a history book, but a guide for our religious lives. God illustrated numerous cases of His Providence so we might increase our appreciation for His ways. Case-by-case, our understanding of God's Providence grows. There are many factors that determine who, when and where God intervenes. But many people feel "intervention" is a falsehood, as they assume God is literally willing each activity, everywhere, at all times.

Furthermore, God does not wish to fool man. For example, when one ignites a pile of wood in a fireplace with a match, each time he does so the wood eventually ignites. Now, proponents of the view that "God wills each action everywhere" must contend that ignition is a lie, since without God willing the wood to light, it would not ignite despite the presence of a flame. If that were the case, one should be able to ignite the wood using sand, since all depends on God's will, not natural law, since nature is a lie.

God does not wish to fool man. As He created a world where fire – not sand – ignites wood, He did so in order that man become convinced of the reality of unique, constant "laws" that govern the universe's operation at all times. Man can then harness these steady laws for his benefit. Knowing laws are constant, man will attempt each day to cook food with fire, not sand. God knew that the intelligence he created in all men and women would accept the truth of "laws." God wants man to accept only truth. So we conclude that laws do exist. It is not God that causes the fireplace to ignite, but the flame. Now, since God knows we accept the truth about laws, if He in fact "wills each action everywhere," He would be lying to mankind as He allows us to assume that laws exist. That is impossible. Therefore, we are convinced that God is not creating all actions, everywhere, at all times.

Of course, God is the ultimate cause for everything. But as Maimonides teaches, God is not willing each leaf to fall from each tree at every moment, at a certain angle and speed...everywhere. What type of impression would this leave man, if God was concerned with such inconsequential events? Does God also will each falling drop of rain? Or that each drop should have a certain volume of water, a certain shape, color, speed of descent, and land precisely on a certain parcel of earth? Does God desire a specific number of drops to fall, where one extra drop is of importance?

With this understanding we can abandon the approach many take where they imagine every act in their lives is by “Divine design,” “There’s a reason for everything,” we hear all too often. This belief runs contrary to reason.

What increases and decreases God’s relationship with us depends first on our level of perfection in thought and deed; whether the masses are affected; reward and punishment; and many other factors. This is a tremendous study, and man cannot obtain but a small fraction of answers. Nonetheless, the Patriarchs and Matriarchs studied God’s ways. The Yeshiva of Shame (Noah’s son) and Ever had no Torah scrolls, for Torah was not yet given. They studied God’s ways and communications with the Prophets, and pondered His 7 Noahide Laws. We too must study, and we are fortunate to have the words of one of the most brilliant Jewish thinkers, namely Maimonides.

As a final thought, when Noah left the ark and sacrificed animals to God as thanks for his rescue, we read God’s response (*Gen. 8:21-22*): “*And God smelled the pleasant scent, and God said in His heart, ‘I will never again curse the earth for man’s sake, for man’s inclination is evil from youth, and I will never again smite all life as I have done. Furthermore, all the days of earth, planting and reaping, cold and hot, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease.*” Here, we find God referring to “summer and winter,” i.e., “seasons.” If God wills everything constantly, as is falsely assumed, what need is there for seasons? It is thereby evident that God Himself testifies to natural laws. I now reprint Maimonides’ words on this subject.

Maimonides’ Eight Chapters: Chap XIII

It is impossible for man to be born endowed by nature from his very birth with either virtue or vice, just as it is impossible that he should be born skilled by nature in any particular art. It is possible, however, that through natural causes he may from birth be so constituted as to have a predilection for a particular virtue or vice, so that he will more readily

practice it than any other. For instance, a man whose natural constitution inclines toward dryness, whose brain matter is clear and not overloaded with fluids, finds it much easier to learn, remember, and inclines constitutionally toward a certain excellence is left entirely without instruction, and if his faculties are not stimulated, he will undoubtedly remain ignorant. On the other hand, if one by nature dull and phlegmatic, possessing an abundance of humidity, is instructed and enlightened, he will though with difficulty, it is true, gradually succeed in acquiring knowledge and understanding. In exactly the same way, he whose blood is somewhat warmer than is necessary has the requisite quality to make of him a brave man. Another, however, the temperament of whose heart is colder than it should be, is naturally inclined toward cowardice and fear, so that if he should be taught and trained to be a coward, he would easily become one. If, however, it be desired to make a brave man of him, he can without doubt become one, provided he receive the proper training which would require, of course, great exertion.

I have entered into this subject so you may not believe the absurd ideas of astrologers, who falsely assert that the constellation at the time of one's birth determines whether one is to be virtuous or vicious, the individual being thus necessarily compelled to follow out a certain line of conduct. We, on the contrary, are convinced that our Law agrees with Greek philosophy which substantiates with convincing proofs the contention that man's conduct is entirely in his own hands. No compulsion is exerted upon man, and no external influence is brought to bear that would constrain him to be either virtuous or vicious. Of course, as we have said above, a man may be by nature so constituted as to find it easy or hard, as the case may be, to do a certain thing; but that he must necessarily do, or refrain from doing, a certain thing is absolutely untrue.

Were a man compelled to act according to the dictates of predestination, then the commands and prohibitions of the Law would become null and void and the Law would be completely false, since man would have no freedom of choice in what he does. Moreover, it would be useless, in fact absolutely in vain, for man to study, to instruct, or attempt to learn an art, as it would be entirely impossible for him, on account of the external force compelling him, according to the opinion of those who hold this view, to keep from doing a certain act, from gaining certain knowledge, or from acquiring a certain characteristic.

Reward and punishment, too, would be pure injustice, both as regards man towards man, and as between God and man. Suppose, under such conditions, that Simeon should kill Reuben. Why should the former be

punished, seeing that he was constrained to do the killing, and Reuben was predestined to be slain? How could the Almighty, who is just and righteous, chastise Simeon for a deed which it was impossible for him to leave undone, and which, though he strove with all his might, he would be unable to avoid? If such were the true state of affairs, all precautionary measures, such as building houses, providing means of subsistence, fleeing when one fears danger, and so forth, would be absolutely useless, for that which is decreed beforehand must necessarily happen. This theory is, therefore, positively unsound, contrary to reason and common sense, and, by attributing injustice to God (far be it from Him!), subversive of the fundamental principles of religion.

In reality, the undoubted truth of the matter is that man has full sway over all his actions. If he wishes to do a thing, he does it; if he does not wish to do it, he need not, without any external compulsion controlling him. Therefore, God commanded man, saying, "See I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil...therefore choose life" (Deut. 30:15), giving us, as regards these, freedom of choice. Consequently, punishment is inflicted upon those who disobey, and reward granted to the obedient, as it is said, "If you will hearken," and "If you will not hearken" (Deut. 11:27-28). Learning and teaching are also necessary, according to the commands, "You shall teach them to your children" (ibid. 11:19), "and you shall learn them and observe to do them" (ibid. 5:1), and, similarly, all the other passages referring to the study of the commandments. It is also necessary to take all the precautionary measures laid down in the Law; such as "You shall make a battlement for your roof, that you bring not blood upon your house" (ibid. 22:8), "lest he die in the battle" (ibid. 20:5,7), "wherein shall he sleep?" (Ex. 22:26), and "no man shall take to pledge the lower or the upper millstone" (Deut. 24:6), and many other passages in regard to precautions found in the Torah and the Prophets.

The statement found in the sayings of the Rabbis, "All is in the power of God except the fear of God" is, nevertheless, true, and in accord with what we have laid down here. Men are, however, very often prone to err in supposing that many of their actions, in reality the result of their own free will, are forced upon them, as, for instance, marrying a certain woman, or acquiring a certain amount of money. Such a supposition is untrue. If a man espouses and marries a woman legally, then she becomes his lawful wife, and by his marrying her he has fulfilled the Divine command to increase and multiply. God, however, does not decree the fulfillment of a commandment. If, on the other hand, a man has consummated with a woman an unlawful marriage, he has committed a transgression. But God

does not decree that a man shall sin. Again, suppose a man robs another of money, steals from him, or cheats him, and then uttering a false oath, denies it; if we should say that God had destined that this sum should pass into the hands of the one and out of the possession of the other, God would be preordaining an act of iniquity. Such, however, is not the case. Rather, all of man's actions are subject to his free will and undoubtedly comply with or transgress God's commands; for, as has been explained in Chapter II, the commands and prohibitions of the Law refer only to those actions which man has absolute free choice to perform or not to perform. Moreover, to this faculty of the soul (i.e., the freedom of the will) "the fear of God" is subservient, and is, in consequence, not predestined by God but, as we have explained, is entirely in the power of the human free will. By the word "all," the Rabbis meant to designate only natural phenomena which are not influenced by the will of man, as whether a person is tall or short, whether it is rainy or dry, whether the air is pure or impure, and all other such things that happen in the world which have no connection with man's conduct.

In making this assertion that obedience or disobedience to the Law of God does not depend upon the power or will of God, but solely upon that of man himself, the sages followed the dictum of Jeremiah, who said, "Out of the mouth of God there comes neither the bad nor the good" (Lam. 3:38). By the words "the bad" he meant vice, and by "the good," virtue; and, accordingly, he maintains that God does not preordain that any man should be vicious or virtuous. Since this is so, it behooves man to mourn and weep over the sins and the transgressions he has committed, as he has sinned of his own free will in accordance with what the Prophet says, "Wherefore should a living man mourn? Let every man mourn because of his sins" (ibid. 3:39). He continues, then, to tell us that the remedy for this disease is in our own hands, for, as our misdeeds were the result of our own free will, we have, likewise, the power to repent of our evil deeds, and so he goes on to say, "Let us search through and investigate our ways, and let us return to the Lord. Let us lift up our heart with our hands to God in the heavens" (ibid. 3:40-41).

The theory generally accepted by people and found in Rabbinical and Prophetical writings, that man's sitting and rising, and all of his movements are governed by the will and desire of God, is true only in one respect. For instance, when a stone is thrown into the air and falls to the ground, it is correct to say that the stone fell in accordance with the will of God, for it is true that God decreed that the earth and all its elements should be the center of attraction, so that when any part of it is thrown into the air, it is attracted back to the center. Similarly, all particles of fire

ascend according to God's will, which preordained that fire should go upward. But it is wrong to suppose that when a certain part of the earth is thrown upward God wills at that very moment that it should fall. The Mutakallimun are, however, of a different opinion in this regard, for I have heard them say that the Divine Will is constantly at work, decreeing everything from time to time. We do not agree with them, but believe that the Divine Will ordained everything at creation and that all things, at all times, are regulated by the laws of nature and run their natural course in accordance with what Solomon said, "As it was so it will ever be, as it was made so it continues, and there is nothing new under the sun" (Eccles. 1:9). This occasioned the sages to say that all miracles which deviate from the natural course of events; whether they have already occurred or, according to promise, are to take place in the future, were foreordained by the Divine Will during the six days of creation, nature being then so constituted that those miracles which were to happen really did afterward take place. Then, when such an occurrence happens at its proper time, it may have been regarded as an absolute innovation, whereas in reality it was not.

The Rabbis expatiate upon this subject in Medrash Koheles and in other writings, one of their statements in reference to this matter being, "Everything follows its natural course." In everything that they said, you will always find that the Rabbis (peace be unto them!) avoided referring to the Divine 'Will as 'determining a particular event at a particular time: When, therefore, they said that man rises and sits down in accordance with the will of God, their meaning was that, when man was first, created, his nature was so determined that rising up and sitting down were to be optional to him; but they did not mean that God wills at any special Moment that man should or should not get up, as He determines at any given time that a certain stone should or should not fall to the ground. The sum and substance of the matter is, then, that you should believe that just as God willed that man should be upright in stature, broad chested, and have fingers, likewise did He will that man should move or rest of his own accord, and that his actions should lie such as his own free will dictates to him without any outside influence or restraint, which fact God clearly states in the truthful Law; which elucidates this problem when it says, "Behold, the man is become as one of us to know good and evil" (Gen. 3:22). The Targum, in paraphrasing this passage, explains the meaning of the words *mimmermu ladaat tov vara*. Man has become the only being in the world who possesses a characteristic which no other being has in common with him. What is this characteristic? It is that by and of himself man can distinguish between good and evil and do that which he pleases

with absolutely no restraint. Since this is so, it would have even been possible for him to have stretched out his hand and, taking of the tree of life, to have eaten of its fruit, and thus live forever.

Since it is an essential characteristic of man's makeup that he should of his own free will act morally or immorally, doing just as he chooses, it becomes necessary to teach him the ways of righteousness, to command and exhort him, to punish and reward him according to his deserts. It behooves, man also to accustom himself to the practice of good deeds until he acquires the virtues corresponding to those good deeds; and, furthermore, to, abstain from evil deeds so that he may eradicate the vices that may have taken root in him. Let him not suppose that his characteristics have reached such a state that they are no longer subject to change, for any one of them may be altered from the good to the bad and vice versa; and, moreover, all in accordance with his own free will. To confirm this theory, we have mentioned all these facts concerning the observances and the transgressions of the Law...

There is one thing more relating to this problem about which we must say a few words in order to treat in a comprehensive manner the subject matter of this chapter. Although, I had not intended at all to speak of it, necessity forces me to do so. This topic is the prescience of God. It is with an argument based on' this notion that our views are opposed by those who believe that man is predestined by God to do good or evil and that man has no choice as to his conduct since his volition is dependent upon God. The reason for their belief they base on the following statement. "Does God know or does He not know that a certain individual will be good or bad? If you say He knows, then it necessarily follows that man is compelled to act as God knew beforehand he would act, otherwise God's knowledge would be imperfect. If you say that God does not know in advance, then great absurdities and destructive religious theories will result." Listen, therefore, to what I shall tell you, reflect well upon it, for it is unquestionably the truth.

It is, indeed, an axiom of the science of the Divine, i.e., metaphysics, that God (may He be blessed!) does not know by means of knowledge and does not live by means of life. Therefore He and His knowledge may not be considered two different things in the sense that this proposition is true of man; for man is distinct from knowledge, and knowledge from man, in consequence of which they are two different things. If God knew by means of knowledge, He would necessarily be a plurality and the primal essence would be composite, that is, consisting of God Himself, the knowledge by which He knows, the life by which He lives, the power by

which He has strength, and similarly of all His attributes. I shall only mention one argument, simple and easily understood by all, though there are strong and convincing-arguments and proofs that solve this difficulty. It is manifest that God is identical with His attributes and His attributes with Him, so that it may be said that He is the knowledge, the knower, and the known, and that; He is the life, the living; and the source of His own life, the same being true of His, other attributes. This conception is very hard to grasp and you should not hope to understand it thoroughly by two or three lines in this treatise. There can only be imparted to you a vague idea of it.

Now, in consequence of this important axiom, the Hebrew language does not allow the expression *Chei Adonai* (the life of God) as it does *Chei Pharaoh* (the life of Pharaoh, where the, word *chei* (in the construct state) is related to the following noun, for the thing possessed and the possessor this case) are two different things. Such a construction cannot be, used in regard to the relation of a thing to itself. Since the life of God is His essence, and His essence is His life, not being separate and distinct from each other, the word "life," therefore, cannot be put in the construct state; but the expression *Chai Adonai* (the living God) is used, the purpose of which is to denote that God and His life are one.

Another accepted axiom of metaphysics is that human reason cannot fully conceive God in His true essence, because of the perfection of God's essence and the imperfection of our own reason, and because His essence is not due to causes through which it may be known. Furthermore, the inability of our reason to comprehend Him may be compared to the inability of our eyes to gaze at the sun, not because of the weakness of the sun's light, but because that light is more powerful than that which seeks to gaze into it. Much that has been said on this subject is self-evident truth.

From what we have said, it has been demonstrated also that we cannot comprehend God's knowledge, that our minds cannot grasp it all, for He is His knowledge, and His knowledge is He. This is an especially striking idea, but those (who raise the question of God's knowledge of the future) fail to grasp it to their dying day. They are, it is true, aware that the Divine essence, as it is, is incomprehensible, yet they strive to comprehend God's knowledge, so that they may know it, but this is, of course, impossible. If the human reason could grasp His knowledge, it would be able also to define His essence, since, both are one and the same, as the perfect knowledge of God is the comprehension of Him as He is in His essence,

which consists of His knowledge, His will, His life, and all His other majestic attributes. Thus, we have shown how utterly futile is the pretension to define His knowledge. All that we can comprehend is that just as we know that God exists, so are we cognizant of the fact that He knows. If we are asked, “What is the nature of God’s knowledge?” We answer that we do not know any more than we know the nature of His true existence. Scripture finds fault, moreover, with him who tries to grasp the truth of the Divine existence, as we see by the words, “Can you by searching find out God? Can you find out the Almighty to perfection?” (Job 11:7).

Reflect, then, upon all that we have said; that man has control over his actions, that it is by his own determination that he does either right or wrong without, in either case, being controlled by fate, and that, as a result of this Divine commandment, teaching, preparation, reward, and punishment are proper. Of this there is absolutely no doubt. As regards, however, the character of God’s knowledge, how He knows everything, this is, as we have explained, beyond the reach of human ken.

This is all that we purposed saying in this chapter, and it is now time to bring our words to an end and begin the interpretation of this treatise to which these eight chapters are an introduction.

IGGERES HARAMBAN – THE RAMBAN’S LETTER

(Written to his elder son, Nachman, with the instruction to read it weekly)

“Hear, my son, the instruction of your father and don’t forsake the teaching of your mother.” (Mishlei 1:8). Get into the habit of always speaking calmly to everyone. This will prevent you from anger, a serious character flaw which causes people to sin. As our Rabbis said (*Nedarim 22a*) “Whoever flares up in anger is subject to the discipline of Gehinnom” as it is says in (*Koheles 12:10*), “Cast out anger from your heart, and [by doing this] remove evil from your flesh.” “Evil” here means Gehinnom, as we read (*Mishlei 16:4*): “...and the wicked are destined for the day of evil.” Once you have distanced yourself from anger, the quality of humility will enter your heart. This radiant quality is the finest of all admirable traits (see *Avodah Zarah 20b*), because (*Mishlei 22:4*), “Following humility comes the fear of Hashem.”

Through humility you will also come to fear Hashem. It will cause you to always think about (*Ethics 3:1*) “where you came from and where you are

going, and that while alive you are only like a maggot and a worm, and the same after death.” It will also remind you before Whom you will be judged, the King of Glory, as it is stated (*I Melachim 8:27; Mishlei 15:11*), “*Even the heaven and the heavens of heaven can’t contain You*” – “*How much less the hearts of people!*” It is also written (*Yirmeyahu 23:24*), “*Do I not fill heaven and earth? says Hashem.*”

When you think about all these things, you will come to fear Hashem who created you, and you will protect yourself from sinning and therefore be happy with whatever happens to you. Also, when you act humbly and modestly before everyone, and are afraid of Hashem and of sin, the radiance of His glory and the spirit of the Shechina will rest upon you, and you will live the life of the World-to-Come!

And now, my son, understand and observe that whoever feels that he is greater than others is rebelling against the Kingship of Hashem, because he is adorning himself with His garments, as it is written (*Tehillim 93:1*), “*Hashem reigns, He wears clothes of pride.*” Why should one feel proud? Is it because of wealth? Hashem makes one poor or rich (*I Shmuel 2:7*). Is it because of honor? It belongs to Hashem, as we read (*I Divrei Hayamim 29:12*), “*Wealth and honor come from You.*” So how could one adorn himself with Hashem’s honor? And one who is proud of his wisdom surely knows that Hashem “*takes away the speech of assured men and reasoning from the sages.*” (*Iyov 12:20*) So we see that everyone is the same before Hashem, since with His anger He lowers the proud and when He wishes He raises the low. So lower yourself and Hashem will lift you up!

Therefore, I will now explain to you how to always behave humbly. Speak gently at all times, with your head bowed, your eyes looking down to the ground and your heart focusing on Hashem. Don’t look at the face of the person to whom you are speaking. Consider everyone as greater than yourself. If he is wise or rich, you should give him respect. If he is poor and you are richer – or wiser – than he, consider yourself to be more guilty than he, and that he is more worthy than you, since when he sins it is through error, while yours is deliberate and you should know better!

In all your actions, words and thoughts, always regard yourself as standing before Hashem, with His Shechinah above you, for His glory fills the whole world. Speak with fear and awe, as a slave standing before his master. Act with restraint in front of everyone. When someone calls you, don’t answer loudly, but gently and softly, as one who stands before his master.

Torah should always be learned diligently, so you will be able to fulfill its commands. When you arise from your learning reflect carefully on what you have studied, in order to see what in it that you can be put into

practice. Examine your actions every morning and evening, and in this way every one of your days will be spent in Teshuvah (repentance).

Concentrate on your prayers by removing all worldly concerns from your heart. Prepare your heart before Hashem, purify your thoughts and think about what you are going to say. If you follow this in all your daily actions, you will not come to sin. This way everything you do will be proper, and your prayer will be pure, clear, clean, devout and acceptable to Hashem, as it is written (*Tehillim 10:17*), "*When their heart is directed to You, listen to them.*"

Read this letter at least once a week and neglect none of it. Fulfill it, and in so doing, walk with it forever in the ways of Hashem, may he be blessed, so that you will succeed in all your ways. Thus you will succeed and merit the World to Come which lies hidden away for the righteous. Every day that you shall read this letter, heaven shall answer your heart's desires. Amen, Sela!