

Much of this weeks issue contains Moses' words. How careful must we be when studying such words, articulated by the most perfected human, whom God addressed?

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Weekly Parsha

Re'eh

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"You shall not do thus to Hashem your G-d." (Devarim 12:4)

Moshe commands the people that they should uproot all objects of idolatrous worship from the land. He then enjoins the nation not to treat Hashem in this manner. Rashi explains the simple meaning of the pasuk. It is prohibited to destroy any stone of the holy altar of the Temple.[1]

(continued on next page)

PARSHA: dead, mens' gods

RABBI DR. MICHAEL BERNSTEIN

Full victory over the Canaanites will not come, Moses tells the people, when they defeat the defending armies on the battle-field. The ultimate battle will not be fought until afterward (12:30-31). "Watch yourself lest you become drawn to them after they have been destroyed before you, and lest you seek out their gods, saying, 'How did these nations worship their gods? I, too, will do the same.' You shall not do so to God your Lord, for everything that is an abomination to God, that He hates, they have done for their gods; for they have even burned their sons and daughters in the fire for their gods."

These verses reveal the great seductive power of idolatry.

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"Circumcise *the* Foreskins *of*, *your* Hearts"

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Sharpened flint with handle:
Ancient tool used for cutting

"And now Israel what does God your God ask of you, if only to fear God your God, to go in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve God your God with all of your heart and with all of your soul. To guard the commands of God and His statutes, which I command you today for your benefit. Behold, the heavens and the heavens of heavens are God's; the Earth and all that it contains. Rather, in your forefathers did God desire, to love them, and He selected their seed after them from all nations as today. And circumcise the foreskins of your hearts, and your neck shall no longer be stiff. For God your God He is the God of all judges, and the Master of all masters; the mighty, great, powerful and awesome who does not favor anyone, and does not take bribes".[1]

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Weekly Parsha

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Sefer HaChinuch points out that this mitzvah includes a variety of prohibitions. As explained above, it explicitly prohibits destroying a stone from the altar of the Bait HaMikdash. The mitzvah includes destroying other parts of the Bait HaMikdash. But the mitzvah also includes a prohibition against erasing various names used to refer to Hashem and the destruction of sacred texts.

Sefer HaChinuch explains that these seeming disparate prohibitions are all included in the commandment because they are expressions of a common theme. The altar, the names used to refer to Hashem, the sacred texts and all of the other objects included in this prohibition are associated with Hashem. The common theme is that we are not permitted to destroy something that has this association. So, although the items and objects included in this mitzvah are disparate, they share the key common feature that includes them in this prohibition.

Sefer HaChinuch explains that this mitzvah has an obvious function. We are required to fear Hashem and hold Him in awe. This mitzvah requires that we treat objects associated with Hashem with respect and reverence. This reinforces our sense of awe and fear of Hashem.^[2] In other words, in order to encourage us to develop the proper sense of fear and awe towards Hashem, we are commanded to treat with reverence even those objects or names that are closely associated with Him.

There are a number of other mitzvot and halachot that are designed to instill within us the proper attitude of fear and awe for Hashem. One of the most interesting examples is discussed by the Talmud in Tractate Megilah. The Talmud explains that the Sages created various blessings of praise. We are required to recite these blessings on the appropriate occasions. However, it is prohibited to praise Hashem beyond the blessings and prayers created by the Sages. Precisely, what activity the Talmud is prohibiting is not obvious. Rashi suggests that the prohibition is to recite or establish a blessing not required by our Sages.^[3]

What is the reason for this prohibition? After all, we would assume that praising Hashem is a positive behavior! What can be the problem with praise? The Talmud explains that these unauthorized praises are prohibited based on the passage in Tehillim – Who will utter the greatness of Hashem? He who will make heard all of His praise.^{[4],[5]} What is the meaning of this passage and how does it apply to our issue? Again, Rash provides an explanation. He comments that it is not possible for us to praise Hashem in a manner that fully captures or corresponds with His greatness. Therefore, we are required to limit our praises to those constructed by the Sages. The meaning of the passage is that only one who can

fully capture Hashem's greatness has the authority or right to praise Him. The Talmud extrapolates from the passage that we must limit our praise of Hashem to those prayers formulated by the Sages.

The discussion in the Talmud presents a small problem. In order to understand this problem, let us study more carefully one aspect of the Talmud's discussion. The Talmud posits that it is not appropriate for us to construct or establish new blessings and praises because we cannot fully capture Hashem's greatness. Why do the limits of our understanding of Hashem, generate a

prohibition against creating and establishing blessings? It seems that the position of the Talmud is that because we cannot fully comprehend Hashem's greatness, any praise that present is really an understatement. Our intent is to praise Him. But instead, our attempts at praise are diminutions of His greatness.

This raises a question. If our praises are really diminutions, why are permitted to praise Hashem using the blessings and prayers formulated by our Sages. Our Sages were great scholars and individuals of remarkable righteousness. But they were human beings. The pasuk from Tehillim quoted by the Talmud seems to indicate that no human being can fully grasp the greatness of Hashem. Our understanding is limited by our fundamental material nature. This limitation applies to our Sages as well as to us.

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(Re'eh continued from page 2)

It seems that the Torah allows us to praise Hashem in order to satisfy our need to relate to Hashem. True, we cannot offer praise that is fully proper. But we cannot serve and worship Hashem if we cannot in any way form a relationship with Him. In order to facilitate the development of a relationship with Hashem, we are permitted and encouraged to offer praise. This praise is not completely accurate or even completely appropriate. But our need to relate to Hashem requires that we offer praise. ■

This is a remarkable idea. We are not praising Hashem because He needs the praise. Neither does the Talmud regard the praise as accurate or even fully appropriate. Instead, the praise is designed to serve our needs. In other words, we are permitted to inadvertently make statements which are really an attenuation of Hashem's greatness in order to respond to our spiritual needs.

We can now understand the Talmud's insistence that we restrict ourselves to the prayers and blessings formulated by the Sages. We must recognize that any praise that we offer is inaccurate. But there are two potential causes of inaccuracy. First, as the Talmud explains, human beings are innately limited in their grasp of Hashem. Second, even within the limits of our incomplete comprehension, we may not be accurate in our understanding of Hashem. If our incomplete comprehension is flawed, the praises that we formulate will reflect this shortcoming. We cannot overcome the innate limitations upon our understanding of Hashem. But we can eliminate any additional flaws that may exist in our concept of Hashem. We can rely upon the praises that were developed by our Sages. In other words, because we are required to offer praise that is as accurate as possible we must rely on the praises formulated by our Sages.

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik Z'L suggests that this idea is contained in the Baruch She'Amar blessing that introduces Pesukai De'Zimra or Zemirot. This blessing has three parts. It begins with a discussion of Hashem's greatness. Then, it continues by noting that Hashem has been praised by His nation and His righteous. Special note is made of the Psalms – the Tehillim – composed by King David. Last, we proclaim that we too will not praise Hashem. Rav Soloveitchik suggested that this blessing is an appropriate introduction to the Zemirot we are about to recite. He suggests that we are reminding ourselves of the justification for praising Hashem. The Sages and specifically King David created praises for Hashem. We will rely on King David's creations!

Rav Soloveitchik proposes that this understanding of Baruch She'Amar explains a custom

of Rav Eliyahu of Vilna – the GRA. The GRA insisted on reciting Mizmor Shir Chanukat HaBayit LeDavid after Baruch She'Amar. Rav Soloveitchik suggested that the GRA maintains that Baruch She'Amar provides the justification for offering praise. Therefore, we should not recite King David's Psalms before we recite Baruch She'Amar. Mizmor Shir is a chapter from Tehillim. Therefore, it is not appropriate to recite this chapter before we have properly introduced King David's Psalms. ■

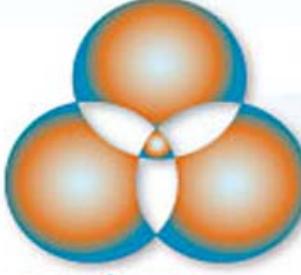
- [1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Devarim 12:4.
- [2] Rav Aharon HaLeyve, Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 437.
- [3] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on the Talmud, Mesechet Megillah 18a.
- [4] Sefer Tehillim 106:2.
- [5] Mesechet Megillah 18a.

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(Circumcise continued from page 1)

Earlier, Moses admonished the Children of Israel, citing numerous cases where they rebelled against God. Here, Moses embraces a positive message, although speaking to a rebellious emotion in man. He first expresses how one should view God's commands, "what does God your God ask of you?" Moses makes Torah obedience appear as a small thing. The Talmud asks, "Is it truly a small thing to follow the Torah? Yes, for Moses it was a small thing". This means that for such a man possessing true knowledge of the good of Torah, Moses loved God and the system, and it was not a burden. It is only in regards to the lesser Jew that Torah adherence is more of a distraction from subjective desire and a burdensome inconvenience. But if one understood – and we can – just how beneficial and enjoyable is Torah study and lifestyle; we would run to it as eagerly as did Moses. Clearly, Moses wished to impress upon the people a perfected view of Torah. Clearly, the Jews needed to hear this since they rebelled so often.

However, the next two verses strike us as completely disjointed: "Behold, the heavens and the heavens of heavens are God's; the Earth and all that it contains. Rather, in your forefathers did God desire, to love them, and He selected their seed after them from all nations as today." What is this verse's connection to the previous one? Why mention that God created everything?

In the first two verses, Moses addresses the Torah system as beneficial, focusing on the value of attaching one's self to God. But we notice a repetition. Moses repeats "God your God" three times...in a single verse.[2] We know who God is, so why the repetition? Why this phrase? What is his message? I believe Moses is stressing the God being our Creator, our "God". And he does so to make the Jews recognize they cannot exist without Him...their lives are due exclusively to Him. Moses wishes to generate a true and deep feeling of appreciation in the Jews, an appreciation for their very existence, for their lives. He wished to focus them on the realization that rebelling against God is ridiculous. Moses says in other words, "God created you, He knows what you need to be happy, and you should run to His direction...His Torah." That is why Moses says, "what does God your God ask of you?" For Moses, it was obvious and easy to follow God.

Moses then refers to himself, "which I command you today for your benefit" as if to say, "If I command you, that too should be a strong argument to follow God, since you respect my wisdom." But Moses mentions that reason to follow him, subsequent to following God...which is the ultimate reason.

Why does Moses discuss the heavens? He does so because he wishes to stress the point that from all creation, God desires man: "Behold, the

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heavens and the heavens of heavens are God's; the Earth and all that it contains. Rather, in your forefathers did God desire, to love them, and He selected their seed after them from all nations as today." The word "rather" means that although He created everything, there is some part of creation, to which He shows preference: mankind. He created us for a good life. It is His will that man enjoys what is beneficial. This argument is one of "providence": as God intervened on behalf of the Patriarchs, we witness proof that He bestows good on man, but only a man who follows the good life.

Moses' first argument was to awaken the Jew to appreciate God for his very existence; we would not be alive without God. This second argument imparts the knowledge of God's relationship with mankind: we see how He operates to benefit our forefathers, and us.

Circumcision

Now that we understand how God desires our existence, and our good, Moses tells us not to be stiff-necked any longer. But he does so with a euphemistic phrase: "And circumcise the foreskins of your hearts, and your neck shall no longer be stiff." Why can't Moses simply say what he means? Why use a euphemism? To answer this, we must first understand the command of circumcision.

Circumcision, as explained by Maimonides[3], seeks to minimize sexual satisfaction for both the man and woman. One uncircumcised experiences much greater sexual satisfaction, and so does his partner. So much so, that a woman who has slept with an uncircumcised man cannot be as satisfied with a man who had a circumcision:

"As regards circumcision, I think that one of its objects is to limit sexual intercourse, and to weaken the organ of generation as far as possible, and thus cause man to be moderate. Some people believe that circumcision is to remove a defect in man's formation; but every one can easily reply: How can products of nature be deficient so as to require external completion, especially as the use of the foreskin to that organ is evident. This commandment has not been enjoined as a complement to a deficient physical creation, but as a means for perfecting man's moral shortcomings. The bodily injury caused to that organ is exactly that which is desired; it does not interrupt any vital function, nor does it destroy the power of generation. Circumcision simply counteracts excessive lust; for there is no doubt that circumcision weakens the power of sexual excitement, and sometimes lessens the natural enjoyment: the organ necessarily becomes weak when it loses blood and is deprived of its covering from the beginning. Our Sages (Beresh. Rabba, c.

80) say distinctly: It is hard for a woman, with whom an uncircumcised had sexual intercourse, to separate from him. This is, as I believe, the best reason for the commandment concerning circumcision."

Circumcision, then, is to distance us from excessive desires. As beings granted a Tzelem Elokim – intellect – God designed us to obtain greater pleasure from knowledge, than from physical lusts. We may not feel that way emotionally, never having reached the bliss of study as exemplified by Rashi, Maimonides, Einstein, Aristotle, the Sages, and numerous others...but we can, with patience and honesty.

Applying this understanding, what did Moses mean by "And circumcise the foreskins of your hearts, and your neck shall no longer be stiff"?

It appears that physical circumcision is insufficient. Had it been, Moses' command here would be unnecessary. We are forced to conclude that although physically circumcised, we also require a "circumcision of our hearts". Ibn Ezra explains Moses' words as referring to "distancing ourselves from thick and heavy lusts". In addition to removing our foreskins, we must also circumcise ourselves "internally". How do these two circumcisions function together?

Dual Approach

One manner in which God's kindness reaches us, is His command that we minimize the intensity of our physical satisfactions. This includes laws of kosher, sexual relations on only certain days and with certain partners, fasts, and so on. Circumcision also minimizes such intensity. But these examples all refer to actual physical satisfaction...in action. There is yet another part of us that has gone undressed: our attitudes and values. It is insufficient that only our actions are addressed. For this is merely a last chance "brake system" to afford us frustration in the world of the physical, long enough to redirect ourselves back to the realm of approaching God through wisdom. For if we were 100% satisfied with the physical desires, we would not leave them. God's mercy demanded that man have frustration built into the physical world and our sensations of this world, for this very reason of redirecting us back to God. But this all applies only once we have corrupted ourselves so much, that we "decided" to sin. What about prior to such a decision? Are we to remain unrestrained in our thoughts?

God's mercy extends even to this area, as Moses commands. Moses asks that we circumcise the foreskins of our "hearts". This means that we must distance our thoughts and attachments from excessive lusts. It is only due to the first step of thoughts that man follows through in action: man

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(Circumcise continued from page 4)

first thinks to do something, and then he acts. The primary means to avoid hedonistic acts, is to learn the destruction of such acts, to gain control over our thoughts, and then avoiding sinful opportunities. And if all this fails, at least God has addressed the sinful action, by causing it to meet with frustration.

We now understand that we must not only remove our foreskin, but we must perfect our thoughts as well. In this fashion, we control both thoughts, and actions: the only two realms in which man functions. (I include speech in the realm of "action")

A Rabbi once explained why in connection with both Adam and Eve, the word "depression" (etzev) is found: "In depression you will bear children" [4] and, "In depression you shall eat". [5] Since both sinned due to an overindulgence in the physical desires, God created a change in both man and woman, that they will now experience a depression at the climax of their respective desires: women will experience postpartum depression upon birth, when they have performed that great act of creating human life; and men will feel depressed when they arrive at their accomplishments – man's area of desire. Both forms of depression are designed to redirect man and woman away from seeking life's ultimate satisfactions in the realm of the physical, enabling us to redirect our energies towards wisdom and God: that which God designed to truly offer us the greatest satisfaction.

So vital is circumcision to our individual perfection and our national formation, that failure to perform it meets with the loss of our souls; our first patriarch Abraham was commanded in it; and circumcision preempted the Exodus of each Jew:

"When God gave them the commandment of the Passover, and ordered that no one should kill the Passover lamb unless he, his sons, and all the male persons in his household were circumcised, that only "then he could come near and keep it" (ibid. xii. 48), all performed this commandment, and the number of the circumcised being large the blood of the Passover and that of the circumcision flowed together. The Prophet Ezekiel (xvi. 6) referring to this event, says, "When I saw thee sprinkled with thine own blood I said unto thee, Live because of thy [two kinds of] blood" i.e., because of the blood of the Passover and that of the circumcision." [6]

Circumcision teaches that the physical lusts are not man's essence: that would be man in the sole capacity of animal. But as our mission is to strive towards the spiritual life, we bare this indelible insignia not only as a real physical imperfection, but also as an equally real internal perfection. As we imperfect our bodies, we perfect our souls.

Perfection

Perhaps this is another subtle reason for Moses' use of circumcision in connection with perfecting our hearts.

My close friend Howard added that Moses uses a euphemism for good reason. Moses desired to teach that this act of circumcising our hearts indicates a "positive" change in our hearts, just as takes place in the organ of procreation when circumcised. Comparing physical circumcision with internal circumcision of our hearts, Moses equates their severity, which might be lost in a simple command of "distance yourselves from desires". Thus, we understand why Moses resorted to a euphemism, and such a harsh one at that.

We come to one last idea, that of Moses telling us that God loved and chose the patriarchs, and us. Why must we know this? I believe this helps us see the Torah lifestyle as truly good, since God loves it Himself. God created everything, and if there is something which He "loves", then this means it is most important to Him, and it should be most precious to us. Certainly, if what God loves...is us.

Summary

Moses desired the good for us, and directed us towards true ideas that should awaken us. He taught us that our existence is due to God, implanting in our hearts an appreciation for God. And then he taught us that of all creation, man is most elevated, and that God loves the patriarchs, and us, their offspring. Moses teaches that we must remove ourselves from the stiff-necked lifestyles that caused us to sin so often, for we are rebelling against the One who desires our good. This is akin to spitting in the face of someone who gives us millions of dollars.

And if all else fails, Moses teaches us that God will judge us: "For God your God He is the God of all judges, and the Master of all masters; the mighty, great, powerful and awesome who does not favor anyone, and does not take bribes." ■

[1] Deut. 10:12-17 [2] Deut. 10:12

[3] Guide for the Perplexed; book III chap. XLIX

[4] Gen. 3:16 [5] Gen. 3:17

[6] Guide for the Perplexed, book III, chap. XLVII

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(continued from page 1)

dead, mens gods

Consider the situation. The Jewish people have just conquered the land. With God's help, they have destroyed the indigenous defenders and completely exposed the impotence of their gods. God's power is manifest; the pagan's imaginary deities are discredited. Incredibly, at this moment of Jewish triumph, the Torah warns the victors not to be drawn to the gods of the vanquished. Why would they be drawn to these dead men's gods or find their cults attractive? What is at the root of this strange seductive power?

In actuality, idolatry is much more apt to arise out of the psychological needs of idol worshippers than from an intellectual mistake. Idolatry allows its adherents to create and observe, in the guise of a religion, a system of rituals and practices that satisfy their primitive urges and address their insecurities. Even when these pagan religions call upon their adherents to make sacrifices, there is a simultaneous satisfaction of deep primitive urges. Often this attraction is so subtle that the worshippers, unaccustomed to self-examination, are unaware of its insidious nature.

The Jewish people entering the Holy Land, although victorious on the battlefield, would not be immune to the drives and character flaws that draw people to idolatry. It was quite possible they would turn in that direction as they contended with the psychological pressures of their daily lives. However, having no direct experience with idolatrous cults, they might be intrigued by the vestiges of the destroyed cults all around them, sensing their psychological appeal. And they would ask, "How did these nations worship their gods? I, too, will do the same." The Torah forbids them to do this and warns them (12:31) that, in the end, such practices can even lead their followers to throw their children into the fire.

Ironically, the practice of child immolation, from a psychological perspective, reflects selfishness rather than altruistically intended, though misguided, religious fervor. The practitioners may tell themselves they are sacrificing their beloved children selflessly, but the exact opposite is true. These supposedly religious people are tremendously narcissistic, full of undeflected self-love. Attached to the physical reality and fearful of their own mortality, they are prepared to make the penultimate sacrifice of a relatively expendable part of themselves, namely their children, in order to protect that which is most important, namely themselves. ■



Letters *from our* READERS



Corroboration: Anyone support my view?

Is it not an internal contradiction to "support" historical credibility from Jewish texts, with another text? I mean, if a "single" historical document (Torah) or artifact is viewed as insufficient evidence alone, how can that same corrupt, "singular" nature of another source add any credibility? That second source is equally deficient as the first...and so on ad infinitum. Is it not truly the mass acceptance - even from a singular source - with universal transmission / acceptance of histories where masses were present, which truly convince the mind of a historical truth? If so, we need not look outside a nation's documents, since mass transmission of witnessed events is 100% proof that no other history is true.

Moshe Ben-Chaim ■

Letters

Psalms & Healing

"SheLo LaChavor Chaver: the prohibition against employing charms:

[That] We were restricted not to make incantations about any matter. In substance, this refers to a man who will say words, then tell people that those words helped or caused harm in any particular matter. About this it is stated, "There shall not be found among you...a charmer (Deuteronomy 18:10-11)." In the language of the Midrash Sifre: It is all the same thing, whether a person casts a charm on a snake or casts a charm on a scorpion — in other words, he says words over them so that they won't bite him, according to his opinion. So too if one says words over a wound in order to be relieved of the pain (i.e. recites a pasuk to cure a wound).

Now perhaps, my son, you might pose a question to me from what we read in the Talmud Shevuos 15b: The Psalm against evil occurrences is with lutes and lyres (Psalms 91), and then he says Psalm 3. In other words, the recital of these Psalms is of use to provide protection from harm. And it says in tractate Brachos 3a: R. Joshua b. Levi would say these verses and go to bed.

However, this matter is not similar (perish the thought) to the business of a charmer that we mentioned. Long ago, the Sages of blessed memory said in this regard (Shevuos 15b): It is forbidden to heal oneself with words of Torah. Yet they mentioned to say these Psalms, since they contain words that inspire the soul that knows them to shelter in the Eternal Lord, place all his trust in Him, establish a reverent fear of Him firmly in his heart, and rely on His kindness and goodness. As a result of his awareness about this, he will be protected, without any doubt from every harm. This is what was answered in the Talmud in this regard. For it was asked there, but how could R. Joshua do this? Here R. Joshua said it was forbidden to heal oneself with words of Torah! And the reply was given: To secure protection, it is a different matter. In other words, the Torah did not forbid a man to say words of Torah so as to arouse his soul in a good direction, so that this merit should shield him to protect him."

Sefer Chinuch, Mitzva 512
Translated by Jessie Fischbein

Translator's message: Note that recitation without understanding cannot possibly be considered something that helps a person focus on the concepts of bitachon, fear of Hashem, and reliance on His kindness. A person's merit protects him, not the words of Psalms. He gains merit when he ponders the words of Psalms and they become real to him, not when he recites them without understanding them. ■

Perfection

Focus: Internal & External Worlds

Self Application of the Parsha's Messages

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

How many areas of our lives are out of focus? To what values do we ascribe? Are they valid, true, and real? Is our vision blurred, oriented towards unchecked desires, which have their origin in external, unproven or invalid ideals? Do our passions blind us? And now that we have erred, by what means do we correct our aim? Fortunately we have the perfect guide in the form of our Torah, crafted with absolutely accurate precision and clarity, where each and every command targets some perfection in our thoughts, feelings, morals, speech or actions.

Soon we commence the month of Elul with the wake up blasts of the shofar. The High Holidays soon approach, when we come before God in judgment. We are fortunate as well to be alive at this time, not already dead with no chance to repent, where we may use this call to reflect, regret, and realign our values and actions with reality; with God's Torah. But not only do the commands' literal content educate us towards truth, the very style of the Torah's written words uncover even more truths; enlightening and

invigorating our souls with God's method of concealment and revealing of these ideas. Two examples may be taken from this week's Parshas Re-eh.

"Guard yourselves lest you stumble after them (alien nations) after they have been wiped out from before you, and lest you inquire of their gods saying, 'How do these nations worship their gods, and I too will do the same'?" (Deuteronomy 12:30)

God designed our minds in a manner that we must focus on individual ideas, as we apprehend nothing when bombarded with sensory overload. Therefore He designed the Torah in a manner that our minds may identify individual concepts: Torah sections are demarcated by gaps in the lines of text, purposefully indicating the commencement and conclusion of individual themes. And although a section will contain many ideas, there exists in each section, one individual concept which determines and binds all subordinate ideas and lessons located therein. This is a tradition, a "Mesora" as we call it. However, determining that underlying singularity in each section is not always an easy task, but it is quite enjoyable and captivating. This very section warning against idolatrous tendencies concludes a few verses later with Moses' warning "not to add or subtract from the Torah". We wonder what the relationship is between these two ideas, between idolatry and altering the body of Torah content.

Man's temptation to follow other nations and their gods is a strong drive, and obviously why Moses felt it crucial to admonish the Jews. As we said at the outset, man may follow something externally validated as real, or else, he can only follow his own machinations. There exists no third possibility, for man is equipped with only two faculties: his intellect and his emotions. He is always functioning in one of these two realms. By aligning his warning against idolatry with the obligation to adhere meticulously to the Torah with no deviation, Moses teaches how man's natural and ever-surfing fantasies may be curbed: exactitude is required if we are to remain living in line with truth. But once we act without instruction, we will end up following some erroneous, emotional feeling. Moses commanded the Jewish nation to be careful and not alter any part of the Torah. In this fashion, they will be protected from alien religious practices, since they are not allowed to deviate one iota. We see the connection.

But this is an example of not "decreasing" from the Torah, as idol worship equates to an abandonment of certain laws. Interestingly, Moses also warns against "adding" to the Torah. This is expressed in over religious activities. Both,

idolatry and over religious zeal are equally prohibited. One might think being over religious is certainly admired by God, but God differs. One who does more than the Torah asks is equally following a destructive lifestyle, for he thinks he knows better than God. Truthfully, man must be humble enough to know that if he does not measure up to the angels, or even a Maimonides, he certainly cannot second-guess God's laws and better suggest what "being religious" means. God knows exactly what man needs, as a doctor knows the quantity of medication to administer to his patients. No patient ever said, "The doctor told me to take 3 pills daily, but I will take 6." No one plays with his life in this manner. So too, no one should play with his soul by adding to what God's limited Torah advises. Remaining true to Torah law, never adding or subtracting is the only means to guard against any deviation. Unfortunately, all too many Jews today pick and choose what laws they will keep. They do further harm to themselves with their justification, "Oh come now, do YOU really keep everything?"

Moses warns against the problem, and offers a solution. In the process, we discover why something seemingly unrelated, is actually the perfect remedy. We understand why Moses connects Torah deviation with idolatry. A further tie between these two themes is what underlies the very reason people deviate: it is their internal desires. The internal, instinctual world is the mother of idolatrous tendencies. Thus, the warning against Torah addition and subtraction is directed squarely at the internal world of emotions, be it sensual or ideational, as is the case with idolatry. Adhering exactly to God's words, we make it impossible to give expression to our internal desires. Eventually, and only with deep study and analysis of His laws, man will come to see the truth in Torah and the fallacy in all other practices. He will eventually feel no attraction to what his mind will then see as fallacy. He will grow in his desire to understand more absolute truths, and ponder further about God.

On this note, I reiterate the dire need that educators insure in their curriculum, regular classes which examine other religions, contrasting them to Judaism, and exposing the absolute fallacy in their doctrines, while teaching the perfection and reasoning of Torah commands. Teaching Maimonides' 13 Principles should precede this. If this path is followed, students will no longer fall prey to missionaries and Jews for Jesus cults. Having clear proofs and answers; they will be dedicated to the perfection and unassailable truths of Judaism, and will easily refute proselytizers. To assist parents and educators, I once again direct you to issues 116 through 126 of the JewishTimes located here: www.mesora.org/jewishtimes

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These issues are free as are all others, so make good use of our efforts and research, exposing and educating the flaws of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and their doctrines as nonsensical and destructive. However, be wary of voiding the education of these false religions, which will certainly keep students in harm's way, making them prime targets of missionaries. If you do not give students the answers, no one else will. (If you have gentile teachers and fear friction, I advise you preempt them about your plans, and even invite them to attend these discussion for their own good. But by all means, no not cower from this responsibility you all owe your children and students.)

"...For God is testing us to learn whether we love God with all our hearts and with all our souls." (Deuteronomy 13:2)

Let's take one more example form this week's Parsha. Deuteronomy 13:2 warns us not to follow a prophet or dreamer who successfully predicts a wondrous sign, while directing us to follow idolatry. We are told not to listen to their words, "for God is testing us to learn whether we love God with all our hearts and with all our souls."

Many problems arise: Why would God test us in this way? What does "test" mean? Does God truly need to "learn" anything? Why would our refusal to follow the prophet or dreamer prove our "love for God"? And why is this prophet any different than Moses, who also gave signs, that we should favor Moses?

The very next verse says as follows, "After God your God you shall go, He you shall fear, and His commands you shall guard, and in His voice you shall listen, an He shall you worship, and in Him shall you cleave." (Deut. 13:4) Some verse! So many topics and actions, and a style of repetition not seen elsewhere. Most of all, we ask again, "What is the relationship between this verse and the warning not to follow the false prophet or dreamer?" How exactly is Deuteronomy 13:4 the 'perfect' response to the false prophet and dreamer?

We must know that God is not "testing" us in the manner you may first assume. This is a test, but one which 'we' initiate, as God would not set up such 'ambushes' on His people. He does not seek that we stumble. He is not vicious. What then is this "test"? It means that God arranged the world and human condition and Earthly experience from Genesis, and this is just another scenario which man will face in life: "Whom do I follow?" The test here is whether we use our minds or our emotions, not that God arranged this specific event. "Do we feel impressed with illusions, or remain firm in our intellectual convictions?" This

is the test. But life has many tests. We could say similarly, that when we pass a non-Kosher restaurant wafting mouth-watering aromas, that God is again "testing" us. God doesn't send messages to individuals to do these things: it is "human nature" at work. God certainly is not forcing a prophet or dreamer to say things he does not wish to: God did not send Jesus as a test to the Jews, as God never tampers with free will, not even with Pharaoh. That would violate His plan that each man and woman be the sole cause of his or her actions: "Reward and Punishment" is based on free will everywhere, with everyone, at all times. God also knows what we will do, but that is irrelevant, since we do not, this event is a trial. So the phrase "God is testing you" used here, means that God designed the world so that in many cases – mostly in following God – (not false prophets) we express our free will, and this expression and choice, is termed a "test".

Now, how shall we refute the prophet or dreamer? We have the answer, but Moses reiterates it again, "His commands you shall guard, and in His voice you shall listen..." This refers to Sinai, from where we received these very commands, and from where we heard the voice created by God[1]. Since we have established proof of God and His Torah from Revelation at Sinai, this is what we know is truth, and nothing else can prove otherwise. An event is as unchangeable as God. Sinai took place, and there is no changing that historic truth. Nothing can disprove God and His will, as expressed in His Torah. This is what is meant by our "love of God", meaning, "our love of truth". This is why Moses' testimonies are superior to those of any false prophet or dreamer: Moses has proof on his side, derived from Sinai. Following proof demonstrates our attachment to reality, and all reality is identical with God's will. Thus, using our reasoning to detect what reality is, and then adhering to what our minds know to be true, we are "loving God." We are attached to the source of all reality.

Therefore we again see that Moses aligns one verse on the heels of another, as the latter verse offers the solution to the problems in the first verse. But we must use our minds to discover these truths. And when we do, we are amazed by Moses' methods of subtle instruction, which propel our minds to uncover more than what can be conveyed with discreet words alone.

The repetitive style of this verse, I feel, may indicate the "overabundance of proof" for following God. Meaning, that which is overwhelmingly rooted in, and validated by reality, is the very method for which we determine what to follow. Judaism is all about truth, proof, reason, and living in line with these fundamentals. We care nothing about what only seems to be a wondrous sign, if

the performer asks that we abandon what we know is truth. Let him make all the miracles he wants, but he cannot convince us that Sinai did not occur. He cannot convince us that the world has no Creator. Signs mean nothing: the message is that which concerns the seeker of truth. For this reason, Maimonides explained that the Jews did not believe in Moses, based on miracles.[2] Therefore, we do not pit Moses against a false prophet, and measure their words based on the 'more impressive' miracle. As a matter of fact, if you can discern, you will see the signs of false prophets and dreamers are in fact, mere illusions, as Sforno teaches, "For there is no doubt that all his words are false and conjured from his heart...his miracles are sleight of hand...you shall know without a doubt that he dreamed nothing". (Ibid)

What is the difference between these two sections and their remedial verses? It is clear that the first verse deals with "internal" prodding towards idolatry: we look at other nations' gods and seek to assimilate. Moses recognized this emotional need, as did Shmuel, and criticized the Jews for desiring a king "as all the other nations".[3] This act of seeking to worship the gods of other nations is borne of the internal, idolatrous emotions, combined with social approval. The instincts are attracted to less abstract (physical) deities, and abandon the true God in place of phantoms. Therefore, the remedial verse addresses the command to never deviate from the Torah, and this will insure adherence to reality. We must keep a yoke on our internal fantasies. But the second case deals with prophets and dreamers who fantasize that God spoke with them. Here, the deviation from Torah ideals originates not internally, but external to the Jew. The source of error can be either internal, or external. This being the case, the remedial verse calls on us to recall those internal flaws or external events which will arbitrate between Moses and others, reminding us of the true reality: that which was witnessed by millions on Mount Sinai, and what our minds know as truth.

Both cases teach us to focus on what is real and true. Many people wish to live in a fantasy world and will do all they can to protect their disoriented and blurred view of reality. But since we all must answer to God – the Creator of reality – and since we live in the world that He created, it is wise that we abandon fantasy, focus intelligently on reality, and do all in our power to use our one life for the best, and that is defined by God. ■

[1] God has no vocal chords, thus, he has no "voice".

[2] Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah, 8:1

[3] Samuel I, 12:19

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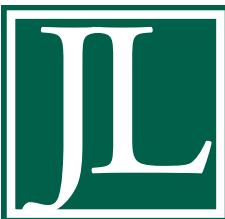
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