



What does the world's creation with no command to know God reveal about one Rabbi's view?

Discussed in cover article

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Weekly Parsha

Toldot

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"And Esav was forty years old and he took as a wife Yehudit the daughter of Be'eri the Hettite and Basmat the daughter of Elon the Hettite. And they were a source of anguish for Yitzchak and Rivka." (Beresheit 26:43-44)

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God: Goes Without Saying

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The following question and answer address a most basic fundamental. Although lengthy, I urge you to read this article in full, and make certain you fully understand the main concept. I thank the writer for his question, as it has answered other questions I recently pondered.

Reader: Inasmuch as many of your recent articles and lectures have related to the issue of faith versus proof, I would like to present the following argument that I believe challenges the strength of at least a portion of your position. Rambam writes in Sefer Ha-Mitzvot:

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Weekly Parsha

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One of the most important elements in this week's parasha is the account of Yaakov's successful endeavor to secure the blessings that Yitzchak had planned to bestow upon his brother Esav. The pesukim above directly precede this account. Generally, there is some relationship between the various issues discussed in the Torah. What is the relationship between Esav's choice of wives and following account of Yitzchak's bestowal of the blessings upon Yaakov? Before we can answer this question we must consider some related issues.

What kind of person was Esav? We know that he was not a tzadik like his brother Yaakov. But this does not mean that his personality did not include any positive elements. One of the more positive elements of his personality is reflected in our pesukim.

The pesukim tell us that Esav was forty years old when he married. Why is his age significant? Rashi explains that Yitzchak was also forty years old when he married Rivka. Rashi explains that this was an important consideration to Esav. He wished to emulate his father. He felt that by marrying at the age of forty, he was following the example of his father Yitzchak.[1] According to Rashi, Esav valued his father's approval and his decision to marry at this time was influenced by the need for this approval. This assessment of Esav's attitudes is confirmed later in the parasha.

“And Esav saw that the daughters of Canaan were displeasing in the eyes of Yitzchak, his father. And Esav went to Ylshmael and he took Machalat, the daughter of Ylshmael, the son of Avraham, the sister of N'vayot, In addition to his wives, to be to him a wife.” (Beresheit 28:8-9)

These pesukim explain that Esav recognized that Yitzchak did not approve of his wives because of their heathen practices. In order to win his father's approval, Esav married Machalat, the daughter of Yishmael, and the granddaughter of Avraham. Again, the Torah is indicating that Esav deeply valued his father's approval and he made an important decision in order to secure this approval.

This raises an important question. If Esav placed such high value upon his father's approval, why did Yitzchak not attempt to reform Esav? Why did Yitzchak not use his influence to motivate Esav to become a better person?

“And Yitzchak loved Esav because he ate from his game. And Rivka loved Yaakov.” (Beresheit 25:28)

The pasuk seems to tell us the Rivka recognized the superiority of Yaakov but Yitzchak preferred Esav to Yaakov. Sforno contends that this interpretation is not the actual meaning of the pasuk. According to Sforno, Yitzchak was not unaware of Yaakov's superiority. He loved Yaakov. However, he also loved Esav. He knew that Esav was not as righteous as Yaakov. But he believed that Esav was basically a good person. In contrast, Rivka loved Yaakov alone. She determined that Esav was wicked. She did not share Yitzchak's more moderate point of view.[2] However, this raises an interesting question. Sforno's interpretation of the pasuk seems somewhat arbitrary. What is the basis for assuming that Yitzchak actually acknowledged the superiority of Yaakov?



“And now, take your weapons – your sword and your bow. And go out to the field and hunt game for me.” (Beresheit 27:3)

Yitzchak is preparing to bestow his blessing on Esav. He tells Esav that a preparatory measure is required. Esav must go on a hunting expedition. He must hunt and prepare for his father a special meal. There are a number of difficulties presented by these instructions to Esav. First, why did Yitzchak insist that Esav hunt game? The impression created by the command is that Yitzchak had very particular tastes and specifically wished to eat fresh game. However, if we consider another pasuk, this does not seem to be true.

“Go now to the flocks and take for me from there two young kid goats and I will make for your father the delicacies that he loves.” (Beresheit 27:9)

Rivka overhears Yitzchak's instructions to Esav. She realizes that Yitzchak is prepared to bestow on Esav blessings that she feels must

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Death of the Soul

(Toldot cont. from pg. 2)

Weekly Parsha

the
FUNDAMENTALS
&
YOUR CHILD

Over the past few months, we have stressed the vital need for schools and yeshivas to teach Judaism's Fundamentals. As you will read in this week's Letters, missionaries are hard at work, striving to convert Jewish youth.

The one defense we must offer our youth is the knowledge of how and why Judaism is the one, true religion. The Fundamentals will offer our youth a lasting commitment to Judaism, and will disarm missionaries. Have you addressed this yet with your school? Or will we allow our children to remain easy prey for well-trained and clever missionaries?

be given to Yaakov. She tells Yaakov to disguise himself as Esav, substitute himself for his brother, and secure the blessings that Yitzchak intends to give Esav. Of course, Yaakov will need to produce the delicacies that Esav at this very moment is preparing. Rivka explains that this is not a problem. She will prepare these delicacies from two young kid goats. Apparently, Rivka is certain that Yitzchak will be incapable of distinguishing the food she would prepare from the foods he had instructed Esav to bring him. In fact, she was correct! Yaakov brings Yitzchak the foods prepared by his mother and Yitzchak does not detect the substitution.

Apparently, Yitzchak's tastes were not that particular or well developed. So, why did he insist that Esav hunt and prepare game for him?

There is an additional problem with Yitzchak's instructions to Esav. Why does Yitzchak need a meal before blessing Esav? Again, there seems to be a simple explanation. Yaakov indicates that this meal will place him in the state of mind needed to bestow the blessing. However, an incident later in the parasha challenges this interpretation.

"And Yitzchak called for Yaakov and he blessed him. And he commanded him and said to him, "Do not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan." (Beresheit 28:1)

Yitzchak summons Yaakov and instructs him not to marry a woman from Canaan. He is to travel to the house of Lavan and seek a wife there. Yitzchak then confers an additional blessing on Yaakov. In this case, Yitzchak does not require a meal before blessing Yaakov. Why did Yitzchak need to enjoy a meal before blessing Esav but not before blessing Yaakov?

Sforno contends that the answer to these two questions offers an important insight into the purpose of the instructions that Yitzchak gave to Esav and supports his assertion that Yitzchak was aware of Yaakov's superiority.

Sforno explains that Yitzchak was not blind to Esav's spiritual shortcomings. He was concerned that his efforts to bestow a blessing upon Esav might be undermined by these failings. He concluded that his success would depend upon involving Esav in some activity of virtue and merit. He hoped that by blessing Esav while he was involved in a virtuous activity the blessing would be effective. Therefore, he instructed Esav to immerse himself in the activity of serving his father. He hoped that the merit of this activity would provide the framework necessary for the blessing to be effective.

This explains Yitzchak's instructions. He did not require these delicacies for his state of mind. He felt that it was important for Esav to involve himself in the activity of honoring his father. Sforno adds that it is apparent that Yitzchak fully recognized the spiritual superiority of Yaakov. When Yitzchak blessed Yaakov, these preparations were not necessary. Yaakov was on a far more elevated spiritual level. He was fit to be blessed without involving himself in some immediate act of virtue. Yitzchak was confident that his blessing for Yaakov would be effective without resorting to any expediency. [3]

There is another even more explicit indication that Yitzchak was fully aware of Yaakov's spiritual superiority.

"And He should give you the blessing of Avraham – to you and to your children with you – to possess the land of your sojourns that G-d gave to Avraham." (Beresheit 28:4)

As explained above, before Yaakov left his father, Yitzchak conferred one additional blessing upon him. He designated Yaakov to be the heir of the blessings that Hashem had bestowed upon Avraham. Sforno notes that it is apparent that Yitzchak never imagined giving this blessing to Esav. He recognized that Esav was completely unfit to carry on Avraham's mission. Yitzchak knew that this blessing was destined for Yaakov. Clearly, this Yitzchak's conclusion indicates that he fully appreciated the spiritual superiority of Yaakov.[4]

We can now begin to understand Yitzchak's failure to rebuke Esav for his behaviors. Yitzchak was not unaware of Esav's failings. However, he did not fully recognize the implications of these failings. He believed that Esav was essentially a good person. But he was not on the elevated spiritual plane of his brother Yaakov.

Of course, it may seem presumptuous to attribute such a significant error in judgment to Yitzchak. Indeed, it is only prudent to consider whether our Sages agree with Sforno's assessment.

"And it was when Yitzchak became old that his vision faded. And he called to Esav his older son. And he called to him, "My son." And he responded to him, "I am here". (Beresheit 26:1)

The Torah tells us that in his old age Yitzchak was afflicted with blindness. Sforno notes that there is a parallel incident of a tzadik being afflicted with blindness. Eli the Kohen Gadol was also afflicted with blind-

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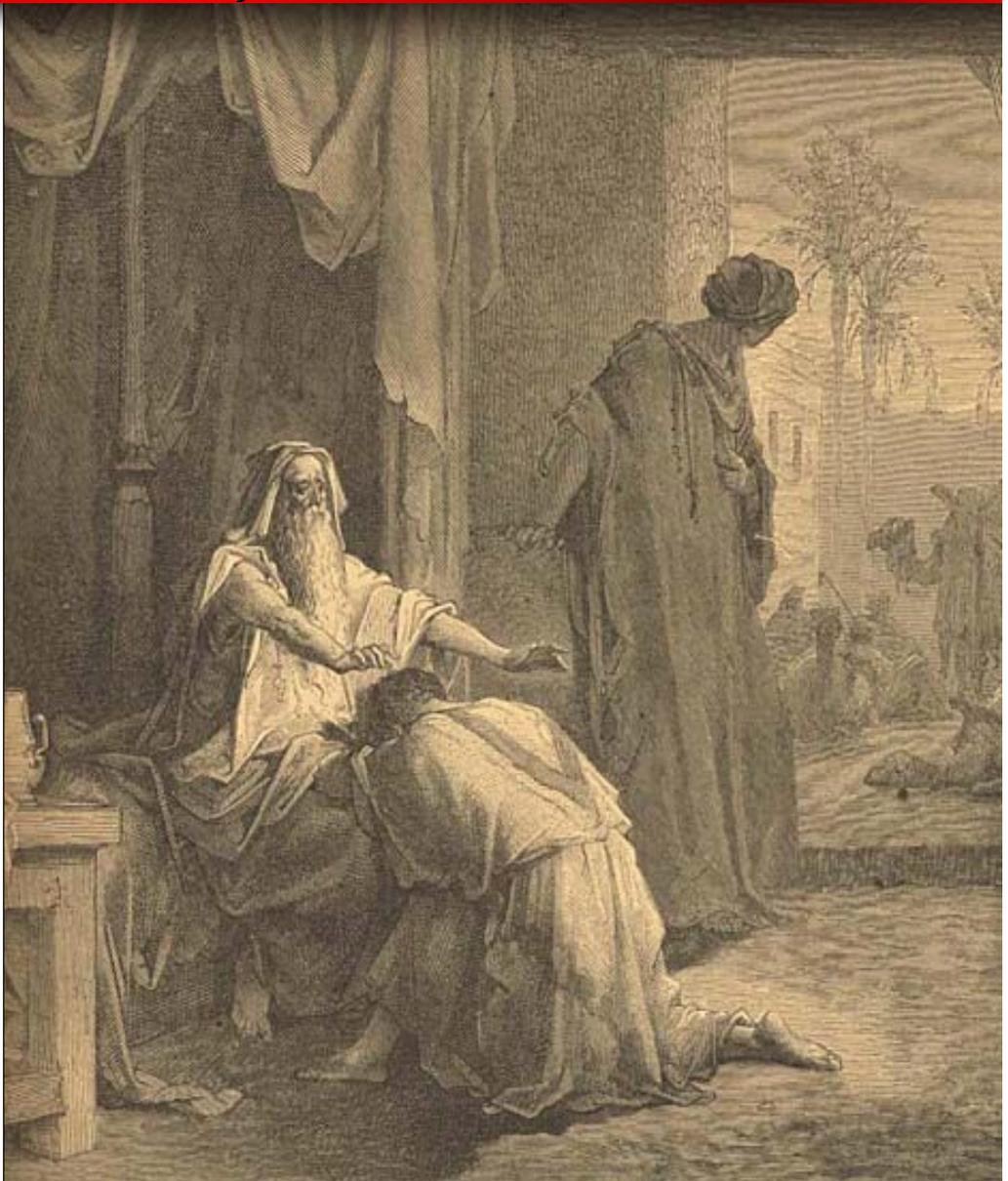
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Weekly Parsha

ness in his old age. Sforno notes that that the Navi tells us the Eli was remiss in not rebuking his sons for their inappropriate behaviors. Although the Navi does not explicitly tell us that Eli's blindness was a punishment for his failure to rebuke his sons, it is notable that both he and Yitzchak failed in rebuking their sons and were subsequently afflicted with blindness.[5] Other commentaries further develop this connection and suggest that Yitzchak's blindness was indeed a punishment. Rashi quotes the midrash that explains that Yitzchak was blinded by the smoke from the heathen offerings given by Esav's wives.[6] Daat Zekaynim quotes another midrash that Yitzchak was blinded in response to accepting a bribe! What was the bribe that Yitzchak accepted? Daat Zekaynim explains that the game that Esav prepared for his father was a bribe. It undermined Yitzchak's judgment of Esav. In other words, in his evaluation of Esav, Yitzchak was unreasonably influenced by the honor and adoration that Esav showed towards him.[7] It is clear from both of these midrashim that Sforno's interpretation of Yitzchak's actions and attitudes is supported by the Sages. Both midrashim share a common theme. Yitzchak was punished with blindness in response to his failure to see through Esav's deference towards him. This same error of judgment prevented Yitzchak from reacting properly towards Esav's decision to marry women from Canaan.

Why was Yitzchak punished with blindness? Of course, there is an obvious connection that is noted by the midrash. The Torah tells us that a judge who accepts a bribe is blinded by it. However, Daat Zekaynim suggests another connection. It was Yitzchak's blindness that allowed Yaakov to successfully masquerade as Esav.[8] In other words, Yitzchak's failure to objectively evaluate Esav precipitated the crisis that could only be resolved through a deception. Yitzchak's blindness was essential to the success of this deception.

Based on this analysis, Sforno explains the relationship between the Torah's account of Esav's marriage to women from Canaan and Yaakov's securing of the blessings that Yitzchak intended for Esav. Esav married these women and Yitzchak did not respond. This incident captures the relationship between Esav and his father. It provides a revealing introduction to the account of the blessings. It alludes to the conditions and imperatives that compelled Rivka and Yaakov to deceive Yitzchak.[9] ■



[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 26:34.

[2] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 27:1.

[3] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 27:4.

[4] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 27:29.

[5] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 27:1.

[6] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 27:1.

[7] Da'at Zekaynim, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 271:1.

[8] Da'at Zekaynim, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 271:1.

[9] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 26:35.

Letters

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"The only poor question is the one not asked."

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“The first mitzvah is that He commanded us to believe (ba-hamunah) in the Deity, that is, that we ‘believe’ that there is a cause and motive force behind all existing things. This idea is expressed in the statement ‘I am the Lord thy God’.”

Interestingly enough, and in support of your position, Rambam changed his language from “faith” to “knowledge” in the Mishne Torah, wherein Rambam writes:

“It constitutes the most fundamental of fundamentals and pillar of all science to ‘know’ (le yodeah) that there is a First Cause bringing into existence all existing things, and that all that exists on heaven and earth and between them, exists only through the truth of His existence. The knowledge of this concept constitutes a positive precept, as it said, ‘I am the Lord thy God’.” (Yesodei HaTorah, 1:6)

Rambam later writes in his Guide:

“There is, however, an opinion of our Sages frequently expressed in the Midrashim, and found also in the Talmud, to this effect: The Israelites heard the first and the second commandments from God, i.e., they learnt the truth of the principles contained in these two commandments in the same manner as Moses, and not through Moses. For these two principles, the existence of God and His Unity can be arrived at by means of reasoning, and whatever can be established by proof is known by the prophet in the same way as by any other person; he has no advantage in this respect. These two principles were not known through prophecy alone. Compare, “Thou hast been shown to know that,” etc. (Deut. iv. 34). But the rest of the commandments are of an ethical and authoritative character, and do not contain [truths] perceived by the intellect. Notwithstanding all that has been said by our Sages on this subject, we infer from Scripture as well as from the words of our Sages, that the Israelites heard on that occasion a certain sound which Moses understood to proclaim the first two commandments, and through Moses all other Israelites learnt them when he in intelligible sounds repeated them to the people.”

Needless to say however, the proofs you have primarily relied upon, to wit, the historical veracity of an event viewed by millions are quite differ-

ent than those employed by Rambam who relied upon philosophical proofs.

Far more important however is that based upon this Rambam, either the Sinaic transmission of the first 2 commandments, or that the first 2 commandments can be attained by intelligence, the fact remains that the balance of Judaism, i.e. the remainder of the 611 mitzvot which we did not hear or witness and are not subject to philosophical speculation (e.g. chukim) are entirely based on faith – faith in Moses that all that he commanded constitutes the authentic message of God.

I await your comment,

Nativ Winiarsky

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Nativ, you raise a most basic question regarding our ongoing address of “Judaism: A Religion of Proof”. Maimonides is renowned for his meticulous detail and precision with his words. With others, we might dismiss such inconsistencies, not so with Maimonides. These very differences are intentional, directing his readers and students to delve into his intent. Over the past few hundred years, great minds have written volumes on such inconsistencies and “slight” nuances, unlocking untapped vaults of Maimonides’ genius.

You have accurately shown that in his Mishneh Torah, Maimonides uses “Yideah”, “to know” when discussing the command to know God. However, when describing the very same command in his Book of Commands (Sefer HaMitzvos), he uses the term “Le’ha-amin” commonly translated as “belief”, but more accurately, to “confirm”. So which one is it: are we to obtain “da-as”, “proven” knowledge of God, or are we to confirm God’s existence, having “emunah”? (The translation of “belief” is not totally accurate: “emuna” is derived from “amen” meaning to confirm as true.) Nonetheless, Maimonides does in fact alter his term, using “to know” in the Mishneh Torah, and “to confirm” in his Book of the Commands. Why the inconsistency?

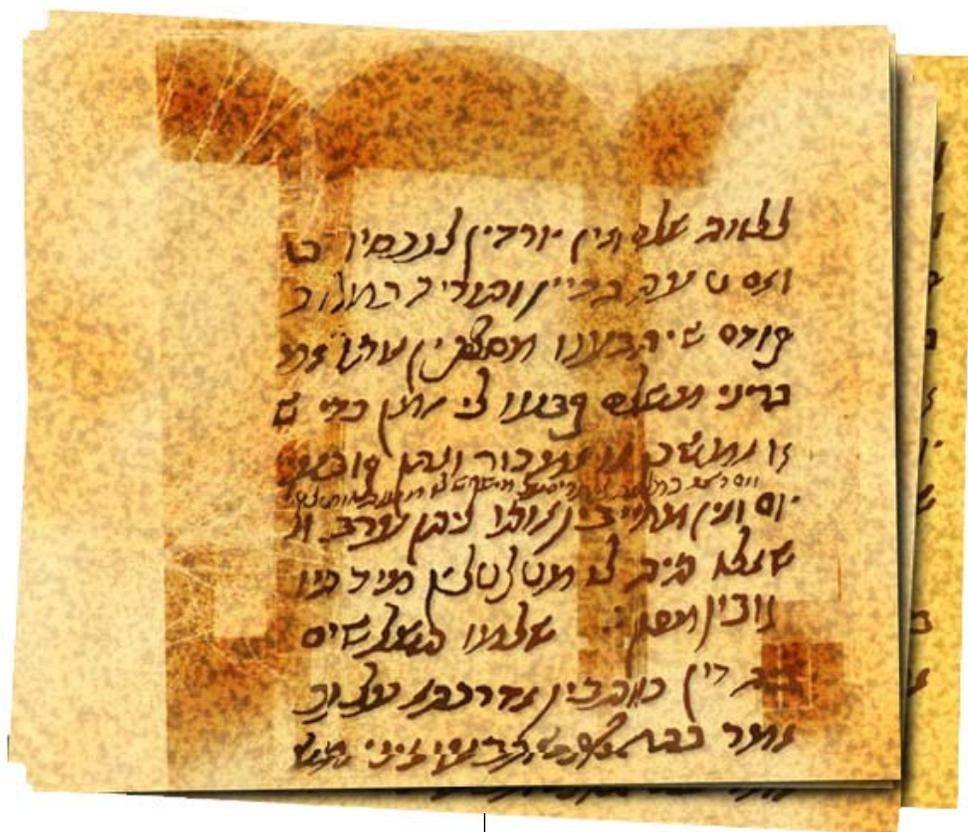
Maimonides again differs when addressing the command to love God. In his Mishneh Torah, (Yesodei HaTorah 2:2) he describes the method as studying His “wondrous creation” alone – no mention of Torah or mitzvot. While in his Book of Commands, he says we must study “His commands and His creation”. Which one is the prescribed method for arriving at love of God: studying creation alone, or also the mitzvot? Why this discrepancy?

Regarding Maimonides’ position on what Moses and the Jews received respectively at Sinai, let us read the beginning of the chapter you quoted from his Guide for the Perplexed, Book II, Chap. XXXIII:

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

Maimonides sums up his words with that last sentence: “It was only Moses that heard the words, and he reported them to the people.” Maimonides is of the position that Moses alone heard real words, while the people heard a sound, and not identifiable words. The statement of the Sages you quoted is not in conflict with Maimonides: “...the Israelites heard on that occasion a certain sound which Moses understood to proclaim the first two commandments, and through Moses all other Israelites learnt them when he in intelligible sounds repeated them to the people.” I repeat, “when he in intelligible sounds repeated them”. This means until Moses spoke, the Jews did not hear “words”. Thus, both Maimonides and the Sages were of the position that the Jews heard no distinct words at Sinai. What they did hear, Maimonides states, “and the people only heard the mighty sound, not distinct words.”

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Nativ, this strengthens your question concerning trust in Moses: Moses transmitted not 611, but all 613 commands. However, we also learn that Moses had no advantage over the Jews regarding the first two commands: I. Knowing God, and II. Refusing Idolatry. Maimonides, quoting the Sages said, “whatever can be established by proof is known by the prophet in the same way as by any other person; he has no advantage in this respect”. What are we to learn from this remark of the Sages?

Let us review the questions, and add a few more:

1. Why does Maimonides differ between his Mishneh Torah and his Book of Commands, stating that we must “know” God (da-as) in the former, and “confirm” God (emunah) in the latter book?
2. Why does he differ again regarding the command to love God: one time describing the method as studying creation alone, and the next, as studying both, the commands and creation?
3. Why did the Sages stress that Moses and the Jews (all mankind) were equal regarding knowledge of God, and refuting idolatry, the first two Commandments?
4. In his Mishneh Torah (Yesodei HaTorah, 1:6) why does Maimonides state, one not only

transgresses the command to know God, but he “denies the fundamental, upon which all stands”? What is this second ridicule, and why is this omitted in his Book of Commands?

5. In his Mishneh Torah, why does Maimonides not mention the ‘command’ aspect of knowing God, until law number VI? One would assume that he should initially describe the command in his very first law.

6. If “knowing God” is such a fundamental, why is it not a “formalized” Noachide law, as are the 7 Noachide laws?

When commenting on Maimonides’ Book of Commands (Positive Command I) Nachmanides states as follows:

“What is apparent from the Baal Halachos is that the count of the 613 is only His decrees, praised be He, which He decreed on us to do, or from which to refrain. However, confirmation in His existence, praised be He, which He made known to us through signs and wonders and revealing His presence to our eyes, that is a fundamental and root, from which were the commands borne out, [and is] not counted in his calculation [of the 613].”

“He [God] made the acceptance of His reign one independent matter, and His decreed mitzvos from Him, praised be He, another matter.”

“And you will not find in any place a command that says, ‘Know and confirm that I am God who took you out of Egypt and perform My commands.’ All this does not fall under the calculation of the 613. For it [knowledge of God] is the ‘essence’, and they [the commands] are secondary.”

It is clear: Nachmanides distinguishes between knowledge of God, and the commands. Knowledge of God is not counted as a command, according to the Baal Halachos. Nachmanides refers to the knowledge of God, as a “fundamental and root”. What is this lesson?

Nativ, your question generates a new understand to myself, and I am sure to others, of how we must differentiate between “knowledge of God” and our “love of Him”, and between all other issues. What is this difference? T is this: Knowledge of God is not comparable to any other issue, or law. This knowledge possesses the distinction of being the substratum of all other knowledge, for without knowing God’s existence, our knowledge of all else is completely inaccurate. Sure, a scientist who is an atheist may know how to predict phenomena, and how to manipulate creation with great accuracy. However, ignoring God’s existence, he knows nothing about the true purpose of anything. God created the world for man to constantly draw closer to God using his knowledge. The atheist misses this mark. This is Nachmanides lesson with his words, “Knowledge of God is a fundamental and root, from which were the commands borne out” and Maimonides’ lesson with “one denies the fundamental, upon which all stands”. This is the first difference between Knowledge of God, and all other issues. But there is another amazing idea here.

Why did Maimonides not initially describe the “command” aspect of the law of knowing God, but instead, opened his Mishneh Torah describing such knowledge as a “fundamental of all fundamentals and a pillar of all wisdom” omitting all mention of Torah and mitzvos? Why in this work, does he omit Torah and mitzvos as the means of “loving God”, even after teaching of the command? What is Nachmanides’ lesson, that the Baal Halachos does not count Knowledge of God as one of the 613, and that “God is the ‘essence’, and the commands are secondary”? This implies there is something greater than Torah and mitzvos! And this startling discovery is strengthened by Noachides having no ‘formalized’ law to know God, and the 2448-year delay in God giving His Torah to mankind.

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God

A universal idea, which surpasses this first one is this: a “command” to know God, belittles the obvious reality of God’s existence. So obvious is it that a world requires a Creator, that any command to recognize this point, implies the need for this command. However, to suggest a “need” for such a command is as if to say, without this command, a human might remain ignorant of this. However, such ignorance is so far from reality that no initial command was given that we must know God. This statement is as absurd as telling someone “You are commanded to know that you exist”. Commands are ‘external’ impositions on our initially blank minds, whereas the reality that the world requires a Creator is the most evident phenomenon that human intelligence from youth is designed to deem mandatory.

Without training, a human mind functions according to “Cause and Effect”. One need not be taught this reality. If an infant sees a new toy on a table, not there a second ago when he last looked, he knows “someone” placed it there, and he looks for that someone, for he knows someone else is in the room. Its new presence was “caused” and he intuitively knows this. Similarly, one need not be taught the idea of “equality”; every infant feels unfamiliar when seeing a stranger. But, how does it know this is a “stranger”, unless its mind naturally compares this face, with his recollection of his mother’s face? Comparison and equality are not ‘taught’ concepts, but are with us from birth, synonymous with our intellect. “Cause and Effect” is no different.

To embellish this idea of the inescapable truth of God, the “Creator”, we find a universal omission of this command in many areas: Maimonides omits this command from his first 5 laws to display its fundamental nature outside of Torah commands; in his Mishneh Torah Maimonides says love of God is derived from creation, and not via studying His commands; the Baal Halachos does not count knowledge of God as a command at all; Maimonides refers to this truth as a fundamental, prior to referring to it as a command: and Noachides were not commanded in knowing God. The position our minds must have of “Knowledge of God” should naturally be one that surpasses ‘imposed’ law (mitzvah) and realized as a self-evident. This explains why Moses and the Jews were equal with regards to the first to Commandments: Knowing God and denying others. Amazing, we learn such a fundamental, by its omission.

Now although the Torah’s 613 includes this command to know God, the Noachide laws do not. This is because, as a Rabbi taught, Noachide laws are not laws mandating perfection, but a minimum set of laws entitling the observer to continued life. The reason why the Torah’s 613

commands do include an obligation to know God is because a system of perfection must include the most primary truth. In contrast, the Noachide laws govern man from deviating too far, deserving death. But aside from those Noachide laws, there were no “laws”: Adam, Noah and all mankind were to live in accord with “reality”, and God created this world with a most evident reality of His existence, and not mandated: “The whole universe is filled with His honor”. This means that God’s design of the world precisely directs all intelligent life towards the truth of the Creator.

This now explains why Maimonides alters his language regarding the command of loving God. In his Book of Commands, he says one fulfills the obligation to know God through studying both: creation, and Torah. For in this work, Maimonides formulates the system of Torah: the 613. But his Mishneh Torah addresses a broader spectrum, also addressing philosophy. As such, he offers us the true philosophy of life and commands, seen in his philosophical summations in each book, and in his commencing chapters of “Fundamentals” and “Personality Traits” (Yesdodei HaTorah and Dayos). Therefore, in the Mishneh Torah, he describes loving God as achieved not through mandated laws, but through studying creation: for this reality exists above and prior to the Torah system.

This brings us to your initial question: Maimonides’ discrepancy between “knowing” God, and “emuna” or confirmation, as I wish to translate it. Again, the Book of Commands’ (Sefer HaMitzvos) focus is the post-Sinai Torah system of laws. As has been demonstrated, the Jews received not 611, but all 613 laws from Moses. This means, they must “trust” Moses’ transmission as truly Divine in origin. This trust or emuna applies to all laws, including the command to know God, and that God exists and commanded this law. Thus, in his Book of Commands, Maimonides uses the precise term “emuna” when describing the commands from Sinai: Torah adherence is based on our trust in, and receipt of Torah from Moses. But in his Mishneh Torah, when describing absolute reality, Maimonides changes his word to “da-as” teaching that “knowledge” of God is available through the intellect and proof, aside from Torah. This is not subject to trust or emuna, but each of us must use our intellect to comprehend it. We learn from Maimonides’ distinction that knowledge of God straddles both realms: 1) it is a command we must confirm based on our receipt of this command from Moses, in whom we trust communicated God’s words truthfully, and 2) aside from the Torah system, we can most definitely arrive at knowledge of God through intellect.

Again, Maimonides stated that one who does not admit of God, “denies the fundamental, upon which all stands”, aside from violating Torah law, for there is this second, meta-Torah and more primary realm of truth. A commentator on Proverbs who I cannot recall stated that the Torah system is a “formulation”. And that which is formulated, is secondary to He who always existed. God’s existence is most primary, while a formulated system “comes after the fact”. For this reason, Maimonides omitted his ridicule that “one denies the fundamental” in his Book of Commands. For this book is reserved for the realm of the Torah system, and not absolute reality.

The very omission of Knowledge of God as a Torah command by the Baal Halachos highlights this central concept: God is a self-evident truth grasped without a commanded, imposition on man. The fact we are commanded to know God is due to the need of a system, not due to any need of this truth itself.

Omission teaches mankind that “God goes without saying.” ■





QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

RABBI DANIEL MYERS

Q. (248) Is one obligated to give Zedaka to an individual who comes to one's house collecting on behalf of an Ani?

A. There are two Halachot regarding one's Mitzvah of Zedaka: 1) Maasair, which requires an individual to give between 10%-20% of one's earnings to Zedaka each year and 2) an Issur which prohibits one from turning an Ani, (indigent) away without giving him anything. (Rambam Hilchot Matnot Aniyim 7:5, S"A Yoreh Daiah 249:1, Ramah ibid., Birkai Yosaif ibid.) The Pasuk (Tehilim 74:21) states "Al Yashov Dach Nichlam" one should not turn back the oppressed in shame. The Ramah (249:4) writes that it is Assur, prohibition, to send away an Ani empty-handed, he must give him something, even a very small amount. This restriction applies even to one who has already given his Maasair for the year. One who has nothing to give an Ani should tell him that he would like to help him but unfortunately is unable to; he should try to comfort him to the best of his abilities. (S"A 249:4) According to Rav Chaim Kanievski Shlita, this Issur applies only when the Ani himself is standing before the individual, not when a representative is collecting on his behalf. (Derech Emuna Matnot Aniyim 7:48. However, see Teshuvot V'hanhagot 3:287 where he is unsure about this leniency. See also B'air Moshe 4:92 where he is Machmir when one receives an authentic request for money on behalf of the Ani.)

Q. (249) Is the Mitzvah today of Teruma and Maasair Midoraita (Biblical) or Midrabanan (Rabbinic)?

A. The Mishna in Bikkurim (2:3) states that although the Mitzvah of Bikkurim only applies when the Mikdash is stand-

ing, the Mitzvah of Terumah and Maasair is independent of the Mikdash. This would imply that Teruma is Midoraita nowadays even though the third Mikdash is not yet standing. However, the Rambam (Terumot 1:26) Paskins that the Mitzvah of Teruma and Maasair is Midoraita only when we have Biat Kulchem, when all of B'nai Yisrael is living in Eretz Yisrael. This condition existed during the Yerusha Rishona when Yehoshua led the conquest of Eretz Yisrael, but did not exist during the Yerusha Shniya, when Ezra led the Jews back from Bavel, and will exist again, Bimhaira B'yamainu, during the Yerusha Shlishit. The Raavad (ibid.) disagrees with the Rambam, maintaining that Biat Kulchem is not essential for the D'oraita Mitzva of Teruma and Maasair, and is only essential for Challah. Many Rishonim agree with the Raavad that Teruma is not dependent on Biat Kulchem, but still Paskin that Teruma is Midrabanan nowadays since they hold that the Kedushat Haaretz during the time of Ezra ceased after the Churban. (Derech Emunah Terumot 1:231) L'maseh, we assume that Teruma is D'rabanan nowadays. (Ramah Y"D 331:2, Chazon Iish Shviit 9:18, Derech Emunah ibid.)

Q. (250) Tehila Jacobs: Is one allowed to pull out a loose tooth on Shabbat?

A. The Shulchan Aruch (340:1) writes that it is Assur for one to cut his nails, or pull out his hair on Shabbat, because of the prohibition of Gozaiz, shearing. The Mishna Berura (340:1) adds that this Issur applies to teeth as well. The Shulchan Aruch (328:31) writes that one is allowed to remove (with his hand) a hangnail if 1) Pirshu Rovav, the majority of the nail is

(continued on next page)

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Halacha - Jewish Law



detached and 2) he is in pain. The Mishna Berura (328:96) explains the Heiter: Since it is mostly removed already, it is considered Halachically detached, and one does not violate the Biblical Issur of Goza'iaz. Normally, it would still be Rabbinnically prohibited to remove it, but the Rabbanan were lenient here, in a case of Zaar, pain, and allowed one to remove it if it is done with a Shinui, such as with one's hand instead of nail clippers. This leniency does not apply to other loose skin, such as cuticles or loose pieces of skin hanging from the lips. (M"B 328:99) Regarding loose teeth, the Piskai Teshuvot (328:24) brings down the Shibalai Haleket, who is lenient, comparing the removal of teeth to the removal of nails. According to this, one may remove a loose tooth with his hand if he is in pain. However, this leniency would apply only if bleeding is not inevitable.

Q. (251) Rabbi Ari Solar: Must one see the entire rainbow in order to say the Bracha "Zocair Habrit"?

A. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 229:1) writes that one who sees a Keshet, rainbow, should recite the Bracha "Baruch Atah. Zochair Habrit Neeman B'brito V'kayaam B'maamaro." The Biur Halacha (ibid. "Haroe'h") raises the question whether one must see the entire rainbow, i.e. the bow-shape, in order to make the Bracha, or it is enough to see any part of the rainbow. He leaves the question unanswered. The Teshuvot V'hanhagot (3:76:6) concludes that since it is a Safaik, one should not say a Bracha unless he sees the complete rainbow.

Q. (252) Mr. Danny Persoff: Is there an Issur to look at a rainbow?

A. The Shulchan Aruch (229:1) writes that it is prohibited to look at a rainbow "B'yotair" for a prolonged period of time. The Gra (ibid.) writes that there is no prohibition of R'eeyah, briefly looking, for one needs to see the rainbow in order to make the Bracha; rather, the Issur is Histaklut, staring intently. (See also Machazit Hashekel ibid.) The Iyun Yaakov writes that it is a Mitzvah to see the rainbow in order to recite the Bracha. However, the Mishna Berura (229:1) quotes the Chayai Adam who maintains that one should not tell a friend that there is a rainbow in the sky. Regarding the reason for the Issur, the Gemara (Baizah 16a) writes that the rainbow symbolizes the glory of Hashem, therefore, it is inappropriate to look at the rainbow just as it would be wrong to look at the glory of Hashem, K'veyachol. (See Shmot 24:10-11 regarding B'nai Yisrael looking at Elokai Yisrael.) The Tosfot Harid explains the comparison between a Keshet and Hashem: Just like the colors of a rainbow are indiscernible, one can not tell where one color ends and another begins, so too with regard to Hashem, we can not truly know Him, and we must symbolize that ignorance by

abstaining from staring at the rainbow. (See the M'eeri Baizah 16a, where he writes that the Issur is not to stare at the rainbow, rather, to delve into the mysteries of the Pesukim that deal with the rainbow in Parshat Noach.)

Q. (253) Shmuel Myers: Can one use an egg slicer on Shabbat?

A. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 321:10, M"B ibid. 36) writes that it is Assur Medin Uvdin D'chol to use a grater or any other device that is specifically designed for grinding purposes. Therefore one can not grate any food with a grater, even those foods that are not subject to the Issur of Tochain, i.e. foods that do not grow from the ground, such as meat, fish, eggs and cheese. (M"B 321:31) Regarding an egg slicer, Rav Shlomo Zalman permits its use since it is essentially only a series of blades designed for slicing, not chopping or grinding. Therefore, it is not viewed as a grinding tool. (Shmirat Shabbat Khilchata 6:note 12, Igroth Moshe Orach Chaim 4:74:Tochain 4)

Q. (254) Mr. Shlomo Heineman: In a Minyan consisting only of Kohanim:

1) Do they say Birkat Kohanim?

2) If yes, does someone read to them the verses and do they repeat after him or do all the Kohanim say the verses together without someone reading them off?

A. 1) The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 128:25) deals with this exact case! He writes: "In a Shul where there are only Kohanim, if there are only 10 Kohanim present, they should all do Birchat Kohanim. Who is the Bracha directed to? To the people in the fields. If there are more than 10 Kohanim, then 10 Kohanim do not go to Duchan so that they could answer Amain to the Birchat kohanim, while the remaining Kohanim Duchan."

2) The Mishna Berura (128:97) writes that the Chazan should call out to the other Kohanim and should not Duchan.

Q. (255) Mr. Shlomo Heineman: In a Minyan consisting only of Kohanim, is there a special order for reading the Torah - does one Cohen get an Aliyah for Levi and Yisroel or is a different Kohain called up each time? On Shabbat when there are 7 Aliyot what is the procedure?

A. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 135:12) writes that if there are only Kohanim in the Shul, then we give each Aliya to a different Kohain. If there is one Yisrael there, he should be given the first Aliya because of Darchai Shalom, so that no Kohain is offended that he did not receive the first Aliya. The Mishna Berura (135:45) adds that this is also the procedure if there is just one Levi with all the the Kohanim. ■

Taken from "Getting It Straight—
Practical Ideas for a Life of Clarity"

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Questioning the Bible

DOUG TAYLOR & RABBI MORTON MOSKOWITZ

"Give me a test," I said. "Any question you want. I'm ready."

I was cocky. I'd been studying the Bible a long time, and I was sure I could handle anything the King of Rational Thought could dish out. We were sharing a take-out pizza when he mentioned that people often read the Bible without questioning or analyzing what they're reading. Convinced that I never do that, I threw down my challenge.

"OK," he replied. "You're familiar with the story in Genesis 47 of Joseph bringing his family into Egypt?"

"Sure," I said. "I've read it many times."

"What happened when Joseph brought his father Jacob before Pharaoh, king of Egypt?" he asked.

"Well, let's see," I said, struggling to remember the details. "Jacob blessed Pharaoh. Pharaoh asked Jacob how old he was. Jacob replied that he was 130 and told Pharaoh how few and unhappy his years had been. Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh again and left. That's about it."

"Very good," replied the King of Rational Thought. "Now, what's wrong with all of that?"

"What?" I said. "What do you mean, what's wrong with it?"

"Doesn't anything about that story strike you as odd?" he asked.

"Like what?"

"Well, why would Pharaoh ask Jacob how old he was right away? Isn't that an unusual opening question? And why did Jacob bless Pharaoh twice? And what's all this about Jacob saying his years were few and unhappy? This guy was a great sage and scholar. What kind of reply is that?"

I was busy eating, which was fortunate because I didn't have a clue as to how to

answer. Sensing my dilemma, the King of Rational Thought answered his own questions.

"A wise person recognizes and takes into account the attitudes and personalities of others," he began. "Pharaoh was a powerful ruler. Jacob knew this. He also knew he was a guest in someone else's kingdom and palace. So he acted carefully and respectfully. He began by blessing Pharaoh, an appropriate action under the circumstances. Then Pharaoh asked Jacob how old he was. Why was that the first thing on his mind? Because there are certain people who have to be the best at everything and can't stand it if someone has one up on them. You know the type. The possibility that Jacob was somehow better than Pharaoh, just because he might be older, bothered Pharaoh. So that was the first question he asked."

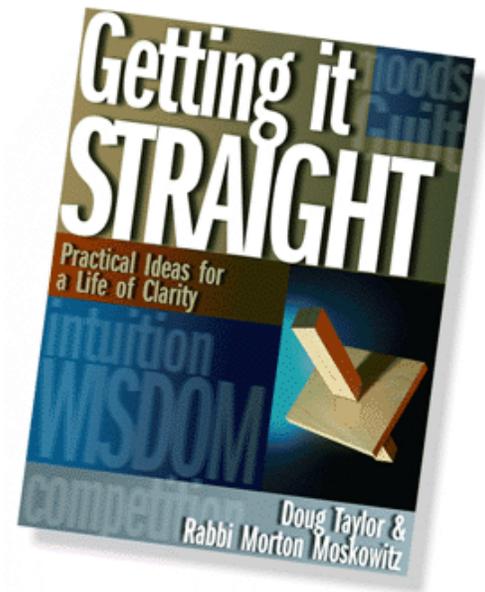
"Now," he continued, "note Jacob's wise reply. Based on Pharaoh's opening question, and possibly other information he had already gathered, Jacob had an idea of Pharaoh's personality. Remember, Jacob was no slouch. He answered truthfully, but played down his life as if to say, 'Yes, I'm old, but my years have been nothing compared to yours.' By his very reply, he appeased Pharaoh's concern, then blessed him a second time to reinforce that."

"But that sounds almost deceitful," I said.

"Not at all," he replied. "If you found yourself in the cage of a sleeping lion, would it be deceitful to tiptoe out quietly to avoid waking him?"

I was practically speechless. "How did you come up with all of this?" I finally asked.

"From the questions," he replied. "You have to question. If a passage isn't completely clear



to your mind or if it doesn't make sense, you must question it. It's your questions that can lead you to answers and real understanding. Based on the questions surrounding this passage, this interpretation is the only one that makes sense."

I wanted to continue the discussion, but realized I had to get back to work. As we parted toward our respective cars, I called out another question. "Does this mean that there are right ways and wrong ways to interpret the Bible?"

"Of course," he called back as he headed across the parking lot.

"Then that would mean that some religions are right and some are wrong," I yelled.

He smiled, waved, and was gone. ■

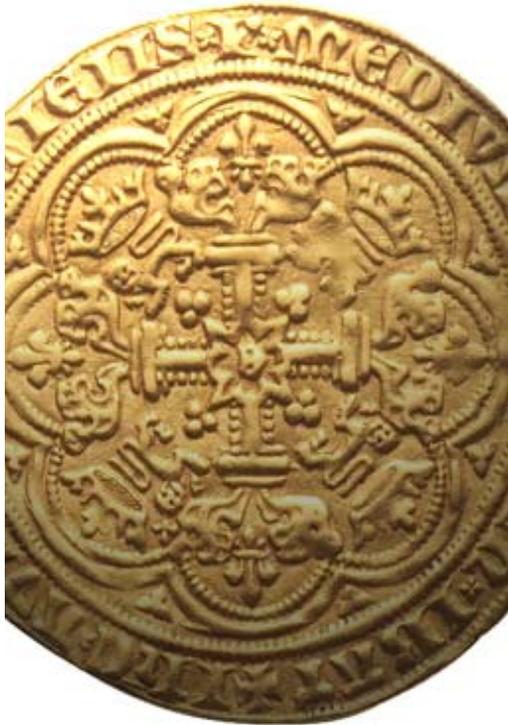
WEALTH



PERFECTION

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by student



We last explained that the mishna which says to ‘be patient when coming to a verdict’ is teaching us how one must relate to the process of knowledge. There is a tendency in man to have a false sense of assurance and confidence when searching for knowledge and it is this attitude that is responsible for people coming to a quick, hasty decision. The source for this feeling is the mindset that the knowledge comes from within the person, as if it resides somewhere within the personality, so that all they have to do is think for a short time and the knowledge will ‘come to him.’ The mishna thus teaches that we must relate to the process of knowledge as a process of seeking and discovering a reality ‘outside’ the self. This demands an attitude of patience and thinking things over to make sure that we have gone through the process correctly. We were left, however, with the question: why would the mishna refer specifically to the process of ‘din’, coming to a court decision, when the idea truly applies to all areas of knowledge?

The Rabbeinu Yonah on our mishna addresses the question. He says that monetary law is essential- ‘a great root’- to Torah, quoting the midrash that before the Ten Commandments, the verse says ‘And you will judge the nation at all times’ and after the Ten Commandments the verse says ‘And these are the judgments’, showing how Torah must be centered around a proper court system. To understand the import of this commentary, we need to understand why the court system, and justice in general, is so important. Why is the court system and monetary law central to Torah?

When it comes to performing commandments of God, there can be different internal, personal motivations that a particular individual may have. Though one person may have the motivation of ‘lishma’, doing it for the right reason only, another may have a materialistic motivation - fulfilling God’s word so that God will reward him with the worldly goods which he desires. A way in which one’s attitude and motivation can be discerned is through his attitude towards the system of monetary laws. It is in this area where his materialism is at risk, so he is put to the test to see how he behaves. There are a few examples of

this found in the Talmud. The Talmud says that the first question one is asked when they reach the world to come is “were you honest in business?” Also, the Talmud says that the prime example of Fear of God is seen in the story of one of the Tanaim who was in the middle of reciting the Shima prayer. A buyer, unaware of his involvement in Shima, kept on raising his price for an item, thinking that his previous offer wasn’t high enough. Yet, when he was done reciting the Shima, the Tana said that he accepted the original price. This Tana’s Fear of God was seen in his attitude towards his money.

When we look at monetary laws, we see that they play a greater role than just maintaining and promoting the welfare of society - there is individual perfection involved. Our Sages pointed out that when it comes to laws of returning lost possessions, the Torah specifically gives the case of finding the lost animal of your enemy to show how a person must be ‘kovesh hayetzer’, be able to control one’s emotions in order to do what is correct. Why did the Torah give us this ethical perfection in this commandment? There are many other opportunities to instruct a person to control himself! Here too, we see that how one relates to material goods is part of the perfection of the individual: the Torah tells us that embedded within the monetary law of returning lost possessions is the responsibility to control, and thus, perfect oneself so that we must treat our enemies’ possessions like anyone else. Built into our legal system dealing with financial matters is the need for perfection of the individual.

With this idea, we can now understand the commentary of Rabbeinu Yonah on our mishna. Central to Torah, is the perfection of a person, and that is specifically expressed in the realm of material goods. This is the idea of the midrash that the Ten Commandments have the idea of justice mentioned both before and after: teaching that in order to uphold these commandments correctly, one must have the correct appreciation for justice. It is for this reason that the mishna specifically highlights the realm of ‘din’, a court decree, emphasizing the value of the correct attitude when dealing with a decision of the courts in the monetary realm. ■

Letters

Never Lost

Reader: Dear Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim:

I would like to know how we explain the account of Yoshiyahu discovering a Torah Scroll. Apparently, Manashe had eradicated Judaism to such an extent that the people were completely unfamiliar with the contents of the Torah. This would refute the claim of mass revelation. Yoshiyahu could have introduced the idea that G-d spoke to our ancestors long ago, but they all strayed and we must return. Thus the religion could have started at that point with a claim of mass revelation in the past so nobody could refute it.

Kol Tuv, *Yosef Schwartz*

Mesora: As we read in Maimonides introduction to his Mishne Torah, there was an unbroken chain, from Moses to Rabbeinu HaKodesh, which includes the era of Yoshiyahu. Maimonides names every teacher and student – no break in the chain. Therefore, we learn that although many were bereft of Torah, there were others who retained the Torah's transmission in its full form, from Moses. Additionally, does not the very identification as the found scroll, as a "Torah" reveal that those Jews in the times of Yoshiyahu, recognized what "Torah" is? Had they been ignorant altogether of Torah, no one could have identified the scroll as "Torah". Hence, they too had some knowledge of Torah. The proof of Sinai thereby remains intact. ■

Never Found

Reader: Hi, Rabbi Moshe. I've been posting many of your articles from mesora.org on a blog perspectives forum. A Christian missionary has been responding to the contents of one your articles. He says that proof of Jesus can be found in the story where G-d demonstrates to Moses something about a rock. Can you please say more on this? Here is a response of the missionary to your articles and some of my arguments:

Missionary: *When Moses was in the desert with his people, God would tell him to hit the rock ONLY ONCE to bring water out of it. When Moses hit the rock Twice God was upset with him and told Moses why you disobey me, I told you only to hit the rock once, and he told Moses you would not see the Promised Land. Why was God so upset that he punished Moses from seeing the promise land? Is it just because he hit a rock twice instead of once as God commanded him? No, this hitting the rock once and getting the*

water from it was a prophecy, that the Son of God will be tortured and crucified ONCE. Jesus explain this to a women when he was at the well, he told her "I will give you water from heaven and you will never thirst". And he told her in the desert, "Moses had given your grandfathers water but they still died, who ever drinks of the water I (Jesus) shall give them, they shall never die". Get it? Moses' breaking the stone ONCE represents Jesus being crucified. The water coming out of the rock for the people to drink so they wouldn't die (the water Jesus said he would give us so that we don't die)? Do you understand this prophecy?

Me: *First, realize that the second coming belief was created by Christianity to mask Jesus' failures. THE TANAKH SAYS LOUD AND CLEAR THAT THERE WILL BE ONLY ONE COMING. And since the Messiah is human, he'll be able to walk upon the earth only once.*

As to your reference to the rock, that has ABSOLUTELY NO CONNECTION TO ANYTHING. It wasn't connected to any prophecy.

You tell me to compare my "belief" in Moses to that of Jesus; but I don't have BELIEF in Moses' prophetic capacity, or in G-d. In fact, blind acceptance is contradictory to Judaism, the only religion BASED ON NATIONAL REVELATION. Sinai was conducted in front of all the Jews and the memory lives on. Just like you don't question other ancient happenings such as major Greek battles or the existence of Pharaohs, there is no reason to question Sinai, Moses, or G-d the Most High.

That Missionary goes on claiming the same things.

Mesora: Good job Gregory...keep up your good work. You might even retort as follows: "Why can't another person claim with equal justification that Moses hitting the rock twice is a prophecy that Jesus will fail twice?"

But don't leave it there. When he responds to that, tell him that the Torah was given with an Oral Law, essential for understanding the Written Law (Bible). And since he never found the Oral Law, he cannot possibly understand the Torah, the Written Law.

As Rabbis and Jews, WE are the recipients - to his own admission - of the Torah, and WE alone possess the correct interpretations. Just as another person cannot approach Henry Ford claiming he has the original Ford, Christians too cannot approach the Jew claiming they possess the correct interpretations, or God's authentic word. ■

Moshe Ben-Chaim

Never Lie?

Reader: Why was Jacob allowed to lie to his father? Isn't lying against the Torah?

Mesora: The "truth" is that Jacob deserved Isaac's blessing, and Rebecca knew this. She was intent on upholding the truth, and she also knew that if she didn't act, even with deception, that the blessing would never be Jacob's - it was now or never. A Rabbi once taught, a "lie" is not inherently evil, if it is not about an important matter. That is, if I lie about what foods I like, it is inconsequential in terms of absolute knowledge about the life God wishes for man. A lie is evil when it forfeits the truth about life. Here, the lie perpetrated by Rebecca was inconsequential, and in fact, she intended on upholding an important truth, i.e., who would be the leader of the nation.

Reader: Thanks for sharing with me your perspective on the "Truth" that Jacob upheld, as promoted by his mother. However, I still don't understand why it had to happen in a seemingly "tricky" way, as opposed to something more straightforward.

Mesora: Regarding Rebecca and the "truth", it appears she had no other option than to deceive Isaac, and secure the blessing, which was rightfully Jacob's. Had she told Isaac that in fact, Esav did not deserve the blessings - as he was a wicked person - Isaac may not have believed it, or it may have had catastrophic results. Imagine a father, who all his life felt his son was perfected, only to hear that he was a murderer, a rapist, and an idolater.

Rebecca, with her high level of wisdom, devised the only plan she felt would succeed, which did not oppose Torah principles, as we see, God did not rebuke her. Additionally, the verses state that as soon as Jacob secured the blessing, no sooner did he leave his father's presence, that Esav entered. I feel this indicates that God worked with His providence to assure all went as Rebecca intended, and that God prevented Esav from arriving while Jacob was deceiving Isaac. Had Esav seen Jacob in front of his father, he might have killed him for stealing the blessings, even though Esav sold them earlier.

Truth is at the focus of a Torah life. How else may we arrive at what is real? However, truth, at times, must be compromised, if we are to uphold life, and "absolute truths". Rebecca demonstrated that for the success of the absolute truths, i.e., establishing the nest Torah leader, other areas may be compromised. Similarly, one may lie to save his life. This in no way distorts one's goal of striving for Torah truths. In fact, it preserves it. ■