



In contrast to those claiming Torah is oppressive, the Torah is in fact perfectly inline with human nature. Abraham possessed no Torah, yet, he followed a reasoned life that mirrored Torah. A “reasoned” life.

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**Weekly Parsha**

## Pinchas

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“And the sons of Eliav were Datan and Aviram. These are the same Datan and Aviram that were leaders of the congregation and that strove with Moshe and Aharon among the congregation of Korach, in their strife against Hashem.” (Sefer BeMidbar 26:9)

In our parasha, Hashem directs Moshe and Elazar to take a census of the nation.

(continued on page 4)

## Fundamentals: Part II

# Human Obligation

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



Last week we commenced a series of articles dedicated to our Fundamentals of Judaism. In part, this new series is in response to the many branches of Jews. However, these branches are mere constructs of the mind, as we are all equally Jews, united by the Torah's objective principles that determine who is and isn't a Jew or Noachide. We explored those tenets that bind all Jews and Noachides, which make us each, a true Torah observer.

It is unfortunate that day schools and yeshivas do not incorporate classes on Judaism's Fundamentals. For without this knowledge, a student will not know what truly defines the Torah system. So I once again urge parents and teachers to make a change this year, and insure that your school

(continued on next page)



(Obligation cont. from page 1)

## Fundamentals

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or yeshiva teaches Judaism's Fundamentals to students at all levels, according to their understanding. The primary source is of course the Torah's words, and Moses' instruction to the people. However, the Fundamentals are not easily located, as they are scattered throughout the Torah. Maimonides consolidated the Fundamentals, and formulated them in his Commentary on the Mishna on Talmud Sanhedrin, chapter 11.

Last week we enumerated and explained the first four Fundamentals: 1) knowledge of God's existence; 2) that God is One; 3) that He is not physical; 4) that He existed before all other existences. It is obvious too that these principles, which Maimonides enumerated, are also in an order. For before one may say God is One, he must know that God exists. And once we know God exists, and is One, then we must understand that He is not physical. These first three principles address God Himself. Maimonides then states Principle IV: we must know that God existed before anything else. This fourth principle addresses knowledge about God in relation to other existences. So this comes after knowledge of God, independent of anything else. Again, the first three principles address God independent of anything else, and the fourth principle addresses God in relation to other existences. But we must bear in mind that when we say "relationship" between God and other existences, it is our 'best' possible term, so that we may express some concept that God is not unrelated to all else. But we cannot assume God relates to things as we do.

Now, once we enter the realm of God and His creations, we find the fifth principle which describes man's "obligations" which emanate from God having created us and giving us a system which best directs us to the most fulfilling life. This concept of "obligation", I feel, is one that is quite alien to many observant Jews, and more so to those non-observant. But this may be excusable, as the Fundamentals are not taught, so many Jews today lack conviction that God is truly "out there". Although they enunciate His truth, they cannot prove that God exists, so they do not truly believe it either. Additionally, since people in general accept things as true only when sensed physically, intellectual conviction does not carry any weight in their estimation of what is "real". Therefore, since

God is not a clear truth in their minds, they sense no obligation to follow His commands. Once again we arrive at the dire need that the Fundamentals are taught.

But in truth, one who recognizes God, in accord with Maimonides parameters, will feel truly fortunate that he is alive, and is granted this opportunity of life. He will, every day upon waking and throughout his day, be cognizant of God's existence, that he is a "created thing". A Rabbi once lectured on this topic, quoting Ramban, and although not an abstract point, it is most essential that we feel "created". This is truth. Those who cannot realize this require serious reflection, as the ego's grip is strongest in this area. This is when a person's ego won't let go. To deny, "I am not in control of my very life...I am created" unveils a distorted personality. But once a person can

relinquish his egotistical emotions, and accept his mortality, he simultaneously admits of a Creator who imposed his mortality, his creation and limited existence on Earth.

Let us now read Maimonides' Fifth Principle:

*"That He, blessed be He, is fitting to serve, to laud and to publicize His greatness, and to perform His commands. And that we must not do so to lesser existences among the angels, stars, planets, and the elements, or anything*

*made from them. For these are natural objects and on their designs there is not judgment or free will, except God alone who is blessed. Similarly, one must not serve them as an intermediary to God, but to God alone must we direct our thoughts, and abandon all else. And this is the Fifth Principle which warns against idolatry, and most of the Torah warns against this."*

Maimonides not only states a principle, but within it, he explains the rationale. He follows the very central rule of a rational life, and that is, following rationality. Thus, we don't recognize anything besides God, since all else are "natural" objects. Meaning, as he says, they have a "design", which clearly admits of their inferior status since they are designed, and thereby limited by their Designer. Therefore, we do not elevate an existence and deify it, if it is not in control of itself, let alone the universe. We only pray to He who is not limited, and actually runs the universe...only he

(continued on next page)

(Obligation cont. from page 2)

can answer. Maimonides adds that we also do not relate to any created entity as an intermediary. What this translates in today's world, is the prohibition to seek cures or success from any mortal, or pray to any angel.

Moses too commands the Jews to guard the mitzvos. However, he commences with the idea that man must first know something, and then he must prove it to his mind (Deut. 4:35,36)

*"You have been proven to know that Hashem is God, there is no other besides Him. From the heavens He caused you to hear His voice to train you, and on Earth, He showed you His great fire, and His words you heard from amidst the flames."*

Forty years later, Moses reminds the people of Revelation at Sinai. He recalls to memory that undeniable event, the proof of God. Moses states that God exists, He is alone, and His voice emanated not from an Earthly source...He is not physical. Interesting...these are Maimonides' first three principles. But Moses continues: (Deut. 4:39,40)

*"And you shall know today, and you shall place it on your heart, that God is governor in heaven above, and on the Earth below, there is no other: And you shall guard His statutes and commands which I command to you today, that he will do good for you and your children after you, and that you shall have a length of days on the land that Hashem your God gives to you, all the days."*

As we stated last week, Moses first tells the Jews they must "know" these matters, and then he instructs them to "place them on their hearts", which means to prove them. The first principle, before all else, is to adhere to a life where rational proof guides every thought and action. He then reiterates the first principle: God exists. He then says His reign is in heaven and Earth, meaning, all that exists is due to Him, and no other being is responsible. This is principle number two: God is one. We also derive from here that if God created the universe, then He cannot be physical, since He created the physical world in its entirety. He preceded anything physical. This is principle number three: God is not physical. And as God "created" everything, he must have come first. Principle number four in Maimonides 13 Principles, is this: God was the First. The last words "all the days" teach that Torah observance is eternal. That is, the Torah will never be changed. This is Maimonides Principle IX. (Sforno) This makes clear sense, as God knows that, as man will never be altered, so too, the system he requires for perfection will never be altered.

We now arrive at Principle V. Let us read it again:

*"That He, blessed be He, is fitting to serve, to laud and to publicize His greatness, and to perform His commands. And that we must not do so to lesser existences among the angels, stars, planets, and the elements, or anything made from them. For these are natural objects and on their designs there is not judgment or free will, except God alone who is blessed. Similarly, one must not serve them as an intermediary to God, but to God alone must we direct our thoughts, and abandon all else. And this is the Fifth Principle which warns against idolatry, and most of the Torah warns against this."*

Just as Moses first tells the Jews to recognize certain knowledge, and then commands them in obeying God's laws, Maimonides follows suit. Principle V describes the obligation we have as God's created beings, to follow His plan for us, and this devolves upon us once we recognize the first four principles.

God created us for a reason. Moses says that this reason is "good" for us, that reason or objective being the Torah lifestyle. God is not imposing that which is hurtful, for God cannot do evil. All He created is for a good, and we can realize this good through study. And isn't it interesting, that the greatest mitzvah, the greatest command, is Torah study. Hence, God desires, more than all else, that we engage in studying His Torah and creations, to arrive at a ever-growing appreciation of His existence, a gift only made available to man, and no other creation. It ends up that this very obligation is for our very good...a very different type of obligation. We are to regularly engage in Torah study, embodying a life of righteousness and charity.

Our greatest minds, Moses and Maimonides, paralleled each other in their recognition of the Torah's fundamentals. From their identical teachings, we confirm what core ideas make Judaism, "Judaism".

One should ponder these principles until they are clear: provable to our minds, and pleasant in our hearts. We should then feel obligated in drawing closer to the Creator, even without the Torah's commands. And perhaps, this is exactly the true perfection of Abraham; that he drew close to God even prior to Torah's existence. Torah, then, actually portrays the life of one who is perfect. We may initially feel 'coerced' to adhere to God's commands, but we will, with proper study and training, eventuate in a natural desire to do that, towards which, our minds and hearts are inclined. With greater knowledge and conviction, we will naturally desire the good, and we will feel a new, unmatched satisfaction and fulfillment in life, knowing that God created each one of us for a great good.

We conclude Part II of Judaism's Fundamentals with the realization that Judaism is set apart from all other religions in its demand that man follow a life based on reason and proof, and not faith. Our minds are to be engaged in all areas, and as Moses and Maimonides taught, we must apply reason to our Jewish lives, and we will find that using reason is the only tool for uncovering the never-ending word of wisdom. We will find, through living such a lifestyle, the enriching happiness we all seek. When man engages his most central feature, his intelligence, and discovers brilliance in God's creations and Torah, his whole being reaches his peak of fulfillment. But if a Torah lifestyle is ignored, and man does not engage his mind as God decreed, then only half his being is nourished, while his soul perishes, and he lives unfulfilled. Man then loses this world, and the next. ■



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The Torah recounts the details of this census. In discussing the Shevet of Reuven, the Torah tells us that Phalu that son of Reuven had one son – Eliav. Eliav, in turn had three sons – Nemuel, Datan and Aviram. The Torah then tells us the Datan and Aviram were involved in Korach's conflict with Moshe and Aharon. They were punished for this rebellion. The earth opened and swallowed Datan, Aviram and Korach. The Torah then adds that Korach's children were not killed in this punishment.

It is interesting that the Torah seems to assign a prominent leadership role to Datan and Aviram in this rebellion. This does not seem to accord with Rashi's opinion. Rashi implies that Korach was the true leader of the rebellion and he influenced Datan and Aviram to join his insurgency.[1] Rashi's contention is supported by the opening of Parshat Korach that describes Korach as the ringleader of the rebellion.

However, Gershonides rejects Rashi's position based upon the passages in our parasha that seem to attribute the leadership role in the rebellions to Datan and Aviram. Gershonides points to another element of our parasha's account of the rebellion that seems to support his position.

A brief introduction is needed in order to understand Gershonides' position. As we have noted, the account in our parasha ends by telling us that Korach was killed by Hashem for his actions but his children were spared. The earth opened and swallowed Korach. It is likely that Korach and his children were situated in proximity of each other. But nonetheless, the children were not swallowed. Rashi is bothered by a problem. The Torah tells us that the children to Korach were spared. This implies that we would presume that they died like their father. The Torah is compelled to correct us and reveal that our presumption is wrong. Korach was killed but his children were spared. Why would we presume that Korach's children should have been punished?

Rashi explains that Korach's children were deeply involved in the rebellion. Korach's children were among the first to join him. In the formative stage of the rebellion, they offered their father support and advice. However, they subsequently recognized the impact of their actions and reconsidered. They repented their mistake and were spared from death.[2] According to Rashi, the apparent intention of the passage is that although they too had been deeply involved in the rebellion, Korach's children were saved by their repentance. In other words, the pasuk intends to demonstrate the efficacy of teshuva – repentance.

Gershonides points out that Rashi does offer an explanation for the Torah's statement that the children of Korach did not die. But there is another problem that Rashi's interpretation does not address. This section of the parasha is describing the census taken by Moshe and Elazar. Specifically, it is providing details regarding the population of Shevet Reuven. Korach was a Leyve. We can understand that he is mentioned as an associate of Datan and Aviram. The Torah is explaining why Datan and Aviram died and tells us that they were

involved in the rebellion of Korach. But this is an odd juncture to mention that the sons of Korach were spared. Why mention this point in the midst of an account of the census of Shevet Reuven?

Based on this consideration, Gershonides suggests that the simple message of the passages suggest and alternative to Rashi's interpretation. Gershonides begins by emphasizing that these passages are an account of the fate of Datan, Aviram, and their children. Korach is only mentioned in passing to explain the reason for the death of Datan, Aviram, and their children. The Torah tells us that the children of Korach did not die. The apparent purpose of this comment – given the context – is to establish a contrast. Datan and Aviram's role in the rebellion was so substantial that their punishment extended to their children. Not only were Datan and Aviram punished, their children were also killed. In contrast, Korach's role was apparently less significant. So, although Korach was killed, his children were spared. This interpretation supports Gershonides' contention that Datan and Aviram were the instigators of the rebellion. Korach played a lesser, supporting role.[3]

Before proceeding, let us summarize the positions of Rashi and Gershonides. Rashi maintains that Korach was the initial instigator and leader of the rebellion. His children were among his initial followers and advisors. However, they repented and were spared death. Gershonides argues that Datan and Aviram were the initial instigators. Korach was a supporter of their rebellion. As a result of their role in the rebellion, Datan and Aviram were punished with death and this punishment extended to their children. Korach played a lesser role. Therefore, although he was killed, his children were spared.

Of course, there is one obvious problem with Gershonides' position. The Torah in Parshat Korach describes the rebellion in detail. There, the Torah mentions Korach before mentioning Datan and Aviram.[4] The obvious implication is that Korach was the leader and Datan and Aviram were junior partners.

Gershonides does not ignore this problem. He explains that Korach is given prominence in this initial account because of his greater stature – he was a more important person.[5]

This is a difficult statement to understand. Why does Korach's greater stature dictate that he should be given prominence in the initial account? It seems that Gershonides maintains that although Datan and Aviram were the initial instigators, the rebellion would not have gained its tremendous momentum and popular support without the involvement of a leader of stature. Korach's participation lent credibility to the rebellion. As a result of his public support and leadership, the rebellion took hold among the people.

We can now understand the contrast between the two accounts of the rebellion. In the initial account – in Parshat Korach, the Torah's objective is to recount the incident of the rebellion and its impact on Bnai Yisrael. From the perspective of this impact, it is irrelevant who

the initial instigator was. Korach's involvement in a leadership role was the crucial factor in converting a personal grievance into a popular cause. Therefore, in discussing the rebellion from the perspective of the impact on Bnai Yisrael, Korach is given prominence.

In contrast, the objective of the Torah in our parasha is not to recount the rebellion and its impact on the nation. Here, the intention is to explain the fate of Datan and Aviram. The Torah is telling us why they and their children died. In this context, it is important for the Torah to note that Datan and Aviram were the instigators. It is this role that explains their deaths and the deaths of their children.

Let us contrast the position of Rashi with that of Gershonides. According to Rashi, there is little distinction between leader and follower. Datan and Aviram were killed with their children. Korach and his children were also destined to die. However, Korach's children were spared because they repented. Gershonides disagrees. He argues that the responsibility of the instigator is greater than that of the follower – even a prominent, key follower. Therefore, Datan and Aviram's children were killed but Korach's were spared.

Perhaps, it is possible to extend our understanding of this debate between Gershonides and Rashi one step further. Gershonides argues that Datan and Aviram were the instigators. Korach – because of a flaw in his personality – was drawn into their insurgency. He would not have initiated this rebellion. But once underway, he became involved and assumed a leadership role. It seems that Gershonides maintains that the subsequent punishment corresponded with the internal wickedness of the parties involved. Datan and Aviram were the self-motivated in their involvement. They were more corrupt than Korach. Korach was drawn into an insurgency he would not have initiated. His wickedness was less than that of Datan and Aviram. As a result his punishment – although severe – was less than that of Datan and Aviram.

Rashi maintains that the punishment does not correspond to the internal wickedness of the parties. He maintains that Korach was the leader and Datan and Aviram were his followers. Nonetheless, they all deserved the same fate. Korach's children were only spared because of their repentance. It seems that according to Rashi, there is little or no distinction between leader and follower. The punishment corresponds with the outcome. All three of these individuals openly confronted and challenged Moshe's authority. Irregardless of their roles as leader and followers, they all engaged in identical behavior towards Moshe. This behavior dictated the punishment. All were condemned to a death that included not only themselves but also their children. ■

[1] Rashi Sefer BeMidbar 16:1

[2] Rashi Sefer BeMidbar 26:11

[3] Gershonides, Sefer BeMidbar, p 143.

[4] Sefer BeMidbar 16:1.

[5] Gershonides Sefer BeMidbar p 143.

# “Disengagement”

## *The Magical World of Words*

WINTER

The Israelis are busy getting readying to leave the Gaza strip so they can “disengage” themselves from those Arab people who lately became known to the world as the Palestinians. I emphasized the word lately, because until 1948 they were known as the Arabs of whom some lived in Palestine. Even in the nineteen fifties and sixties these people were “part of the greater Arab Nation,” to quote Nasser the revered leader of the then United Arab Republics, (meaning Egypt, Jordan, and Syria). It was only after their Failure to wipe Israel off from the face of the earth and drown their Jewish inhabitants into the Mediterranean Sea, when the world first began to hear about the Arabs as “Palestinians.”

Before the six day war, the West Bank in its entirety and Jerusalem was part of Jordan, who promptly kicked out the total Jewish population from Jerusalem, the eternal Capitol of the Jewish people and the rest of Judea and Samaria, known to us today as the West Bank. In the process of evicting the Jews they were also doing all they could to evict the indigenous population, with just as much dedication and enthusiasm as they were doing it in 1929, and 1936 when they massacred and exiled the Jews of Hebron and attempted to do the same with the Jews of Jaffa and Tel Aviv. The Arabs, no matter if they were Jordanians, Syrians Egyptians or Lebanese, they were uniformly busy destroying all the Jewish synagogues. If they were from Jordan or from Palestine, they didn't stop at the synagogues, but went on to destroy all the schools, farms, and everything that had anything to do with the Jews; including the Jewish cemeteries and using their gravestones for the public latrines of the famed Jordanian legion.

The words “ethnic cleansing” were still not in fashion but cleansing an area from the Jews was already deeply ingrained in the Arab people.

Before the establishment of Israel in 1948, it was the Jews who were known to the world as the Palestinians. “Go back to Palestine,” was the battle cry of the anti-Jewish world throughout the centuries of the Jewish exile.

The Israeli rationale for this ingenious move to give up a portion of the land that was theirs to begin with, and for what they paid with the blood of their youth, was their hope in a lasting peace: harboring their cunning belief that once the Jews will leave Gaza, thereby removing their troops and civil population, they will also remove all contacts that lead to conflict generating situations.

This is also the reason for erecting the walls of



separation between the Jewish population in Israel proper and some of the Jewish population who lives in Judea and Samaria. Of course the same logic governs the separation of the Arab population who also live in the territories of Judea, Samaria and Gaza.

The evacuation of the Jews from Gaza is still in its pre activation state. Yet the prospect of expelling the Jews outside of Gaza treated with the increasing terror on the Jews who live well within the borders of Israel proper. In other words the Arabs who are living in Gaza are already engaging the Israeli population with the demonstration of their intent what they have in mind for the future of the Israeli people.

With such encouraging indications about the future is there any wonder why the Sharon Government so looking forward to the deportations of the Jews, first from Gaza, and latter of course from Judea Samaria and lets not forget Jerusalem.

The Sharon Government, recalling the wisdom of the Rabin/Peres Oslo doctrine that states the wisdoms; “You don't make peace with your friends rather you make peace with your enemies!”

Now let me ask you; is there anybody who is better qualified to make peace with then the Palestinian Authority, and Hamas? Is there anyone out there who even comes near to the qualifications as an authentic enemy, that we could sign a peace treaty with the Father Abbes; this well documented Jew Hater, a terrorist with the highest credentials, and a holocaust

denier of the highest order; in addition to being Arafat's soul mate and partner in crimes?

Disengagement, really, from whom are we Separating from?

You mean we will disentangle ourselves from the Arabs?

Well, that sounds truly great, but are you sure?

You mean that we leave Gaza and maybe even Judea and Samaria, and the Arabs will leave Israel is that what you mean? Well, I am not happy about giving up sovereignty over some of our holy places, but may be I can learn to get use to it.

What's that...you mean the Arabs will not have to leave Israel, as part of a population exchange, as was the case among so many other nations around the world?

So, of course you also mean that the Jews won't have to leave Gaza and the West bank either; and that they can enjoy the same freedom as the Arabs in Israel do, with having their own schools, their own language, their own places of worship and religious freedom...Just as the Arabs have it in Israel?

Again you say no? You mean that is not what the road map to peace prescribes, but that the Jews give up territory to the Arabs who in turn give nothing but a solemn promise that they will destroy Israel and its entire Jewish inhabitant as soon as they can?

Is that what the road map prescribes, is that where the road map leads to; a dead end for the Jewish people?

You mean the road map to peace is but a spelling mistake, where the intended word is “piece” and not peace. A plan that intends to be a road map that leads to smaller and smaller pieces until there is nothing left from Israel. The real aim is to break down Israel's ability to survive piece by piece; by shrinking its borders while allowing the Trojan horse of the Arabs in Israel to devour its population plurality from within.

I understand the other nations of the world who find nothing wrong with the concept, that France is for the French, England is for the English; and in a world where there it is right to have over 20 Arab countries, filled with their Muslims only populations. Yet, there is no room on this globe for a nation of Israelis, with a predominantly Jewish population.

I have a much bigger problem with the Sharon Government unconscionable stand to forcefully “disengage the Jews from their land.” Therefore bringing the affirmed enemy closer and closer to the population centers of Israel; so they can target millions of Israelis with their missiles, and not only the lesser populated areas.

Is this the same Sharon, who for decades was advocating the right of the Jews to live wherever they wish to do so? Is this the same Sharon who with his brave actions made us time and again proud to be Jews in our ancestral lands, or is this a Sharon turned Marshal Henri Philippe Pétain, about to commit the most treasonous act in Jewish history, by preparing the Jewish people for a national suicide? ■

*Taken from "Windows to the Soul"*

# Pinchas

RABBI MICHAEL BERNSTEIN



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## THE ULTIMATE SHIELD

Prudence, goes the old saying, is the better part of valor. Bravery is a virtue, but only as long as it doesn't overstep the line that separates courage from foolhardiness. Moses quite sensibly asked God that his replacement be a courageous leader, but he also asked that he lead the troops into battle, as would King David centuries later (27:17; Rashi). Was this prudent? Would it be wise for a general to risk his life by placing himself in the heat of the battle?

In the annals of warfare, a king or general rarely rides into battle at the head of his armies. A general is simply too valuable an asset to risk. Moreover, a general at the front would be in greater danger than an ordinary officer, because the enemy would throw all its forces directly at him; a decapitated army is an incapacitated army. In the short run, the general's presence might inspire the troops, but in the long run, the loss of a general would cripple the army. Why then would Moses want his replacement to lead the troops into battle?

Unlike the general providence that governs the fortunes of all peoples, the Jewish people exist under a special divine providence. This is particularly true when the entire nation and its leader are at risk. Enemy troops may launch thick clouds of arrows at the Jewish leader, but none will find its mark if it is not specifically so ordained. When he leads his troops into battle, a Jewish leader underscores the important point that faith in God is the Jewish nation's ultimate shield, that his and the nation's spiritual shortcomings are far more threatening than enemy weapons.

Moses wanted a Jewish leader who would be in the forefront of battle. He wanted a leader who understood that the Jewish people, and their leader in particular, were under an intimate divine providence. Such an attitude would convey to the Jewish soldiers that only fealty to God and His Torah would bring them victory.

Moses also asked God that his replacement lead the Jewish armies back from battle. What was the purpose of this request? What difference could it possibly make?

There are two outcomes to war—victory and defeat. In victory, it is common for conquering troops to vent their triumphant exhilaration in a rampage of pillage and plunder. A Jewish leader, the moral shepherd of his people, cannot allow this to happen. Once the battle is won, he must lead the troops home sober and humble in the knowledge that it is God who has delivered their enemies into their hands. Conversely, if the battle should end in defeat, leaders of lesser virtue shift the blame to underlings and downplay their own roles. Not

so the ideal Jewish leader. He takes full responsibility for whatever takes place. Even if his troops return home, heads hung in defeat, he stands at their head of his troops, bearing the blame. And he leads the people to self-examination and repentance.

## THROUGH THE CRACKS

Spear in hand, Pinchas strode into the encampment and impaled the Jewish prince Zimri as he coupled with a Midianite princess, stemming the plague that had claimed twenty-four thousand lives. For this, God duly rewarded him (25:10-13). "And God spoke to Moses, saying, 'Pinchas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the Kohain, deflected My wrath from the people of Israel when he wrought My vengeance among them, so I did not annihilate the people of Israel in My vengeance. Therefore, say, 'Behold, I give him My covenant of peace.' And it shall be a covenant of eternal priesthood for him and his offspring after him for his having taken vengeance for his Lord and atoned for the people of Israel.'"

The paradox is striking. God rewards Pinchas for his violent, albeit justifiable, act of vengeance with an eternal covenant of peace! God also gives him an eternal covenant of priesthood (Kehunah), which in itself includes the priestly blessing to the people that "may God grant you peace." How do we reconcile Pinchas' reward of peace with his ferocious and violent vengeance on God's behalf?

Our Sages praise (Avos 1:12) Pinchas' righteous grandfather Aaron, the patriarch of the priesthood, for "loving God's creatures" (ohev es habrios). Love of his fellow man was one of Aaron's overriding virtues, and yet it still required balance.

Twice in the Torah do we find Aaron liable to punishment. The first is when Aaron participated passively in the construction of the Golden Calf in order to stall for time. In Deuteronomy (9:20), Moses reveals that he had successfully intervened to save Aaron from death at that time. The second occasion is at Mei Merivah, where God commands Moses and Aaron to bring forth water from a rock by speaking to it but Moses strikes it instead (20:7 ff). As a result, both Moses and Aaron are barred from entry to the Holy Land; they must die in the desert. In this case, only Moses hit the rock, and yet Aaron is guilty for his passive acquiescence to Moses' act. We may find a commonality of these failings. We may suggest that in both instances Aaron's great love of humanity led to a small lack of immediate zeal to criticize and find fault in another human being.

Aaron's principal trait, which was to set the tone for all future Kohanim, was his love for his fellow man. This great virtue, however, carries the risk of imbalance. The Kohanim's love of humanity needed to be balanced with zeal on God's behalf. The word shalom, peace, is best translated as harmony. Pinchas' act of zealotry for God balanced the scales for the Kehunah by introducing zeal into the equation. Henceforth, Kohanim were characterized not only by love for man but also by zeal for God; in the Talmud, we find that rabbinic regulations do not apply in the Temple. They are unnecessary, because the priests are zerizim (diligent). God rewarded Pinchas with the eternal covenant of priesthood and peace in recognition of the balance he had brought to the Kehunah with his seminal act of zealotry. He brought a true and lasting peace, a harmonious peace.

Why, of all the Kohanim, did only Pinchas see clearly the need to temper love with zeal? The answer may lie in his personal background. Initially, Pinchas had actually been excluded from the priesthood. When God initiated Aaron and his sons Eleazar and Isamar into the priesthood (Leviticus 8:1 ff), Eleazar's son Pinchas was too young to be invested in his own right. But since he had already been born at the time of the investiture, he could not claim hereditary sanctity as would his brothers and their future descendants. In effect, Pinchas was excluded from the priesthood. He had fallen through the cracks.

But there are no cracks in divine providence. If circumstances had excluded Pinchas, there must have been a good reason. And indeed, there was, because his very exclusion led to the harmonious restructuring of the priesthood.

According to the Sages (Shemos Rabbah 7:5; Bava Basra 109b), Pinchas' mother Putiel descended from Joseph and Jethro. Her very name recalled Joseph's resistance to an illicit liaison and Jethro's rejection of idolatry (Exodus 6:25; Rashi). Moreover, perhaps because Jethro was an outsider, he gave Moses good counsel from a clear perspective (Exodus 18:13 ff).

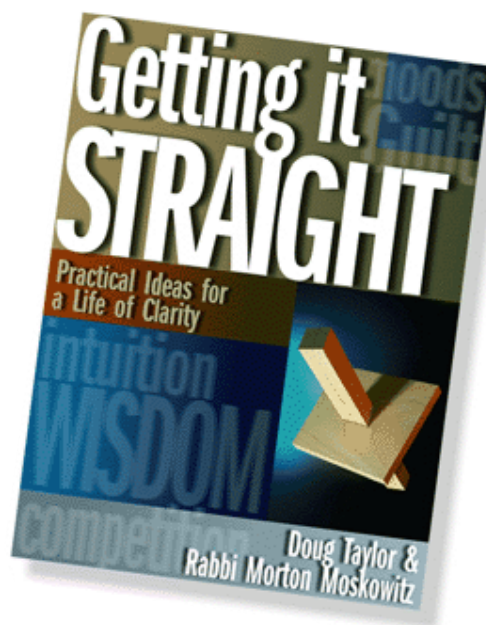
Precisely these virtues propelled Pinchas to his heroic deed. Zimri's outrageous act aroused Pinchas' visceral rejection of lust and idolatry. And as an outsider, excluded from the Kehunah, he could observe his relatives the Kohanim treating the people with great love but insufficient zeal. He compensated for their deficiencies when he grabbed his spear and wrought God's vengeance on the sinners. By his heroic deed, Pinchas entered the Kehunah on the highest level, as the beneficiary of God's eternal covenant of harmonious peace. ■

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*Taken from "Getting it Straight"*

# Belief

DOUG TAYLOR & RABBI MORTON MOSKOWITZ



"So what do you believe about God?" I asked.

The momentary din of the ferry horn drowned out our discussion for a few seconds. The King of Rational Thought and I were taking a late afternoon round-trip ferry from Mukilteo just for the fun of it. With the warm July sun comfortably set at slow roast, we were walking and talking on the upper deck.

"Why is that important to you?" he replied.

I wasn't sure quite how to answer. "Well, uh, because I'm interested," I said hesitantly.

"The truth is, I have no belief about God," he said.

"What?" I couldn't believe my ears.

He smiled. "I suspect you're jumping to conclusions too fast," he said. "Tell me. What is a belief?"

"A belief? Well, it's, uh, something that you believe," I said, struggling to come up with a good definition. "It's having faith. It's believing something when there's no evidence."

"I see," he said. "So you think there's no evidence for God?"

"I didn't say that," I replied, backpedaling quickly. "There's lots of evidence. I mean, all you have to do is look around."

"At what?" he said.

"Well, at the trees, the stars, the sea, everything around us. It couldn't possibly have happened by accident."

"So you've done a scientific analysis to prove that?" he asked.

"No, but I know it's true. I believe it."

He smiled again. "Let me offer another definition of belief," he said. "Belief is a conviction you have concerning something about which you are ignorant."

He paused to let that sink in. Then he went on.

"Think about it," he said. "People only have

'belief' about something that they don't know about. Otherwise, they wouldn't need belief about it. Have you ever heard someone ask, 'Do you believe in gravity?' Of course not. A question like that is absurd. Why? Because you know gravity as a fact. Just like you don't have a 'belief' about electricity."

"Belief, in and of itself," he continued, "proves nothing. No offense, but your saying that you believe in God, as if your belief makes it true, is no more valid than a small child saying he believes in the tooth fairy. Lots of people 'believe' things. That doesn't make them true."

"So you don't believe there is a God?" I just couldn't let that point go.

"You misunderstood me," he said. "I said I

have no belief in God. What I mean is that I don't have a belief that is based on ignorance. I have studied that issue thoroughly, answered all the questions, and have proven to myself that God does exist. It is possible to prove that. Once the idea is clear to your mind and all the questions have been answered, 'belief,' as I defined it, ceases. The truth is, I know God exists. Not because of some emotional experience, but because I proved it rationally to myself in the same way that you prove a mathematical formula to be true."

The boat docked and we headed up the ramp. My mind spun like a fishing reel out of control. I believed lots of things that I didn't know how to prove. So where did that leave me?

"Don't let this bother you," he said, reading my mind. "You won't change your whole approach to life overnight. Just think about the ideas. And the next time someone tells you that something in the religious realm is too complicated to understand, or that you need to just 'have faith,' remember something. God didn't give you a brilliant mind capable of abstract thinking just so you could trash it when it came to religious matters and believe things you would otherwise consider nonsense. Ask questions, ask questions, and keep asking questions. Don't accept an idea unless you've answered every question and the idea is completely clear to your mind."

I heard what he said, although my mind was already somewhere else. I was thinking about all the things I had been told all my life that I should believe and not question. I was thinking about all of the party lines I'd been told to swallow, even when I knew they didn't make sense.

I was thinking that I was going to be making some changes in my life. ■

# TISHA B'AV

## *the Spies & the Temples*

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

As the Three Weeks commence Saturday night, it is appropriate that we begin contemplating the focus of these weeks: the destruction of both Temples.

Talmud Sanhedrin 104b states God's sentiment, "You cried an unwarranted cry, (therefore) I will establish for you a cry throughout the generations." The Rabbis suggested this was God's sentiment addressed to the Jews on the ninth of the month of Av - Tisha B'Av - when the Jews cried at the spies' divisive report. The spies spoke against God's promise that He would conquer the land of Canaan - Israel. The spies incited a riot, declaring the Jews could not succeed over Canaan's mighty inhabitants, despite God's age-old promise to Abraham. The Talmud says that as a response, God established Tisha B'Av as a day of crying for many years to come.

Many questions emerge. Why would future generations pay the price for a former generation's sins? Didn't God punish that former generation with 40 years in the desert? If so, why is additional crying necessary? How is a crying for many generations justified - why not just one generation? What was the sin of the spies, and of the Jews? What is meant by, "you cried an 'unwarranted cry'..."? And finally, we are taught that the latter generation's sins of immorality, idolatry and baseless hatred are what brought upon us the destruction of both Temples respectively - not the sin of the spies. So which is the cause for the mourning of Tisha B'Av: the spies, or the latter generation's sins?

Our first step is to note that the Talmudic statement does in fact tie the sin of the spies and the Jews' cry, to both Temples' destructions, "You cried an unwarranted cry, (therefore) I will establish for you a cry throughout the generations." The Rabbis teach there is a direct relationship. We must analyze the sin of the Jews' cry.

Why did they cry at the spies' report? They did so out of a fear of destruction. This fear was caused by their overestimation of their enemy's strength. But the Jews failed to include one more essential element into their military equation: God's promise. The Jews' cry was baseless, as they were already guaranteed victory, despite the strength of their opponent! God's word should have outweighed any other consideration, and should have been all they heeded. As we read at Mincha (afternoon prayers) of fast days, "As the heavens are higher from the land, so also is My way higher than yours, and My thoughts from your thoughts." (Isaiah, 55:9)

Digging deeper, we discover that "tragedy" is directly proportional to one's sense of the good. If 'A' is greater in importance than 'B', the loss of 'A' is a greater tragedy, than the loss of 'B'. In other words, God was saying that with your cry,

you display your value system - and your system does not include Me. This must be corrected. A life where God is not part of our daily considerations is not the life God planned for man. He did not give us intelligence to gather riches, create fame, or overindulge in pleasures. The gift of intelligence has but one aim: knowledge of the Creator. What is God's remedial action? The destruction of both Temples, on the same date. How does this address the problem?

What is "Temple"? Without understanding its purpose, we cannot mourn its loss. According to Sforno, the Temple was given as a response to the Golden Calf, with which the Jews displayed a distorted approach to God. With the Golden Calf, man displayed his inability to approach God bereft of religious practice. They did not feel the Calf was God, rather, a means to reach Him. Their corruption required a fix. "Temple" was the answer: it came to realign man's approach to God, to conform with real and true ideas, not man's imagined, idolatrous emotions - displayed via the Calf. However, when man is left to his own devices, he creates Golden Calves and idolatry. Man's religious expressions require guidance, and Temple's strict and meticulous system of laws, satisfies this need. Additionally, the Temple's presence indicates God's continual acceptance of our worship, and thus, His providence over the nation. Conversely, its destruction indicates God's absence.

The Jews cried over their imagined defeat, had they attempted combat against Canaan's inhabitants. They discounted God's guarantee of success. In response, God destroyed the Temples to correct a few errors: their destructions indicated that His absence is what the Jews should view as



(continued on next page)

(continued from page 8)

## Tisha B'Av

a true loss. God is the most essential factor for one's happiness. During the epoch of the spies, the Jews did not view God's promise as a reality, as much as their own prowess. Therefore, God used Temple - His 'presence' - as an indicator that herein lays the greatest factor in our lives.

But how would the Jews accept that this destruction is God's will? Primarily by the element of duplicate dates. Both Temples fell on the ninth of Av. This cannot be coincidence. God must have executed this judgment. Not only that, but this devastation recalled the spies' crime committed on this date - the Jews reliance on "self", and omission of God from their view of reality. All three tragedies falling on the same date teaches God's hand is evident - it is Divine Punishment.

It is true, that latter crimes of immorality, idolatry, and baseless hatred demanded their own, exclusive punishment, without the sin of the spies. But perhaps the exact punishment of the Temples' destruction, and on duplicate dates, would not have been the selected measure, had the spies never sinned. The Talmud's exact words "I will 'establish' crying throughout the generations", might be understood as God duplicating a date alone to link the spies' sin with latter evils, not the 'nature' of the punishments. The spies determined the date, while the punishment was determined by latter generations. However, the Marshah disagrees with this theory, stating that based on the spies' and the Jews' cry alone, was the date fixed, and the Temples were marked for destruction.

Even subsequent to the 40-year term in the desert, this corruption in the Jews was not yet removed. Certainly the original offenders have passed on. The Temples' destructions can only address latter generations. We are forced to conclude that remnants of the original sin are still cleaved to by their descendants - by us

today. Even during the times of the Talmud, the Talmud says that latter generations lacked faith in God's ability to provide, so they worked most of the day, and learned little, instead of the Torah's prescription for the exact opposite. Man still limits his equations to natural law, disbelieving that which does not compute based on cause and effect. But Chanina ben Dosa displayed the correct philosophy. His daily activities included the possibility of God's assistance. He did not rely on miracles, which we must not do. But he also did not rely on his own knowledge as the sole determinant of how a successful life is achieved. He knew of God's unlimited abilities, and His wish for man to learn, above all else. Chanina ben Dosa's learning taught Him his belief in God, and this was not an abstract belief, but one by which he lived each day.

God wills the best life for man. If man has shortcomings, it is addressed by God's mercy. Our shortcomings today begin with a lack of Torah study, which can teach us the proper way the world operates, what to value, and how to achieve true happiness. It is outright foolishness for man to continue in the sin of the spies, to abandon the one invaluable tool - Torah knowledge - that can open doors which as of yet, remain closed to many, and prevent man from working within God's reality instead of fighting it, all for temporal wealth, fame, or lust.

To mourn for the Temples' losses properly, we must first realize the loss we all suffer from an incomplete Torah system, one if sustained today, would offer us the most rewarding and enlightening existence with God's providence, unparalleled by anything else you can imagine. "All desirous things do not compare to her (Torah)". (Proverbs, 8:11)

"Return to Me, and I will return to you." We must take the first step. ■

## Letters

*Egyptians felt inscribing the names in stone gave them permanence. Obliterating them was a kind of postmortem punishment or revenge: the person was assigned to oblivion. This was the fate post-Amarnan pharaohs had in mind when they erased inscriptions containing a name of Akhenaten.*

*What is Judaism's view of the soul?*



# the Destruction of the Soul?

**Reader:** Thanks for answer on clothing and cross-dressing. I have another question. A Rabbi explained how one could see the existence of a soul. The way I understand him is this; there is the physical world. Then there is a world of laws and ideas. These laws and ideas are more real than the physical, even when the physical objects are destroyed, these laws remain i.e. are eternal. Since (only) man can access this world of ideas, he too must have something in him that too is eternal, hence eternal. Later on, the Rabbi explains the concept of sheol. If you listen to him carefully, he contradicts himself by saying some people's souls will go down to sheol (grave) i.e. get destroyed. Which is which: are some souls subject to destruction or are all souls eternal?

Thank you again.

**Moshe Ben-Chaim:** Although a soul has the ability to live forever, it too was created, and it too can be destroyed.

The manner, in which the Rabbi differentiated physical matter from the soul, is that physical objects decay by nature, while the soul does not. So he is comparing the "natural" functions of each, not the absolute ability of God to destroy anything.

However, the "world of ideas" meaning, i.e., "knowledge", which emanates from God, is truly absolute and eternal, since God is absolute and eternal. ■

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## Regional Lists

### Connecticut

• **Fairfield County Shuls (75)** An announcement list serving the Jewish community and all shuls in the greater Fairfield County Connecticut location.

### New York

• **Jewish Community (1576)** The Jewish Community is intended to combine the efforts of the local "shul" groups (NYC, Teaneck, Fair Lawn, Monsey, Essex County etc) and create a single resources for the New York and New Jersey metropolitan orthodox community for announcements of interest and common events. Certain announcements are very local in nature and belong in the local "shul" groups. Other announcements are regional in nature and should utilize this group to get the word out on a larger scale.

• **brooklynshuls(60)** A list for those affiliated with Brooklyn shuls.

• **bronxshuls(53)**

• **events\_for\_jewish\_women (182)**

• **FiveTownsJewishCommunity (1595)** The purpose of this email list is to enable local shuls, yeshivot and organizations to communicate with members of the Five Towns Jewish Community. The list should be used primarily for the dissemination of information regarding local shul, yeshiva and organizational or charity events and functions in accordance with the list policy posted on this site. It is the hope of the moderators of this group that this service will bring the community closer together by enabling the publicizing and enhancement of the

• **FiveTownsBiz (52)** **NEW** Established to allow free business contact for all Jewish communities, generating more business for all involved.

• **FiveTownsShuls (1345)**

• **FiveTownJewishCommunity**

• **HillcrestOnline (220)**

• **flatbushJewishAction (81)**

• **JFlatbushOnline (633)** Welcome! This is a group to allow members of the Brooklyn, New York Jewish community in Flatbush and other neighborhoods, to communicate. It is a place to let others know about events or programs at your shul or school, religious and cultural events, and singles events. We can also cover neighborhoods such as Boro Park or Crown Heights. It is also a place for various neighborhood topics, such as goods needed or available, different community efforts, concerns, etc.

• **lessshuls (112)** Discussion group for issues, topics and events of interest to the Jewish community of the Lower East Side of Manhattan.

• **MonseyShulsChat (72)**

• **manhattanshuls (95)**

• **NYCShuls (533)** NYCShuls@YahooGroups.com is an announcement list for the Jewish community in New York City. The primary goal of the group is to be an effective tool in the building and maintenance of our community.

• **PlainviewShuls** Established to enable area residents a quick and effective means of information distribution. Please use this new forum to post shul/Torah class times,

announcements, business, share ideas, and converse on matters relevant to the Plainview Jewish communities. As Torah Jews we must follow what God demands of us. Let us all strive to learn more Torah, and practice the unmatched codes prepared by our Creator. Rising above our personal preferences, let us achieve something great...together.

• **queensshuls (102)** A general list for those affiliated with Queens shuls.

• **QueensCentralShuls (44)** An announcement list for the Jewish community and Shuls of Central Queens.

• **RiverdaleShuls (541)**

• **SiShulList (123)**

• **statenislandshuls (27)**

• **UWSyoungprofessionals (715)** The list is intended for announcements of interest Young Professionals living on the upper west side. HOW TO SUBSCRIBE: To subscribe go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/uwsyoungprofessionals/join> or send a blank email to [uwsyoungprofessionals-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:uwsyoungprofessionals-subscribe@yahoogroups.com). INFORMING OF EVENTS: To get an event added to our weekly e-mail send [grubey1@yahoo.com](mailto:grubey1@yahoo.com) information about the event and it will most likely be distributed to our list.

• **WestHempsteadShuls (270)**

• **WesleyHillsShuls (383)**

• **WhitePlainsShuls (26)**

### New Jersey

• **BergenfieldShuls (40)** Information for and about shuls in the Bergenfield / New Milford / Teaneck area.

• **EdisonHighlandParkBulletinBoard (563)**

• **EnglewoodShuls (635)**

• **LakewoodShuls (160)**

• **PassaicJews (651)**

• **TeaneckShuls (5958)** TeaneckShuls is an announcement list for the Jewish community and shuls in the Teaneck / Bergenfield / New Milford vicinity.

• **TeaneckShulsUnrestricted (60)**

• **TenaflyShuls (204)**

• **WestOrangeJewishCommunity (79)** The Vibrant, Diverse, and Growing Jewish Community of West Orange, NJ USA This mailing list is intended for the sharing of information between, and communication among, all members of the West Orange Jewish Community and its many Jewish Institutions - regardless of religious affiliation.

• **WestOrangeShuls (638)** The list is intended for announcements of interest to shul-goers in the West Orange vicinity

## Topical Lists

### Business

• **buscardexchange (22)**

• **jcbusinessforum (322)**

• **JewishBusiness (173)** Business ethics and practices according to Jewish law.

• **JewishBusinessnetworking (380)** A place for Jewish business people to network, develop leads and contacts, exchange ideas, find jobs, provide employment, and shmooze!

• **JewishBusinessAssoc Colorado (255)** We have monthly luncheons to discuss various business topics as well as Happy Hour get togethers to socialize with others in the Jewish Community.

• **JewishBusinessNetwork (490)** Hear Exciting Speakers, Exchange Business Leads, and Job Opportunities, Promote Your Business, and/or Come Socialize at Our 3rd Tuesday, Monthly Meetings, 6:00-8:15pm at the Jewish Community Association of Austin, 7300 Hart Lane

• **jewishwork (334)** The Jewish (and Bnai Noach) job market. For employers and for people seeking employment, anywhere in the world. On this email list you can announce positions available, and positions being sought. This list is not for ads to promote your business, product, or services.

• **UCLAAnderson-JBSA (99)**

### Dating

• **Bay Area Jewish Singles (29)**

• **Frum-Jewish-Singles (101)** The purpose of this group is for Orthodox Jewish singles to be able to get together, exchange information about each other, post information about gatherings / singles weekends, to ask questions and possibly be able to set up a shidduch. You MUST be an Orthodox Jew to join this group and you will NOT be accepted until you answer the questionnaire that is emailed to you.

• **JDate Jewish Online Dating (50)** Are you Jewish? Are you Single? We have the solution for you! At JDate.com, you can meet like-minded Jews that are also single! This isn't an ONLINE dating site full of fake profiles! These are REAL PEOPLE just like you.

• **Jewish Matchmaker (108)**

• **jewish-singles (350)**

• **jewish-single-doctors (28)**

• **mercerc\_jewish\_singles (294)**

### Home Life

• **1davening (60)**

• **1-JewishComputing (64)**

• **1Jewish\_Homes (83)**

• **chiddush (232)** Chiddush is an advanced group that offers Yeshiva-level Jewish scholars (talmidei chachamim) the opportunity to share original insights into Jewish ritual and lore. Submissions may be up to one screen long, and must include traditional sources for reference. Include a statement that the submission was your own and that it has not been published elsewhere.

• **davening (337)**

• **Frum-Jewish-Parents (90)**

• **Gabbai (143)**

• **Jewish Cuisine (623)**

• **jewish-food (1749)** Jewish-Food is a moderated list for all interested in the discussion of GENERAL aspects of Jewish food which includes the exchanging of recipes, and cooking techniques of Jewish food using Kashruth (laws of keeping kosher).

• **JewishGeography (334)**

• **jewishhomes (719)**

• **JEWISH-RECIPE (492)**

• **jewish\_stitchery (112)**

• **Jewish\_Weight\_Watchers (169)**

• **Vegetarian\_Jewish\_Cuisine (392)**

### Religious

• **Jewish\_Converts (260)**

• **Teshuvah (123)** This is a group for those returning to Halachik Judaism, or already-frum Jews interested in assisting others.

• **Torah\_study (79)**

### Social

• **1-JewishPhilanthropy (113)** Jewish Philanthropy offers information about philanthropic activities and surveys of foundations that fund Jewish institutions. It networks Jewish fundraisers and donors.

• **Jewish\_Action\_Alerts (178)** This is an action alert listserv for Jews and friends of Jews from around the world to participate in local, national and international action alerts to governments, businesses, agencies as they effect the safety, security and welfare of Jewish people at home, abroad and in Israel.Groups from which action Alerts will be posted include, but are not limited to: AIPAC, UJC, JCPA, ADL, HonestReporting.com, CAMERA, and others.

• **Jewish\_Self-Defense (841)**

• **Jewish-Humor (318)**

• **jewish-jokes (455)**

• **jewish-american-veterans (83)**

• **Jewish-Outdoors-Club (1521)**

• **Jewish\_World (428)**