



"...those who fashion evil into a way of life....God turned upon them their own violence, and with their own evil He will cut them off,...God will cut them off."

King David: Psalm 94

ESTD 1997

Dedicated to Scriptural and Rabbinic Verification of Jewish Beliefs and Practices

JewishTimes

Volume I, No. 23...July 12, 2002

WWW.MESORA.ORG/JEWISHTIMES.PDF

Download and Print Free

IN THIS ISSUE:

WHY SHOULD ONE SERVE GOD?	1, 2
SEVENTY INTERPRETATIONS	1, 3
GOOD LUCK	2, 3
GOD TALKING AMIDST FLAMES	3

SUGGESTED READINGS:

SEE THESE AND OTHER ARTICLES AT OUR SITE

Maimonides' 13 PRINCIPLES

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

God's Existence Belief or Proof?

www.mesora.org/belieforproof.html

God's Land Without God?

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

Why Should One Serve God?

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

An intelligent reader from Belgium made it clear to me that my past article warrants a sequel. We have stated that one of the premises of our faith is that God has no needs and derives no benefit whatever from our serving Him. As Nachmanides states, "all our praise is as nothing to Him." This is clear to any intelligent person. For how would God, the Creator of the universe, derive satisfaction from our praise? Would an Albert Einstein derive satisfaction from the praise of a child who says he is a great mathematician because he knows

(continued on page 2)

Seventy Interpretations to the Torah

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Can both the Rambam and the Ramban be right on a specific point? Is this possible? They argued on each other, so they would be the first to admit that both of them couldn't be right on a specific point. The Gemora too is replete with arguments. Did Hillel really think that Shammai was right on the very same point upon which Hillel was arguing? Obviously not.

What does "Shivim Panim L'Torah" mean? (Literally, there are 70 interpretations to any area of Torah). Does this mean that one can say anything he wants about the Torah, and since there's a principle of Shivim Panim, he is right? This is an absurdity.

Are we then to say that when Hillel said "X" is non-kosher, and Shammai said "X" is kosher, they are both right, but we are just on such a low level and can't understand it? This is equivalent to saying that Hillel said 2+2=4, and Shammai said 2+2=5, and we then say that they are both right. How can 4 be the same as 5? How can non-kosher be the same as kosher?

Hillel and Shammai cannot both be right. As far as halacha goes, their respective students must follow each. But in objective reality, something cannot be both kosher and non-kosher simultaneously.

It would seem that when we say Shivim Panim L'Torah, we mean that there can be many explanations for a given topic. However, the explanation must make sense. There was a point in history when there were no machloksim (disputes) over halacha (law). It was only after minds became less sharp than the original baalei hamesora, (masters of tradition) that we began to see disputes. Eventually, to keep one identity to the Torah, the

(continued on page 3)



THE HEAVENS AND THE TORAH SHARE INGENIUS DESIGN.

Teach children to have the same appreciation for Torah as for the universal laws. God made both. Have your children email us with their questions: questions@mesora.org

Speculation

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: I have a question that's been bothering me for a while. I understand we can't ask why God created the world. There's something about it that appears illogical to me. We say that God is perfect and complete, that God could not have created the world out of any need or lack. We also say that God is infinite and that nothing physical is infinite. The only existence that is infinite is God. We also say that God is unchanging. My question is given all of this, if God is unchanging and at one point was the only existence existing, how could God have created the universe? That is to say that at one point only God existed and at another point the universe existed as well. God doesn't change and I don't understand how God could go from being a non creator to a creator. I guess the example I keep thinking of is the one where God is compared to a flame. The flame doesn't change but different results can be obtained depending on what is placed before the flame, i.e smoke, explosion, burning, etc. If God is like the flame, and unchanging, yet the world was created, this implies something came in front of the flame, since the flame cannot change and that is impossible when it comes to God, since there was nothing else in existence aside from God. It seems anti-logical. I hope you understand what I'm asking. I'd really appreciate a response. Thank You

Mesora: Yes, God is perfect, unchanging (change implies imperfection). He needs nothing. He does not work by motive - a physical phenomena - so to ask "why" God created the earth is a futile endeavor.

You state correctly, "God doesn't change and I don't understand how God could go from being a non creator to a creator." I had this question many years ago and asked my teacher. He said that "God's nature is to create" - thus, creation resulted from God who "always" created. Our universe's creation was not a deviation in God's nature. What else God created besides our universe is irrelevant.

Speculation in matters prior to the first acts of creation are prohibited. The first Mishna in Chap. II, Talmud Chagiga reads, "If man ponders four things, it is better that he was never created (they are) what is above the earth, what is below, what came before the Earth, and what succeeds it". This is where the human mind must know it has reached its limit. Speculation in these areas is useless, as man fails to function as a seeker of knowledge when the investigation approaches areas where the doors are shut. His existence is purposeless when he ponders these areas, "it is better that he was never created".

Why Should One Serve God?

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

(continued from page 1)

□ the multiplication table? Our knowledge of God is far less than that of a child's knowledge of an Einstein because a child at least knows something of Einstein while we know nothing of God other than the little we understand of His works and that He exists. Also, we consider it an imperfection if a person is in need of praise and enjoys praise and we do not ascribe imperfection to God.

All this being clear the question remains, why do we serve God, since He gains nothing from our service? Is it for ourselves? Isn't this then hedonistic? Is our religion self-seeking? Because of such questions some have maintained that the essence of religion lies in helping others. But if one's self-fulfillment is dependent upon helping others one must wish that others be in a state of need. Were everyone self-sufficient such a person would have no purpose in life. They would be like a successful General whose very success in ushering in an era of peace renders his services obsolete.

In the messianic era, we are told, no one will be in a needy state yet all will serve God. The service of God, therefore, must contain something other than helping others. There must be some other underlying good that we are helping others to attain. This underlying good is something we would necessarily occupy ourselves with even if everyone had everything attainable. It is a good we would involve ourselves with even if we were alone, as Adam the First. What is this underlying good if it is not for the benefit of God or of other people? Does the Torah provide the answer to this most important question upon which our entire worship of God depends?

The Torah states in Deuteronomy 10:12,13, "And now, o' Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to follow in all His ways, and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul, to keep the commandments of God, and His statutes, which I give you this day so that it shall be good for you?" In other words, the purpose of the entire Torah, the reason why God gave the

Torah to man, is that man may benefit from it. Again in Deuteronomy 6:24 we read, "And God commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, so that it will be good for us all the days, that He might preserve us alive, as it is at this day." It is clear from the Torah that the purpose of our serving God is to benefit ourselves and for no other reason. As Nachmanides states, "It is all solely for our own benefit. (Nachmanides on Deuteronomy 22:6)." But, we might ask, how does this differ from hedonism? Does not the Torah put down the selfish and hedonistic way of life? To answer this question we must understand what is wrong with the hedonistic way of life. What is wrong with the hedonist is not that he is interested in himself, but that he is living a way of life that is not appropriate for man. The Torah wants us to be concerned about ourselves. Moses states in Deuteronomy 4:9, "Only take heed for yourselves and guard thy soul diligently..." It is incumbent upon man to be concerned for himself, but, this must be done in the proper manner. Man must choose the life which is most appropriate for him. God wants man to fulfill his potential as man and this is the purpose of the entire Torah. The hedonist has chosen a life that is destructive to man's very essence, namely his soul. Just as it is God's will that every animal live life in line with its own nature, it is His will that man live a life in line with man's nature. Man must be concerned about himself if he is to accomplish this. Since man has free will this cannot occur spontaneously as it does in the rest of the animal kingdom. Man must have Torah so that he has knowledge of what is good and what is evil and can then make proper choices.

What is the "good life" according to Torah? It is not the life of searching endlessly for material pleasure or wealth or fame. It is the life in which man pursues truth and knowledge, in which man is involved in studying and understanding the ideas of God's Torah, in experiencing the infinite beauty of Torah and God's universe, in doing kindness and helping others when they are needy. This kind of life makes man truly happy and blessed. Ironically man is happiest when he turns away from the self and is involved in something far greater than the self, i.e., pursuit of knowledge through God's Torah. The initial motivation must always be for the self. This is natural and even necessary. But when one gets involved in truly helping one's self in the manner of Torah one finds that he

or she is in the face of a reality that is so awesome that the self becomes insignificant. Knowledge of Torah draws the individual into the world of God's reality, a world of beauty and awesomeness that makes man's petty concerns seem trivial and unimportant. In this world man rises to ever increasing heights as he transcends the mundane and the temporal. This can only be accomplished through a constant involvement in the knowledge of God's Torah and God's universe. as Maimonides states, "It is known and clear that the love of God cannot be bound to the heart of man unless he toils in it constantly in the proper manner," (Laws Concerning Repentance, Chap. 10 Law 6).

God gave us a great Torah, we can involve ourselves in its study our entire lives and never exhaust its infinite knowledge. This is the ultimate good for mankind. It is what mankind will do in the messianic era when man will be provided with all his physical needs. It is what man can do when he is alone or in the company of others. The study of Torah and appreciation of the beauty of God's knowledge is the ultimate aim of human existence. It is what gives human life its human character and provides man with the kind of existence that makes his life worthwhile. It is the aim of the entire Torah and the true benefit for mankind. □

See the Mesora website for our new link entitled, "Advertise with Us."

Advertising opportunities in Mesora.org, the JewishTimes, and issue dedications.

Advertise to our select demographic while supporting our educational and activist efforts.

Good Luck

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The concept that there is a protective force other than G-d is alien to Judaism.

We have never seen an object given any value other than its own simple function. A lamp gives light. Do we bow down to it? A fireplace gives heat. Do we say it also possesses intellect? No. So why do people say about a string which is red, that it has a miraculous force of removing the Ayin Harah? That it protects? Where does it say this in the Torah?

Attributing powers to simple, physical objects is an absurdity. The truth is, if one were to ask a person who believes in red bendels, "when does the bendel become powerful? Once it is twined, or even before? As it is half full of red dye, or only completely red? Before or after it dries?" The person will be dumbfounded, as there are no rules. Showing how the bendel is a manufactured item, and follows no rationale, removes the strength of the blind emotional belief incorrectly attached to it. It shows the believer that it really isn't any more significant than a green bendel. They will fully admit that a bendel of any other color will not protect. Also, if this is so powerful, why has G-d not mentioned it in the Torah?

Believing in the bendel is just that....a belief without proof. It is based in an insecurity in the follower. Many items discussed by the Rambam as being under the category of Avodah Zarah also bear the same markings as the red bendel. A need for security.

The Haftorah on Parshas Vayikra states that people used to take a tree, half of which they would cook their food, and even warm themselves. The other half they would make into an image, and say to it, "save me, for you are my god". What this Haftorah is teaching, to quote a Rabbi, is contrasting these two performances, 1) warming oneself, and 2) idolatry. This Haftorah is showing how absurd it is to take an object such as a tree, to which nobody would claim had any power, and use half for practical purposes, and half insanely for idolatry. The apparent contradiction is that half is only firewood. So why was the other half any better, that they

(continued on page 3)

Seventy Interpretations to the Torah

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

(continued from page 1)

□
Shulchan Aruch, the Code of Jewish Law was written.

Hillel and Shammai both cannot be correct on the same point if they hold opposing positions. But that doesn't matter, as the goal is not to determine what Moshe Rabbeinu knew, but to determine with one's own mind how one sees an area. Halacha is not based on what Moshe Rabbeinu would have said, but it's based on what a Rabbi determines today. There is a gemora where a certain individual stated that, "had Yehoshua bin Nun told me such and such...I would not listen to him". What does this show? It shows that we are not looking for confirmation from the original baalei hamesora. This is not what makes a halacha. Rather, as the Torah states, "al pi hatorah asher yorucha", "in accordance with the Torah which they (the Rabbis) teach you". The rabbis today create halacha for us. When we are perplexed we consult our Rav. He determines the halacha.

The halacha is, that if one has learned through an area in gemora, searched clearly through the Rishonim, and sees the law different than how he was taught, he has the right to follow his own mind. He does not have to follow his Rav. He must not however teach this ruling to his peers - as his peers have not gone through the area as he did, they then must follow their Rav or posek.

But one must not be foolish and think that since someone said an idea, that it must be true. Or since one saw an idea in a printed medium that this validates it. One should analyze what he hears. Just as the students in the time of the gemora asked questions on their teachers, so too must we. We should not blindly accept ideas. Chazal say that "lo a bayshan lomed", "an embarrassed person will not learn".

If we are not to ask questions, but we are to simply follow today's ignorant view of "we can't know as they did, we are not on their level", how then did Chazal say this statement of "an embarrassed person will not learn"? Evidently, they were urging us to ask in order to learn. How can one learn the Torah and not have questions? That is simply ridiculous. To train people to don false humility and claim, "I am not on the level of the Rambam or Rashi, therefore I must not ask on their statements", will certainly lead to further ignorance, and the Sages and the Rabbis z"l abhor this approach.

"Aylu v'aylu divrei elokim chaim", "these and these (people) God's words live"

means something similar. It means that as long as one is elucidating the Torah based on fact, and his opinion makes sense, then this opinion is also valid. There's not only one idea in a given area. Many ideas can be learned from a single pasuk or area of the Torah, "Shivim Panim l'Torah".

When one is in the pursuit of knowledge, as long as one is following their mind, this person is then functioning exactly as Hashem desired he act.

I feel that this approach of false humility is one of the causes for so many young students abandoning Torah learning. Teaching students and children that we can't question a Rashi or a Tosfos is basically telling them that the Torah is to be followed without understanding. How can we expect our children to love learning if their minds are not stimulated by questions? If they aren't given the courtesy as equal human beings to receive dignified attention to their questions? We must all urge students to ask their questions. And if as parents or teachers we don't know the answers, we must tell them "I don't know". Compliment them as well on their questions. You will never see a student or child light up as much as when they have a great question, and they are told so. Teachers must be on their guard not to seek consistent reinforcement of their authority by squelching a student's zeal. This ruins what might be a great student. What could be a greater loss? Conversely, if we urge honest inquiry, and show respect to our children and students, you will see that in no time, your students and children will be learning out of a true appreciation for wisdom. "Leshma", for the very sake of learning, with no other motive but to satisfy their genuine curiosity - our true goal.

Young people have natural inquisitiveness. You always see young children asking questions such as, "Why don't cats have wings like birds?" "What keeps clouds from falling?" And the like. These are humorous examples, but they make the point. This inquisitive nature can either be suppressed, or hopefully, encouraged. And when these children enter the world of learning Torah, they will again not be afraid to ask here, as you have encouraged this attitude.

We have the opportunity to turn children on to knowledge, offering them the true enjoyment of learning, of life. Let us be extremely careful not to dissuade them. □

Good Luck

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

(continued from page 2)

□
should prostrate themselves to it and call it a good?

The Navi also talks about how Hashem

caused the idol of the Phillistines, Dagon, to be broken. This idol was half man, half fish. Two creatures which the Phillistines would openly agree had no powers. When they combined the two, they attributed god-like qualities to it. To correct their ways, as Hashem's punishments always strive to do, Hashem caused Dagon to fall down in front of the ark of G-d, broken apart by the seams where the fish parts met the human parts. This was to demonstrate that Dagon was nothing special - just fish and man. Hashem's intent here was that when the Phillistines would arrive for prayer, they would find their god broken into pieces of fish and man. Perhaps seeing these two worthless components, they would abandon their worship.

Rambam (Hilchos Avoda Zarah, 11:4) certainly classifies this type of activity as idolatrous. Anyone who gives signs for themselves is partaking of primitive practices. Rambam states, "If one's bread falls from his mouth, or his staff from his hand and he says I won't go to such and such a place for I won't be successful", this person receives lashes (Malkus). These activities have no bearing on daily occurrences.

The same applies to red bendels, or placing a prayer in the Kotel Hamaaravi, the Western Wall. The bendel is just a thread. The wall is just stone. The Torah says (Exodus, 20:21) "any place that you mention my Name, I will come to you and I will bless you". Hashem can hear equally well from the Wall, or from one's shul. One is no closer to Hashem by merely being at the Wall. Closeness in physical proximity to the Wall, does not mean closeness in one's approach to Hashem.

There are statements in the Talmud that talk about the air of Israel making one wise, and the like. These are accurate statements, but one must interpret these statements carefully. Breathing the air of Israel will not make someone wise. It means that when one is in the environment where the forefathers and prophets lived, it creates in him an additional awareness of his heritage and the ideals of the Torah. It is an added impetus to cleave to the Torah. It is not mystical.

The most clear statement however regarding red threads is actually an open Tosephta in Chapter 7 of Sabbath. It states there a list of acts which are considered as "darchei HaEmori", "ways of the Ammorites", and the Tosephta includes "one who wears a red thread on their finger".

In Jeremia 9:23, the Metsudas David states that G-d says, "I am G-d, there is no other". The Metsudas David further states that "G-d forbid (one should think that) there are good or evil forces in the world." He clearly says that there are no other powers in the universe except for G-d. There is no greater proof against red bendels, kapituls in the Western Wall, ayin hara, or the like, than this statement of Metsudas David.

By keeping these sources in mind, let us

examine our ways and return to Hashem and the teachings of the rabbis, and abandon the foolish habits of the masses. □

Vaueschanan: God Talking from Amidst the Flames

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

What is the concept intended by the numerous times the parsha states that the Jews heard G-d speak from the midst of the flames?

The reason why G-d created the event at Sinai as a voice of words emanating from a fiery mountain is as follows: G-d desired that this event be a proof to all generations that the Torah is of Divine origin - not man made. The one element in which a biological organism cannot live is fire. By G-d creating a voice of "words", meaning intelligence, emanating from the midst of flames, all would know for certain that the cause of such an event was not of an intelligence on Earth. They would ascribe the phenomena solely to that which controls the elements, that being G-d Himself. Only the One who controls fire, Who formed its properties, can cause voices to exist in fire. As the sounds heard by the people were of intelligent nature, they understood this being to be the intelligent, and metaphysical G-d.

The purpose of the repetition was to drive home the concept which is supreme and more essential to man's knowledge than all other concepts, i.e., that G-d gave the Torah, and that He is metaphysical. A question was asked, "Why would the people not err and assume G-d to be fire itself?"

We see the first words heard from the flames were "I am the G-d who took you out of the land of Egypt". This means to say that the Cause of the miracles in Egypt is now claiming responsibility for this event at Sinai. The fact that there were no fires in Egypt shows that fire is not indispensable for the performance of miracles, all claimed by the voice at Sinai. The Jews therefore did not view the fire as G-d, as they experienced miracles prior to this event without witnessing any fires. It is true there was a pillar of fire which led them by night, but as we do not find fires connected with all miracles, we conclude that fire is not the cause of those miracles, or of revelation at Sinai. There must be something external to fire, which controls the laws of nature, and is above nature. That can only be the Creator. □