



A shocking but true picture of Jews in the next generation. If Judaism's tenets are not taught by Jewish organizations and Jewish educators, our next generation will not be Jewish. What makes Judaism Jewish, are our tenets. Start teaching them today.

ESTD 1997

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

JewishTimes

Volume IV, No. 30...May 6, 2005

WWW.MESORA.ORG/JEWISHTIMES

Download and Print Free

IN THIS ISSUE:

PARSHA: KEDOSHIM	1,5
SELF INFLICTED WOUNDS	1,4
SANCTITY	1-3
YOSEF'S COLUMN: EVIL SPEECH	3
ANGELS IN THE WOMB	4
PRAYING TO THE DEAD	6
RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE	7,8
WITCHCRAFT	9
LETTERS	10

FREE AT MESORA:

SEE THIS AND OTHER FEATURES AT OUR SITE

Free

Receive the JewishTimes free each Friday morning

Send any email to: subscribe@mesora.org

Weekly Parsha

Kedoshim

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“You must, every person, fear your mother and father. And my Shabbat you must observe. I am Hashem your G-d.” (VaYikra 19:3)

We are obligated to honor and fear our parents. The mitzvah of honor requires that we care for our parents. We must assure that our parents have

(continued on page 5)

EMORITE KING ASHURBANIPAL (680 BC)



Self Inflicted Wounds

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Written by student

Leviticus 19:28 reads, “and cuts (on the flesh) for a soul you not shall place in your flesh...” Rashi states this refers to the Emorites who used to cut their skin as a sign of mourning for their dead. What is the corruption in such an act? Why did these Emorites mutilate their bodies?

When man leads a life driven by the physical enjoyments and his sense of self becomes attached to his

(continued on page 4)

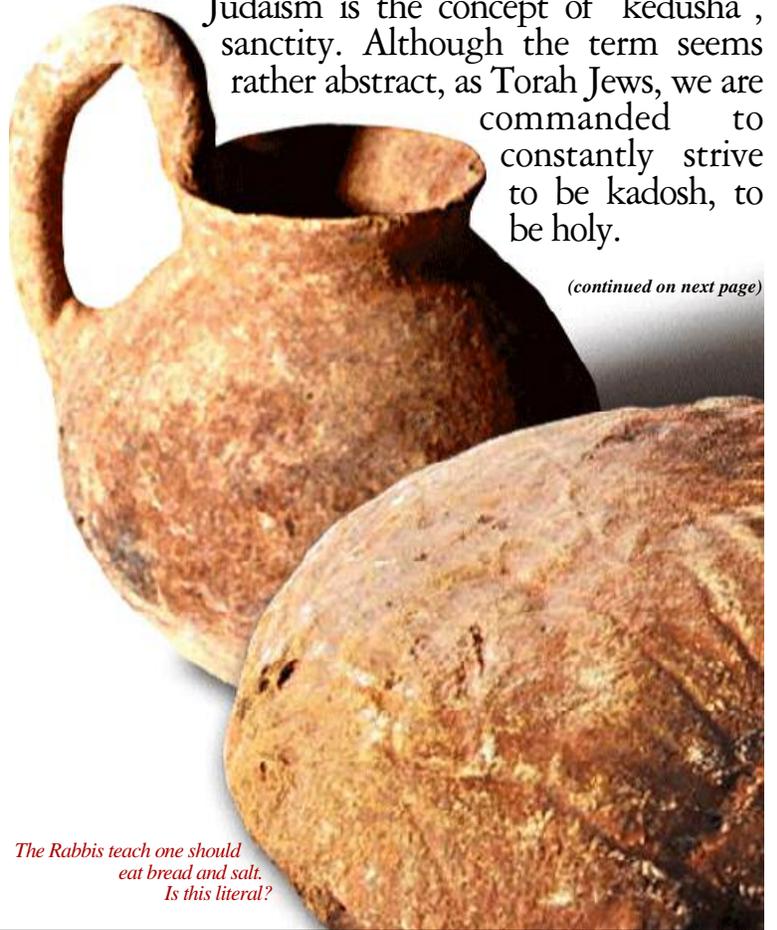
KEDOSHIM: Sanctity

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by student

A very central theme throughout Judaism is the concept of “kedusha”, sanctity. Although the term seems rather abstract, as Torah Jews, we are commanded to constantly strive to be kadosh, to be holy.

(continued on next page)



The Rabbis teach one should eat bread and salt. Is this literal?

In Leviticus chapter 19 verse 2, we are commanded to be kadosh because "I the Lord your God am holy." Chazal teach us that kedusha means to be "poresh mey arayot", abstain from the sexual prohibitions. This implies that if not for this commandment, there would be no reason for one to live a moral life style. Throughout the generations, the greatest philosophical minds without the benefit of the Torah have come to the same conclusion, based upon their rational faculty. The best life is one of abstention from the physical pleasures. It would therefore seem that the Torah is redundant.

The Torah additionally instructs us to be holy because God is holy. This creates a dilemma based upon our aforesaid definition. If holy means merely to abstain from the sexual prohibitions, what relevance does it have respecting God?

The concept of a "poresh", an abstainer, must have greater significance than simply abstaining. Pure abstention infers that the person is withholding something from himself. This would imply that the person really has the desire to do the prohibited action but he is just controlling himself. Such an idea would be nothing more than an exercise of self-restraint and denial. The Torah's concept of a poresh is not so trite. The essence of a poresh is an individual who is poresh because it is a reflection of his true nature. His energies are no longer attracted to the areas of the sexual, but flow naturally to the area of wisdom. Insofar as one's essence is truly that of a poresh, he partakes of the "image of God" in himself. The Creator by His very nature, is extraneous to, and not limited by, the physical. Thus, in order for one to be a poresh from the Torah perspective, requires great intellectual conviction, whereby all ones energies flow to the acquisition of knowledge.

There is a critical distinction between the Torah's concept of "prishah" – abstention – and that of the philosophers. The philosophers, although advocating a lifestyle of abstinence, based it upon their appreciation of human nature. They recognized that human nature has two components. Man has an instinctual nature and an intellectual nature. Based upon their investigation of human nature they concluded that man could only achieve true happiness in the pursuits of his essential, intellectual nature. They therefore preached a lifestyle of abstinence. However to the Torah Jew the concept of abstinence has much greater significance. We are taught that if we lead a lifestyle of abstinence, then we can have a relationship with G-d. We strive to mold our nature to be essentially a Poresh - one who abstains - and attain sanctity in order that we can relate to God. In Judaism, there is a metaphysical dimension if one is a true Poresh. This metaphysical relationship with the creator is only possible when one is a poresh. If one succeeds in

redirecting his energies so that they naturally flow to wisdom, only then will he relate to the creator, the source of reality. If a person abstains from the physical because of fear of punishment than he is not truly a poresh. Such a person is still guided by the pleasure principle. The fear of punishment is merely a means to control the person from being punished, and thereby remain in a state of pleasure. He is abstaining from the physical prohibition only because he feels that indulging said physical desires would ultimately cause him greater physical pain. However a talmid chacham – a wise person – is naturally drawn towards the principles of the Torah. He is in a unique state, whereby his energies naturally flow to the metaphysical. Thus we can appreciate the Torah imperative to be holy because "I your God am holy." At such a high spiritual level a person can relate to God as his energies naturally flow to wisdom.

The Rabbis agree with the philosophers, that the life of the ideational is the best life since they hold that "kol d'racheha darchay noam", "all the ways of the Torah are pleasant". It would be absurd that God would command man not to live life the best way. It is obvious that God desires man to achieve happiness by living life in line with his essential nature. However the Torah recognizes that by living a life of wisdom, one initiates a relationship with the creator. God, who is not physical and whose essence is mirrored in the world of the ideational, commands that man aspire to live a life based upon the intellectual dictates of the Torah not predicated on the physical. Only then is one able to approach God through wisdom. Since God is not subject to physical whims and passions, so too man is directed to be holy because "I your God am holy." We are taught that the Rabbis did not fully partake of the pleasures of this world. This does not mean that they essentially sought an austere existence. They did not believe in repressing their desires simply because they felt there was a virtue in moral restrictions. This philosophy is characteristic of Catholicism, which venerates the lifestyles of priests and nuns. Nor did they have an emotional repulsion to pleasure. Quite the contrary is true because we are taught "ei efshar bli basar chazeer"; one should not refrain from eating pork because he doesn't like it. The proper attitude is for one to say that he really desires pork, but that he is not having it to demonstrate his acceptance of the mitzvos. He struggles to elevate his behavior from purely the instinctual to the level of kedusha – holiness – which is based upon mans true nature, his tzelem Elokim, his intellect. Maimonides in his Mishna Torah in his book on kedusha incorporates the laws of the forbidden foods and prohibited sexual relations. His point is evident. One can only attain kedusha by channeling his energies from the basic instinctual drives of man, the sexual and appetitive

(continued on next page)

(continued from previous page)

Perfection

and directing them to the intellect. This does not mean denial of the physical but rather an appreciation of the life of wisdom.

Chazal did enjoy the benefits that God offered in this world. We are told that Rebbi was very wealthy and there was nothing lacking from on his table. However, he did not direct his energies to the physical. He had the blessings of the physical world, which he did not deny, but his energies were not drawn to the physical. He lived the life of a kadosh as evidenced by his appellation. His energies naturally flowed to wisdom.

Alternatively, the Rabbis taught that the reason Job lost his wealth was because he had an over attachment to materialism. He viewed it as an end in and of itself. However, after he realized that the physical was only a means to relate to God, not an end, was he capable of regaining his riches. After learning this lesson and redirecting his energies, he used his prosperity simply as a means in Avodas Hashem, worship of God.

The Vilna Gaon explains the concept of “pas bemelach tochal” that one should subsist on bread and salt. This is not to be taken literally as espousing an austere existence. The Gaon explains that at the beginning of one’s learning he must “pas b’melach tochal”. This means that if one is to succeed as a talmid chocham – a wise student of Torah – he demands total commitment. If one is fortunate to live a life of kedusha his energies must naturally flow toward wisdom of Torah.

Rashi teaches us that the parsha of Kedoshim is so basic that “kol goofay hatorah teluyin bah”, all the basic principles of the Torah are summarized within it. This obviously cannot be taken literally for most of the 613 commandments are not within the parsha of Kedoshim. Rashi is expressing the importance of the concept of kedusha. It is such a vital and essential concept to the Torah observant Jew, that adherence to its basic principles can lead one to perfection as a Ben Torah.

Therefore, the mitzvah of kedusha is an extremely valuable concept in Judaism. The imperative of “kedoshim teheeyu” must be appreciated in the proper perspective. We must be scrupulous in our pursuit of true holiness. If one abstains from being a glutton because of health reasons, he is not fulfilling the commandment. He is simply pursuing one desire in favor of another. His desire for longevity has displaced his appetitive desires. Such a person’s energies are still rooted in the physical pleasures. True sanctity requires a painstaking process where one works to channel his energies to the learning of Torah and its teaching. Ultimately he can aspire to kedusha where his energies will naturally flow to wisdom since the learning of Torah will give him the greatest pleasure. Thus, he will obtain true kedusha and be blessed with an appreciation of “I your God am holy” and be fortunate to have a metaphysical relationship with the creator. □

Students

Yosef's Column

YOSEF ROTH



Evil Speech

& MURDER

In this week’s Torah reading of Kedoshim, we learn a deep insight into the psychology of people. The Torah tells us that we cannot speak Loshon Hora (evil speech) and that we cannot stand idly while our friend’s blood is being shed. Why are these two points mentioned in the same sentence?

The reason I believe is that when we speak Loshon Hora, we are actually attempting to destroy that person. We can’t bring ourselves to actually kill him, so we speak Loshon Hora about him instead. We therefore see the reason why these prohibitions are in the same sentence. The Torah is teaching us that if you say Loshon Hora about someone, it is really an attempt to destroy him or her. □

The JewishTimes is happy to announce a new column, “Yosef’s Column”, delivered by our young friend Yosef Roth. He invites other young students to contribute your Divrei Torah. Email your Torah to Yosef here: yosef@mesora.org

(Self Inflicted cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

Metaphors



temporal, Earthly stay, man is grieved at the demise of his body - he values it over his eternal soul. This is the opposite of the Torah's philosophy. King Solomon wrote, "Better is the day of death, than the day of birth." (Eccl. 7:1) When one is born, man knows not yet what will become of this child: "Will he be righteous or wicked?" But at one's death, at the end of a righteous life, one has earned his eternal life, and this death is a good. (ibid; Ibn Ezra)

The Rabbis teach that today, upon hearing good news, we recite the positive blessing of "Hatove v'Hamativ", "Who is good and does good". Upon hearing about one's death, we bless God's ultimate justice with the blessing of "Dayan haEmess", "The true Judge". This latter blessing smacks more of acceptance than of praise, but this is because we are imperfect and view death as an evil. But in the days of the Messiah when the world sees clearly, and identifies all of God's ways as good, man will recite the blessing "Who is good, and does good" even upon hearing that one died. Man, in that perfect state, will realize death as equally part of God's good plan for mankind.

The Emorites, who cut their flesh upon the loss of a relative, were thereby declaring that they were grieved at death. This is why they cut themselves in response to death, and no other event. "Death" - the loss of the physical life - was so disturbing to them. In their anger that reality did not conform to their fantasy of immortality, the Emorites cut their skin as a display of disappointment in the very "body" they wished lived eternally. □

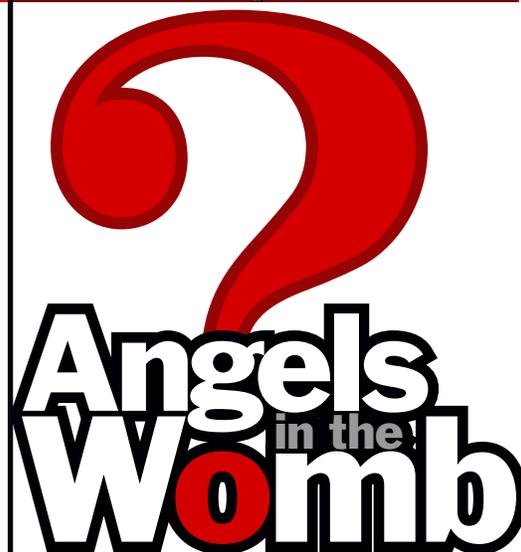
Spring Rates

New

Purchase a Mesora HTML email ad, and receive 2 more ads **FREE**: one here in the JewishTimes, and an ad on our homepage. Inquire here: info@mesora.org

\$895

HTML Email Ads



RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: I was reading this Medrash, and it all seems too "magical" and not rational, especially the part that says, "When a baby is in the womb, he is taught the entire Torah. However, as soon as he enters the air of this world, an angel comes and strikes him on his mouth, causing him to forget the entire Torah." (Niddah 20b) Can you shed some light on this?

Mesora: This Medrash was once explained by a Rabbi, and in consonance with Plato's theory of "recall". (Plato said we do not learn anew, but we recall, thus, explaining how one may at one moment be ignorant, and subsequently see new concepts.) This Medrash means that certain knowledge is innate, "as if it was taught in the womb". An example is our concept of "equality": we know when two things are not equal, and not because it was taught to us, but because our minds are already "stamped" with that concept equality, from the womb. This explains why a child is frightened at a non-familiar face. He 'knows' the features of his real parent, as he "compares" what he sees to his memory. But this realization that this face is not "equal" is not learned, but innate. So too is his "comparison". The child automatically compares, as this is the function of the mind, and not learned. Humans possess a mind, which is formed from birth including certain "functions" by design, such as comparing and equating. These functions are not learned later, but are part of the mind...as if we "learned them in the womb". The aspect of "forgetting" once entering this world means that the child is not readily enabled to utilize all of the mind's features, as if he "forgot" them. "Angel" is used to refer to God's natural laws. Nothing more. □

sustenance, clothing and that their needs are met.[1] We must also fear our parents. The mitzvah to fear our parents obligates us to act towards them with awe. There are many expressions of this obligation. We may not sit in a parent's chair. We may not refer to our parents by their first names.[2]

The obligation of honoring our parents is fulfilled during their lifetimes. We only have the opportunity to provide for our parents during their lives.[3] The mitzvah of fearing our parents extends beyond their lifetimes. Even after our parents have passed away we must still behave with reverence. For example, we still may not refer to them by first names.[4]

This distinction is indicative of a basic difference between the mitzvot of respect for and fear of our parents. Respect is directed to our parents as individuals. As long as these individuals are with us, we can fulfill this command. The mitzvah of fear is not merely an expression of reverence for our parents as individuals. It continues to exist and guide our behavior even after the individuals are no longer with us. It is an obligation to behave with reverence towards parenthood. Our parents will not always be with us. Nonetheless, we must continue to display our appreciation for the role of the parent. This obligation demands that we continue to behave with an attitude of awe, long after our individual parents have departed.

“You must not eat on blood. You must not act on the basis of omens. And you must not act on the basis of auspicious times.” (VaYikra 19:26)

Parshat Kedoshim includes many prohibitions regarding occult practices and superstitions. We are not permitted to base decisions upon omens or adopt behaviors associated with the occult.

Maimonides includes all of these prohibitions in the section of his code devoted to idolatry. He explains that superstitions and occult practices were used by the idolaters to deceive their followers. He further explains that it is incorrect to maintain that there is any value or wisdom to these practices. Superstition and occult ritual are foolish and of no benefit.[5]

It is readily understandable that belief in the occult is associated with idolatry. However we need to understand the relationship between superstition and idolatry.

Superstition is based upon human imagination and fantasy. It attempts to create order and security in an ever-changing world. The primitive seeks omens and other sources of protection. Superstition involves a flight from reality. Truth is too harsh. Fantasy provides solace.

The Torah requires that we approach life and

the universe with wisdom. We must attempt to understand reality and find truth. This search, honestly conducted, inevitably results in an appreciation of the Creator and His Torah.

Superstition is therefore antithetical to the Torah perspective. Escape from reality results in an outlook that has no basis in truth. Any theology resulting from this fanciful and fantastic perspective is a projection of the individual's imagination upon reality.

Idolatry and superstition have identical roots. The idolater does not base religious beliefs upon wisdom and truth. Inspection is replaced by projection. The theology of the idolater is an expression of the imagination not tempered by serious thought. The connection is now clear. A person guided by superstition has succumbed to the very attitude that underlies idolatry.

“Before the elderly you should rise. And you should give respect to the wise. And you shall fear your G-d. I am Hashem.” (VaYikra 19:32)

We are required to respect the wise. This requirement dictates that we stand in the presence of a scholar. This law applies even to a scholar that is not one's teacher. Maimonides explains in his Mishne Torah that this obligation is derived from our passage.[6]

There is an additional obligation that applies to one's teacher or rebbe. Maimonides also discusses this requirement in his Mishne Torah. He explains that one is obligated to respect and fear one's parents. Similarly, one is required to fear and honor one's teacher.[7]

These are two obligations of respect for scholars are separate requirements. The obligation to respect the wise differs from the obligation to respect and fear one's teacher. For example, we only rise for a wise person, when this individual enters into our immediate vicinity. Once the scholar passes our four cubits we may sit.[8] This is not the case when dealing with one's teacher. We must rise as soon as the teacher enters into our vision. We remain standing until the rebbe passes out of our field of vision. [9] In addition, there are various other expressions of respect required in dealing with one's teacher. We are not required to express these forms of respect towards other scholars.

It is clear that the level of respect and awe required towards one's rebbe is greater than the respect due a scholar. This is reasonable. One has personally benefited from the knowledge of one's teacher. It is understandable that a higher form of respect is required.

Maimonides makes an astonishing statement that seems to contradict this reasoning. He explains that the teacher can exempt the student from the obligations of respect and awe.

Nonetheless, the student remains obligated in the forms of respect due a scholar.[10] Under no circumstances can the honor due a scholar be dismissed. It is odd that the more elaborate obligation due one's teacher can be ignored. But the lesser respect due a scholar can never be dismissed!

Maimonides provides an important insight into his reasoning. In beginning his discussion of the obligation to fear and respect one's teacher, Maimonides explains the reason for this requirement. He explains that the obligation to honor and fear one's teacher surpasses the requirement to respect and fear one's parents. Parents bring us into this world. However, the teacher provides us with the opportunity to achieve everlasting life in Olam HaBah.

These comments suggest a basic difference between the obligation to honor the scholar and the requirement towards one's teacher. The obligation to honor the scholar is an expression of our appreciation of wisdom. Because we value wisdom and thought, we honor those who possess this invaluable assets. It follows that these individuals cannot forgo this honor. We are not honoring the individual scholar. We are showing our respect for the wisdom the scholar represents.

In contrast, Maimonides compares our obligation to our rebbe to the requirement to respect and fear our parents. This obligation is an expression of appreciation to the individual for the gift we have received. We are required to show a deep and pronounced appreciation. This consideration dictates the respect and awe due our teacher be expressed in many forms and emphatically. However, the obligation is fundamentally an obligation towards the individual who has provided us with wisdom. This means the rebbe can forgo this honor.[11] ■

[1]–[4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Mamrim 6:3.

[5] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Avodat Kochavim 11:16.

[6] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Talmud Torah 6:1.

[7] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Talmud Torah 5:1.

[8] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Talmud Torah 6:1.

[9] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Talmud Torah 5:7.

[10] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Talmud Torah 5:11.

[11] See Rav Yizchak Zev Soloveitchik, Chiddushim on Mishne Torah, Hilchot Talmud Torah.

DEVIANT JEWS PRAYING *to the* DEAD

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: By the grace of G-d. Shalom u'Brocha! Perhaps you have no obligation to believe the Lubavitcher Rebbe or the Besht were prophets, but those who witnessed their prophecies and miracles have such an obligation. Brocha ve'hatzlocha! Ariel

Mesora: First off, let me offer you a sampling of reality regarding the Rebbe: a close friend went to the Rebbe and asked him a question about the condition of her sick relative. The Rebbe told her that her relative would live, but she died. The Rebbe was wrong. All humans are bereft of absolute knowledge, and of future events.

Furthermore, to suggest the Rebbe, the Besht or anyone is a prophet, never having produced the Torah's required proofs of prophecy; you display a severe lack of adherence to the Torah, which destroys Torah. For you will most certainly follow your self-proclamation of their prophecy with the view that "all they said is Torah." Suggesting man is infallible and is always speaking "prophetic truths" leads many astray. These men were never proven as prophets, so your claim exposes you as a very poor judge of Torah principles. Based on God's words, we do not accept what an unproven prophet speaks, lest he mislead Jews from God. So until a man produces the phenomenon required by Torah to be a prophet, he is not considered one. You seem to be living in a fantasy world, simply to maintain your idols as leaders of "holy" status. Be mindful: when Moses died, the Jews accepted his death. They did not say he was returning. So why do you place your Rebbe higher than Moses?

I visited your website "www.kingmessiah.com" where under a picture of the most recent Lubavitcher Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, you write, "The Lubavitcher Rebbe - King Messiah may he live for ever". You feel the Rebbe is Moshiach, but he never satisfied any requirements that he might be considered the messiah. Your credibility as a voice of Torah is thereby completely stripped from you. But the most disgusting element of your website is where you encourage others to violate a Torah prohibition of consulting the dead, where you

write, "Write to the Rebbe and Behold Miracles." You openly tell Jews they may consult the dead, and that they will receive miracles. You are no different than a devout Christian waiting for Jesus to perform miracles from HIS grave. You do not practice Judaism, but idolatry. We just celebrated our liberation from the idolatrous, Egyptian culture, but you intend to return the Jews to the Egyptians' primitivism.

In contrast, what is accurate Torah? What does God say? God tells us "[do not] inquire of the dead. For it is an abomination to God, all who do such things, and on account of these abominations, Hashem your God wiped them out from before you." (Deut. 18:11,12) God also says, "do not lie" (Lev. 19:11) but you violate this too, and lie by telling others they may talk to the dead. Not only can the dead not hear our words, they cannot do anything. They know nothing, as King Solomon said, "for the dead know nothing." (Ecclesiastes, 9:5) This is why God prohibited this action, for it is useless, false, and breeds hope in that which cannot be. Your views cause many to become distressed.

You suggest that a minority, which claims to have seen a miracle, may be believed, such as with regards to the Rebbe or the Besht. If so, may I believe anyone today who says he saw someone perform a miracle? Perhaps someone today, I will claim, outperformed the supposed miracles of the Besht and your Rebbe. According to your view, you must allow me to believe this new miracle worker has surpassed the Besht and your Rebbe. Let us say this new miracle worker, I claim, outperformed Moshe Rabbeinu. Again, you must defend your position that I must be right in following this new miracle worker. According to you, I must then be allowed to believe a Christian, who believes he saw Jesus do a miracle, or a Muslim, that Mohammed is a true prophet. You see, your opinion allows anyone to attain a status of a prophet. But this is not Judaism. You are following your devotion to the Besht and the Rebbe and fake stories, and not a devotion to truth and Torah. As a Rabbi once said, you are attached to "man", not God.

God created the event of Har Sinai – precisely in the eyes of ALL Jews – that such 'mass witnesses' be the singular proof of His will and selection of the Jews, and no others. But your opinion negates the need for this mass event of Sinai, as you suggest, one may believe miracles, even with few "witnesses".

What is the Torah's position? It is this: we must deny all stories of the Besht's and the Rebbe's miracles – of anyone's miracles – (Jew or gentile) and follow what God intended through His miracles at Sinai: we are to follow only that which is "comprehensively proven in front of masses". This is the story God wishes all mankind to follow, and to abandon all other impostors. Only such a phenomenon removes all possibility of fabrication and ignorance. And when fabrication and ignorance do not enter a story, the story must be true, as there is no other possibility that a massively attended event, communicated throughout history, can be false. When all possibilities of falsehood have been removed the story must be true. Regarding Sinai, all possibilities have been removed: fabrication is refuted, as masses cannot all share one common motive to lie. Ignorance is refuted, as the event was simple in nature: all know what fire is, and what mountains are. Thus, regarding Mount Sinai's fiery revelation, there is no possibility that this event was false. It must have occurred. But regarding other stories of reported miracles, if there are no masses, we know that the story may have been fabricated. This applies to your stories of the Rebbe and the Besht performing miracles. God does not demand that we accept any story some religious Jew reports, be he a Rabbi or less. It is precisely because God desires we live based on proof, that He orchestrated Sinai: an event, which cannot be shown to be false.

There is no excuse for your blatant Torah violation, as you entice Jews to violate idolatry, the prohibition of "consulting the dead". It is essential that others 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". ■



RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

WHY WE MUST TEACH JUDAISM'S FUNDAMENTALS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

This week, Mesora continued its efforts to search for a grant for our free website and JewishTimes weekly journal. Although a discouraging one, we received a very kind response from one individual representing a funding organization. She was familiar with Mesora and did not feel her organization would favor granting to us. She wrote as follows:

"We are also particularly interested in supporting small organizations that are outside of the mainstream of organized Jewish life, as well as pluralistic organizations that tolerate a broad range of ways of being Jewish. Again, just from perusing your website, it seems to me that your organization might appear too "narrow" to our grant making committee members — that it might be too identifiably Orthodox, and thus that its appeal to the unaffiliated and tolerance for different ways of being Jewish might be suspect in their minds."

I responded below, and felt my response may be of interest to our readers.

"Dear XXXX,

Thank you for taking the time to write and explain. I appreciate your intent and efforts. I suggest you circulate our latest issue of the

JewishTimes with your board (free to download and print) so they may learn of Mesora's mission: to continually educate Jews of all denominations on the "tenets" of Judaism. We all agree that there is one text of the Torah, and that in this text; there are tenets central to Judaism. Without these tenets, Judaism is no longer Judaism:

God's role as Creator;

He is Exclusive in His role — there are no others;

He is not of what He created (i.e., He is not physical);

His knowledge is supreme — He knows all;

He is omniscient — He can do all;

He rewards and punishes;

Moses' Torah is the only Torah, etc.

It is these tenets and all that flows from them that Mesora has been teaching, and what is lacking in the work of a majority of Jewish organizations. Judaism is first and foremost defined by its tenets, and spreading these tenets forms the core of Mesora's mission. The tenets are not subject to debate. They are not an issue of factions. All Jewish denominations agree on them, but do not necessarily teach them.

At times, those unfamiliar with the tenets will find fault with Judaism, such as those who favor homosexuality or abortion. But the Torah clearly prohibits these acts. What is apparent from those favoring unrestrained freedom of sexuality and morality is that a tenet of Judaism is not being taught; i.e., the Torah is God's word. Had Jews understood that the Torah is entirely God's word, they would not deviate, nor would they think they have greater knowledge than God, so as to violate open Torah verses. But since this fundamental is not taught, many others will decide not to follow other laws, and so on...until Judaism becomes corrupted and diluted into a system of man's desires, no longer reflecting God's original commands.

To support Judaism, we must not cower from man's disapproval. We must be firmly dedicated in our support for what we know is written in God's Torah. God knew man's weak nature, as well as his overzealous nature, and therefore directed man not to add to, or subtract from His Torah. (Deut. 13:1) In this week's issue of the JewishTimes (May 6th issue), I respond to a Jew who prays to dead Rabbis, thinking they will create miracles, and I explain that this other extreme is also a violation of God's words, and a deviation from what is real and true. Torah is all about following what our minds see as truth, and avoiding that which is false.

(continued on next page)

In his 13 Principles, Maimonides conveyed his view of Judaism's core truths.

Now, provided God's Torah laws are not violated, there is ample room for one's expression of his or her Judaism, and the Torah does in fact tolerate much latitude in religious expression. For example, one may build and beautify his Sukkah with what pleases him the most; he may celebrate the Holidays with his choice of food and song; he may cheer up the sick with his sense of friendship and humor; and Jews may dress for Holidays and Temple as they wish, provided modesty is upheld. The Talmud too is replete with various views on numerous laws. The truth is that tolerance is a much-needed trait. The Rabbis teach that one should be "Maavir al Midosecha", "Give in on your character". This means that one should seek harmony with others, and to foster this harmony, one must be willing to allow others freedom of expression, even if it means we endure some frustration in the process. For when we tolerate others, we recognize God's right to create many personalities, and we also allow others to witness and appreciate our sensitivity towards them. When others see that we recognize their needs and we bend to their desires, this in turn allows greater friendships to bloom. And it is friendship and peace that is the crucial backdrop for a harmonious Jewish society. Of course, the Torah must guide such freedom of expression, and the Torah in this week's reading (Deut. 19:17) demands that when someone is in violation, that we rebuke his or her deviation. This too is God's word, and sustains the Torah system, as well as helping a fellow Jew improve.

Thus, there is something called "deviation", and we learn from God's written words what are these deviations. To deny something as a deviation means to deny the Torah. To support those who allow deviations means to support that which is not Torah. We see again how crucial it is that the Torah's tenets are adhered to. If the tenets are not taught, then Torah cannot truly be supported.

This absence of education of the Torah's tenets contributes greatly to many Jews' acceptance of alien notions. This acceptance blurs the lines between Judaism and other religions, causing intermarriage and the destruction of Judaism. As a proof to the lack of education of Judaism's tenets, an average Jew today could not explain why he or she should not intermarry; why other religions are not God's religions; or why he should not eat non-Kosher. He also could not explain the prominent events in Jewish history: ask an average Jew why God gave the Torah, if Judaism is not the only correct religion, according to him. Ask a Jew if he or she affirms

God's existence, or could prove it. The answers one will receive will unveil just how far Judaism has strayed from its tenets. The only solution is to teach these very fundamentals. Other approaches, which may afford good feelings, do not necessarily protect against intermarriage, unless the primary arguments against intermarriage are taught: these are the fundamentals. Programs that celebrate the holidays and attract large groups of Jews are certainly enjoyable. However, if these attending Jews cannot teach their children the error of other religions, such momentary celebrations fall short. Some of that time could have been used to educate the parents. Had these programs strongly supported regular classes on Judaism's tenets, the parents would be capable of shielding their children from conversion, intermarriage, securing yet another generation of Jews. But this is not the case, as intermarriage and conversion continue. It is every Jew's responsibility to address these fatal errors.

This is truly the greatest crime, when the most central of all ideas in Judaism are replaced by beliefs in red strings, when Jews know more about pop stars than about God, and when Jews are seeking to ease their Torah adherence, which results all too often in intermarriage.

God taught us not to add or subtract from His words. It is clear that He desires the Jewish nation to sustain all parts of the Torah, and with even minimal breakdown, every succeeding generation further deviates, and Judaism is eventually lost. This does not apply to Judaism alone, but any religion or system, which is not governed, thereby, it allows man's weaknesses and overzealous natures to find expression. This alters the original system into something that can no longer be identified as the original. Judaism too is surely being altered into a new religion, "Jewish" only by name.

To sustain Judaism for future generations, we must prioritize our work: we must first teach the tenets and approach every individual with the latitude required to accommodate his and her personality. We must be clear on what Judaism is, and not cower to popular opinion, if this means that Judaism is compromised.

"In every generation there are those who rise up against us to destroy us." (Haggadah) Sometimes they are gentiles, and sometimes, they are Jews. No one Jewish group is insulated from attack from another. So who is acting in accord with Judaism? It is those who do not deviate from God's Torah fundamentals. The tenets must be taught, and on them, by definition, there is no room for compromise." ■

WITCHCRAFT

FORBIDDEN FALSEHOODS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

In this week's Parsha, Kedoshim, we read of the commands regarding Nichush and Onane; not to follow the heathen practices of setting signs, setting 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, and therefore I will restrict my actions because of this event." Both are prohibited.

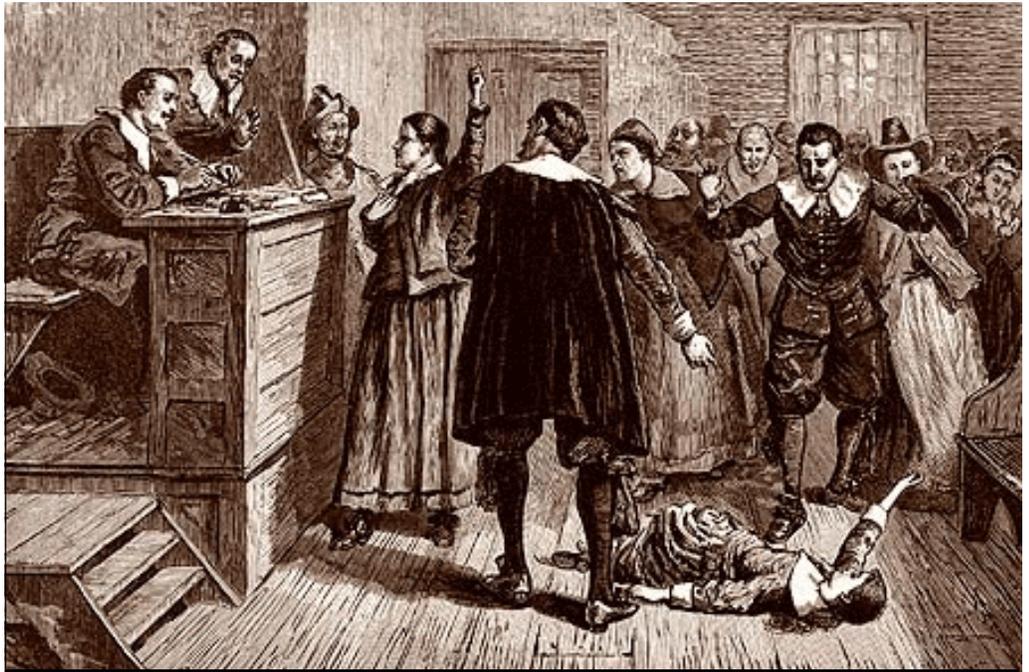
Why did the Torah group together, the setting of signs and the setting of times? Also, why is fortune telling and speaking to spirits grouped together, and why were these given the additional command "not to inquire"?

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 one's own mind to determine which activities he should do. (Our article on Idolatry goes into detail of the basic definitions.)

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 routes. 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 they are, and how contrary to God's plan. God endowed us with intelligence, to understand that He alone controls all, and that we must engage this intelligence to realize how the world operates, and to live by its laws.

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.

With minimal reasoning, these prohibited practices of imagined security can easily be shown



Salem Mass: 17th century witch burnings bear out the Torah's timeless truths

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 will place the person in a position where he realizes he has no reasoning for his actions. It will then make sense to him to abandon such foolish practices. (See Tosefta Shabbos, Chap 7 for the prohibition against red bendels.)

To answer our initial questions, Nichush and Onane are attempts to establish a false sense security. One seeks assurance that his actions are the "right" moves. Nichush and Onane are grouped together as 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 feigned 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. 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, only God. This follows reason. God created everything. Nothing that can override His control of man's affairs. 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", alone to blame when he sins, and solely the cause of his good. Reward and punishment are true fundamentals of Judaism. If one deserves God's punishment, wearing a red bendel, or following other superstitions prohibited in our Torah, cannot stand in the way of God's punishment. Conversely if man does good, natural causes will be no opponent to God's rewards. ■



Recognizing a Good

It is disheartening, but lately, we have been in touch with two orthodox websites, both of which asked Mesora to help them, to which we agreed. But when we asked that they reciprocate and assist Mesora, one cited their unquestionable clause, "it is not our policy to promote other websites". To this, we responded, "If you feel you can ask for help but do not wish to reciprocate, then you do not follow Torah principles and you are not worthy of praise – we will not promote your site on ours, as you requested of us."

Six months to a year ago, another website asked that we help field their questions from their Gentile visitors. We agreed, and for all this time, we have helped them, not ever asking a thing from them. We were glad to respond to those virtuous individuals seeking knowledge of Torah. This week, we asked them to help promote the JewishTimes in an email to their readers. Such promotion would increase our readership and attract new advertisers to help pay for our website. This was the response we received:

"While we do appreciate your tremendous help in fielding some of the questions that come in our policy remains that you are welcome to advertise your publication in your responses, but we can't grant you free advertising to our subscriber base. The current total of our subscribers totals about 50,000 and as such the advertising comes with a price."

Our response:

"We also have a list of 42,000 so we are familiar with the going rates. Considering the matter, the time we have given you and your readers over this past year, asking nothing in return, far surpasses the price of even 10 emails. There is something called Hakaras Hatove as well. We are quite disappointed in your response, especially from a website intent on upholding Torah principles."

When others ask of you, but themselves are not willing to do the same in return, especially when they claim Torah observance, it appears to me as a Chillul Hashem (disgrace of Heaven) and truly exposes their agenda as not in line with Torah. They have no Hakoras Hatove (recognizing the good) but place themselves superior to others;

they feel they deserve the help of others, but not that they should reciprocate. Selfishness destroys friendships, communities and societies. It is of utmost importance that we always recall a good done for us, and recognize it in some tangible manner, be it words of thanks, deeds of reciprocation, or even more. The need for "recognizing a good" is due to human nature: our sense of fairness, and feelings of dignity and respect in others. When such reciprocate equality is not practiced, it is indicative of one's incorrect feeling that others do not deserve the same justice as him. But as God gave "one" Torah to be practiced equally by us "all", we learn that God desires equality, and those who oppose equality, oppose a Torah principle.

We must all take to heart how important it is to seek fairness, to go out of your way to be tender and delicate with the feelings of others, and to also seek to promote justice - not only by "recognizing the good", but with the other pole as stated in this week's Parsha Kedoshim: rebuking someone who violates Torah. (Lev. 19:17) □

Teaching Death to Children

Reader: My 5 year old, has been questioning me regarding death. He asks the same question several times a week. He probably is even more preoccupied because I haven't answered him to his satisfaction. But basically, how do I answer a 5 year old who asks what happens when you die? (This has been more on his mind since my grandmother passed away 2 months ago). Thanks, as always.

Mesora: I discussed your question with Rav Mann. He said to tell the child that death is when you are "with God". It is a very happy time. There is no need to discuss the morbidity, or painful ideas connected. I don't know if you need to tell him more right now, unless he asks. If he does, please email me. He may ask if you will be with him there. I feel you should tell him yes, at this point. You can also tell him that there are things that man is not smart enough to know. This way, he doesn't feel you are holding out on him, or left out from matters that others know. He may even find comfort in the knowledge that adults don't have all the answers either. □

Learning Torah... to Destroy Others

Reader: Regarding whether God is subject to "parts"; what is your understanding of the Sefirot? After all, God has no parts. Dan

Mesora: I never studied the area yet. The Rabbis teach, "One must fill his belly before he walks in the garden". Meaning, one must master the Talmud, before entering higher areas...and I have plenty of Talmud to study yet. There is an order to study: one, who jumps to the metaphysical areas before mastering lower areas, will only harm himself, and others.

Reader: So why don't you just stick to Talmud and talk about what you know!

Mesora: You should be aware that the Rabbis warn, "One who learns to simply destroy another person is better off never having been born." (Rashi, Talmud Berachos 17a) You just exemplified this behavior; asking a question in a manner which hid your true intent...to set me up for a fall. However, you are incorrect. Knowledge of God being one, that He is not physical and not subject to parts, are matters all derived from Torah and reality, primary areas we must commence with, and not wait until our "bellies are full". This is not a matter of understanding Sefirot, as you assumed. We can and must understand these fundamentals, as Maimonides teaches. This is not part of metaphysical Sefirot, but acknowledged though or very capable intelligences, and obligatory, based on many Torah verses. I would also question why you are personally disturbed about this topic. Perhaps you are functioning from your emotions, and not from reason. □