



THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST

ESTD 1997

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

JewishTimes

Volume III, No. 20...Mar. 5, 2004

WWW.MESORA.ORG/JEWISHTIMES

Download and Print Free

IN THIS ISSUE:

TETZAVEH	1,2,3
HIGH PRIEST CLOTHING	1,4,5
THE PURIM STORY	1,6,7
HAMAN'S INTOLERANCE	7
ZACHOR & MEGILA	8,9
"THE PASSION": RESPONSES	10
APPROACHING G-D	11,12
G-D IS ONE	13
ROSH CHODESH	14

SUGGESTED READING: SEE THESE AND OTHER ARTICLES AT OUR SITE

Maimonides' 13 PRINCIPLES

THE BASIC FOUNDATIONS WHICH ALL JEWS MUST KNOW AS TRUE. WE URGE YOU TO READ THEM:
www.mesora.org/13principles.html

God's Existence: Belief or Proof?

www.mesora.org/belieforproof.html

God's Land Without God?

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY:
www.mesora.org/openletter/openletter2.html

THE CLOTHING of the High Priest

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The High Priest alone had rights of entrance into the Holy of Holies, and only on Yom Kippur. This is the most sanctified of all locations. It represents man's closest approach to G-d, and mimics Moses' approach to G-d on Mount Sinai; both cases included cloud.

In his "Guide for the Perplexed", (Book III, Chap. IX) Maimonides discusses another
(continued on page 4)



(continued on page 7)

THE PURIM STORY

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

King Achashverosh created a lavish banquet. Tapestries hung from pillars of marble, and fine marble paved ways for beds of gold and silver. The King was celebrating his faulty calculation that redemption would not occur for the Jews. His outright denial was seen in his use of the

(continued on page 6)

Weekly Parsha

TETZAVEH

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"And you should make sacred garments for Ahron and your brother for honor and glory." (Shemot 28:2)

Our parasha discusses the garments of the Kohen Gadol. In the above passage, Moshe is command to instruct Bnai Yisrael in the creation of these garments. The pasuk says that these garments are designed for honor and glory.

(continued on next page)

(continued from previous page)

Weekly Parsha

TETZAVEH

RABBI BERNARD FOX

However, the pasuk is vague. The garments glorify whom or what?

The commentaries offer a number of responses to this question. Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra suggests that these beautiful and impressive garments glorify Ahron or the Kohen Gadol who wears them.[1] Nachmanides acknowledges this possible interpretation of the pasuk. He also suggests an alternative explanation. He proposes that the garments honor and glorify Hashem.[2] Apparently, Nachmanides reasons that the Kohen Gadol serves Hashem. Performing his duties in these wondrous vestments glorifies the service and the Almighty.

Sforno suggests that the garments serve both purposes. They honor Hashem and glorify the Kohen Gadol.[3]

There is another dispute among the Sages regarding the requirement that Kohanim wear special vestments. Maimonides, in his Sefer HaMitzvot, writes that our passage communicates a positive command. The Kohen and the Kohen Gadol must wear their assigned vestments when serving in the sanctuary.[4] Halachot Gedolot disagrees with Maimonides. He does not derive a commandment from our passage. He maintains that there is no separate command that directs the Kohen Gadol or the other Kohanim to wear these garments.

Of course, this creates a problem. The Kohen Gadol and the Kohanim are not permitted to perform service in the Temple without these garments. How can Halachot Gedolot contend that there is no specific command directing the Priests to wear these garments, and also acknowledge that the Kohanim are not permitted to serve without their vestments?

Nachmanides responds to this question. He explains that the Halachot Gedolot certainly acknowledges that a Kohen cannot serve without the proper vestments. However, according to Halachot Gedolot, the vestments are a requirement for the proper performance of the service. They are a prerequisite for the performance of the mitzvah of service in the Temple. As a prerequisite for another command – the performance of the service, the requirement to wear the vestments does not merit to be classified as an independent commandment.[5] Let us consider another example from halacha that illustrates Nachmanides' argument. All males are required to wear Tefillin. Wearing Tefillin is a mitzvah. Now, in order to wear Tefillin one first must acquire the Tefillin. Yet, clearly the procurement of Tefillin is not a separate mitzvah. It is merely a prerequisite for the fulfillment of the commandment of wearing Tefillin. Nachmanides argues that similarly the garments worn by the Kohen are a prerequisite for the proper performance of

the Temple service. As a prerequisite, the wearing of these garments does not qualify as a separate mitzvah.

How would Maimonides respond to Nachmanides' position? Nachmanides is seemingly offering a compelling argument for not counting the wearing of the vestments as a separate mitzvah. Maimonides agrees that the procurement of Tefillin is not a separate mitzvah. Why does he consider the requirement for the Kohen to wear his special attire a separate mitzvah?

In order to answer this question, we must consider the order in which Maimonides places the various commandments concerning the Kohanim. Maimonides states that the requirement of the Kohanim to wear their garments is the thirty-third positive command. According to Maimonides' enumeration of the commandments, the thirty-second positive commandment is to honor the Kohanim – the descendants of Ahron. It seems from the close association of these two commandments that they are related. What is this relationship?

Apparently, Maimonides maintains that the garments are designed to honor and glorify the Kohanim. These vestments distinguish the Kohanim and defer special status upon them. It is true that a Kohen cannot serve in the Temple without his vestments. But according to Maimonides, this is not because the vestments are a prerequisite for the service. The garments complete the status of the Kohen. The vestments qualify him for service. In other words, without the garments, the Kohen is not the person permitted to perform the service.

Let us now focus on identifying the pivotal issue of contention between Maimonides and Nachmanides. According to Nachmanides, the garments are designed to glorify the service in the Temple. They are a prerequisite for service. Therefore, wearing this special attire is not a separate mitzvah. In contrast, Maimonides maintains that the garments glorify and honor the Kohanim. They confer full status on the Kohen. As a result, the wearing of the garments is a separate mitzvah within Taryag --- the 613 commandments.

(continued on next page)



Weekly Parsha
TETZAVEH
 RABBI BERNARD FOX

“And it shall be upon Ahron when he serves. And its sound will be heard when he comes to the sanctuary before Hashem and when he goes out he shall not die.” (Shemot 28:35)

Our pasuk discusses the jacket that is worn by the Kohen Gadol. This jacket is of unusual design. A series of gold bells hang from the jacket. What was the purpose of these bells?

Most of the commentaries agree that our pasuk is addressing this question. However, they differ on the answer the passage is providing. Nachmanides comments that the bells announce the Kohen Gadol's entry and exit from the sanctuary. Why is this notice required? Nachmanides explains that it is inappropriate to enter the presence of the King without announcing oneself. It is also disrespectful to leave the King's presence without first providing notice. The bells provide the necessary announcement.[6]

Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra takes a very different approach to explaining our pasuk. He suggests that the proper translation of the pasuk is that “his – the Kohen Gadol's -- voice will be heard when he comes to the sanctuary before Hashem.” According to Ibn Ezra, the bells, as well as the other garments, are designed to distinguish the Kohen Gadol from the other Kohanim. Through wearing his special vestments, the Kohen Gadol distinguishes himself as the leader of the Kohanim and the people. The passage assures that the sincere prayers of this leader will be heard.[7]

Gershonides offers a unique approach to explaining the bells of the jacket and the meaning of our passage. He explains that the Kohen Gadol's garments are not merely designed for visual beauty. These vestments also communicate important ideas. For example, the Choshen – the breastplate – worn by the Kohen Gadol includes a series of stones. Engraved on these stones are the names of the Shevatim – the Tribes. The Choshen conveys to the Kohen Gadol that he represents the entire nation. These various messages motivate the Kohen Gadol to concentrate exclusively on the spiritual. However, these various messages can only be communicated to the Kohen Gadol when he is aware of the special vestment. The bells draw the Kohen Gadol's attention to his garments. This, in turn, allows the vestments to convey their messages to him. Based on this interpretation of the bells, Gershonides explains our passage. The Kohen Gadol hears the ringing of his own vestments. This encourages him to notice his garments and their special messages. His focus on these messages raises him to an elevated spiritual plane. As a result of his spiritual focus, the Almighty hears his voice and prayers.[8]

It is noteworthy that Ibn Ezra's interpretation of the bells is consistent with his overall perspective on the vestments of the Kohen Gadol. Ibn Ezra maintains that the garments of the Kohanim are designed to bestow honor and glory upon them. He interprets the bells as one of the elements of the vestments that distinguish the Kohen Gadol.

Nachmanides contends that the vestments are designed to glorify Hashem. His understanding of the bells is consistent with this perspective. He explains that the bells are required in order to show proper reverence when entering before Hashem and leaving His presence.

Gershonides' understanding of the bells is somewhat unique. He contends

that the vestments are designed to communicate to the Kohen Gadol. The bells facilitate this communication. They focus the Kohen Gadol's attention of the garments. The bells are not a fundamental element of the vestments. They do not communicate any idea. However, they enhance the performance of the other vestments.

“And they shall be on Ahron and his sons when they enter the Ohel Moed or when they approach the altar to serve in sanctity. And they shall not be guilty of sin and die. It is an eternal law for him and his descendants after him”. (Shemot 28:43)

Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik Ztl explained that there is a crucial difference between the utensils of the Mishkan and the garments of the Kohen Gadol. The design of the garments was strictly governed by the law. If any garment was lost or damaged, it was replaced by an exact duplicate. The description of the garments was binding for all generations.

In contrast, the design of the utensils was not permanently binding in all of its details. The design described in the Chumash was intended for the Mishkan. These utensils were also essential components of the Bait HaMikdash. However, the utensils in the Holy Temple were not required to meet the description of the Chumash in every detail. Deviation was permitted.

Why is the law of the garments different from the law of the utensils? The Mizbeyach Menorah, Shulchan and other utensils were part of the Mishkan. They were as essential as the tent itself. The Mishkan was only one model of the institution of sanctuary. These utensils were designed for this model. Other models could have utensils designed in a different manner. However, the garments were not a part of this institution of sanctuary. They were an expression of the sanctity of the Kohen Gadol. This sanctity did not change with the various forms of sanctuary. Therefore, the garments were not altered. The Kohen Gadol of the Mishkan had the same sanctify as the individual serving in Shlomo's Temple. The garments of both High Priests were therefore identical. □

[1] Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer Shemot, 28:2.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 28:2.

[3] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Shemot 28:2.

[4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Aseh 33.

[5] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Critique on Maimonides' Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Aseh 33.

[6] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 28:35.

[7] Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Abbreviated Commentary on Sefer Shemot, 28:35.

[8] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer Shemot, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1994), p 382.

THE CLOTHING of the High Priest

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

(continued from page 1)

"screen" separating him from G-d. It is a brief chapter, and I quote it in its entirety below:

"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 G-d and us. They say He is concealed from us in vapours, 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 G-d is corporeal, and is invisible because He is surrounded by thick clouds, vapours, darkness, or mist. This figure is also expressed in the passage, "He made darkness His secret place" (Ps. xviii. 12). The object of G-d revealing Himself in thick clouds, darkness, vapours, 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 G-d, 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 G-d, 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)."

As a Rabbi once explained, cloud alludes of the ever-present veil which exists between man and G-d. Even at Revelation at Sinai, and in connection with the most perfected man who ever lived and who ever will live - Moses

- there was "darkness, cloud and thick cloud." ("And any form was not seen, only a voice", refers to what was witnessed at Sinai.) It was essential that the Jews realize their inherent ignorance (cloud) in relation to knowledge of G-d's essence. On Yom Kippur, the High Priest is also commanded to smoke the Holy of Holies with incense, again creating a veil. Man has no faculty by which to grasp another person's thoughts. We are limited. Certainly, we cannot know G-d or His thoughts. We can only perceive that which is in some way connected to our senses, which G-d is not. The clouds teach the idea of the impregnable veil between man and G-d. G-d told Moses, "You cannot know me while alive." (Exod. 33:20)

As the priest was to be exemplary of man at his optimum. He displayed certain, prized qualities. I would like to suggest an idea behind a few of the garments worn by the high priest which embellish his role. My belief is that the "tzitz", the gold plate worn on the priest's head reading "Holy to G-d", was to demonstrate that one of such perfection, has his intelligence focused on, and subjected to G-d. His mind - represented by his forehead - is bound up in a love of the knowledge of G-d. In contrast, but complimentary, the priests' heart goes out to his brethren, seen in the Breastplate bearing colorful and precious stones representative of all twelve tribes, and worn on his "heart", the seat of man's emotions.

Another garment was the Ephod, a robe, with two onyx stones in settings of gold on each shoulder. From rings attached to these settings, there hung the Choshen, the breastplate we just mentioned. But what catches the attention is that again on the black onyx stones are the twelve names of each tribe. Why two sets of the tribes' names? Why is one a colorful stone-set of the 12 tribes' names, suspended from the black stones with the tribes' names? And is there an idea behind the "suspension" of one set from the other?

I once heard an interesting explanation from a Rabbi; black, more than color, represents death. We might refer to that which is burned, or a plant which is dead, as proof of the connection between the lack of color, and death. Perhaps the colorful tribes represent the tribes in existence, i.e., "us", the "living" Children of Israel. The black onyx stones represent the actual individual sons of Jacob, i.e., Reuben himself, Shimone, Levi, themselves, etc. What this would mean, is that the living Jews are "suspended" on our forefathers. That is, our merit today is suspended (based) on the merit of Jacob's perfected sons, who have died, represented by black onyx stones. This teaches that our distinction and merit before G-d is based not on ourselves, but on the fact that we are descendants from those great individuals. The High Priest wears this display so as to call upon G-d's mercy. He beseeches G-d to remember those twelve dead tribes for the sake of being benevolent to those living twelve tribes - us today. The High Priest calls upon G-d to remember us, Who desired the creation of the Jewish nation through these twelve, righteous men. So, we are represented by the twelve color stones, that are suspended by the black, onyx stones. That is, our merit to existence is drawn from the Tribes' righteous lives, and G-d's oath to their descendants.

Addressing ornate garments, we must be careful not to fall prey to idolizing objects. Even the Choshen which housed the Urim v'Tumim, a prophetic system, never possessed powers itself, as nothing has power but G-d alone. Not people, not objects. It is impossible to be otherwise. All things are created, and are subject to laws of creation, therefore, they can not alter creation.

I recently read an article by a Rabbi who attempted to deter Jews from ascribing powers to the Ayin Hara, the "Evil Eye." At first, I was excited by the prospect that our teachers see Judaism clearly. But as I read the article, I saw that this Rabbi too felt there is a power of an Evil Eye. He was only attempting to persuade Jews to ask G-d to defend them from it. But this Rabbi indeed felt a defense from its power was needed, displaying his belief in the nonsensical notion of powers other than G-d. This is a form of idolatry.

(continued on next page)

THE CLOTHING of the High Priest

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

(continued from page 1)

Rashi states that when the brothers of Joseph came down to Egypt, they were commanded by their father Jacob to enter Egypt through separate entrances so the Ayin Hara should not have power over them. How do we understand this Rashi? Allow me to briefly expound.

Ayin Hara - "evil eye" - can be explained very simply: It refers to a psychological state. If one says, "My! What a beautiful baby". Others will say, "Don't give it an Ayin Hara". Does this mean that admiration of an infant can cause some change in that child? Not at all. Words have no powers, other than producing a change in the listener. What might happen is that another mother will be jealous that this statement was not made about her child. She may develop unconscious jealousy and aggression towards the favored baby, or towards the mother. The unconscious of a person is very cunning, usually going undetected, and seeks satisfaction. This jealous mother might unconsciously, "accidentally" pour some of her hot drink on the mother, or the child. But the act of spilling doesn't assume a new power in the universe. It is explained by three existing, natural phenomena - jealousy, revenge and the unconscious. 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 her's, and unconsciously, she pours her drink on the other mother, satisfying her aggression.

We need not create false, mystical explanations of Ayin Hara. A person with the chochma (wisdom) of human nature will understand this very easily.

The same applies to the brothers as they entered Egypt. Jacob knew that his sons were of great stature, as we see that just two destroyed an entire city. Jacob figured that 10 men of great stature, coupled with a foreign appearance walking through the gates of Egypt would raise some eyebrows. Imagine 10 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 each of them to enter through a separate gate. This would minimize any attention. Jacob's suggestion was wise - 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. Jacob wished that no "suspecting eyes" cause harm to his sons through trumped up charges.

Our forefather Jacob desired to be buried outside of Egypt, lest the Egyptians make his grave into an idolatrous object. (Rashi) Jacob knew the

nature of man, that it seeks to deify leaders. This is yet another permutation of man seeking powers for his security.

Tying a thread around Rachel's tomb does not instill power in that red bendel. There is no such thing as power out side of G-d, other than our own muscular strength and forces of nature. Rachel had no powers, and even pleaded with her husband Jacob for children. Had she any powers, she would make her own miracle. It is therefore contradictory that fools project powers on Rachel, who openly testified to being powerless herself.

It is to my dismay that I now see Jewish bookstores run by 'rabbis', selling red bendels. The Tosefta in Talmud Sabbath, chapter seven, clearly states that this practice of wearing red strings was a heathen custom, and is prohibited.

Help the Jewish people. When you see stores selling these chamsas, red bendels, and devices to "protect" your cars, inform them of the grave prohibition they violate. Tell them to read the Tosefta and think about their actions, how they are bereft of reason - G-d's gift to us. As a Rabbi once taught, wisdom is so prized a possession in G-d's eyes, G-d allowed His name to be associated with it, "Tzelem Elokim", "form of G-d".

When you see idolatrous practices, it is your duty to genuinely denounce them, and express that you are concerned for another Jew - so others are not misled. Speak out. By remaining silent, you encourage further corruption. □

Laws of Purim:

The Megila us to be read o Saturday evening, and again on Sunday. During the festive meal, one should drink more than what he is used to. The main meal should take place while there is yet sunlight. Gifts or money should be distributed by each person to at least two poor people. Each person should deliver two cooked foods to one friend.

We are celebrating G-d's mercy, in that He spared us from Haman's decree. Let us be mindful of this, and rejoice in our lot.

A happy Purim to all.

(continued from page 1)

Temple's vessels for his haughty affair. He decreed that wine should be older than the guest who imbibed it.

For this ploy, I give recognition to the King. I wondered why he wished this to be. I thought, perhaps as a King, his position bore a double edge: on the one hand, you must placate your viceroys to remain popular and in power. On the other hand, your own, firm rulership must be displayed. Aged wine was a solution. The King treated his guests with honor by providing wine older than themselves, a respectful drink, securing his popularity. But he also kept his officers humble - by implication the King said, "this wine was around long before you." Reminding one of a time when he was not yet around is quite humbling, and an affective maneuver to keep subjects in check.

THE PURIM STORY

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

During this affair, the King boasted that his Chaldean wife Vashti surpassed the beauty of other women. He demanded her to appear before him and other officials naked. She refused. Haman the wicked suggested she be killed for such an insult to the King, and this was so. Subsequently, a new queen was sought. This now paved the way for Esther to be placed

in the palace as queen, which occurred soon afterwards.

Later, after Esther's appointment as queen, Mordechai overheard a discussion between two men plotting the King's assassination. They spoke in a foreign language, but as an adviser, Mordechai knew their language. Mordechai informed Esther to warn the King. The matter was investigated, and the would-be assassins were killed.

Afterwards, Haman was elevated in position. He moved the King to agree to a decree that he be bowed to. When confronted with Haman's decree to prostrate before him, all obeyed, all but Mordechai the pious. Haman was filled with rage at Mordechai for his violation, and Haman conjured charges against Mordechai, then against the rabbis, and



finally he planned to annihilate the Jews as a whole. Letters were sent throughout the kingdom to this effect. Mordechai responded by wearing sackcloth, mourning this anticipated fate, and praying for G-d's salvation. He communicated to Esther that she must intervene, using her position to assist. She was reluctant at first, as one who approaches the King uninvited faces death. Mordechai told her that if she did not act, salvation would come from another direction, and her house would not be saved. Esther agreed, but devised a cunning plan, in addition to her request that

all Jews fast with her. Esther invited the King and Haman to a private party. Once there, the King asked what her request was, and up to half the kingdom would be awarded her. She responded by requesting that both the King and Haman attend yet another party. What was Esther doing? Why didn't she speak up now, informing the King that Haman planned to annihilate her people? As I heard from a Rabbi, Esther used her honed psychological knowledge to devise her plan. She felt, had she directly accused Haman, the Kings appointed officer, she would not

necessarily meet with salvation for the Jews. She planned to create suspicion in the King's mind, as the Talmud states. The King thought, "perhaps Haman is invited to this private party of three, as Esther and Haman are plotting against me. Is there no one who loves me who would not be silent in this matter?" That night the King could not sleep, and for good reason - Esther successfully aroused the King's suspicion. The King called for the Book of Remembrance to be read, "perhaps I have not properly rewarded those who love me, and they do not wish to inform me." It was found

(continued on next page)

(continued from previous page)

THE PURIM STORY

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

that Mordechai's previous favor of saving his life went unrewarded.

It was precisely at this moment, that Haman was in the King's courtyard. His approach in the middle of the night exposed his haste and desperation to hang Mordechai. The King just finished reading of Mordechai's kindness to him, and Haman wants to kill this loyal officer?! Esther's plan is seen to be taking effect. She successfully drove the King to ponder Haman's business. While in this state of suspecting Haman, G-d orchestrates Haman's arrival. Be mindful too, that Mordechai only made it into the Book of Remembrance, as he was "fortunate" enough to be passing by, just when the two assassins were discussing their plot. We begin to appreciate that these events are not coincidences.

Now the King was bent on suspecting Haman - now was the time to accuse Haman.

At the second party, Esther is again questioned by the King of her request. She finally accuses Haman. The King is angry, and storms out of the party. According to the Talmud, he gazes at his trees being plucked out of the ground by ministering angels. The King demanded, "what are you doing?" The angels responded, "Haman ordered us to do this." The King returns to the party, only to see Haman fallen onto Esther's bed. (He had been pleading for his life, he got up, and then fell down on her bed. To the King, Haman was seeking the throne. The King responded, "will you conquer the queen while I am yet in the house?" The Talmud again says that ministering angles were at work, this time, forcing Haman onto the queen's bed. How do we understand this metaphor of these angels?

It would appear that once Esther accused Haman, all the King had on his mind was the fear that all leaders have: a close supporter is really seeking the throne. Looking at trees being plucked means the King was now viewing his kingdom (trees) as being destroyed. The King began interpreting all events as Haman's usurping of his throne. Once the King was suspicious of Haman, and

then that suspicion was confirmed by Haman's desire to kill the loyal Mordechai, the King needed nothing else but his own paranoia to interpret matters against Haman. What would be conclusive? A clear demonstration. This was also afforded to the King in the form of Haman's position, falling onto the queen's bed! This too was generated by G-d's intervention, i.e., the angels. In both cases, "angels" refer to some force, physical or psychological, which influenced the King.

At this point, Charvona, a Haman supporter, saw Haman's impending doom and switched 'sides' from Haman to Mordechai. He was an opportunist, also out to save his neck. Charvona suggested to hang Haman on the very gallows built by Haman for Mordechai. Haman was hung, and Mordechai was elevated in status. The Jews were then victorious over their enemies, and Purim was instituted as a holiday for generations.

The Jews arose and reaccepted the Torah out of a love, whereas Sinai was acceptance with some coercion. Seeing an undeniable revelation of G-d at Sinai, Torah acceptance carried with it some fear and coercion. However, when these Jews saw the brilliance demonstrated by Esther and Mordechai, and how G-d worked within their plan to save the Jews, the Jews now appreciated the Torah with no coercion. They saw a prime example of how using wisdom is the one path to the proper life, and that G-d does in fact intervene when one operates in this manner.

It is interesting to note that the initial cause for the tragedy of Purim was Mordechai's refusal to bow to Haman's idol. (Rashi & Ibn Ezra state Haman carried an idol.) This was the precise sin the Jews committed overtly that they deserved this punishment. (Inwardly they did not commit idolatry) The very same institution - idolatry - acted as both the obligation for punishment (the Jews' prostration to idols) and the delivery of that punishment (Mordechai's refusal to bow enraged Haman to annihilate the Jews). Perhaps the identical nature of these two events displays G-d's hand in this matter.

In reviewing the personalities of the Megila, Haman taught us that self aggrandizement is fatal. His initial intolerance that one single person would not recognize him drove him to seek permission from the King to murder Mordechai, leading to his downfall. Mordechai taught us that certain principles are worth sacrificing for, and he therefore did not bow to idols. And Esther taught us that with wisdom, a plan may find success, and G-d may intervene. ■

Haman's Intolerance

In the Megillas Esther read on Purim, (3:4), we learn that the other ministers had informed Haman that Mordechai was not following Haman's command to bow to him. Why did these ministers in King Achashverosh's court need to inform Haman? Wouldn't Haman know this, seeing Mordechai perfectly erect?

Either Haman knew or didn't know about Mordechai's refusal. If Haman didn't know, then it makes sense in 3:5 that his anger flared upon hearing Mordechai's deviation. This is in line with Haman's nature. When he would first hear of something going against his egocentricity, Haman would be angered.

But perhaps Haman did in fact know that Mordechai didn't bow to him. This is more plausible, as why should Haman alone be ignorant of Mordechai's behavior? This being the case, we must ask, "Why didn't he get angered about Mordechai's refusal immediately upon his first encounter of Mordechai's disobedience?"

One possibility is that the very same ego which caused Haman to desire others to bow to him, would also cause him to avoid the reality of that one person disgracing him. This is intolerable to Haman, and perhaps why he didn't face it until it was brought out in the open in 3:4 (suggested by Eva Tavlin). Only now did Haman have to deal with it as he could no longer act for his own motives alone, i.e., suppressing this disturbing fact. Similarly, Pharaoh forgot Joseph after Joseph's death. A Rabbi explained, Pharaoh could not tolerate the loss of Joseph. He was in great need of Joseph's insights in order that he, Pharaoh, could successfully rule Egypt. Therefore, upon Joseph's death, Pharaoh feigned complete ignorance of the entire era of Joseph as a means of saying, "I never needed him and I am a capable ruler independent of another person's assistance". Such a denial allows Pharaoh to feel capable once again.

Haman acted as Pharaoh, denying Mordechai's blatant opposition, but only to the point when the matter was no longer avoidable. The other ministers in the courtyard who brought this news to Haman did so as they did not want to see Mordechai escaping punishment. This is why the passage states "to see if Mordechai's position would stand". ■

PARSHAS ZACHOR *the Laws of Purim* AND THE MEGILA

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“There are those that maintain that the reading of Parshat Zachor and Parshat Parah is a Torah obligation. Therefore, people living in an area in which there is not a congregation are obligated to come to a place that has a minyan for these Shabbatot. This is in order to hear these Torah readings that are Torah commandments.” (Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chaim 685:7)

The Shabbat prior to Purim, we read Parshat Zachor. This special reading is found at the end of Parshat Ki Tetze. It discusses two mitzvot. The first is the obligation to remember the evil of Amalek. The second is the obligation to destroy the very memory of this corrupt nation. Shulchan Aruch notes that, according to many authorities, the reading of Parshat Zachor is required in order to fulfill the mitzvah of remembering Amalek. Therefore, it is important for every person to hear this reading.

Parshat Zachor is one of two sections in the Torah that discusses the wickedness of Amalek. The second section is at the end of Parshat Beshalach. These passages describe the unprovoked war that Amalek waged against Bnai Yisrael. This section also records Hashem's pledge to destroy Amalek. These passages are the Torah reading for Purim. Magen Avraham raises an interesting question. Can one fulfill the obligation to recall the wickedness of Amalek through the Purim Torah reading? This reading also discusses the wickedness of Amalek.

Magen Avraham suggests that one can fulfill the obligation to remember Amalek with the Purim reading. He argues that there is no reason for specifically requiring one

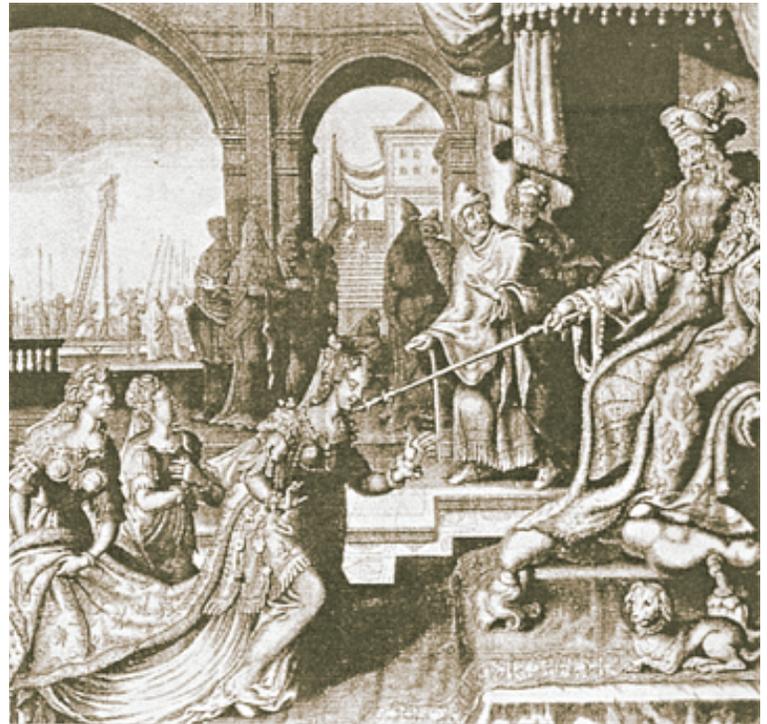
to read the passages at the end of Parshat Ki Tetze. Neither is there any obvious reason for requiring that one fulfill the mitzvah the week before Purim.

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik Zt"l disagrees. He points out that there is a basic difference between these two sections. Parshat Zachor discusses the mitzvot regarding Amalek. These are the mitzvot to remember Amalek and to destroy the nation. The reading of Purim does not describe these commandments.

Rav Soloveitchik continues his analysis with a very simple question. What is the nature of this mitzvah to remember Amalek? In his Mishne Torah, Maimonides implies that this commandment to remember Amalek is closely linked to the mitzvah to destroy the nation. Maimonides explains that we are required to destroy Amalek. Then, he adds that we are required to regularly recall the evil of Amalek in order to evoke an abhorrence of this nation. Maimonides seems to imply that remembering Amalek is a precursor to waging war against the nation. We remember Amalek in order to motivate us to fulfill the commandment to destroy Amalek.[1]

This implication is confirmed by Maimonides' formulation of the mitzvah to destroy Amalek in his Sefer HaMitzvot. There, Maimonides writes that we are obligated to recall the evil of Amalek in order to motivate the Bnai Yisrael to wage war with this wicked nation.[2]

Rav Soloveitchik suggests that Maimonides' formulation of the mitzvah to remember Amalek suggests that Parshat Zachor may be specifically required. It is possible that the Purim reading is not adequate. The mitzvah to remember Amalek is designed to



provide motivation for waging war. It is reasonable to assume that the mitzvah can only be fulfilled through a Torah reading that specifies the obligation to destroy Amalek. Through this reading, the recollection of Amalek's wickedness is linked to the commandment to destroy the nation. The Purim reading does not discuss the requirement to wage war against Amalek. This commandment is only mentioned in Parshat Zachor.[3]

“One is obligated to read the Megilah at night and to repeat it during the day...” (Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayyim 687:1)

Shulchan Aruch explains that the Megilah is read twice on Purim. It is read at night and during the day. This law is derived from the Talmud in Tractate Megilah.[4] Tosefot and many other commentaries explain that the two readings of the Megilah

are not of equal importance. The more fundamental reading is during the day. There are numerous proofs for this assertion. One simple proof is that the fundamental mitzvot of Purim are observed during the day. For example, the Purim feast can only be held during the day. The Talmud equates these observances to the reading of the Megilah. The equation seems to imply that, just as other mitzvot performed of Purim must be performed during the day, so too the reading of the Megilah is related to the day of Purim and not the night. [5]

This raises an interesting question. Why, then is the Megilah read at night? Secondly, the wording of Shulchan Aruch and the Talmud seem to imply that the nighttime reading is the more fundamental. Both refer to the daytime reading as a repetition of the nighttime reading. Referring to the second reading as a repetition

(continued on next page)

(continued from previous page)

PARSHAS ZACHOR AND THE MEGILA

the Laws of Purim

RABBI BERNARD FOX



indicates that it is secondary!

Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin (Netziv) Zt"l answers this question through a brilliant explanation of the relationship between the two readings. In order to understand his explanation, we must more carefully study the text of the Talmud.

The discussion in the Talmud begins by quoting Ribbee Yehoshua ben Levi. He explains that a person is required to read the Megilah at night and lessnotah by day. The term lessnotah can be interpreted in two ways. It can mean "to learn" or it can be understood as "to repeat". At first the Talmud understands the term to mean "to learn". According to this interpretation, we are required to read the Megilah at night and the study the laws during the day. The Talmud rejects this interpretation and concludes that lessnotah means "to repeat". Therefore, the

requirement is to read the Megilah at night and repeat the reading during the day.

Netziv asks, "How could the Talmud initially assume that the Megilah is not read during the day?" Yet this seems to be the Talmud's original understanding of Ribbee Yehoshua ben Levi's lesson. The Talmud interprets his statement to mean that the Megilah is read at night and the laws of Purim are studied during the day!

Netziv responds that the Talmud never assumed that the laws of Purim should be learned to the exclusion of reading the Megilah. The Talmud always understood that the fundamental reading of the Megilah takes place during the daytime. Instead, the Talmud originally assumed that Ribbee Yehoshua ben Levi was establishing an additional requirement. Beyond the mere reading to the Megilah,

one must study the laws. This enriches the reading of the Megilah. Through the study of the laws, the student acquires a more advanced comprehension of the Megilah's contents. Netziv further points out that this initial interpretation of Ribbee Yehoshua ben Levi's dictum reveals an essential premise of the Talmud. The Talmud assumes that Ribbee Yehoshua ben Levi is not describing the fundamental mitzvah of reading the Megilah. The fundamental mitzvah is to merely read the Megilah during the day!

Ribbee Yehoshua ben Levi is establishing a requirement to enhance this performance.

Through identifying the Talmud's premise, Netziv answers our



questions. The Talmud rejects its initial interpretation of Ribbee Yehoshua ben Levi's lesson. His intention is to require the reading of the Megilah at night and its repetition during the day. However, the Talmud never abandons its essential premise! Ribbee Yehoshua ben Levi is establishing a requirement to enhance the performance of the mitzvah. In order to enhance the reading during the day, it must be preceded by a reading during the night. The daytime reading will be a repetition of the nighttime reading. Like any material, the Megilah more is understood more clearly with review! Because the daytime reading is a second review, it will be better understood and appreciated.

Netziv explains that the nighttime reading is required to prepare us for the daytime reading. The daytime reading must be a repetition of the nighttime reading. True, the Talmud and Shulchan Aruch refer to the daytime reading as a repetition. However, this is not intended to diminish the importance of this second reading. The intention is to stress its fundamental nature. Through rendering this daytime reading into a repetition it is enhanced with greater understanding and appreciation.[6] □

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

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Aseh 189.

[3] Rav Michel Sherkin, Harrai Kedem, Chapter 195.

[4] Mesechet Megilah 4a.

[5] Tosefot, Mesechet Megilah 4a.

[6] Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin (Netziv), Meromai Sadeh, Commentary on Mes. Megilah 4a.

"I attended a showing of Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ". In it, Gibson displays the Jews as bloodthirsty mob demanding the pain and torture of Jesus. Having discussed "The Passion" with an orthodox community leader this week, he had the following to say. I am paraphrasing his words:

"No where in his Torah does G-d condone pain or torture, or desire anyone to experience it. No where in the Torah is brutality accepted, or valued. In true Judaism, animosity and public humiliation of another Jew would never be tolerated, certainly not by our priests.

Integral to Judaism is the avoidance of pain - not only towards man, but towards animals: Kosher is achieved only by painless slaughter. We are commanded to send away a mother bird, lest she see when we take her eggs, and she experience the same sorrow for her lost offspring as felt by humans. (Maimonides) Even when the prophet Samuel killed the wicked Agag, he did so quickly, sparing Agag any pain. If we captured a Hitler today, his sentence would be quick, with no torture. Torture is a violation of G-d's Judaism. The mere handing over one of our own to others, violates Torah law. Certainly, crucifixion is barbaric, and not a Jewish idea. We certainly would not crucify anyone, and we would not approach other peoples to do so for us."

I do not see proof for the Gospels, and find in them contradictions, as has already been stated by others. However, if a false prophet would arise, observant Jewish leaders would never violate Torah law, committing acts of torture or handing over one of our own. The false prophet would not paraded around in chains, nor would other Jews be encouraged to jeer or abuse the false prophet. Barbarism is not G-d's way.

A truly observant Jew is never a traitor to justice, and meticulously

adheres to G-d's Torah system. Jewish Priests above all others, are responsible for educating Jews and Gentiles, and on the whole do not violate their positions, although no man is insulated from sin. The observant Jew is merciful, and is commanded to offer his only pillow to his slave, as kindness is at the core of our law: "And you shall love your neighbor as yourself." "And you shall love the convert."

"And you shall watch them and keep them as they (the commands) are your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations, who will hear all these statutes and declare 'what a wise and understanding people is this great nation. Because what great nation has God close to them like God, whenever (they) call to Him? And what great nation has statutes and laws as righteous as this entire Torah'..." (Deuteronomy 4:6-8)

The Rabbis stated in line with this quote, that we are chosen for no other reason than to imbue the world with God's wisdom. His "righteous" laws aim towards peace and harmony among all people, securing both physical and psychological ease. As G-d's Torah passages teach, the Torah system is one which when upheld, generates in Gentiles a respect and admiration for the righteousness contained, not revulsion for it's sadism, which opposes Torah.

The observant Jew is not bent on anger, hostility or sadism, but on mercy, forgiveness, justice and charity. Maimonides teaches that of all man's traits, two must be completely avoided: haughtiness and anger. The High Priest Aaron, Moses' brother, was famous for his chasing after peace between others. He represents the Torah's ideal. The truly observant Jew does not live in a subjective world, seeking

vengeance fro those who wrong him. He is attached to G-d's objective laws, and follows them, not petty emotions.

In contrast, Gibson's "Passion" includes many of his own fabrications - not found in the Gospels - which in no manner do I validate. As such, the vile depictions of Jews and their attitudes deserves ridicule which falls exclusively on Gibson."

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim
m.ben-chaim@mesora.org

"The passion has evoked both strong negative and positive responses from those who have viewed the movie and film critics. I do not have intense feelings about the film. But the movie and the reactions it has evoked have caused me to make a few observations.

First, I think much of the discussion regarding whether the movie is in fact anti-Semitic is a dispute over semantics. Speaking with many people that have seen the movie and having read numerous reviews, I have not heard any evidence that the movie is overtly anti-Semitic. Nonetheless, it does portray the death of Jesus and the role played by the Jewish people in a manner that has historically inflamed anti-Semitic responses. So, I would not be surprised if the movie provoked anti-Semitic sentiments and incidents.

Second, I think that in general an artist has the right in this country to express personal sentiments and views. The public has the opportunity to decide whether it will view the artist's work and support it. However, we do recognize that there are clear exceptions to this rule. For example, we do not allow the right to free

expression to be used to libel or defame someone. So, the decision of a newspaper to publish an article that knowingly falsely defames an individual cannot be defended as an act of artistic expression or freedom of expression. The newspaper would be held responsible for any damage caused by its willfully irresponsible actions. It is interesting that issues of religion are not held to the same standard. So, although Gibson's portrayal of Jesus' death is almost universally regarded as historically inaccurate, and as a reasonable person he should recognize the volatility of the emotions evoked by his portrayal, no one suggest that he should be held to the standards of responsibility applied in other circumstances. In other words, no one has suggested that he should be held responsible for any harm caused by his film.

This special treatment of religious expression implies that issues of religion are completely determined by faith and exist in a subjective realm. Because Gibson's views and actions are expressions of his personal faith, they are regarded as legitimate religious expression. As religious expression, they are exempt from the common standards of responsibility.

In short, we would all agree that if a publisher intentionally printed a report that he should have known was both false and damaging to a community or individual, he would be responsible for his actions. But if he printed a report with the same characteristics but it was an expression of religious faith, he would be above criticism.

Frankly, I do not understand why religious expression should receive this special treatment. It seems to me that parameters of truth and falsehood should apply to religion just as they apply to other issues. I fail to grasp the reason for exempting a movie that expresses religious convictions from the general liability for defamation and libel."

Rabbi Bernie Fox
Northwest Yeshiva High School
rfox@nyhs.com

SINAI

“Approaching” G-d through Intelligence

Never Knowing Him

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: I read your quote from the Rambam about how the events that occurred at Sinai are one of the “secrets of the torah” (it being unclear whether G-d spoke all 10, or just the first 2 commandments.) This seems strange to me. If we think of the revelation at Sinai as the event that demonstrates incontrovertibly that G-d revealed Himself to the people, that is dependent on 2 factors: 1) mass revelation, i.e., that many people witnessed the event, and 2) simple, rather than complex information so that there is no mistake that G-d was revealing Himself. This was achieved by the lightning, thunder, fire, and voice.

But why wouldn't it be clear what events actually transpired? Wouldn't that undermine the absolute proof that the event occurred? If we can't figure out exactly what happened, doesn't that leave a hole? Once we're not even sure what happened, isn't that a slippery slope?

The answer can be that the events are clear that all the people believed that G-d revealed himself. Even though it's not clear exactly what happened. Despite this, I find it strange that the event upon which we base all our conviction is an ambiguous event.

Mesora: You suggest the word “secret” conveys that we are unsure of what transpired at Sinai. Maimonides' statement that this is “one of the secrets of the law” does not mean what transpired on Sinai is not known. Just the opposite is true. A “secret” means that something very definite and clear exists, albeit in a discreet form. One may only refer to some knowledge as a “secret”, if he in fact knows that secret. That means the knowledge was definitely known by Maimonides, and those from whom he received his knowledge. Therefore, “secret” only means that it is safeguarded by the Rabbis, or unapproachable by most individuals lacking the required intellectual training to discover that secret.

What is an “event”? “Event” refers to an exclusive set of matters, which have transpired at a given time, or duration. These matters are absolute, and unchangeable. We know there can be but one true depiction for any given event in history. The question is whether we possess the true account. As you said, masses and simple phenomena validate an event as truth. At Sinai, there was and is no ambiguity about which events transpired, only

regarding which commands the nation heard, in contrast to Moses. Moses recalls the events to the people in Deuteronomy. Had there been any ambiguity about events, the Jews would not accept and transmit Moses' depiction exclusively. It is clear, the people and Moses were in unanimous agreement as to which events transpired.

What were some significant features of that event? Moses - and certainly everyone else - was not able to approach G-d directly, thus, the inclusion of clouds and “darkness”. G-d also told Moses, “Man cannot know Me while alive”. Sinai's elements were not accidental, but orchestrated by G-d to teach man of his inability to perceive G-d, or know Him in any positive fashion. We are flesh, with limited intelligence. This limit is conveyed by G-d's creation of “darkness, cloud and thick cloud” which accompanied the event of Sinai. (See Deut. 4:11) It was essential to G-d's revelation, that man be made aware that his limited intelligence is a veil between him and G-d. Man did not perceive G-d Himself, as Moses pointed out to the Jews so many times.

I do not feel we ever stated this in so many words, that man cannot perceive G-d, and that he did not perceive G-d at Sinai. G-d is not physical, while all man's perceptions are only of physical matters. Therefore, man cannot truly perceive G-d. Therefore, how was Sinai a proof of G-d's existence, if we did not perceive Him? The answer is that although we did not perceive G-d, we did perceive proof of His existence, and His complete control of the universe. Only the One who created and controls the physical world could create such an event as Sinai.

Maimonides teaches, “...what Moses experienced at the revelation on Mount Sinai was different from that which was experienced by all the other Israelites”, also, “...the people did not understand the voice in the same degree as Moses did”. This must be so. Revelation of G-d means that man was directed by G-d's “physical event”, to strive and perceive something metaphysical, to acquire new knowledge. As such, this event was not limited to sensory perception alone, but afforded those on their own, respective levels of intelligent proficiency to apprehend new truths. As Moses surpassed all Jews in intelligence, his apprehension also surpassed theirs. Moses perceived something greater than the Jews. His understanding of G-d must be on a greater

(continued on next page)



(continued from previous page)

SINAI

“Approaching” G-d through Intelligence

Never Knowing Him

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

level. Everyone including Moses perceived the physical phenomena identically. Moses' eyes and ears are no better than the Jews'. Therefore, Moses excelled over others in the realm of intellectual apprehension.

This is one of the central lessons of Sinai, almost as vital as the proof of G-d: our knowledge of G-d is in proportion to our intelligence:

Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed, Book II, Chap. XXXII:

“As to the revelation on Mount Sinai, all saw the great fire, and heard the fearful thunderings, that caused such an extraordinary terror; but only those of them who were duly qualified were prophetically inspired, each one according to his capacities. Therefore it is said, “Come up unto the Lord, thou and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu.” Moses rose to the highest degree of prophecy, according to the words, “And Moses alone shall come near the Lord.” Aaron was below him, Nadab and Abihu below Aaron, and the seventy elders below Nadab and Abihu, and the rest below the latter, each one according to his degree of perfection. Similarly our Sages wrote: Moses had his own place and Aaron his own.”

Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed, Book III, Chapter XXXIII, opening words:

“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”.

We derive this important lesson: Sinai did not only prove G-d's existence, but it taught mankind that ours is not to know G-d, (which is impossible) but only that we may “approach” Him. And in our approaching G-d, our degree of knowledge determines our metaphysical proximity to greater truths. The varying levels of ascension of Moses, Joshua, Nadab, Abihu and the elders taught this very lesson, that we only “approach” G-d, never knowing

Him. The truths arrived at by Moses are of a far higher degree of clarity than what others apprehended.

We already said that our perception is limited to physical matters alone. G-d is not physical, and therefore we can never perceive Him. However, what we can do is approach Him, and this is achieved only through advancing our intelligence and knowledge. Torah study is the greatest command for this very reason, that knowledge of G-d is our priority.

This idea that we may only “approach” G-d, never comprehending His essence, and that such an approach is based only on intelligence and perfection (applied intelligence) and no other consideration, is displayed by the command G-d gave the Jews not to ascend Mount Sinai. Exodus 19:12: “Set boundaries around the mountain saying, “Be ye careful, ascending the mountain or touching its edges, anyone touching the mountain will be certainly killed.” Why such a severe punishment? Why would people wish to ascend? The answer is obvious: the Jews might be led to feel that geographical proximity exists in connection with G-d. But this is heresy, as this is predicated on the fallacy that G-d has location, that He is physical in some way. (Based on this idea, I personally feel those who insert “kapituls” or letters into the Western Wall for G-d's response, are failing to understand G-d.) The fact that G-d warned the Jews from touching Mount Sinai displays the human proclivity towards doing so. Again, we are made aware of the idea that an approach to G-d can only be through our advance in intelligence, and in applying this intelligence to life, thereby perfecting ourselves. For knowledge, which does not eventuate in subsequent employment, surely falls short of a complete conviction in that knowledge. True conviction is the goal we must strive for in our studies. And the barometer of complete conviction in our ideas - is action.

As a final question, why were both cloud and darkness incorporated into revelation at Sinai? Couldn't either one teach the lesson? And how does the meteorological phenomena work with the levels of human ascent on the mountain, that both categories were required? Write in with your ideas. □



G-d is One

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: May I ask a hypothetical question? I have wondered this for many years: That which we say in Shema – “Hashem Echad”, that “G-d is ONE” - is central to Judaism. But I wonder why that has to be so? The meaning of ONE, I understand to mean as the absolute source of everything. For the source to be THE absolute source, it must be ONE in the most basic meaning on the number one.

I posed the following question to my brother in a discussion: What would be wrong if we were to think that the source for our existence in our universe was our Creator, but maybe there are other creators that created and control other universes.

I do not, G-d forbid, believe this question and am not trying to imply any truth to this question that I am posing, but I ask so that I may develop a better understanding.

My brother once explained to me that if we were to consider such a belief, then we would have to delve to now find the source of those two, three or how ever many "creators" there were "up there." Each would be subservient to that source - and that source would be the ultimate source - the ONE. We Jews pray to the ultimate source and that source is the ultimate creator.

I hope I made myself clear. I would appreciate learning from your response. Thank you.

Mesora: The concept of plural gods, by definition, means that each cannot be G-d. By definition, G-d is omnipotent, completely powerful. The true concept of G-d means that He created all that is. He has no needs, as “needs” is a creation, and a deficiency. He needs nothing, and in your example, other gods were responsible for other universes. But if G-d has complete power, there is no need for other “gods” to assist Him in His creation. Additionally, the concept of two gods is contradictory, as anything that possesses number, or rather, division, must be physical. Since G-d created all physical matter, He cannot be physical. That would like saying, He and His creation are the same thing. This is a logical impossibility.

First and foremost in our minds, must be the correct concept of G-d: the sole source of the universe. For this reason, we begin each day's prayers with “Baruch Sh'Amar v'haya Olam”, “Blessed be the One who spoke, and the world came into existence. We must remind ourselves, at the very commencement of our day in the morning

prayers' first prayer, of an accurate idea of G-d. Otherwise, we pray to a fantasy, and not a reality, and fantasies cannot hear us. Prayer would be futile, as would be our entire lives, unless we correct such harmful notions.

The true idea that G-d is the sole Creator is central to Judaism, because Judaism is synonymous with “truth”. I will conclude with a quote from Maimonides:

Guide for the Perplexed, Book III, Chap. XLV

“...It is known that the heathen in those days built temples to stars, and set up in those temples the image which they agreed upon to worship; because it was in some relation to a certain star or to a portion of one of the spheres. We were, therefore, commanded to build a temple to the name of God, and to place therein the ark with two tables of stone, on which there were written the commandments "I am the Lord," etc., and "Thou shalt have no other God before me," etc. 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 dear that the belief in the existence of angels precedes the belief in prophecy, and the latter precedes the belief in the Law. The Sabean, in their ignorance of the existence of God, believed that the spheres with their stars were beings without beginning and without end, that the images and certain trees, the Asherot, derived certain powers from the spheres, that they inspired the prophets, spoke to them in visions, and told them what was good and what bad. I have explained their theory when speaking of the prophets of the Ashera. But when the wise men discovered and proved that there was a Being, neither itself corporeal nor residing as a force in a corporeal body, viz., the true, one God, and that there existed besides other purely incorporeal beings which God endowed with His goodness and His light, namely, the angels, and that these beings are not included in the sphere and its stars, it became evident that it was these angels and not the images or Asherot that charged the prophets. From the preceding remarks it is clear that 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.” □

Please visit our advertiser

One Focus: Your Message

Video: Concept to Completion

DMJ Productions & Digital Media - a full service production & editorial boutique servicing the non-profit community for over a decade. With organizations, Special Education Institutions, Day-schools, Yeshivas, and medical facilities as clients, DMJ produces award-winning videos with emotional impact that produce results. In-house digital editing and graphic workstations insures creative, cost effective on-time work, from treatment to final delivery of your message.

DMJ Productions & Digital Media

450 Park Ave. South, 3rd Floor

New York, N.Y. 10016

T: 212.779.4944 F: 212.779.4999

Email: jasse@dmjdigital.com

www.dmjdigital.com



The Gift of ROSH CHODESH

RIVKA OLENICK

“They are joyous and glad to perform the will of their Creator – the Worker of Truth Whose work is truth.” From the blessing of the New Moon.

Chazal tell us that because the Jewish women refused to give their jewelry to participate in the creation and the worship of the Golden Calf (Gemara Yoma 66b), they were rewarded with the gift to refrain from all work on Rosh Chodesh. The women were given the task of publicizing the day. It is not that work is absolutely prohibited, because men may work rather it is in publicizing the day, and focus our attention to the special mitzvos belonging to Rosh Chodesh; special prayer, an additional Torah reading and the sacrifice brought on that day. Although we don't bring sacrifices we recite prayers and read an additional Torah portion. Today women still refrain from their work. The Code of Jewish Law calls this “a beautiful custom to be preserved.” We don't mark off the day as “just another day.” To the contrary, on the Sabbath preceding Rosh Chodesh the blessing of the new month is said. At that time we are already preparing ourselves in anticipation of the new month. So even the preparation for Rosh Chodesh has special significance. Women refrain from their work reminds us that this unique day is designated for our praise of the Creator, as we recognize Him as the Master of the Universe. We have this recognition of God's handiwork that the moon symbolizes.

The moon is an incredible

body that revolves around the earth. It is part of a complicated universe that didn't just happen! The moon's light comes from the sun's reflection. The moon illuminates the sky and we reflect on it. By gazing at the moon we recognize how profound His works are. We see that we too are part of His created world, His created beings. We can't ignore the moon, it captures our attention and we are in awe of it. We might stare at it with wonder and think: What is the moon's purpose in relation to me?

Every month we are given the opportunity to look at the full moon and once again be reminded of all His works. He gave us every possible way individually and through each other to “Serve Him with gladness and exultation,” as it says in Psalms 100:2. It is easy to forget this idea as we get so caught up in our “own world.” Each month we can renew ourselves with the realization that our purpose in this world is to align ourselves with the will of the Creator. We were created only for this purpose and we recognize that truth comes only through the knowledge that God gave us access to. Our Torah ideas that were lived out by our Patriarchs and Matriarchs were models of truth. Through their deeds and trials we learn about life that gives us strength to continue individually and as a nation.

I would like to say that when a person gazes intently at the moon's full reflection one's mind is illuminated, lit up. This

illumination reminds us that we have the ability to use our real free will that brings us closer to God and further away from sin. We see the moon as analogues to ourself, and as the moon goes through stages of such smallness to such greatness, so can we. We can renew ourselves and work to remove our flaws, which is always within our capability. According to the Rambam: “For in every situation a person has the choice of changing from good to bad, and from bad to good. The choice is in his hands.” (From Chapter 8 of the Rambam's Eight Chapters/Shemonah Perakim). The mitzvah of Kiddush HaChodesh, blessing of the new month allows each of us the opportunity to reflect with hope and motivation. As we work to change and renew ourselves we also reflect on the belief that God will bring about the Ultimate Redemption. The Messiah will help restore us as the Jewish people with the rebuilding of the Temple. Once again we will regain our leadership as “the light” unto the other nations. With God's help Klal Yisrael will be whole again and shine brilliantly in the world like the moon shines brilliantly in the sky.

“To the moon He said that it should renew itself as a crown of splendor for those borne (by Him) from the womb, those who are destined to renew themselves like it, and to glorify their Molder for the name of His glorious Kingdom. Blessed are You, Hashem Who renews the months.” □