



Claiming God selectively instills “superior Jewish souls” in a small minority of His creations implies a Divine injustice. It also suggests that Torah does not perfect man, denying God’s words.

1997  
2007  
10  
YEARS

# JewishTimes

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

Volume VI, No. 20...Mar. 16, 2007

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## Weekly Parsha

# VaYakhel

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“And Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: On the first day of the first month you shall erect Tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting.” (Shemot 40:1-2)

Bnai Yisrael were commanded to construct a sanctuary that would

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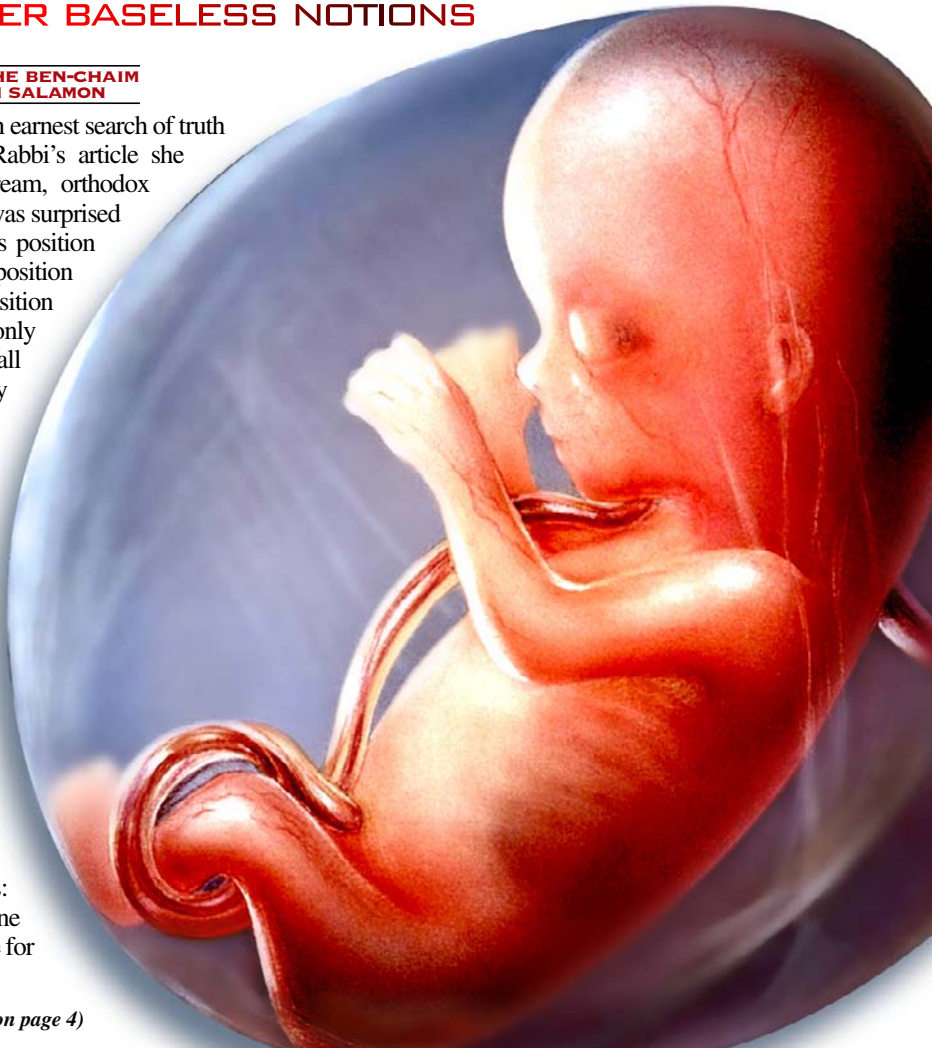
# A JEWISH SUPERIOR SOUL? AND OTHER BASELESS NOTIONS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM  
& CHAIM SALAMON

A gentile woman in earnest search of truth had emailed us a Rabbi’s article she found on a mainstream, orthodox Torah website. She was surprised to find that Mesora’s position and this Rabbi’s position were at odds. Our position is that God created only one mankind, and all humans alive today share the exact same physical, psychological and spiritual elements. Just as our hearts and emotions are identical, we all share one, identical soul.

This was printed in last week’s JewishTimes (March 9, 2007). In support of our view we cited a number of verses and arguments: “One Torah and one statute you shall have for

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# JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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accompany them in the wilderness. The Chumash provides a detailed description of this sanctuary and its contents. In the above passage, Moshe is commanded to assemble and erect the completed sanctuary. The passage employs two terms in referring to this sanctuary. It is referred to it as Mishcan – Tabernacle – and as Ohel Moed – Tent of Meeting. What is the difference between these two terms? Both seem to refer to the single sanctuary! Why are both terms needed?

“And Moshe erected the Tabernacle, and laid its sockets, and set up its planks, and put in its bars, and reared up its pillars. And he spread the tent over the Tabernacle, and put the covering of the tent above upon it; as Hashem commanded Moshe.” (Shemot 40:18-19)

This pasuk describes Moshe's activities in erecting the sanctuary. It is clear from this passage that the sanctuary includes three coverings. The Mishcan is composed of a series of curtains. These curtains are spread over a skeletal structure of boards. The curtains create a ceiling or covering over the area within the boards and extend over most of the outer area of the boards. The result is a box-like structure of curtains supported by the skeletal boards. Over the Mishcan is spread a second series of curtains. Our passage refers to this second set of curtains as a tent. These curtains cover the entire surface of the Mishcan. Finally, a third covering is placed over the roof of the tent curtains. According to some opinions, this covering is composed of two layers. Therefore, three layers of coverings are suspended over the inner area of the sanctuary. The curtains of the Mishcan are the inner surface, or ceiling. Lying atop this ceiling are the curtains of the tent. These curtains are covered by a third covering of a single or double layer.

Each of the layers has its own name. The innermost layer is the Mishcan. The middle layer is referred to as the tent. The outer layer is referred to as a covering. What is the significance of these three terms? All three of the terms seem applicable to each layer. The innermost layer is part of the Mishcan. It creates a tent over the inner area, and it covers this area. The same can be said regarding the middle and outer layers. Yet, the Torah never interchanges these names. The inner layer is always referred to a Mishcan. The middle is the



tent. The outer layer is the covering.

Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno deals with this question. Before we consider his explanation some background information is helpful. The inner curtains are woven. The design of the weave is intricate. Shapes of cherubs are interwoven into the fabric. These cherubs are visible on both sides of the curtains.

Sforno explains that the inner curtains of the sanctuary are referred to as Mishcan because they are designed to surround with cherubs the aron, shulchan and menorah – the ark, table, and candelabra.[1] He further explains that the middle layer of curtains is described as a tent because their purpose is to create a tent over the inner curtains. However, the inner curtains are not referred to as a tent. This is because

their purpose is not to serve as a tent. Their purpose is solely to impose the figures of the cherubs above and surrounding the aron, shulchan, and menorah.[2]

In these comments, Sforno is explaining the meaning of the term Mishcan and tent. Sforno is proposing that these two terms have very different meanings. The term ‘tent’ refers to a structure designed to create an inner space. It demarks the inner space, separates it, and shields it from the surrounding. The term ‘Mishcan’ refers to walls and a ceiling that are not designed to create a space. Instead, they are designed to create a specific

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## Weekly Parsha

appearance or environment within a space.

An analogy will be helpful. Consider a house. A house has outer walls and a roof. These outer walls and the roof are designed to separate the space within from the outside and to protect this space from the elements outside. These outer walls may be made of brick, stone, wood, or some other substance. The roof will be composed of shingle, tile or some other substance. The substance will be selected to correspond with the design and function of the outer walls and roof. They will not be composed of plaster or wood paneling. These materials are not appropriate for the function of these outer walls and roof. But plaster is appropriate for the inner walls and ceiling. The inner walls and ceiling are not designed to protect the space from the outside. They create the living area within. Their appearance, form, and texture should complement this space and give it character. In fact, we use different terms to refer to the overhead surfaces on the outside and inside. The outside surface is a roof; the inner surface is a ceiling. These two terms communicate their different functions. Although we do not have different terms to refer to the inner and outer walls, these two surfaces are distinguished in function and design in the same manner as a roof and ceiling.

Sforno is suggesting that the inner Mishcan curtains are designed to surround with cherubs the essential components of the sanctuary. They provide character and environment. In other words, they create an environment of surrounding cherubs within which the aron, shulchan, and menorah are placed. The middle layer of curtains – the tent – is designed to separate and protect the inner space from the outer area.

In order to fully appreciate the meaning of these comments, it is important to visualize an outcome of the design of the sanctuary. The inner curtains – the Mishcan – include the cherub figures. However, these figures are only visible to an observer standing inside the sanctuary and looking overhead. The figures woven into the curtains that hung down to form walls are not visible from the inside or outside of the sanctuary. On the inside, they are obscured by the boards that hold up the curtains. On the outside, they are completely covered by the tent curtains that descend over them. It seems odd that the essential feature of the Mishcan curtains – the cherubs – are only visible to a person inside looking up!

Sforno is suggesting that although these cherubs are not readily visible from within or without, they nonetheless are the essential feature of the environment of the Mishcan. They create an environment of surrounding cherubs. Their effect-- or the creation of this environment -- is not dependent on their visibility. Their existence as figures woven into the fabric of the curtains creates the required environment.

Now, we can understand the term used to refer to the outer curtains. These curtains are placed atop the roof of the tent. They are referred to as a covering. The term ‘covering’ has a very literal meaning in our context. These curtains are not designed to create a space or to create an environment. They serve as a covering to protect the surface of the middle tent curtains.

Based on Sforno’s comments, we can appreciate the lack of interchangeability of the terms ‘Mishcan’, ‘tent’, and ‘covering’. The inner Mishcan curtains cannot be referred to as a tent. They are not designed to create an inner space and separate and protect the inner space from the outer area. Neither are these curtains a covering. The middle curtains are a tent. They do not create the inner environment. They are not a covering. The outermost covering of curtains is not a tent. Also, they do not create an inner space and they do not create an environment.

**“And you shall make the planks for the Mishcan of acacia wood, upright.”** (Shemot 26:15)

As noted above, the Mishcan curtains are supported by a skeletal structure of planks. Our passage explains that these planks are to be placed upright. Each plank is placed immediately adjacent to its neighbor. In this manner a continuous surface is created. The commentaries explain that the planks must be upright. They cannot be positioned horizontally upon one another.[3] This is an interesting requirement. It would seem that whether placed upright to create a continual

surface or placed horizontally upon one another, the same outcome is achieved. Why must the planks be placed in an upright position?

According to Sforno, we can understand this requirement. These planks are not intended to create an inner wall. The inner wall of the Mishcan is the curtains of the Mishcan. The sole function of these planks is to support the curtains. In other words, the planks support the curtains; the curtains do not cover and adorn the planks. The positioning of the planks communicates their function. Horizontally placed planks placed atop one another creates the impression of an inner wall. Such an inner wall contradicts the function of the Mishcan curtains. It is these curtains that create the inner environment of the Mishcan. The upright position of the planks contributes to communicating their purpose – the support of the Mishcan curtains.

Now, our original question is easily answered. The terms Mishcan and Ohel Moed both refer to the sanctuary. However, these terms refer to different aspects of the structure. Mishcan is the innermost structure. The innermost curtains create this structure. Ohel Moed – tent of meeting – refers to the middle curtains that create the tent within, where the Mishcan is situated. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Shemot, 26:1.

[2] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Shemot, 26:7.

[3] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 26:15.

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## The Soul

yourselves, and the convert who dwells among you.” (Numb. 15:16) This teaches that we are identical, since we both can follow one law. Messiah, and Kings David and Solomon are descendants of Ruth the convert, God’s anointed, teaching that God finds no favorite in the Jew. God created man only once; therefore, all humans are direct descendants of that first gentile couple, including Jews. And Talmud Sanhedrin 59a states, “A gentile who studies Torah is akin to a High Priest.” Thus, human perfection is not a Jewish birthright, but an accomplishment, available to all God’s creatures. Jews are created no differently than gentiles. And just now I was recalling that God sent the prophet Jonah to the sinful city of Nineveh to steer them to repent. Nineveh was not a Jewish culture. Yet, God employed the same methods He applies to Jews: He sends prophets to guide them back to righteousness. God uses identical methods for Jew and gentile, precisely because Jew and gentile are identical.

However, the Rabbi quoted by this woman held the opinion that Jews have a superior soul, and that gentiles who convert, always had some “Jewish spark”: a loose term at best, with no absolute meaning. I had identified this position as arrogant and false, based on the above quotes and rationale. I contacted the Rabbi, asking him to substantiate his claim. I wrote:

“Rabbi, A person wrote me with a concern I share, over something you wrote, which I quote:

*“The Talmud, continuing this idea that converts already have a Jewish soul inside of them, uses a very interesting phrase when discussing Jewish laws of potential converts. It is written, ‘a convert who comes to convert...’ The phrase begs the question - why does it say ‘a CONVERT who comes to convert...’? Rather, it should say, ‘a GENTILE who comes to convert...’! The reason is because they already have a Jewish spark inside of them.”*

Rabbi, You suggest the Talmud (Shavuos 39a) teaches that converts already have a Jewish soul inside of them. However, the Talmud did not say that. It said “future generations of Jews, and gentiles who will eventually convert, are also part of God’s covenant”. That Talmudic portion bases this view on the verse says “. . .and those not here with us today” [at Sinai] do I forge a covenant. (Deut. 29:14) You claim there is a “Jewish soul is inside gentiles”. However, first of all, there

**This notion of “superior Jewish souls” denies the fundamental of Reward and Punishment. For how can God punish a gentile or reward Jews, if it is a defective or superior soul that causes our actions?**

is no source differentiating Jewish and gentile souls, let alone that the Talmud “continues this notion of Jewish souls” as you suggest. You then conclude with the “Jewish spark” theory...also not supported here. You claim this is all quoted from the Talmud. Please email me that exact Talmudic source. Thank you, Moshe Ben-Chaim”

The Rabbi wrote back with many quotes that he feels substantiate his view, but failed to provide my requested “Talmudic” source, which he said exists:

“R’ Moshe Ben-Chaim, It is important to first quote “Teshuvot Ba’alei HaTosefot” Addenda 1:19 - that converts are Jewish souls that were placed in the embryos inside non-Jewish mothers. Rishonim such as the Ba’alei HaTosefot usually do not write metaphors. We therefore have to accept what they have written at face value. With this knowledge, we can easily understand the Gemara in Shavuos 39a, and also a similar Gemara in Shabbat 145b-146a. I hope this helps.”

He also added numerous other sources; none of those that I researched support his claim. And he uses the quote from Job, which we mentioned last week, “a portion of God on high”. He feels this means man has a “part” of God inside him, which Maimonides and literally all other Rabbis reject. What is disturbing is that this Rabbi too makes the same illiterate error of quoting part of this verse in Job. This is the accurate reading of Job 31:1,2: “A treaty have I made with my eyes; for what shall I gaze at a virgin? And what portion of God above shall I have, and an inheritance of God on high?” Job rightfully defends himself, claiming that he never gazed at a woman for any other reason than examining her qualities, to determine if she was a fit bride for his sons. For by gazing longer, it would be out of lust, and he would forfeit his share of God’s reward. But the Rabbi misreads this verse to fit his preconceived notion.

I responded as follows:

“Rabbi, You asked if your quotes helped...actually, they do not help. I did not write disputing who might hold this view, or if we are to truly understand such statements literally. I thought I was clear. In fact, the “Talmudic” sources you cite (not the quotes you emailed me) do not

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## The Soul

speak of “Jewish sparks”, or “Jewish souls” possessed by converts, neither in Talmud Shavuot or Sabbath. These are all your projections onto the Talmud from other sources. Since the “Talmud” in fact does not say this, it is only proper that you remove from your article such claims that it does. Moshe Ben-Chaim”

I did not hear back. Regardless, I wish to present a few more arguments that also prove our view.

1) The claim that converts always possessed a Jewish soul or spark, belittles the Torah. According to this view, it is not the Torah that perfects man, but it is some “superior soul”. This denies the core of what Torah is! God gave the Torah as the means for us to elevate ourselves. In fact, the Talmud states, “I [God] created the instincts, and I created the Torah as its antidote”. (Kiddushin 30b) Thus, it is not an imagined “superior Jewish soul” that perfects man, but it is the Torah.

2) This view also displays God as unjust, since accordingly, God neglects His creations, by choosing not to give “better” souls to most of the world. However, Ibn Ezra states that Adam the First was a great chocham (wise man). Yet...he was a gentile. So we see, without being Jewish, man loses none of his faculties, and therefore we learn that a gentile has the same perfect soul as a Jew.

3) This theory also denies the fundamental of Reward and Punishment. For how can God blame a gentile, if his soul is defective?

4) The commentaries on the verse the Rabbis quoted do not say any gentile converts were “at Sinai” or had Jewish souls. In fact Ibn Ezra rejects that view as false (Deut. 29:14). And there, Sforno explains “...all those not with us today” [are included in the Covenant] as: those standing on Sinai must teach future generations. So when God says that “all those Jews and future converts not at Sinai are also included in His covenant”, He means that any human – although absent at Sinai – may enjoy a relationship with God just as those Jews who stood there. It is quite simple.

5) What about Jews who sin and kill...where is “their” Jewish soul? If a Jewish soul is somehow “superior”, how does this Rabbi explain some Jews who are more evil than some gentiles? Countless Torah personalities killed innocent Jews – Doeg and Ezav to name a few – and countless gentiles saved Jews during the Holocaust; converted to Judaism; became Torah scholars, etc.

6) God said, “For I know him [Abraham] that he will teach his children and his household after him, and they will follow the ways of God...” (Gen. 18:18) God therefore makes Abraham into a great nation, so Abraham might teach others. We

learn that God wishes man to draw to Him by one method: study. God gives no shortcut of a “superior soul”, but endorsed Abraham’s path of study and education. Yes, the only path to God is where one controls his passions, and redirects his energies towards a life of wisdom, to know God. Now, why would God bother with creating a nation from Abraham, if He simply inserts superior souls in those He chooses?

7) Finally, an absolute rejection that future converts were at Sinai, are the Torah’s very words: “and those who are NOT HERE with us today”. The Talmud explaining this verse clearly states that converts were NOT at Sinai. Now...the Rabbi was so diligent not to take the Sages words metaphorically, saying, “the Rabbis usually do not write metaphors”. So why does he not apply the same care to God’s words? The sages taught, “No verse can be interpreted against its literal meaning”. This Rabbi is violating his own principle. When God writes in His Torah that there are “those who are NOT HERE with us today”...this Rabbi should have read that literally.

But in truth, our Rabbi’s claim that we must understand literally “God placed Jewish souls in gentile embryos” goes against King Solomon’s words: “The words of the wise and their riddles”. King Solomon spoke in metaphors, and as he states, the Rabbis do as well. Our Rabbi’s quote about embryos is just another metaphor.

In summary: reason, the Talmud, and the Torah verses reject the concept of a superior soul, or that converts were at Sinai. The motives for this theory are ego, and irresponsibility. By claiming a superior soul, a Jew feels special, with a guarantee of God’s unconditional love. Truly, this unconditional love is merely wish to replay one’s infantile state, where parents showered this down upon him. But as adults, we must study the Torah, which is the only reality. And the Torah rejects notions that violate reason.

We must reflect on ourselves, for we all carry into adulthood, remnants of our infantile lives. Unless one can say he has studied himself objectively, and has abandoned all those years of corruption our society impressed on our psyches, then he is still living with corrupt notions. The wish for unconditional love is but one of thousands of wishes. We also wish to be viewed as “good”. So claiming we possess “part of God”, or a “superior soul” is quite satisfying. However, we must not live in a dream state, for God does not excuse us for what we “fantasize” to be true. God judges us based on reality. There is only one system. And God graciously granted every man – gentile and Jew – the capacity to determine what that reality is...by use of our one soul. ■

**“There is only one system of reality. God graciously granted every man – gentile and Jew – the capacity to determine that reality by use of our one soul.”**

*the* Weekly Parsha:VaYakhel/  
Pekuday*taken from  
Windows to the Soul***RABBI DR. MICHAEL BERNSTEIN****Vayakhel: Paradox of Fire**

After Moses sternly warns the Jewish people to refrain from forbidden labors on the Sabbath, he singles out one of these labors for special mention (35:3). "Do not light a fire in all your dwelling places on the Sabbath day."

Why is the prohibition against lighting a fire (hav'arah) extracted from the collective mention of the 39 forbidden labors?

The Talmud (Shabbos 70a) cites two views. According to one, it is meant to be a paradigm to show that each individual labor is considered its own distinct violation (hav'arah lechalek yatzah). According to the other view, the differentiation of labors is derived elsewhere. The prohibition against lighting a fire sets it apart from the other labors and downgrades it from being a capital offense (hav'arah lelav yatzah).

What are the underlying principles of this dispute?

Let us first consider the view that hav'arah lechalek yatzah. Why would ignition be singled out as the paradigm for a self-standing forbidden labor? Is it because ignition is the archetypal labor? If this is so, then it would be diametrically opposed to the view that lelav yatzah that sees ignition as less severe and hence somehow inferior to other labors. This is highly unlikely, since the Talmud eschews sevaros hafuchos, diametrically opposed views; a dispute is more likely to center over shades of gray than black and white.

According to Rabbeinu Bachya and other commentators, the forbidden labors mirror the creative activities by which God created the universe, so to speak. Accordingly, our cessation

from labor on the Sabbath is a potent reminder that God rested from creation on the seventh day. Elsewhere, however, the Midrash states fire was first created by Adam at the conclusion of the first Sabbath, one day after he himself was created. Ignition, then, is the one forbidden labor representing an activity specific to mankind that does not reflect any of God's acts in creation.

At the conclusion of Creation, the Torah records (Genesis 2:3), "And He sanctified [the Sabbath], because He ceased from all His labors that God created to do." Our sages comment that the verb "to do" (laasos) refers to the work God left unfinished for mankind to complete. Man, through his moral choices, may become a partner in creation by causing it to resonate with the knowledge of God; it is within his power to unleash or actualize the potential of creation. Ignition, which is essentially the release of the potential energy locked in the chemical bonds of matter, is the labor most closely associated with the specific purpose and creative power of mankind.

We can now discern, as did the Sages of the Talmud, two singular and parallel properties in the forbidden labor of ignition. On the one hand, it represents the teleological aim of all the acts of creation. As such, it is the archetypal labor; the first view sees it as representative of all the other labors (lechalek yatzah). On the other hand, it is the one labor that, according to the Midrash, does not reflect God's handiwork; it is rather man's specific labor. From this perspective, it is inferior to the other labors; the second view considers its particular mention as an indication that it alone is not a capital offense (lelav yatzah). ■

*Questions may be e-mailed to the author at this address:  
bernsteinmichael@msn.com*

**Pekudei: Monotonous Repetition**

Eighteen times in this parashah, the Torah assures us that "the people of Israel did everything God commanded Moses, so did they do." What is the purpose of this repetitive emphasis on obedience? Why we have thought otherwise?

This parashah also raises questions about the divine "literary style" of the Author. Parashas Terumah and Parashas Vayakhel already describe the plan of the construction of the Mishkan in painstaking detail. Why then was it necessary to repeat all the details with regard to the actual construction and installation in Parashas Pekudei? Why wasn't it enough to write that everything was done according to plan?

The same questions arise in Parashas Naso (Numbers 7:11 ff) regarding the sacrifices of the tribal princes following the construction of the Mishkan. On twelve successive days, one after the other of the tribal princes brought their offerings, all of which were identical, yet the Torah expends seventy-eight verses to describe them twelve times. Why the monotonous repetition? Why didn't the Torah simply describe the first day's offering and then tell us that all the rest were identical?

It is the nature of a human being to want to feel special and outstanding, especially in an enterprise of eternal significance. It would have been natural for anyone bringing an offering or donation to the Mishkan to seek some individual expression, to do something that distinctly identified him as the donor and set him apart.

Nonetheless, as the eighteen repetitive verses demonstrated, the Jewish people disregarded their own inclinations and followed God's command faithfully. They were not trying to mold their religious worship to their own desires and personalities, but rather, they were clinging to the divine instruction. The tribal princes as well sought no expression of their own individuality in their offerings, as the seventy-eight repetitive verses demonstrated.

The Torah, in its inimitable style, allows us to experience a bit of the greatness of these people. If we are already impatient with the repetitiveness after a few minutes reading these verses, we can well imagine the feelings of those whose obedient acts allowed for no creativity or expression of their individuality. And they still complied wholeheartedly and joyously with the divine will. ■



## Letters



# Letters

*from our*

## READERS



### A Piece on "Piece"

**Reader:** Hello. I am not sure if you are aware of this source or if it adds anything more to the case of the "Piece of God crisis", but I figured I'd let you know. In "The Laws Concerning The Morning Blessings and Other Blessings" (Hilchot Birkot Hashachar V'Shear Brachot) 1:1, in the Shulchan Aruch, The Bracha of Elokoay Neshama is mentioned. In regards to that blessing, the Mishna Brurah adds quite an interesting fact. It explains, "One must pause a little in-between the words Elokai (my God) and Neshama (my soul), so that it should not sound as if the soul is one's God, God Forbid". Apparently The Mishnah Brurah was quite aware of the danger that might arise if one had confused these two fundamental ideas (about the soul and God). Thanks for everything and Shabbat Shalom. ■

*Michael*

### Majority of One

**Reader:** In the first instance, as it relates the articles, I trust you are fully aware that when expressing the position that Jews are not innately superior and far more holy to Gentiles, you are espousing a minority opinion. However, that being said, "yeshlacha al mi lismoch", "you have what to rely on". Specifically, your position (our position) is wholly and completely consistent with the Great Eagle and ultimately I believe is the position of the Torah as given by Hashem Yistabach Shemo. Thus, in this respect, you (we) are with the majority of one. ■

*Nativ Winiarsky*

### "Human" Sacrifice?

**Reader:** Dear Rabbi: I have a question regarding our morning prayers in the section about Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. When we are praying, there are many different types of sacrifices: the daily Tamid offerings, the Chataas for sins, the bull and the he goat on Yom Kippur, the communal sin offerings of the community, the he-goats of Rosh Chodesh and festivals, communal peace offerings, the guilt offerings etc. My question is why wasn't Abraham's offering delineated? What kind of offering do we call Isaac? Did G-d tell Abraham what kind of offering he was to accomplish? Wouldn't it have helped Abraham to accomplish this difficult act if he knew he was killing his son for a specific reason?

Thank you,  
*Chaim*

**Mesora:** The Temple did not yet exist, and as both history and the Talmud teach, no Torah system was yet given at this time. So Abraham was not bringing a Temple sacrifice. Perhaps the term Olah (fully burnt) is used in connection with Isaac to teach this was not a punishment for Abraham, and that Isaac was to be given "fully" by Abraham. The sacrifice of Isaac was – according to our Rabbis – to teach mankind how far one must go in his devotion to God. The Shema states that we are to love God with "all" our heart, soul and might. So Abraham had all that was necessary to act in line with God's will. Typifying Isaac as a certain type of sacrifice was unnecessary, as the sole purpose for Abraham, was displaying his love for God over all human attachments...even to his long awaited, beloved, only son. ■

### Death for Studying Life?

**Reader:** I am not comfortable about the death penalty for reading Torah. Christians read and study Torah, and some of my relatives read the Bible. You say that gentiles can study whatever appeals to their mind as a genuine interest (beside Shabbos, Holidays and Tefillin)

You gave me this rules: 1) you can learn whatever laws address perfection, such as charity, idolatry, prayer, kindness and so on. 2) Reading and study of Torah is the same thing. 3) You can study any law you wish to keep in addition to the 7 Noachide laws.

You wrote, "My understanding is that what is prohibited, is to study laws if you have no desire to observe that law. I also feel you may be able to study any law that appeals to your mind as an attempt to learn more about God. I cannot imagine that you would not be able to study what appeals to your mind as a genuine interest, but I will get back to you."

How can it be proven that someone is not studying something that appeals to him/her? Who has this authority?

People will get scared if you talk to them about death penalty! In my case is different because I want to learn and I am sure I will understand and I can recognize Torah is God's wisdom, I don't trust human beings and I don't understand; how, who and when, this severe law will be applied. I hope you understand my doubt. Please help me understand.

Thank you for your time,

*Aurora*

**Mesora:** Yes, I wrote, "I cannot imagine that you would not be able to study what appeals to your mind as a genuine interest". I believe this must be so, since God wants all mankind to know truths, and to continue growing in our knowledge. So if you wish to learn more about the world, which is a reflection of God, then you are permitted to do so. It is only Torah commands that carry a prohibition if you intend to study without practice. But to study about God, His attributes and philosophy, your are permitted to study.

Your other question regarding who can determine if you are genuinely interested, can only be determined by yourself. God knows our true intentions.

Regarding death, Jews are killed for writing two letters on Sabbath, whereas gentiles are not. We could lodge the same complaint, if we wish to view such "strict" measures purely in contrast to harmless actions, or good intentions in your case. "Why should I be killed simply for lifting a pen

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## Letters

and writing on Sabbath, isn't that extreme? I'm not hurting anyone!" a Jew might suggest. And as you said, "I wish to study about God, why should I be killed for that?" However, with understanding, we will justify the response of death for a Sabbath violator, and for a gentle Torah studier.

The reason for such strict measures is because the goal of Sabbath targets the primary objective for mankind. The Jew is to restrain his creative activities, so as to 1) embody the first moments of the universe... when God rested from His creative activities; and 2) to study Torah at least one day weekly, insuring the perpetuation of Torah, i.e., God's will.

What is "death"? It is the removal of life. And when one's life misses the central purpose intended by God, his life is no longer meaningful, and death must follow to teach this lesson. The Jew has the goal of educating the world about God – the Creator. So when we forfeit teaching this lesson to our fellow humans by breaking Sabbath, our lives are no longer meaningful. (Another proof of gentile/Jew equality, since we are killed for abandoning our role to teach gentiles.) If we behave on Sabbath as a gentile, we forfeit the opportunity we may offer the gentile to inquire, "Why are you not working like us?" Maimonides states this is what we wish to achieve, thereby offering the gentile an opportunity to learn from our reply: "We rest to mimic the Creator who rested on the seventh day." And then we go on about God's will for His creations, thereby imbuing the gentile with the essential knowledge to commence his path to follow God's will for his entire life.

And a gentile is killed when he or she abandon's his or her objective, which is to not obscure the Jew's role as "Torah educator". When the gentile studies Torah purely for theoretical purposes, he portrays the Jew. Doing so, he can mislead others that he is a Torah authority. They will then inquire of "him" in place of the Jew with their Torah questions. Of course, as he is not obligated to observe, his studies are not as ripe as the Jew, and he will destroy Torah. In both cases, the preservation of the Torah system sustains our right to life, and our abandonment invites our death. One goal – two different expressions. ■

## God & Physicality

**Reader:** Dear Rabbi, I greatly appreciated having an article, which addresses a real issue for me. This article was in the new March 9th JewishTimes: "Perfection: Human Accomplishment, Not a Jewish Birthright." It is apparent you are



**God created the physical.  
So prior to its creation,  
there was no physical substance.  
Therefore God cannot be physical.**

attempting to expose the differences between the Jewish teachings and the Christian dogma. My eyes were opened to the extent of Jewish teaching, which I had not really understood.

However, I have more concerns now as a result, which apparently are inconsistent. The greatest of these is with the first two paragraphs, which to quote you, "But in no way can God have parts..." and, "He possesses no physical qualities..." Firstly, this gracious, all-powerful, all-knowing, omnipotent God didn't create man and women in sin, in fact, He created them in perfection calling them good and then rested from his labors —[Genesis 1:26-31]. This is obvious for anyone who reads the passage, for God would not have considered it good, if it was not perfect, or holy or pure as He.

In Genesis 2:7, man is formed [yatsar], an act of a potter, which he is describe as being in the prophets. On-the-other-hand, God could have done this act without hands, but just speaking it, however, I am not lead to believe this was the case. In continuation, Genesis 2:21-22 speaks of God taking [laquck] one of Adam's ribs in order to make [banah] the female for him. There is a great difference between the term "yastar" and the term "banah" and I don't think this is metaphorical, although it does explain the nature of hierarchy within the family.

The point I am attempting to make is God is actively involved within the construction, as if He has a body to perform this work. However, let us not stop at this juncture, and move one into Genesis 3:8, which speaks of God walking [halak, akin to yalak] as if to not only suggest a physical form, but the act of walk in the midst of the garden, which was created perfect. However, I cannot just dismiss the validity of the concept God had form and we are created in his image, as a "tselem," a resemblance or shade representing a figure. With

what is here, I have to then attend to Abraham, Genesis 18, where "jehovah" appears to him, and he sees, speaks, and eats with the angels [malak-messengers] and someone he calls "adonay," which would I assume is God in the flesh speaking, eating with Abraham. In addition, the writer calls this "adonay," "jehovah" in Genesis 18:13, which is the one speaking, sitting, eating, and soon to be walking with Abraham. It appears to me, just in the reading of this portion of the Torah, God has density of body, and uses it for his purposes.

How do you rectify the flaw between the Torah's presentation of action of God and the apparent inconsistencies toward his having a body? It would seem that the Latter Day Saints of Jesus-Mormons (a true cult), and the New Age movement would have more in common with the Jewish teachings, than Christianity ever thought of having. However, I don't believe this to be the case at all, and suspect, there was a flaw in the teaching itself, which dispels God as being gracious, omnipotent, all-knowing, and capable of communicating with humanity in various times, and in various ways, including some form of physical form.

Furthermore, I would like to once again express my appreciation for your candor for exposing this issue in the last Mesora. I will be looking forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Jay T. Attebery

**Mesora:** First of all, my article was not addressing Christianity, although you might have taken it that way.

Second, God did not say man's creation was "good" as He stated in connection with other individual creations. The summary statement "and it was very good" addresses "all" of creation, not man alone. So we understand this to mean that although man is not yet good – i.e. he must perfect himself – nonetheless, he is part of a total picture that is "very good". Meaning, man's imperfect start in life is God's will, which must be good.

Now regarding Torah verses that imply God is somehow physical. The greatest Torah minds teach, and reason demands, the Creator of the physical world cannot be what He creates! Meaning, if God "created" the physical, then prior to its creation, there was no physical substance. Hence, God cannot be physical. The Torah "speaks in the language of man" as the Rabbis teach. God knows we are simple beings, and start life in complete ignorance. In order to arrive at truths, we must first read ideas that make sense to our limited vocabulary and understanding. So God says He is angry, yet when we mature, we learn that He cannot

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partake of human psychology. We read that He covered Moses with His "hand"...yet we finally learn as we progress, that again, a hand is a human quality, and not possessed by God. Therefore, God uses this terminology to teach ideas, but relating to our frame of reference and vocabulary. Regarding the angels who visited Abraham, Maimonides teaches this was all a vision in his mind. And the term "adonai" can also mean "My master". So you need not assume this means God, and that God "ate" or was a humanoid form, far be it.

The danger you have encountered is studying Torah without referring to the Torah's teachers...the Rabbis. The Torah was given in two parts: the Written Law (Bible) and the Oral Law which is the Mishne, Talmud and the wealth of transmitted sayings of the Rabbis. Without recourse to the latter, we cannot understand either. (See Maimonides' "Guide for the Perplexed" Book 1)

The worst crime is in assuming God to be physical, or to partake of any idea we imagine. Truly, He is unknowable, and we must realize that our intellects are severely limited. We cannot know God, as God said to Moses. (Exod. 33:20) ■

## Life or Death?

**Reader:** From what I have read on your site you accept the Shulchan Aruch but not reincarnation. What then is your view of Rabbi Caro's Maggid Meisharim where he discusses reincarnation and other mystical topics? This seems like a contradiction. If I may add - "Rabbi Yosef Karo author of Shulchan Aruch, was not only a learned scholar; he was also a pure and holy man to such a degree that when he studied Kabbalah he was taught by a special angel called a maggid who descended from heaven to reveal to him the innermost secrets of the Torah and to disclose the future to him. Rabbi Yosef Karo wrote down the revelations, which he heard from this angel in this book. This book contains not only Torah concepts but also exhortation, mussar."

Thanks,  
Scott Edelman

**Mesora:** Although angels exist, I don't agree that Rav Yosef Karo stated this concerning the angel...he knew prophecy had ended. It may simply be a publisher's inclusion. Our cover article this week shows how a someone made claims of Talmudic quotes, which simply do not exist. This may be the case here, no error of Rabbi Karo.

But I am not the only one who argues on reincar-

nation; Saadia Gaon does as well, and offers rationale for his rejection. (The Book Beliefs and Opinions, Yale Univ. pp 259-263) But I have yet to hear rationale pro-reincarnation. A Torah concept must be rooted in truth, and reason. Saadia Gaon offers a number of arguments that display reincarnation as violating true principles.

Furthermore, the Shulchan Aruch deals with "law", and this is where the idea of a "ruling" or something mandatory is relevant. But as a wise Rabbi taught, Torah cannot demand "belief". We can be told what to "do", but there is no way that a rational system like Torah would suggest that we must believe something...if we don't. It is akin to an obligation to "find beauty" in something disgusting. So there can be no obligation to follow a Rabbi in matters of belief, since Torah cannot legislate belief, only actions. ■

## Erased

**Reader:** In your last JewishTimes you wrote: "Why did God erase Moses name from Parshas Tetzaveh, as opposed to any other Parsha? Write in with your suggestions."

Perhaps Parshsa Tetzaveh and Moses name erasure deal with a similar issue: man's tendency to identify with something physical. Moses name erasure may diminish the attachment to "the man" Moses as evidenced in the story of the Golden Calf. Parsha Tetzaveh ends with the incense altar, on which the incense would smoke. In Parsha Ki Tisa, Moses is absent ("delayed" on Sinai), and Aaron fashions a very visible calf. In Parsha Tetzaveh, Moses' name is absent, and Aaron is to burn incense, demonstrating that man cannot see God.

What do you think?

Joshua Plank

**Mesora:** If I understand you correctly, you are suggesting that just as the incense targets our recognition that God is unknowable (the smoke is a veil), so too, Moses' name is also omitted for this reason: obscuring Moses is a step on the path to deny corporeality to God. Meaning, by detaching ourselves from the "man" Moses, we can more readily detach ourselves from attributing physicality to God.

Therefore, the incense that obscures our vision, and the obscuring of Moses' name are both found in one Parsha, Tetzaveh. It is a sharp idea. Thank you. ■

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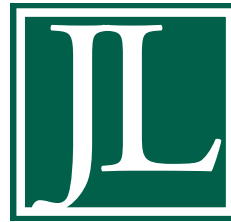


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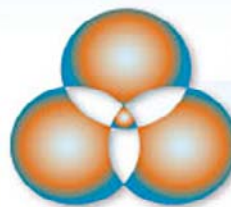
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