



In this issue, we study how God responds to man's errors, and his sins, be he king or idolater. We also discuss how Jewish leaders should lead - not follow - their flock.

Dedicated to my teachers -Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

ESTD 1997

JewishTimes

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

Volume IV, No. 27...April 8, 2005

WWW.MESORA.ORG/JEWISHTIMES

Download and Print Free

IN THIS ISSUE:

PARSHA: TAZRIA	1,6,7
KING DAVID'S TEMPLE	1-4
TORAH LEADERSHIP	5
YOSEF'S COLUMN: BLESSINGS	7
GOD'S RESPONSE TO IDOLATRY	8
A SHADCHAN'S COMMENTARY	9
MAIMONIDES: ADAM'S SIN	10
ADAM'S SIN & PUNISHMENT II	11

FREE AT MESORA:

SEE THIS AND OTHER FEATURES AT OUR SITE

Subscribe Free

Receive the JewishTimes free.
Subscribe by sending any email to:
subscribe@mesora.org

Weekly Parsha

Tazria

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"If a person has upon his skin a white blotch, discoloration or spot and it is suspected of being a mark of the tzara'at affliction upon his skin, he shall be brought to Ahron the Kohen or one of his children the Kohanim." (VaYikra 13:2)

This pasuk introduces the Torah's discussion of tzara'at. Tzara'at is an

(continued on page 6)

King David

WHY THE TEMPLE COULD NOT BE BUILT BY

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Each week I am invited to my dear friends for Shabbos dinner. I enjoy their company and our conversations. My close friend of 26 years, Tzvi, always has a profound question dealing with fundamental areas - a great way to start Shabbos.

(continued on next page)



Prophets



*Shrines and statues -
monuments to man - are
contrary to the Torah's view
that we focus on God alone.*

Ari makes me laugh, with his laugh, and always remembers last week's discussion. His 7 year old imaginative sister always greets me, taking large bites out of my arm, pretending I am her dessert. Eli is simply a joy to be around, passionate and excited about everything, and growing in his thinking each week. He let's me hug him for exactly 60 seconds...then he has to get back to his important business...I mean play. Tzvi's wife creates the most luscious meals with a little help from the help, and spurs on more questions from her kids on the Parsha. Yitzy simply wants to read more issues of the JewishTimes, with increased pages. (I'll gladly include your articles Yitzy!)

This past Shabbos, we made kiddush, sat down to eat, when Yosef asked an interesting question: "Why couldn't King David build the Temple?" His question is strengthened by the fact that Nathan the Prophet supported the King's wish to do so. But God said that David would not build the Temple, rather, his son Solomon will. Why couldn't David build it? Was this a penalty? Talmud Shabbos 56a says, "Whoever says King David sinned is in error." So if David did not sin, why could he not build the Temple? How is his son King Solomon better qualified for this task? Or, is it not that Solomon was better qualified, but there is another reason?

Rav Tzvi and I concurred: David was famous for his military victories, and such fame threatens God's name: David's victorious battles might overshadow the Temple's true distinction - God's sanctuary. This being so, David could not build the Temple, but not due to any sin. Rav Tzvi added why David was unfit whereas Solomon was fit: David was more associated with the military, an involvement that is celebrated with "monuments", i.e., the Temple in this case might serve to celebrate David's military history. And since the purpose of Temple is to focus on God, if one who builds this Temple is too popular, he dilutes the exclusive identity of the Temple being dedicated to God. In contrast, Solomon was not a war hero, so the Temple being built by him was not at risk to suffer from becoming a monument to man's wars. Therefore, Solomon built the Temple, and David could not.

However, this explanation is not found in the very verses where God refuses David as the builder of the Temple. I feel the ideas that Tzvi and I agreed on have merit, however, this does not mean there isn't a more primary reason for God's refusal of David's Temple plans. Let us review the verses:

Samuel II, 7:1-17

[1] And it was as the king dwelled in his

house, and God gave him respite from all around, from all of his enemies. [2] And the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See how I dwell and a house of cedar and the ark of God dwells inside of curtains." [3] And Nathan said to the king, "All that is in your heart do, for God is with you."

[4] And it was on that night, and it was that the word of God was to Nathan saying: [5] "Go and say to David saying, 'So says God; Will you indeed build me a house that I will dwell? [6] For I have not dwelled in a house since the day I took the Children of Israel up from Egypt, and until this day, and I traveled in a tent and a Tabernacle. [7] In all that I traveled, in all the Children of Israel, was the matter ever spoken by Me to even one of the tribes of Israel, of whom I commanded (judges) to herd My people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?'

[8] And now, so shall you say to my servant David, 'So says the Lord of Hosts, I have take you from the shepherds' huts, from following after sheep, to become a ruler over my people Israel. [9] And I was with you with all that you went and I cut off all your enemies from before you and I made for you a great name like the name of the great ones that are in the land. [10] And I shall yet establish a place for My people, for Israel, I shall plant it there and it shall dwell in its place so that it shall be disturbed no more; crooked people shall no longer afflict it as in earlier times. [11] And also from the day that I appointed judges over My people Israel, and I shall give you respite from all your enemies; and God informs you that God will make for you a house. [12] When your days will be complete and you will lie with your fathers and I will establish your seed after you that come from your loins and I shall make his kingdom firm. [13] He shall build a house to My name and I will establish his seat of kingdom eternally. [14] I will be to him a father, and he will be to Me a son so when he sins I will chastise him with the rod of men and with afflictions of human beings. [15] But my kindness will not be removed from him as I removed it from Saul, whom I removed before you. [16] Your dynasty and your kingdom will remain steadfast before for all time; your throne will remain firm forever." [17] In accordance with these words and in accord with this vision, so spoke Nathan to David.

(continued on next page)

(continued from previous page)

Prophets



*Of all people, King David,
who composed Psalms, was
the first to think of how to
beautify the Ark's dwelling.*

*But was his thinking in line
with God's?*

The first thing that strikes me is God's use of a rhetorical question, "Will you indeed build me a house that I will dwell? And again in the next verse, "was the matter ever spoken by Me...why have you not built Me a house of cedar?" This is to say that God denounces David's sentiment. God says that He never requested a house of cedar to replace the Tabernacle, making David's sentiment to build a house to God, somehow a wrong idea. When God uses a rhetorical question, He means to indicate that He never requested this Temple, i.e., it is clearly man's wish and not Mine. However, God says David's son Solomon will build that house. So which is it, wrong or right to build a house? One may simply answer that it was David who could not build the house – the Temple – but Solomon could. So the idea of Temple per se is acceptable, but it is with the 'builder' that God takes issue. We must understand why.

But God goes on in verses 8 and 9, describing how He made David king, and how He made his name great like those famous in the land. Why does God mention this here? What does God's elevation of David have to do with His disagreement that David build a Temple? We also must understand why David must die, and only then his son will build a Temple. Additionally, what purpose is there in the relationship God describes that He will be a "father" to Solomon, and Solomon will be as

His "son". Was this relationship absent with regards to David? If so, why?

God clearly states that He never requested a house. Simultaneously, He says Solomon will build it. Therefore, the house, or Temple, is not an evil...but simply something God "never requested." Therefore, we cannot understand God to be rebuking David, that Temple is an evil. What then is the rebuke, and I do not mean rebuke in the sense that David sinned, as the Talmud states, David did not sin. I mean rebuke, in the sense that David's proposed building cannot take place for good reason, but not that the reason implies sin. So what is this reason that David cannot build the Temple, but Solomon can? Where do we look for the answer? We look right here...God continued with His response to David through Nathan, describing how He made David a king, and made his name great. Think for a moment...what may this have to do with David building the Temple?

The Temple's Purpose

There is a most primary question, which must be asked before answering our other questions: What is the purpose of the Temple? What did David say? He was bothered that God's ark was housed in simple curtains while he dwelled in a strong, cedar wood home. What was his sentiment? His words are, "See how I dwell and a house of cedar and the ark of God dwells inside of curtains." David equates his dwelling with God's dwelling. Here is another clue.

David meant to say that greater honor was due to God, over himself. He wished to give God's ark greater honor than the simple curtain in which is currently dwelled. But for some reason, God did not approve, at least not that 'David' build this Temple. God says, "Will you indeed build me a house that I will dwell? For I have not dwelled in a house since the day I took the Children of Israel up from Egypt..." God's response focuses on the concept of "dwelling". With His rhetorical words, "Will you indeed build me a house that I will dwell?" I believe God is indicating that David's offer exemplified two errors.

The first error (not sin) is David's attempt to beautify the ark's dwelling. God said, "Was the matter ever spoken by Me to even one of the tribes of Israel...why have you not built Me a house of cedar?" Meaning, God never asked for something, so man should not attempt any enhancement. God goes on, reminding David of the real truth, "God does good for man" as he cites how He made David so great. Now, just as God bestowed good on David making him so great, this Temple too is "for man", not for God. This is precisely why God reminds David of all the good He bestowed on David; to call to

(continued on next page)

Prophets

David's mind the real relationship is that God benefits man, and not the reverse.

While in other areas, the Torah's injunction "Zek Aylee v'Anvayhu" ("This is my God and I will adorn Him") allows man to beautify the commands, God's message here is that one who attempts "enhancement" in relation to Temple alone, is overstepping the line: he misinterprets Temple. Temple is the one area in Torah where God must initiate change. Perhaps the reason being, that regarding Temple, man may err, feeling he is "offering to God" somehow. Sacrifice, incense and the like are subject to misinterpretation of this kind. However, the opposite is true: Temple is God's gift to man, not man's glorification of God. When we glorify God in Temple, it is for our own good that we concentrate on the proper ideals, and we offer God absolutely nothing. However, David's sentiment was that he should not "dwell" in beautiful cedar wood, while the ark dwells in curtains. He felt that he would be improving the idea of Tabernacle with a Temple, when Temple is in fact for man, and not for God. God reiterates this theme by reminding David that He made David who he is today. It is God who benefited David in the past making him great, and it is God who benefits man in Temple. Perhaps David erred in this matter. We also note that at the very beginning David says to Nathan, "See how I dwell and a house of cedar and the ark of God dwells inside of curtains." It appears David is unsure about building a Temple, and seeks Nathan's counsel. This may teach that David was not certain of his idea at the very outset.

Allowing Error to Surface

Perhaps we may go one step further and suggest that this was the precise sentiment God desired to draw out from David into the open, for David to recognize, and come to terms with. Surely Temple is a good, provided God initiates its activities and enhancements, but God refrained from requesting it of man, until after David had this opportunity to express his thought, and God could respond. Now, that David was corrected, Temple may be built, and by David's son. Why his son? Perhaps, since David heard the correct idea that Temple should exist, he would impart this to his son who could build it with the proper ideas. And, there was no longer any need to delay its building.

"Structure for God": An Oxymoron

But there is a more profound error and lesson here. Improving the Tabernacle into a Temple acceptable to God does not occur structurally alone. Rather, the Temple's very definition as a 'good' depends on it being initiated by God,

and not man. What is lacking in Temple when man initiates it, or what is added to Temple when God requests it of man?

It is impossible that man should suggest a structure, without casting the frailties of humans onto that structure. Meaning, once David suggested making a Temple from a more 'durable' cedar and not curtains, for God's "dwelling", he was using "human terms" for a building that is exclusively identified with God. This may very well explain why the original Tabernacle had no ceiling, as it is not a "dwelling", but a location on which to focus on God. This being the case, such a structure would be marred, had it any semblance of a shelter, which a roof indicates by its very definition. God needs no shelter, He needs no roof, and a structure man envisions, even dedicated to God is inherently flawed. Thus, the original Tabernacle could not possibly have a roof; only curtains covered it. Now, David suggests creating a more permanent "building" of cedar?! This violated the very concept of the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle was to remind man of ideas about God. Had the Tabernacle a roof, it would convey an incorrect and heretical idea, that God shares the frail, human need for protection from the elements. Thus, Tabernacle can have no roof. Additionally, if man initiates the idea to create a structure to God, this is equal to suggesting a roof be placed on the Tabernacle. For what difference is there, if I place a roof on the Tabernacle, or create a new structure to God with a roof, now replacing the Tabernacle? There is no difference. Therefore, God refused David's offer to create the Temple. In such a Temple, there would be no way to remove the identity that man conceived it. Thereby, it would eternally reflect man's concept of a "shelter", not true ideas.

It is contrary to the true ideas of God that a building is made to Him, as "building" carries with it the notion that it is for man's purposes; a building is a human structure. However, if God initiates such a structure, as he did with the Tabernacle, then it is no longer "man's" idea of building. In that case, it may look like a shelter, but it is more akin to a museum, which contains prized objects, and does not function to provide a haven for inner dwellers. And when God initiates such a structure, man is then building the structure due to a command, and not any other source in him, traceable to the human frailty requiring shelters. Therefore, Solomon was able to build the Temple, as it was now God's wish, and not David's.

I thank Yosef for his question, as it opened new doors for me, and others. I look forward to your questions this week Yosef, and to yours too Ari.

A good Shabbos to everyone. ■

When the Flock Leads the Shepherd



RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

What is the role of a Jewish educator or a Jewish leader? What is the obligation of such an individual? Is Jewish education thriving or being harmed, when the shepherd is lead by the flock?

A Jewish leader, who seeks approval from his diverse population, and desires not to ruffle their feathers, no longer bases his reality on God's truth. He is no longer leading, nor is he fit to lead. Public approval becomes his master, whereas God's truth must guide our every act and thought.

This need for approval must be overcome by every Jewish leader, and is harmful in a large way: Aaron also did what the people wanted, and created a Golden Calf. King Saul lost his throne due to this very error. And that brief time where he allowed Agag the Amalekite to live enabled Haman to issue forth. But the direct crime in seeking not to be "inappropriate for one's diverse population" is the implicit commitment to something other than God's word.

Rabbi Reuven Mann once cited the Talmud that teaches the following: a leader who is liked by his flock is not a good leader. This teaches that this leader is not rebuking his flock to improve, which naturally breeds aggression towards that leader. But if his flock loves him, it means that he imposes no demands that they change. He is not leading.

A Jewish leader must be one who is ready for disapproval. He should be wise enough to know that man is moved greatly by his emotions, and with more members in his flock; he will be opposed by more and more diverse views. But the true, Jewish leader has one mission: to educate his members on God's Torah and its ideals. Approval or popularity is not on his radar, and he is accepting of opposition. He is not disturbed by unfavorable polls. He is even ready to lose his

position, because he is devoted to conveying truth. This is what makes a true Jewish leader: one who cares about the truth, who won't sell out God, and will not compromise Torah values for any other consideration. If he is honest, prioritizing the teaching of God's words over all else, God has many messengers to provide for his needs. He need not worry about retaining his job through compromising truth.

Jews wishing to be leaders, must not seek popularity, conforming their message to what the public wants to hear, but just the opposite: they must carefully but diligently mold their people into adherents of the Torah's accurate and sometimes difficult demands, for their very good, regardless of their encountered friction. "Leading," means to 'change' the follower.

It is said that a wicked man is the one who tries to conform reality to his wishes, while a righteous man does the converse; conforming himself to reality. The righteous man observes how God designed his world, and His Torah; he acquiesces to God's will, and changes his desires and actions to meet God's. Our great prophets risked much by delivering their messages of truth. Abraham was imprisoned for teaching truth, and even then, he did not cease from his preaching. Abraham continued his mission, as he was convinced (and was proven correct) that the truth is incomparable and compelling. He felt that just as he was enamored by the truth over all else, so too others could be.

This should be the view of Jewish leaders today. A true Jewish leader must be more impressed by the beauty of, and enjoyment in Torah study and practice, to the degree that he desires this for others. This should be what initially moves a Jewish leader to lead: his desire that others witness

the marvels of Torah wisdom. Therefore, he will never dilute the Torah's teachings for any consideration. And if this is the case, then, may this Jewish leader be successful in transferring his love of Torah to others. If he honestly loves his Torah study over all else, he will be enabled to illuminate the minds and souls of many other Jews. He will not compromise his message, lest he do a grave injustice to the purity and precision of Torah ideas and truths, and reduce the potential attraction it may have on others. This would be the greatest sin: to present something as Torah, when it is not. And when such a leader does portray the precision and clarity of Torah fundamentals, he will surely enlighten and give renewed life to those he touches.

This is the most salient lesson: do not seek instant applause, but count on defensive rebuttals...but know how to address them. Be patient and precise in your own learning, so your presented ideas are refined, succinct, clear, and penetrating. In time, those seeking the truth will appreciate it, but only if you offer it. For that is exactly how God designed each and every one of us – to be drawn towards truths, and to repel imposter ideas.

If you truly wish to lead Jews, then you must risk all other considerations, except the singular desire to imbue others with pure Torah ideals, leading them to a love of God. Only then will you succeed. If you fear rebuking your flock, you deserve the rebuke; for you sin by withholding knowledge essential to their perfection.

If your flock leads you, you are not a Jewish leader. The truth is, the flock that feels they can lead their rabbi, will not respect him for too long, and that rabbi will be seeking a new pulpit sooner than later. ■

Weekly Parsha

affliction often translated as leprosy. In appearance there may be similarities between tzara'at and leprosy. However, these two afflictions are very different. Leprosy is caused by biological factors. Tzara'at is caused by spiritual factors. It is a punishment, from Hashem, for misconduct. A person suffering from tzara'at cannot be cured through medical treatment. Instead a process of seclusion, proscribed by the Torah, is required. This process is supervised by the Kohen. During the period of seclusion, the afflicted individual is required to examine his or her behavior. Only through repentance can the individual be cured from the tzara'at. The Kohen periodically examines the afflicted person and determines the status of the affliction. Upon the pronouncement of the Kohen, the afflicted individual is regarded as cured. At this point, the individual can begin a process of reentering the community.

Our Sages discuss at length the spiritual shortcomings that cause tzara'at. One prominent cause is tale-bearing and defamation of others. The phenomenon of tzara'at reinforces the sinfulness of such behaviors. Sefer HaChinuch, in his discussion of tzara'at, does not dwell upon the specific sins that cause the affliction. Instead, he explains a different lesson to be derived from these laws.

Our behaviors affect the condition of our soul. Righteous behavior brings us closer to our Creator. His influence over our lives increases as we improve our character and behaviors. Conversely, evil actions have a degenerative effect upon our souls. Such behaviors create a barrier between the individual and Hashem. This barrier reduces the providential influence in our lives or result in punishment.

The results of righteousness or iniquity are real. However, they are not concrete or detectable by the senses. This allows us to falsely believe that our moral or religious behaviors do not really make a difference. Tzara'at helps counter this impression. Through tzara'at iniquity results in a physical effect. Divine reward and punishment become readily visible.

This lesson is reinforced in a second way. Tzara'at can only be treated through repentance. Spiritual improvement is the cure. Again, this teaches us that our moral and religious behaviors determine the nature of our relationship to Hashem. The person suffering from tzara'at learns an essential lesson. These behaviors have a real effect.

“And the Kohen shall see. And the tzara'at has covered all of his skin, then he shall declare the afflicted person clean. As long as he has turned completely white, he is clean.” (VaYikra 13:13)

A person whose skin is generally healthy but a small portion is afflicted with tzara'at is unclean. However, a person completely covered by the

affliction is considered clean. This seems somewhat odd. A small blotch of tzara'at is adequate to render a generally, healthy person unclean. Yet, a person covered with the affliction from head to toe is clean!

This paradox can be explained through an analysis of the definition of tzara'at. Tzara'at is an affliction of the skin. It must exist in contrast to healthy skin. This contrast is essential to the definition of tzara'at. Without the contrast, tzara'at does not exist. Therefore, a person completely covered with the affliction is not deemed unclean. There is no contrast. The criteria for tzara'at have not been met.

The issues can also be viewed at a deeper level. Let us begin by considering another issue. A person afflicted with the discoloration of tzara'at is immediately brought to the Kohen. After examination, the Kohen must determine the status of the individual. This decision has various ramifications that are discussed in the parasha. It is sufficient to note that advanced tzara'at is far more serious than the preliminary form of the affliction.

Tzara'at of the skin is evaluated on the basis of three symptoms. Any one of these symptoms indicates that the tzara'at is advanced. One of the symptoms is a discoloration of the hair in the affected area. This discoloration is a change from the natural color to white. The presence of white hair is an indication of advanced tzara'at.

Imagine a person finds a white blotch upon the skin. The person sees that white hair is present. May the person remove the white hair before consulting the Kohen? This is prohibited.[1] Nonetheless, if the law is violated and the hair is removed, the intervention is effective. The Kohen must evaluate the person as he or she appears.[2] At the time the person appears before the Kohen, the white hair is not present.

This might seem a little odd. The Torah is creating a tremendous temptation. The metzora has the opportunity to remove the hair before appearing before the Kohen. The intervention is effective. Yet, the metzora is expected to refrain from taking this step!

In order to respond to these issues, we need to understand the function of this affliction. Tzara'at is a Divine punishment. It is attributed to lashon hara – tale bearing and gossip.[3] The affliction is a warning designed to encourage repentance. The tzara'at cannot be treated medically. Only spiritual improvement cures the disease.

The affliction cannot be relieved until the person is declared unclean and begins the process of repentance and spiritual cleansing. This is adequate motivation to prevent a person from removing the signs of tzara'at. Little will be gained through the intervention. Much will be lost. True, the intervention will influence the declaration of the Kohen. However, the affliction will continue unabated. The person can only begin the process of

purification after the declaration of the Kohen. In other words, one must first accept the status of being unclean. Then one may begin the process of purification.

This provides a possible deeper understanding of the law governing the person completely covered with the affliction. The person is not declared unclean. This is not a leniency. Until the person is declared unclean, the process of purification cannot begin. The affliction will continue. Only after a healthy portion of skin appears, can the person be identified as a metzora. With this declaration, the process of repentance and purification can begin.

“All the days that he is afflicted with the disease he shall be unclean. He is unclean. He shall dwell alone. Outside of the camp shall be his dwelling.” (VaYikra 13:46)

A person declared to be a metzora is segregated from the community. Rashi explains the reason for this law. Tzara'at is a Divine punishment for lashon hara. These activities create division and strife. The segregation of the metzora is a fitting punishment. He has caused division within the community. It is appropriate that his punishment should include exclusion from the community.[4]

Daat Zekaynim offers another explanation for this law. The affliction of tzara'at is a Divine punishment. However, the disease is a physical ailment and contagious. The metzora is quarantined in order to prevent the spread of the disease.[5]

The explanation of Daat Zekaynim presents an interesting problem. The disease of tzara'at can be communicated through contact with the metzora. Yet, halacha treats the metzora as guilty of a crime. This treatment implies that the ailment was not contracted by natural means! How can this assertion be made? The possibility of natural transmission does exist!

Maimonides explains that the laws of the Torah are designed to encourage physical, as well as spiritual well-being. In discussing the laws regulating our eating, he elaborates on this theme. He explains that the foods prohibited by the Torah are generally unhealthy.[6] It must be noted that Maimonides is not asserting that the reason for these laws is simply to ensure good health. He explains that the Torah regulates our behavior in order to encourage temperance and moderation.[7] However, these prohibitions, which encourage temperance, are not arbitrary. They offer the secondary benefit of encouraging good health.

Modern medical science may differ with some of Maimonides' theories regarding proper diet. Yet, his basic assumption is reasonable. The Torah is a guide for the proper life. It is appropriate to assume that the various laws encourage physical well-being.

Rabbaynu Yitzchak Karo answers our question based upon Maimonides' thesis. He explains that it is possible for tzara'at to be transmitted naturally. However, confronted with an individual suffering

(continued on next page)

Weekly Parsha

from the disease, we do not assume that a natural transmission took place. We assume that the ailment represents a Divine punishment. What is the basis for this assumption? The Torah regulates our consumption and hygiene. Through these regulations, the physical causes for the disease are controlled. Therefore, halacha assumes that the contraction of the disease is not a result of natural transmission.[8]

Rabbaynu Yitzchak Karo explains another mystery regarding tzara'at based upon this same approach. The Torah outlines various forms of tzara'at. If tzara'at is a Divine punishment, why are all of these forms needed? He explains that although the disease is a spiritual punishment, it is a natural phenomenon. In other words, the Almighty causes the person to contract a natural ailment. A physical ailment will take slightly different forms in various people. A single disease has different symptoms in different people. Therefore, tzara'at will appear in varying forms.[9] ■

[1] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Tumat Tzara'at 10:1.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Tumat Tzara'at, 10:2.

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Tumat Tzara'at, 16:10.

[4] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer VaYikra 13:46.

[5] Daat Zekaynim Commentary on Sefer VaYikra 13:46

[6] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Moreh Nevuchim, volume 3, chapter 48.

[7] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Commentary on the Mishne, Introduction to Avot, chapter 5.

[8] Rabbaynu Yitzchak Karo, Toldot Yitzchak, Commentary on Sefer VaYikra 12:2-5.

[9] Rabbaynu Yitzchak Karo, Toldot Yitzchak, Commentary on Sefer VaYikra, 13:9-13.

Students

Yosef's Column

YOSEF ROTH



THE Shehechionu

BLESSING

I heard this d'var Torah from my dad who heard it from Rabbi Zucker.

It would seem that according to the Rambam, on Chanukah, if you didn't make a Shehechionu on the first night on the candles, you don't make Shehechionu the second night. But on Purim if you didn't make Shehechionu the first night on the Megilah, you can make it the next day? What is the difference between the days?

We say Shehechionu on the persumay nisa, or publicizing the miracle. The way to publicize the miracle on Purim was instituted differently by Chazal than the publicizing the miracle on Chanukah. The way to publicize the miracle on Purim is reading the Megilah. And reading the Megilah is publicizing the miracle per se. The lighting of the candles on Chanukah is not a publicizing of the miracle per se. There are a number of reasons why you would light candles at night. The real publicizing of the miracle is the day of the twenty fifth of Kislev. The Gemarah says that on the twenty-fifth of Kislev there are eight days of Chanukah. So we see that the first day of Chanukah is the main day therefore the publicizing of the miracle is tied to that day. Therefore if you forget to make a Shehechionu on the first day of Chanukah you cannot say it on the second day. You have lost the day of the 25th. You cannot get that back. But on Purim, since the publicizing of the miracle is the reading of the Megilah, if you didn't say Shehechionu the first night, you can make it the next day. You can still fulfill the reading and hence the mitzvah of publicizing the miracle.

How come Chazal instituted two types of publications? There are two ways the Jews can be saved, by repenting or by the special relationship between the Jews and God. So on Purim we were saved by repentance but by, Chanukah we were saved by the special relationship with us and God.

On Purim since we were saved by repenting, Chazal instituted that we commemorate with an action of reading the Megilah. On Chanukah no repenting took place, so we commemorate with the day. ■

This week 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

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



Careful study of God's words bear the fruit of ripe ideas in all areas. Isaiah is no exception when he describes God's response to idolaters.

How God Responds to Idolaters

Reader: Please define in Hebrew, Isaiah 40:22. It tells us that the Creator is the one, "who sits on the circumference of the Earth, with its inhabitants like grasshoppers, who spreads the heavens like a thin curtain, and stretches them like a tent to dwell in." Can you explain the Hebrew verse in English for me? Sincerely, Linette

Mesora: This verse comes on the heels of the prophet Isaiah exposing the foolishness of those who create idols. They "overlay gold and silver" and they "seek wood that won't rot." Meaning, they use wisdom to design enduring statues shielded from the elements; metals that don't rust, and woods that don't rot. But they don't apply wisdom to the overall picture. These fools are then reminded by Isaiah of a truth that they should have "heard of and known". Meaning, they fabricate idols assuming they are of help. Instead, they should have used their minds to recognize the overabundance of evidence that God exists. Thus, the prophet says (40:21), "Do you not realize, have you not heard? Has it not been told to you from the beginning? Have you not contemplated the foundations of the Earth?" The rebuke is that they use their minds on seeking out their fantasies, but they are blind to apparent truths! What is more apparent is overlooked, as they favor their internal world of fantasy and build idols with imagined powers. Let us understand each part of the prophet's rebuke:

[40:21] **"Do you not realize, have you not heard?"** The Rabbis teach that man should have realized that God exists. But if he didn't, he should have "heard" about it by reading books.

"Has it not been told to you from the beginning?" If these first two avenues of knowledge have not taught him anything, then he should have heard it from others, through normal transmission.

"Have you not contemplated the foundations of the Earth?" Finally, one is accused for not using his own understanding.

Isaiah continues: God is the one "who sits on the circumference of the Earth, with its inhabitants like grasshoppers, who spreads the heavens like a thin curtain, and stretches them like a tent to dwell in."

[40:22] "Who sits on the circumference of the Earth..."

He first teaches that God created the Earth. This is the primary mistake of these idolaters: they don't even think that the universe requires an explanation. They are so submerged in their miniscule, personal worlds; that they cannot look past the self and 'hear' the universe almost scream out to them: "Who created me?"

"...with its inhabitants like grasshoppers..."

Isaiah then teaches that man is so small, and he mentions this because these idolaters' second problem is their myopic view centered on themselves to the exclusion of all else. They cannot see past themselves and their insecurities. But in truth, man is but a grasshopper, a small insect in comparison to the universe. If only man would recognize his small place, he would be attracted to the larger picture, and eventuate at knowledge of God. He would leave off being self-absorbed, and even find great delight pondering all else outside of himself.

"...who spreads the heavens like a thin curtain..." Next, Isaiah teaches that God's capabilities are most impressive; He created the heavens. This is intended to emphasize to these fools that God's power is unmatched and amazingly great: He created the heavens! This is intended to attack the idolaters' fantasy that small wooden idols have power. Perhaps the stark contrast between their frail, assembled gods, to God's lofty heavens will strike a chord.

"...and stretches them like a tent to dwell in."

Finally, Isaiah teaches that God created the heavens for man's own good. This is intended to counter the idolatrous notion that idols care for man and protect him, while it is just the opposite: idols are powerless, and it is in fact God that created a universe for man to dwell.

Idolatry and idols have at its center the alluring illusion that there is some good and protection gained by idol worship. This is why people serve idols; they imagine their gods will grant them some good, security, wealth, health and the like. "If I worship this idol, it will protect me." Meaning, idolaters believe there to be a reciprocal, and mutually beneficial relationship. Idolaters feel they bestow some benefit on the idol or their gods, and therefore they will be rewarded. But in truth, the true God gains nothing from man and in fact, created the heavens "as a tent" for man. Meaning it is the exact opposite: God does good for "us", whereas we can do nothing for Him.

This last idea is alien to the idolater. He feels he gives something to the gods by his worship. Some Jews today feel that they do some good for God when they keep Judaism! How absurd, that we can benefit He that has no needs! In fact, our sacrifices are salted, dry matza and no honey are brought with it, demonstrating our conviction that God does not "consume" sacrifices, nor can we benefit God with them. We bring nothing edible before God, lest we fuel the heresy that God benefits from our actions. We sacrifice, but only to inculcate ideas into ourselves – this and all practices cannot benefit God.

Isaiah again teaches that each of God's divinely inspired verses contains deep ideas, and only through patient study may we be fortunate enough to see them. The prophet exposes absolute truths, communicated to him by God. When we see such profound wisdom, we appreciate the gift of the Torah even more. ■

What is Going On?

A Matchmaker's Commentary

RIVKAH: A SHADCHAN

I guess I am confused, as I look around at all the beautiful young people who are still single, even though they are wonderful in every way. I see intelligent, decent, honorable, hard working, Torah observant, beautiful young people who are gradually getting older as they search for the right partner. It seems to me that there is something so wrong with what I am seeing, but I cannot fix it...even though I have tried so many times.

I love people and so I try to help with introductions. I talk with them to find out what is going on inside their heads.

One young girl was not willing to go out with a young man I told her about. She remarked to me that she needed to do some research about him. Of course, I was willing to tell her all I knew, but apparently she was interested in something more. What was it? She wanted to know if he wore a black hat. That was a simple and a valid question, which I answered quite frankly. The boy does not wear a black hat, but aren't you interested in what is UNDER the hat? What is in his head? Do you care about what is important to him; is he Torah learned, is he honest, does he follow HASHEM fully? There are some religious groups that do not wear black hats, but are totally dedicated to a Torah observant lifestyle. On the other hand, I know a young man who wears a black hat, but he is a drug addict and is dishonest in his business dealings and I feel that while he IS wearing a black hat and doing these things, he is a disgrace to HASHEM and all observant Jews. I certainly would not recommend him to any young woman as a good marriage partner, unless he got rabbinical professional help.

The next thing she wanted to know was how much money the boy made.

The boy in question made a good living. Then I asked her why she was not interested in what was in his HEART more than what was in his pocket. If a young man appears to have money, maybe it was given to him and he does not know how to make a living. He may not know the value of money and spend foolishly,

or gamble, or he may not care to give tzedaka.

I could go on and on...things aren't always as they seem.

When I have spoken to young men who are searching for their Eishis Chayil, they tell me they want someone pretty and slim.

Some of the very pretty girls I have spoken to are not that interested in Torah and creating a true Torah home, they are more interested in their careers, shopping and looking good all the time. It is hard to accept what comes out of these girls mouths...it is not Torah, but a request for another credit card because they like "nice" things.

Baruch HASHEM we survived a lot to get to this point. Families were lost during the wars and now, Baruch HASHEM, families have grown in size and in Torah and Mitzvot. Our young people want this too and they are suffering as they continue to search and find disappointment after disappointment. Matchmakers are not always honest when they give information and the people involved are misled. If young men take the time to go on the date, spend the money to get there and go out, not to mention, that in addition to working hard all day, they put themselves in harms way by driving at night when they are tired...at the very least, we must not mislead them.

We must help the young people find their mates...how can we watch and not help them to understand how to think and how to live the Torah way of life?

If we do not do whatever we can, they will continue look for the wrong things in a possible mate. We must educate them to see clearly what is the truth and thereby see what is important. We must make honest statements when giving information.

We just experienced Purim and we all remember how Haman wanted to annihilate the Jews. Baruch HASHEM he did not succeed because Mordechai and Esther knew what was important...and that was to follow HASHEM and the precious Torah that HE gave to us, no matter where and no matter what. ■





MAIMONIDES

Adam's Sin & God's Punishment

Guide for the Perplexed (Book I, Chap. 2)

Some years ago a learned man asked me a question of great importance; the problem and the solution which we gave in our reply deserve the closest attention. Before, however, entering upon this problem and its solution I must premise that every Hebrew knows that the term Elohim is a homonym, and denotes God, angels, judges, and the rulers of countries, and that Onkelos the proselyte explained it in the true and correct manner by taking Elohim in the sentence, "and ye shall be like Elohim" (Gen. iii. 5) in the last mentioned meaning, and rendering the sentence, "and ye shall be like princes." Having pointed out the homonymity of the term "Elohim" we return to the question under consideration. "It would at first sight," said the objector, "appear from Scripture that man was originally intended to be perfectly equal to the rest of the animal creation, which is not endowed with intellect, reason, or power of distinguishing between good and evil: but that Adam's disobedience to the command of God procured him that great perfection which is the Peculiarity of man, viz., the power of distinguishing between good and evil—the noblest of all the faculties of our nature, the essential characteristic of the human race. It thus appears strange that the punishment for rebelliousness should be the means of elevating man to a pinnacle of perfection to which he had not attained previously. This is equivalent to saying that a certain man was rebellious and extremely wicked, wherefore his nature was changed for the better, and he was made to shine as a star in the heavens."

Such was the purport and subject of the question, though not in the exact words of the inquirer. Now mark our reply, which was as follows: "You appear to have studied the matter superficially, and nevertheless you imagine that you can understand a book which has been the guide of past and present generations, when you for a moment withdraw from your lusts and appetites, and glance over its contents as if you were reading a historical work or some poetical composition. Collect your thoughts and examine the matter carefully, for it is not to be understood as you at first sight think, but as you will find after due deliberation; namely, the intellect which was granted to man as the highest endowment, was bestowed on him before his disobedience. With reference to this gift the Bible states that "man was created in the form and likeness of God." On account of this gift of intellect man was addressed by God, and received His commandments, as it is said: "And the Lord God commanded Adam" (Gen. ii. 16) -- for no commandments are given to the brute creation or to those who are devoid of understanding. Through the intellect man distinguishes between the true and the false. This faculty Adam possessed perfectly and completely. The right and the wrong are terms employed in the science of apparent truths (morals), not in that of necessary truths, as, e.g., it is not correct to say, in reference to

the proposition "the heavens are spherical," it is "good" or to declare the assertion that "the earth is flat" to be "bad" - but we say of the one it is true, of the other it is false. Similarly our language expresses the idea of true and false by the terms *emess* and *sheker*, of the morally right and the morally wrong, by *tove* and *ra*. Thus it is the function of the intellect to discriminate between the true and the false -- a distinction which is applicable to all objects of intellectual perception.

When Adam was yet in a state of innocence, and was guided solely by reflection and reason -- on account of which it is said: "Thou hast made him (man) little lower than the angels" (Ps. viii. 6) -- he was not at all able to follow or to understand the principles of apparent truths; the most manifest impropriety, viz., to appear in a state of nudity, was nothing unbecoming according to his idea: he could not comprehend why it should be so. After man's disobedience, however, when he began to give way to desires which had their source in his imagination and to the gratification of his bodily appetites, as it is said, "And the wife saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to the eyes" (Gen. iii. 6), he was punished by the loss of part of that intellectual faculty which he had previously possessed. He therefore transgressed a command with which he had been charged on the score of his reason; and having obtained a knowledge of the apparent truths, he was wholly absorbed in the study of what is proper and what improper. Then he fully understood the magnitude of the loss he had sustained, what he had forfeited, and in what situation he was thereby placed. Hence we read, "And ye shall be like *elohim*, knowing good and evil," and not "knowing" or "discerning the true and the false": while in necessary truths we can only apply the words "true and false," not "good and evil."

Further observe the passage, "And the eyes of both were opened, and they knew they were naked" (Gen. iii. 7) : it is not said, "And the eyes of both were opened, and they saw", for what the man had seen previously and what he saw after this circumstance was precisely the same: there had been no blindness which was now removed, but he received a new faculty whereby he found things wrong which previously he had not regarded as wrong.

Besides, you must know that the Hebrew word *pakah* used in this passage is exclusively employed in the figurative sense of receiving new sources of knowledge, not in that of regaining the sense of sight. Compare, "God opened her eyes." (Gen. xxi. ig) "Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened." (Isaiah xxxviii. 8) "Open ears, he heareth not" (ibid. xlii. 20), similar in sense to the verse, "Which have eyes to see, and see not" (Ezek. xii. 2). When, however, Scripture says of Adam, "He changed his face (*panav*) and thou sentest him forth" Job xiv. 20), it must be understood in the following way: On account of the change of his original aim he was sent away. For *panim*, the Hebrew equivalent of face, is derived from the verb *panah*, "he turned," and signifies also "aim" because man generally turns his face towards the thing he desires. In accordance with this interpretation, our text suggests that Adam, as he altered his intention and directed his thoughts to the acquisition of what he was forbidden, he was banished from Paradise: this was his punishment; it was measure for measure. At first he had the privilege of tasting pleasure and happiness, and of enjoying repose and security; but as his appetites grew stronger, and he followed his desires and impulses, (as we have already stated above), and partook of the food he was forbidden to taste, he was deprived of everything, was doomed to subsist on the meanest kind of food, such as he never tasted before, and this even only after exertion and labour, as it is said, "Thorns and thistles shall grow up for thee" (Gen. iii. 18), "By the sweat of thy brow," etc., and in explanation of this the text continues, "And the Lord God drove him from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground whence he was taken." He was now with respect to food and many other requirements brought to the level of the lower animals: compare, "Thou shalt eat the grass of the field" (Gen. iii. 18). Reflecting on his condition, the Psalmist says, "Adam, unable to dwell in dignity, was brought to the level of the dumb beast." (Ps. xlix. 13) May the Almighty be praised, whose design and wisdom cannot be fathomed." ■

Adam's Sin & God's Punishment II

Reader: What is the opinion of why when Adam fell, that God didn't just start over? He started over to some degree during Noah's time. Maybe what He had created could not be done again and He couldn't destroy it?

Or He knew that we are all like Adam and it would have done no good to start over?

Mesora: Nothing limits God if He wishes to start over. The reason He did not was because the changes He made in Adam's nature corrected the original problem, i.e., Adam's cause for his sin. Once God corrected the problem, mankind could exist as God desired. But later on, during Noah's era, man had sunk so low, there was no recourse to correct man's next flaw...he was too far gone. Therefore, God wiped out that generation, except for Noah and his sons who were good people. God saved him and started anew with him.

Reader: Thank you so much for your response. I still am not clear on one thing though. God corrected the problem with Adam, but it went immediately wrong again with Cain killing Abel. It doesn't seem like He corrected anything. Of course it is silly for me to second-guess God, but from a human viewpoint it does seem like He should have started over after Adam fell from grace. What is your opinion of this thought? Thank you.

Mesora: Please read Maimonides Guide for the Perplexed, Book I chapter 2. Then tell me what you learned from that chapter. This will lay the groundwork to answer your question. (See that chapter, reprinted in this issue of the JewishTimes, and then continue reading from here.)

Reader: What did I learn from The Guide for the Perplexed? I learned that God created Adam with the ability to think or react. He was intelligent but also instinctual, like the animals. Adam would have to learn to strike a happy medium between the two. I believe God created Eve to help Adam to harness the energy of his instinct. God originally was making things easy for Adam. Adam didn't have to discern between right and wrong, or his eyes weren't open to worry about such things. I think the tree was a test. The tree was no big deal, it was just an ordinary tree. But, God made the tree something "important" to see if Adam could use his intellect properly. Unfortunately, Adam gave way to fantasy, desire, and did what God commanded not to. Adam didn't use his thinking power. Now instead of things being easy and all made to order, Adam would leave the garden and have to make a living by himself. In

a way Adam acted like the animals that he had named. He chose to do things his way and not God's way. He gave more power to his baser instinct.

God has given us the ability to choose between right and wrong. He wants us to choose his way but for some reason gives us free will. He made things easy but we chose the difficult route. Tell me if I am wrong about this.

Mesora: You are correct, God desires that we all possess free will. He wishes that man be the cause of his reward.

Reader: Adam was always naked and didn't care that he was naked. Right or wrong it didn't matter to him. After he eats the fruit, nudity becomes an evil. Maybe being naked wasn't bad, but Adam made it bad, by thinking it was, even though God never said it was. His thoughts and ideas made it something that was forbidden, God never made being naked bad. Does this make any sense? This is what I learned from The Guide for the Perplexed. But I am still perplexed in that I don't feel confident that that is what I was to learn from the story. Please tell me your ideas on my opinions.

Mesora: Adam did not merely fantasize that nudity felt wrong; it was a true and accurate moral perception. God, as a response to Adam's sin, granted this new perception to Adam. As a Rabbi once taught, this new apparatus of the psyche – the conscience – allowed Adam a new means through which he may refrain from destructive behavior. Prior to the sin, the processes through which man decided his actions could lead him to destruction by violating God's commands. Although prior to his sin, Adam was in a higher functioning state – involved exclusively in absolute truths – he ultimately demonstrated the need for a secondary apparatus through which he may sense remorse about an improper act, prior to violation. This secondary apparatus is the conscience – that which generated his feelings of shame when naked.

Once God granted Adam this conscience, man was equipped with all he required for his entire life. He was now and eternally enabled to "check" his actions with a new morality before he might sin. His sense of "right and wrong" could help steer him clear of evil. Although the conscience had this capability, man still possessed free will and could still sin, even grievously. But this flaw was now addressed in a manner sufficient according to God's plan. So although Cain sinned, this did not mean that God's action was a failure for mankind. God made an adequate change in man's nature. Additionally, we witness Cain's remorse after his sin as testimony to this new faculty in action.

We learn that God created Adam without a conscience, as this allowed Adam to be engaged in the highest spheres of wisdom. Only after demonstrating his need, did God give Adam and Eve the conscience. However, this only addressed the sin of Adam, and not that of Noah's generation.

God does not address that which has not yet demonstrated any lack. Certainly, God wishes man to exist in the most prized state. He affords man this great opportunity, until man displays his inability to remain there.

We learn that God engulfed the Earth, killing all except Noah, his wife, and his three sons and daughters in law. In this era, man sinned due to another aspect of his psyche: he felt invincible. Therefore he feared no one, and stole from anyone. Society had crumbled beyond repair. Since man's sin in Noah's time was due to self-overestimation, God addressed those very features intended for good, and minimized them: the Midrash teaches that due to man's grand stature, he used to traverse the Earth in a few steps, uprooting cedars, and beasts were to him as fleas. This teaches us from where man derived his great ego. As a response to correct man, God minimized his height and limited his years. We see from the ages of man recorded in the Torah after Noah, a sharp decrease in lifespans, dropping from 1000 years to less than 200 years. However, God minimized these features only after man abused them.

We learn that God granted man the very best conditions; psychologically and physically, and only after man abused these gifts, did God alter them.

Adam and Noah's generation display two errors. Adam displayed a need for a new, psychological faculty to prevent sin (the conscience), and Noah's generation required a diminution of his overabundant ego, which caused man to disrespect others. This was addressed by diminishing those physical characteristics, intended for good, but abused for selfish gain and pleasure. ■

