

Patience is a virtue.
 Concluding a "truth" in your mind prior to studying our
 sages, is hasty, and often produces flawed notions.
 After learning all the facts, test your thoughts on others.
 This was King David's approach in Koheles.
 "Koheles" means "congregation" ... of listeners.



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 of Authentic Jewish Beliefs and Practices

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IN THIS ISSUE

PARSHA: TERUMA	I-3
DESTINY & BASHERT II	I,4-7
BLIND BELIEF	8
SPIRITUAL	9

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Weekly Parsha

Teruma

RABBI BERNIE FOX

"The poles should be in the rings
 of the Ark. They should not be
 removed." (Shemot 25:15)

A ring was attached to each corner
 of the Ark. Poles were passed

(continued on next page)

Reality

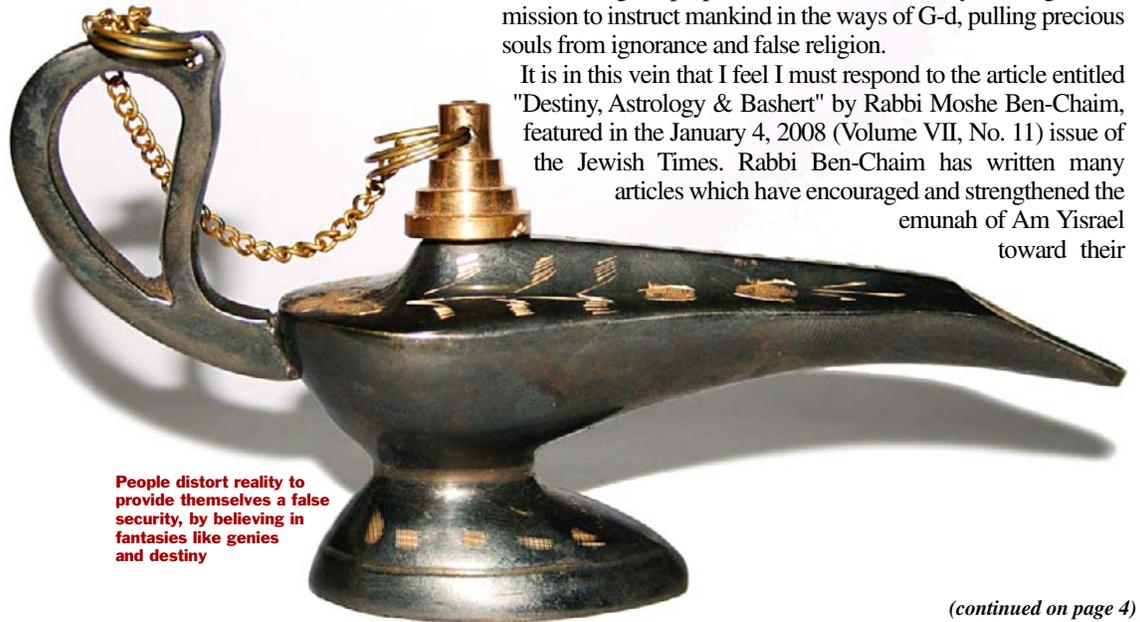
DESTINY & BASHERT II

Reader: Dear Editor,

I appreciate the JewishTimes and even implement your rational approach to Torah and Judaism presented excellently. Rambam, Ibn Ezra and Saadia HaGaon, zt"l, have improved my life. This is especially true of Mesora's stance against superstitious practices derived from Kabbalah. The Jewish Times truly follows the great proponents of Torah rationality, making it their mission to instruct mankind in the ways of G-d, pulling precious souls from ignorance and false religion.

It is in this vein that I feel I must respond to the article entitled "Destiny, Astrology & Bashert" by Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim, featured in the January 4, 2008 (Volume VII, No. 11) issue of the Jewish Times. Rabbi Ben-Chaim has written many articles which have encouraged and strengthened the emunah of Am Yisrael toward their

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



People distort reality to
 provide themselves a false
 security, by believing in
 fantasies like genies
 and destiny

(continued on page 4)

(Teruma cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

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through these rings. These poles were used to carry the Aron – the Ark. The Torah commands us that the poles must remain in the rings at all times. Even when the Mishcan is erected and the Aron is at rest the poles are to remain attached.

The poles were designed for the transport of the Ark. When the Aron was moved the poles were needed. But when the Ark was at rest the poles did not have any apparent function. Why should they not be removed at such times?

Gershonides discusses this issue. He explains that the Ark represented the Torah. The Torah is perfect. Therefore, the Ark must always be perfect. With the removal of the poles, the Ark would no longer be complete. An incomplete Aron is unfit to represent the Torah.[1]

Gershonides explanation seems difficult to understand. In order for an object to be perfect it must be complete. However, perfection also requires that the object have no extra or meaningless components. Imagine the perfect machine. Every part would serve a purpose. No needed component would be absent. No component would lack purpose.

When the Ark was at rest the poles had no purpose. They were extra. It seems the Aron would have better represented the perfection of the Torah without this superfluous component!

Gershonides is providing us with an important insight into the nature of the Aron. The Ark constructed in the wilderness was transported as the nation traveled. Therefore, the Aron was constructed so that it could be carried. However, this design was not merely a practical necessity. The portability of the Ark was essential to its very definition. In other words, the Ark was defined as a portable item. The Aron could only be considered perfect when it expressed this definition. Even at rest the Ark was required to conform to this definition. It must remain completely portable. For this reason the Aron of the permanent Bait HaMikdash remained unchanged in design. The poles were part of the design and could not be removed.

Perhaps, this provides a message regarding the perfection of the Torah. This perfection, in part, lies in the portability of Torah. Torah is a way of life that applies to all times and places. Even when Bnai Yisrael are dispersed throughout the world, Torah is still to be the guide.

“And the cherubs shall spread their wings upward, their wings covering the Ark-cover. And they shall face one another. They should face the center of the Ark cover.” (Shemot 25:20)

The Aron – Ark – in the Mishcan held the tablets of the Decalogue. The opening of the Ark was sealed by the Kaporet – the Ark cover. Mounted on this golden cover were two cherubs. The golden cherubs were positioned at the ends of the cover. The cherubs faced one another. Their wings were spread forward and upward.

There are various opinions regarding the meaning of these cherubim. Don Yitzchak Abravanel explains that the cherubim symbolize two relationships. Their up-stretched wings represent



the relationship between the individual and the Almighty. The cherubim faced one another. This represents the relationship between the individual and his or her friend. The cherubim were placed upon the Ark that contained the tablets. This communicates the message that both of these relationships must be based upon the commandments of the Torah.[2]

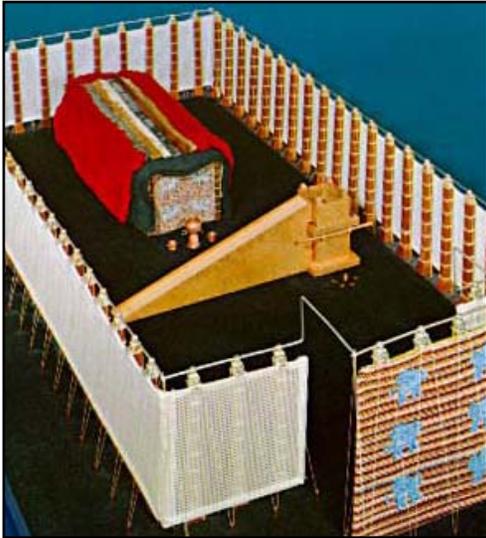
The importance of the Torah in regulating relations between individuals is reflected in a well-known teaching of the Sages. “Torah scholars increase peace in the world.”[3] This concise dictum communicates the lesson that the Torah is a guide for the treatment one’s neighbor. Through following the principles of the Torah, a healthy community is formed.

It is interesting that our Sages taught that Torah scholars increase peace. Why did the Sages not say that the scholars create peace?

Rav Zalman Soroskin ztl offers an insightful response to this question. He explains that two issues must be addressed in order for peace to be achieved. First, there must exist, among the members of the society, a desire to establish peace. Second, wisdom is required to translate this goodwill into concrete rules for relationships. The scholar, through the Torah, can provide the framework in which peace can develop and flourish. However, in order for these efforts to be successful, there must exist a sincere desire to pursue peace.

(continued on next page)

Based in this insight, the meaning of the Sages emerges. The Torah scholar cannot create peace. First, the desire must exist. However, given this desire, the scholar can help society achieve its goal.



“And they should create for me a sanctuary and I will dwell among them.” (Shemot 25:8)

In this pasuk Hashem instructs Moshe to command Bnai Yisrael to construct the Mishkan. Hashem tells Bnai Yisrael that through this Mishkan, He will dwell among the people.

This passage cannot be understood literally. In order to understand the difficulty presented by a literal interpretation of the pasuk, an introduction is needed. Maimonides, in his commentary on the Mishne enumerates the basic foundations of the Torah. The third of these basic principles is that the Almighty is not, in any sense, material.[4]

Maimonides discusses this principle in further detail in his Mishne Torah. He again explains that the Almighty is not material. He adds that it is also inappropriate to attribute to Hashem any of the characteristics associated with physical bodies. For example, Hashem does not have a front or back. One cannot ascribe physical actions to the Almighty. Also, one cannot ascribe a place to Hashem.[5]

This principle, identified by Maimonides, is a logical extension of the proposition that Hashem is a unity. The Torah clearly states that “Hashem is one”.[6] This statement tells us that there is only one G-d. However, our Sages understand the passage to also mean that the Almighty is a perfect unity. This means that He has no parts or aspects. He is not subject to division. He is an absolute representation of “oneness”.[7] The principle of Hashem’s unity precludes attribution of a material existence to Him. Any material entity is has parts or aspects. It has a front and

back or dimensions. These characteristics contradict the concept of absolute unity.

Furthermore the Torah clearly states that Hashem is not material. This principle is communicated in Moshe’s review of the event of Revelation. He reminds the nation that they had experienced Revelation at Sinai. In this experience the Almighty was not represented by any material image.[8]

We can now understand the difficulty presented by our passage. If our passage is interpreted literally, it contradicts this principle. Literally understood, our passage attributes location to the Almighty. The passage states that Hashem will dwell among Bnai Yisrael! This is impossible. Hashem is not material. Therefore, it is not correct to say He dwells in any place.

Unkelus is sensitive to this anthropomorphism. In his translation of our passage, he alters the problematic phrase. In his rendering the phrase reads, “and I will cause the Divine presence to dwell among them”. Unkelus’ intention is to remove any attribution of place to the Almighty. According to Unkelus, the passage’s refers to Hashem’s Divine presence or influence. In other words, the passage describes a providential relationship. The Almighty will exercise His providence over the Mishkan and the people.

Rav Yosef Albo, in his Sefer HaIkkrim, uses the same approach to explain various anthropomorphic expressions found in the Torah. A few examples will illustrate this approach. Hashem tells us, in reference to the Temple, “Mine eyes and Mine heart shall be there perpetually”.[9] Hashem does not have eyes or a heart. The intent of the passage is to communicate that a special providential influence exists over the Mikdash.[10] The Torah states that at Revelation, “the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain”.[11] This passage does not intend to communicate that Hashem was present at Revelation. This would attribute a place to the Almighty. Instead, the passage is stating that the influence of the Almighty was evidenced through a physical manifestation. In this case, the manifestation was the conflagration that appeared at the top of Sinai.[12] It should be noted that the pasuk refers to the “glory” of the Almighty. This supports this interpretation. The Almighty was not present. However, His “glory” or influence was indicated by the fire.

One anthropomorphic expression has occasioned considerable discussion among the Sages. One of the names used for the Almighty is HaMakom – the Place.[13] This is popularly understood to mean that the Divine presence extends everywhere. However, our Sages provide a different explanation of the term. They

explain that the term means that Hashem is the makom – the place – of the universe.[14]

This explanation is very difficult to understand. How can the Sages refer to Hashem as the place of the universe? Hashem is not material. He is not a place! Rav Yitzchak Arama offers a novel interpretation of the Sages’ comments. He explains that the term place can be understood as the base upon which something rests or is supported. As an example, he cites the second mishne of Tractate Avot. The mishne explains that the world stand on three pillars – Torah study, Divine service and acts of kindness. The intent of the mishne is that these three activities are essential to the existence of the world. The mishne expresses this idea by representing the world as standing on these activities. In other words, standing in a place – upon the pillars of Torah study, Divine service and acts of kindness – represents dependency. Rav Arama explains that the name HaMakom communicates the universe’s dependency upon the Almighty. He is the “place” upon which the universe stands. This means the universe only exists as a result of His continuing will. His will supports the universe’s existence. Without His will, the universe would cease to exist.[15] ■

[1] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer Shemot, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1994), p 342.

[2] Don Yitzchak Abravanel, Commentary on Sefer Sehmot, p 252.

[3] Mesechet Berachot 64a.

[4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Commentary on the Mishne, Mesechet Sanhedrin 10:1.

[5] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Yesodai HaTorah, 1:11.

[6] Sefer Devarim 6:4.

[7] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Yesodai HaTorah, 1:7.

[8] Sefer Devarim 4:15. See Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Commentary on the Mishne, Mesechet Sanhedrin 10:1.

[9] Melachim I 9:3.

[10] Rav Yosef Albo, Sefer HaIkkarim, volume2, chapter 14.

[11] Sefer Shemot 24:17.

[12] Rav Yosef Albo, Sefer HaIkkarim, volume2, chapter 17.

[13] See, for example, Mesechet Avot 2:9.

[14] Midrash Rabba, Sefer Beresheit 68:9.

[15] Rav Yitzchak Arama, Akeydat Yitzchak on Sefer Shemot, Parshat Terumah.

Creator. I am convinced that the impetus behind the article was to show the spurious nature of "fate" and fatalism which erroneously removes human responsibility from the equation of daily existence. This passive "bashert" attitude toward life is certainly false and may be refuted easily from both the Written and Oral Torah. However, it is my view that the article went further than necessary in its assertions and is fraught with straw-man arguments, eventually leading to the subversion of Torah and Chazal in order to reach its conclusions.

Rabbi Ben-Chaim begins with the importance of introspection as a response to life's troubles and ego problems. He shows well the fallacy of always crediting "fate" (or, bashert) for negative events and the "self" (or, ego) for positive events. After this, he moves on to express his strong aversion to "all is for the good." Although regularly mis-used by those who have a strong desire to not acknowledge evil in the world, I think it very pertinent to affirm the place that the Gemara affords such sentiments: "Why was he called Nachum of Gimzo? Because whatever befell him, he would say, 'Gam zu l'tovah', 'This too is for the good.'" (Ta'anit 21a) Rabbi Nachum responded "This, too, is for the good" in two examples; one concerning his suffering with amputation and boils which was in retribution for his allowing a starving man to die, and another when he was entrusted with a gift for the government that was eventually stolen. Was this tzaddik a fool, God forbid? Most surely not. In one case the sage is receiving just punishment for his sins in this world so as to escape judgment in the next, in the other he had not sinned at all, but was wronged by thieves. Should his attitude have been rebuked? Are we allowed to sit in judgment over Rabbi Nachum of Gimzo? Surely not.

Also of note is that for twenty-two years, none other than the great Rabbi Akiva ben Yosef, zt"l, was a student of Rabbi Nachum (b.Chagigah 12a). This is noteworthy since it is Rabbi Akiva who is remembered for the famous maxim, "All is foreknown and free will is given" found in Pirkei Avot 3:19.

The article's example of Kayin murdering his brother Hevel is clearly a straw-man argument since it is obvious that no reasonable person would ever assert that murder is not our choice. Thus, this example cannot be used to as a proof for anything since it is arguing against a non-position.

What most concerns me is where Rabbi Ben-Chaim claims to dispel the supposed myth of

there being any concept of 'destiny' in the Gemara. Not only does this undermine Chazal who contradict his premise, but the Talmudic portions simply do not support his conclusions. He begins by quoting Megillah 25a, which says, "Amar Rabbi Chanina, 'Everything is in the hands of Heaven outside of the fear of Heaven.'" (b.Megillah 25a) Although the plain sense of this saying is that everything is under the control of G-d except for man's choices, it is immediately inferred that to believe that "everything" includes leaves falling off of trees is somehow absurd since that is merely "nature" or "natural law." It is also portrayed as being equally absurd to believe that G-d has control over "chance meetings" between people.

The next Gemara quoted is from Avodah Zarah 3b. Rabbi Ben-Chaim quotes it as saying "All is in the hands of Heaven except cold and heat" and goes on to explain that it refers to the cycles of "weather patterns." He also maintains that this saying appears to contradict that of Rabbi Chanina quoted first in Megillah 25a. Upon a closer look at the passage, however, it becomes clear that it does not contradict Rabbi Chanina and has nothing to do with "weather patterns." The full passage in context reads as follows:

"Amar Rav Chanina, Everything is in the hands of Heaven outside of tzinim and pachim. As it is said, Tzinim and Pachim ("thorns and snares") are in the path of the perverse, he who guards his soul will distance himself from them [Mishlei 22:5]."

As can be clearly seen, this passage has absolutely nothing to do with "weather patterns" or "nature" but is instead entirely ethical in its scope. The words sometimes translated as "cold" and "heat" are tzinim and pachim, which literally mean "thorns" and "snares" respectively. To interpret them as referring to the varying temperatures of the weather does not make logical sense since then it would have to be read as "Everything is in the hands of Heaven outside of weather patterns" which is most certainly false.

"Amar Rav Shmuel bar Rav Yitzchak, 'When Reish Lakish began to expound concerning the sotah, he spoke thus: They do not yoke him, a man with a woman, except according to his deeds. As it is said, For the staff of the rasha will not rest upon the lot of the tzaddikim [Tehillim 125:3]' Amar Rabbah bar Bar-Chanah, 'Amar Rav Yochanan, It is as difficult to yoke them as it was to part the Yam Suf. As it is said, G-d settles those who are alone in a family; He brings forth those who are bound to prosperity [Tehillim 68:7]. It is not so, is it? For Amar Rav Yehudah,

'Amar Rav, Forty days before the formation of an embryo a bat kol goes forth and says, The daughter of so-and-so is for so-and-so...!' There is no difficulty here, this one [the latter] refers to a first marriage and that one [the former] refers to a second marriage.'" (b.Sotah 2a)

There are several factors in the proposed interpretation of this Gemara by Rabbi Ben-Chaim which are either unfounded or produce logical inconsistencies. The first of these is the preparatory assertion that the terms shamayim/shmaya (Aramaic and Hebrew for "Heaven") and bat kol ("Heavenly voice") refer not to G-d but are merely metonyms for "nature" or "natural law." Far from being a functional term for natural causes, Chazal frequently uses the term "Heaven" in ways that completely undermine its being understood as "nature." Many examples indicate the term shamayim all speak of G-d and not merely "nature." In addition, "Heavenly voice" is used by Chazal to denote a common function of prophecy or a Divine decree, but never to explain some natural occurrence.

It would seem that the redefinition of a term that refers specifically to HaShem as simply being "nature" is merely a philosophical exercise in an attempt to somehow remove G-d directly from the situation and prove his intended point in spite of the clear statements of the Gemara. Not only this, but by reading "Heaven" and "Heavenly voice" as referring to "nature" or "natural law" Rabbi Ben-Chaim creates internal contradictions in his own reasoning. To be consistent, he would have to understand the maxim of Rav Chanina (quoted above) as literally meaning "Everything is in the hands of nature outside of the fear of nature" and, even more absurd, "Everything is in the hands of nature outside of weather patterns." Clearly, he cannot intend such a reading in this case, since it undermines the very point that he intends to make, namely that "weather patterns" are natural events and not signs from G-d!

On a more anecdotal level, the equation of G-d with nature is dangerously close to the views expressed by the 17th century apostate, Baruch Spinoza, who, basing his approach on Aristotle and Maimonides concluded that G-d and nature were one and the same. While I am completely sure that Rabbi Ben-Chaim is not a student of Spinoza, I do feel that perhaps some of his views (which are overtly Maimonidean) are being cast in a similar mold and are in need of being seriously reconsidered.

As to the meaning of Sotah 2a itself, it is asserted, based on a misunderstanding of 'heavenly voice' being a reference to man's natural

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sexual propensity, that the situation of a "first marriage" is based merely on physical attraction exclusively, whereas a "second marriage" is usually based on what one has gathered from being married to a previous woman who, although physically attractive, apparently was not righteous. This interpretation has several difficulties. First, it is based squarely on the understanding of the bat kol ('heavenly voice') mentioned by Rav and Rav Yehudah as being a metonym for the natural processes involved in the physical formation of the fetus, a view which has clearly been shown to be in error.

It is first stated that men are paired with their wives on the basis of a man's deeds, i.e. if one is wicked he will be paired with a wicked wife and if he is righteous he will be paired with a righteous wife. But then an objection is made on account of another statement which says that the pairing of a man with his wife cannot be based on his deeds since Rav says that such pairing takes place before a man is even formed and thus he has no deeds on which to base any such decision. The reconciliation comes when it is said that both are true but speak of two differing situations; that of a first marriage and that of a second.

The underlying principle which drives the conclusion of the sages is middah k'neged middah ("measure for measure"), i.e. to "reap" what one "sows." It is my view that G-d first destines a person irrespective of deeds since, being yet embryonic, he has no deeds to speak of, being as yet unformed. If, however, the individual should find himself with need to marry again, G-d then destines him according to what kind of man he is since once a person is credited with deeds, he is subject to the principle of middah k'neged middah and will then maritally "reap" what he has "sown." A driving point and assumption of the Gemara is that it is the Creator Himself and not physical drives or "nature" that destine a man to his mate. So then, the assertion that the sages are merely describing a natural process devoid of destiny and unaffected by the intervening hand of G-d is simply not tenable from the text. Even in the Midrash Rabbah, Rabbi Yose, zt"l, emphatically declares that it is the Creator who pairs men and women together for marriage and not human beings (cf. Breishit Rabbah 68:4). The Talmud cannot simply be haphazardly used to proof-text a position that one holds.

Upon my reading of Rabbi Ben-Chaim's article, I began to recall the Torah narratives concerning Yosef. In my view, they serve to provide a complete illustration of the concepts of destiny, free will, and G-d intending evil deeds/events for eventual good all working together harmoniously

and without any sort of logical contradiction. The Torah shows us that although all involved had free will, many uncanny "chance" meetings took place that served to bring Yosef to the place where G-d, through his dreams, had revealed to him that he would eventually arrive. When Yosef finally reveals his identity to his brothers, he states that all that happened was Divinely ordained:

"And he said, 'I am Yosef your brother whom you sold into Egypt. And now, do not be distressed nor be angry with yourselves for having sold me here, for it was to give life that G-d sent me ahead of you. For this has been two years of hunger in the midst of the land and there are still five years in which there will not be either plowing or harvesting. So G-d sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant in the land and to keep you alive in a great escape. And now, it was not you who sent me here, but G-d. He has made me father to Pharaoh, lord of all his house, and dictator throughout the land of Egypt.'" (Breishit 45:4-8, emphases mine) Still, the question must be addressed: How can both the Omnipresent and his free moral agents be responsible for the same events?

The issue is confused by the equivocation of "fate" (beshert) with "destiny." Fate is certainly false, in that it teaches that whatever takes place in the world is completely in the hands of G-d and not at all in the hands of human beings. Destiny, however, maintains that while all is in the hands of G-d, human beings are responsible moral agents capable of choices and affecting circumstances in the world around them.

Since both the Torah and Chazal relate such a tension of Divine providence and the free will of humanity, it is thus incumbent upon us to do so as well, even if it doesn't fit into the molds we have cast for ourselves.

Thank you for your time in reading and considering what I have written here. I look forward to your reply.

*Shalom U'vrachah,
Brian*

RESPONSE

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim:

Brian, you accuse me of quite a number of grave errors, starting with subverting Torah and the Rabbis to meet my baseless agenda...to illiteracy in Talmud...judging Nachum Gamzu...and approaching Spinoza's heresy.

Could it be, that I made so many fundamental errors, and in a single article? I hope my response sheds light on my reasoning.

"Gam zu l'tova" – "This too is for the Good"

Before accusing me of criticizing Nachum ish Gamzu, did you consider that perhaps I was not not addressing Nachum? Certainly, you must have read that I never mentioned him once in my article. Nonetheless, your impute me of addressing him. Did you consider "this too for the good" may have more than the one meaning you understand?

My critique is on common people – not Nachum – when they shift the blame for their errors by attributing their mishaps to some imagined "fate". They falsely indemnify themselves saying "this too is for the good", instead of reflecting and discerning their poor judgment, which can be a step towards their future avoidance of similar mishaps as Eicha suggests: "Let us search and examine our ways and return to Hashem". (Megillas Eicha, 3:40)

In contrast, Nachum ish Gamzu is a second and proper type of "this too for the good". Nachum said so on two occasions, as you mentioned. One occasion was said as an acceptance of punishment for his sin...punishment he verbally wished on himself. In the area of the Divine punishments, he admitted God's will is "for the good". This makes sense – man is better off being punished on Earth, than afterwards, again as you said. The second instance Nachum "looked on the brighter side", was when he was robbed of a gift he was to deliver to the emperor to placate him towards the Jews. This realm of life is not the Divine, but the mundane. While at the inn en-route to the emperor's palace, immoral guests saw Nachum's bag of gems and pearls, secretly stole them, and replaced the contents with dirt. Nachum didn't know of this thievery until he reached the emperor and looked at the contents before handing over the bag. Now – almost too late to salvage the situation – Nachum used his keen intellect or providentially supplied insight (referred to as Elijah) and turned a situation heading for tragedy, into great success. "This too for the good" – in this case – refers to Nachum's ability to generate positive results from negative factors. This is a great trait, and he, a great man...not one of whom I "sat in judgment", as you wrongly accuse.

Again, my critique had nothing to do with Nachum, but is upon those who use that catch phrase to shift the blame from themselves onto "fate". Instead, one should reflect, admitting error, and make positive change in their actions.

(continued on next page)

(Destiny continued from page 5)

Reality



"All is in the hand of heaven except free will. All is in the hand of heaven except tzinin pachin."

First, let me address your misunderstanding that I "misinterpreted tzinin pachin". Rashi and Tosfos on Avoda Zara 3b (and other places) both translate "tzinin pachin" as cold and heat, as I wrote. Cold and heat are phenomena which man can avoid. Repeating, cyclical phenomena allow man to predict a pattern, and thus, avert its harm. In light of Rashi's and Tosfos' glaringly clear and unanimous position, I am puzzled how you rejected the definition of "tzinin pachin" as referring to weather. Now let us address the main issue.

How can Rabbi Chanina make these two seemingly contradictory statements: 1) "All is in the hand of heaven except free will". And, 2) "All is in the hand of heaven except cold and heat (tzinin pachin)"? Think a moment...if Rabbi Chanina first said ALL is in the hand of heaven except free will, then cold and heat CANNOT be

in man's control. Yet, Rabbi Chanina goes on to say cold and heat ARE in man's hands! And so are thorns and snares! So which is it?

We are forced to explain "All is in the hands of heaven" to refer to how little man controls anything...all is in heaven's hands. But we cannot say that literally "all" is in heaven's hands except weather...and then say that in regards to free will. Each time Rabbi Chanina says his various statements, he simply wishes to bring to mind how few are the matters which man controls.

Tosfos (Megilla 25a) asks and answers our very question pertaining to Rabbi Chanina's apparent contradiction. Tosfos answers that what is included in man's control spans two arenas: 1) man's nature, and 2) man's experiences. Rabbi Chanina addresses both spheres independently, with each statement. "All is in the hand of heaven except free will" is meant to address man's nature: i.e., man's height, hair color, and personality traits are not due to man, but heaven, or "nature" as Maimonides teaches. And the second statement, "All is in the hand of heaven except tzinin pachin" refers only to man's experiences. Here, Rabbi Chanina states that nothing in man's daily experiences is under his control except for bodily harm according to Rashi, or weather, according to Tosfos. In these two areas, man can take measures to protect himself. These snares entangle the fools blinded by desire, unaware of the drastic results of their poor choices. Those who don't look before they leap, will choose poorly, and pay the price, described by King Solomon as thorns and snares. So Rabbi Chanina's words "tzinin pachin" can also refer to King Solomon's address of thorns or snares...or "life's troubles". Thereby, both understandings of "tzinin pachin" are equally true. Your error was in not fully researching the area, and jumping to the first conclusion you read. You didn't look before you leaped.

Destiny

You claim my argument about Cain and Abel is a faulty straw man argument, as you said, "this example cannot be used to as a proof for anything since it is arguing against a non-position". In fact, it was a rhetorical argument, as was Abraham's when pleaded to God on behalf of Sodom and others, "Will the Judge of the entire Earth not do justice?" (Gen. 18:25)

My citing of Cain killing Abel as "not bashert" intends to expose bashert as false. Bashert has long been accepted as a truism...defined as that which is true 100% of the time. If however I show even one instance where bashert cannot apply – regardless of how obvious the case is – bashert can be reduced to a falsehood.

A similar method of teaching also used, is a Kal-v'chomer, an a fortiori argument – from the lesser to the greater: "If a child can lift a weight, certainly an adult can lift it". If we can get a person to agree to an obvious matter, we may then succeed in helping them grasp more subtle points that share the same reasoning.

As Jews, our goal is to imbue others with greater knowledge, knowledge unbeknownst to them at any given point. How then do we help them cross that bridge to areas in where they have no bearings? The method is through analogy, exaggeration, and other means. If I can get a person to agree that Cain's murder of Abel is NOT an example of "bashert", I have now succeeded in demonstrating that bashert cannot be used at "all" times. Once the person agrees, he or she can no longer find excuse in all cases for poor decisions, citing "this too is for the good". Having been shown that there are cases where bashert does not apply, such as Cain and Abel...that rule is no longer a "rule" (something ALWAYS true). The person can now begin to take responsibility for is or her poor actions.

You also cited Pirkei Avos which states "All is foreknown and free will is given." (3:15) You incorrectly apply God's Divine orchestration of Joseph's (his descent into slavery then his rise to power) to all people. You wrongly feel God steers events in all of our lives, as was true with Joseph! You took license where you must not. Maimonides proves from Torah verses that "man enjoys Divine providence in accordance with his perfection". He cites King David's quote "they are equivalent to animals" to mean that certain people are so devoid of intellect and perfection, that they are "like animals" in that they too have no providence, just as individual animals: (Guide, Book III, chap. XVIII)

"The relation of Divine Providence is therefore not the same to all men; the greater the human perfection a person has attained, the greater the benefit he derives from Divine Providence. This benefit is very great in the case of prophets, and varies according to the degree of their prophetic faculty: as it varies in the case of pious and good men according to their piety and uprightness. For it is the intensity of the Divine intellectual influence that has inspired the prophets, guided the good in their actions, and perfected the wisdom of the pious. In the same proportion as ignorant and disobedient persons are deficient in that Divine influence, their condition is inferior, and their rank equal to that of irrational beings: and they are

(continued on next page)

(Destiny continued from page 5)

Reality

"like unto the beasts" (Ps. xlix. 21). For this reason it was not only considered a light thing to slay them, but it was even directly commanded for the benefit of mankind. This belief that God provides for every individual human being in accordance with his merits is one of the fundamental principles on which the Law is founded."

So too, Job's afflictions were due to his erroneous opinions of God's justice. He was left without Divine providence until he learned new truths, and was only then healed. "All is foreknown and free will is given" is explained equally by Rashi, Maimonides and Rabbeinu Yona to mean that God knows all – NOT that He "destines" events to occur. (See their commentaries right there on the page on that Mishna in Avos.) Only when God expresses His steering of events, can we say He did so. But today, without prophecy which the Talmud states has ended, we have no right to say what is or isn't God's providence.

Nature

Regarding leaves falling from trees, Maimonides openly states this is nature. Chance meetings with people too are literally "chance", and not Divinely ordained, unless the person – as Maimonides teaches – is on the level to deserve providence. Is each leaf predetermined when to fall from every one of the billions of trees on Earth, and at what speed and angle? Does this really matter in God's Earth dedicated to human perfection, that so many leaves – never seen by us – should be timed to fall exactly? That is absurd. And Maimonides too does not think so as I quote below (Guide, Book III, chap. XVI). He calls it "nature", which he clearly differentiates from "providence". So I put it to you to at least ponder Maimonides' reasoning, and explain his view, which contradicts yours:

"For I do not believe that it is through the interference of Divine Providence that a certain leaf drops [from a tree], nor do I hold that when a certain spider catches a certain fly, that this is the direct result of a special decree and will of God in that moment; it is not by a particular Divine decree that the spittle of a certain person moved, fell on a certain gnat in a certain place, and killed it; nor is it by the direct will of God that a certain fish catches and swallows a certain worm on the surface of the water. In all these cases the action is, according to my opinion, entirely due to chance, as taught by Aristotle."

**Marriage**

Is man's choice of a wife "predetermined"? I thank my friend Howard for pointing me to Maimonides' statement (Shmoneh Perakim: chap VIII) that marrying a prohibited woman is a sin, and marrying a permitted one is a mitzvah. In no case might we say God determines us to choose a wife. For God does not force sin or mitzvah on man. Maimonides concludes that our selection of a wife is NOT both free will, and Divinely ordained as you suggested.

If man is truly predetermined to marry a certain woman, of what use were all of King's Solomon's counsels concerning which women to avoid? Why tell us this, if we are destined to marry someone? According to you, King Solomon contradicts the Talmud. But in fact, the answer is that we have free will to choose who we wish. We select our wives. But it is also true that in exceptional cases, a worthy man can benefit from God's providence over whom he marries, in accordance with his perfection. We are not forced to say that God provides a wife in any case except for the righteous. This is validated by the verse quoted in Sotah 2a: "The staff of the wicked will not rest on the lot of the righteous." (Psalm 125) Read carefully, this is unidirectional: the verse says it is only the righteous that earn God's merit of protection from a poor wife. But the reverse is not true – a wicked man is not granted any type of providence for a wife. The verse only speaks of providence over the righteous – "the wicked (woman) will not be given to the righteous (man)". This is the exact view of Maimonides that God's providence is in accord with man's perfection. And that is how this Talmudic portion concludes: the second marriage is where man's merit "may" determine his selection of a mate. Not in every case. But the first marriage is due to psychological and genetic design...the "Bas-Kol" which I referred to as nature. You took issue that I quoted a Rabbi who explained the Bas-Kol as nature, and not heavenly design. But Rashi on the spot describes what Maimonides mirrors in his Guide (Book II, chap. VI):

"...all parts of the Universe, even the limbs of animals in their actual form, are produced through angels: for natural forces and angels are identical. How bad and injurious is the blindness of ignorance! Say to a person who is believed to belong to the wise men of Israel that the Almighty sends His angel to enter the womb of a woman and to form there the foetus, he will be satisfied with the account: he will believe it, and even find in it a description of the greatness of God's might and wisdom; although he believes that the angel consists of burning fire, and is as big as a third part of the Universe, yet he considers it possible as a divine miracle. But tell him that God gave the seed a formative power which produces and shapes the limbs, and that this power is called "angel", or that all forms are the result of the influence of the Active Intellect, and that the latter is the angel, the Prince of the world, frequently mentioned by our Sages, and he will turn away; because he cannot comprehend the true greatness and power of creating forces that act in a body without being perceived by our senses. Our Sages have already stated – for him who has understanding – that all forces that reside in a body are angels, much more the forces that are active in the Universe. The theory that each force acts only in one particular way, is expressed in Bereshit Rabba (chap. 1.) as follows: "One angel does not perform two things, and two angels do not perform one thing"; this is exactly the property of all forces."

Brian, you accused me of "redefining a term that refers specifically to HaShem", as simply being 'nature'. You called my interpretation a "mere philosophical exercise attempting to remove G-d from the situation and prove my point, in spite of clear Talmudic statements." It appears from Maimonides that the exact opposite is true: I have in fact been loyal to the understanding of one of the greatest minds...who followed reason over all else. You originally stated that "I went further than necessary in my assertions". But is it not you who has gone further than necessary, accusing me of motives that are your own projections?

You also equated me to Spinoza who held that G-d and nature were the same.

I feel you now see that your statements are truly without cause, when reading my words independent of your interpretations. I feel your major error is reading, and not studying. I hope my analysis of these sources unveils their depths you missed. ■

ARI FISCHBEIN

Bling Belief



The following is an unqualified letter I assume has been distributed via the internet, and a well-considered response. The response has much merit. The author's reasoning should be applied to all similar cases. – Moshe Ben-Chaim

Letter: An Orthodox Jew from New Jersey was involved in a car accident and accidentally killed an old non-Jewish man. Although the courts found the Jewish man not guilty, he could not carry the the pains of the guilt that he killed an old man. It gave him no peace and it caused him to lose his appetite and was unable to sleep for weeks.

He decided to seek counsel from the revered sage, Rabbi XXXXX of Bnei Brak, and wrote him a letter asking the Rav what tikun can he do because he accidentally killed a non-Jew. The Rav wrote him an answer that included one word, "Amalek".

The Jew did not understand this answer and continued suffering with sleepless nights. At some point he decided to move away from his town to begin a new life. He began searching for a new house and found a house that appealed to him. The owners of the apartment told him that they are eager to get rid of this house because they inherited from their dead father that was killed in a car accident.

After short investigation, turns out the apartment belonged to the non-Jew who was accidentally killed by the Jew. In the basement of the house, the Orthodox Jew found materials belonging to the old non-Jew man. He was shocked to find a picture of the old man during his youth proudly wearing an SS uniform, standing next to Hitler, yimach shemo.

It turned out that this old man was an SS officer in the Nazi army and after the war, he came to the United States and hid his past. The SS Nazi Officer also hid other documents, including all the names of the Jews he personally murdered.

When he read the names of the Jewish people that were murdered, he found both of his parent's name on this list.

HaShem avenged their blood.

It was then that he understood Rabbi XXXXX answer that contained one word, "AMALEK".

Response: I think the more amazing part of this story was not that the Rav said Amalek and was "right", but rather that the killer ended up buying the dead man's house. In any case, look at the story...there are just about zero verifiable facts.

It says he was acquitted by a jury over the car accident.

What was the court case number?

What was the defendant's name for that matter?

What was the dead man's name?

What was the address of the house?

Also, the fact that the rav wrote back "Amalek" is revealing. He didn't write, "this man is of Amalek" He didn't write, "The man you killed was a nazi". Nor did he write, "This man killed your parents". Just "Amalek", which could mean a lot of things, and is probably why it was written that way. If in fact this did happen, and it was written that way, the rav probably just wanted to make the guy feel better by hinting the man he killed was a rasha. Of course he couldn't come right out and say because you can't just call anyone a rasha.

Also, is this rav a prophet?

Can't be...we know there are no more prophets. Perhaps it is Divinely inspired insight? So is this rav claiming himself he has Divine inspiration, or are others attributing this to him?

Further if we posit all of this is true, why would it be justice for this Jew to kill him? Why not some other way? This Jew had to go through years of self-torture, arrest, courts, money for defense, etc. Is that fair?

Also what does that say about those thousands or millions of others whose parents perished, but were not afforded this kind of justice. Were they not deserving?

Bottom line...this story has lots of unanswered questions. And if given just a few more facts, it could at least be determined if it was plausible. But since the specific facts are NOT included, is most revealing.

Regards,

Ari Fischbein ■



“I’m More Spiritual than Religious”

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

You've heard this said many times...but what is this person saying? And are they justified?

I understand what being "religious" refers to: enacting specific actions connected with a religion. But what does "spiritual" mean? Do I simply sit around and "feel spiritual"?

People accept the notion that there is something we refer to as "spiritual". This notion is in fact based in reality, since there do exist physical entities, as well as non-physical or spiritual entities, such as natural laws, angels, concepts, and our souls. So, one could rightly say he or she is spiritual when referring to studying, thinking, or prayer. A prophet would also be correct to say he was spiritual when experiencing prophecy. In all of these cases, a person accurately refers to an activity where he or she relates to a non-physical entity.

But if one says "I am more spiritual than religious", what are they saying? What is the non-physical entity they relate to? This sounds to me like one who accepts the beliefs of Judaism, but tosses out the physical laws. Does God endorse this? Of course not. God didn't say the laws are optional. It ends up that one who abandons the laws, is actually denying God's will, and is "less" spiritual, as he or she follows God less than a religious person!

Many people seek an "easy" life without restrictions, and their guilt forces them to enunciate a justification for ignoring what they know God requires. In fact, this "spiritual" person is exposed as simply rationalizing his or her abandon of meticulous, Jewish law. One further justifies himself professing that the "spirit" of the law is all God really wants from us, saying "God just wants me to be a good person". Another rationalization, and another outright denial of God's lengthy Torah.

Had God simply wanted us to be "spiritual" and not religious...or a "good person" ...His Torah would not specify 613 commands, and demand we follow the thousands of rabbinic protective laws.

Finally, saying "I'm More Spiritual than Religious" is akin to saying, "I know better than God".

We wouldn't reject a doctor's advice to have surgery if he felt our life was at risk. Therefore, we must look at our souls as even more vital, since they take us to our final existence...our bodies do not. ■