

JewishTimes

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Be Strong, Be Strong.

Rabbi Reuven Mann
on completing Exodus
and the need for strength

Parshas Parah

Rabbi Darrell Ginsberg
on the special Haftorah

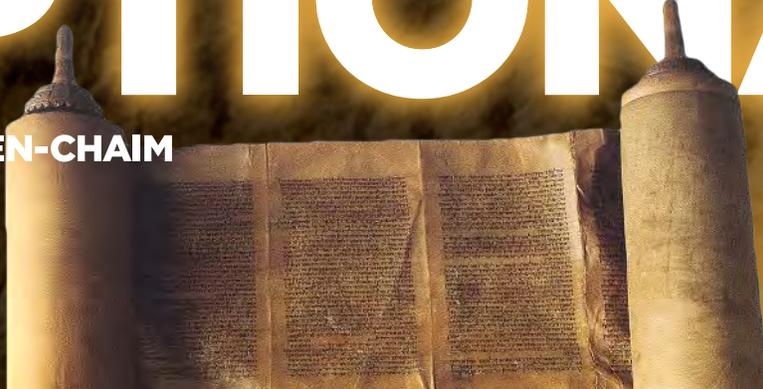


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RABBI BERNIE FOX
ON THE PARSHA

DID GOD MAKE TORAH OBSERVANCE OPTIONAL

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



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by Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim, Founder Mesora.org

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or simply popular
among other Jews?

33 pg Preview

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REVIEWS



RABBI REUVEN MANN

Rabbi, Y. Israel of Phoenix; Founder, Masoret Institute; Menabel YBT

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim has written extensively about the philosophy and Hashkafa of Judaism for many years. As the title of his book, "Judaism; Religion of Reason" indicates, his ideas are rooted in an uncompromisingly rational approach to Judaism. He follows the guidelines of the great rationalist philosophers such as Rambam and Saadia Gaon in his exploration into the values and ideals of Torah Judaism. He is convinced that all of the teachings of Judaism and the statements of the Sages make perfect sense and are amenable to the rational, inquiring mind.

He is absolutely opposed to all forms of "mysticism" and seeks to debunk all practices and beliefs which are rooted in superstition or are contrary to reason. This collection of writings covers a wide variety of topics that are of interest to contemporary Jews. It also contains insightful analyses of Biblical narratives as well as the underlying significance and relevance of many mitzvot.

Rabbi Ben-Chaim demonstrates that Judaism can be harmonized with human reason. Indeed he asserts that one can only understand and appreciate Judaism by analyzing it in a logical manner in order to elucidate its deeper ideas. He is not afraid to ask the most penetrating and challenging questions because he is absolutely convinced that Torah is the Word of God and thus based on the highest form of wisdom.

Jews who have a profound desire to make sense out of their religion will benefit greatly from reading this book. One need not agree with all of Rabbi Ben-Chaim's ideas, but his questions, analyses and original thoughts will open your mind to a new appreciation of the wisdom and logical consistency of Torah Judaism.

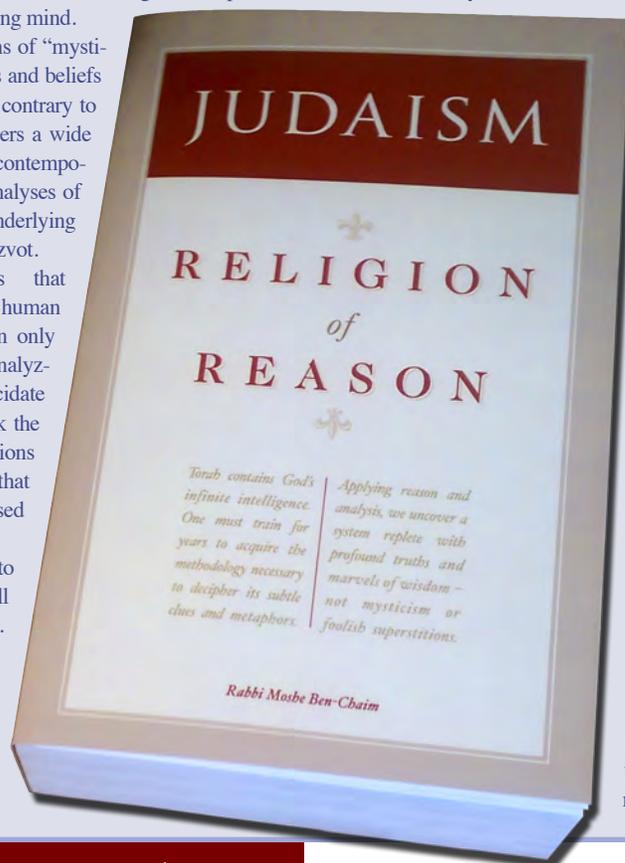


RABBI STEVEN WEIL

Executive Vice President, The Orthodox Union

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim has followed in the footsteps of the great Medieval Rishonim (Rambam, R. Avraham ben HaRambam, etc.) in trying to explain, define and lay out the world outlook of Torah and the philosophy of Judaism in rational, logical terms. Rabbi Ben-Chaim asks critical, crucial and defining questions that any thinking Jew needs to ask. He is extremely critical of approaches to Judaism that superimpose external methodologies (such as mysticism, other religions) and project primitive emotions onto the

Almighty. Although one can disagree with some of the conclusions; his approach, his questions and method enable the reader to explore and engage our theology in a meaningful and serious way. When Chazal employ certain terms and convey certain images, the student is forced to conceptualize, extract and deduce profound psychological and philosophical principles. Unfortunately, many take Chazal at face value or project onto Chazal, motives and rationalizations they never meant. Rabbi Ben-Chaim following the method of the Rishonim, forces us to define, weigh and analyze each word and phrase of Chazal. Rabbi Ben-Chaim shows there is no contradiction between a serious investigation of Science and a serious investigation of Judaism. Rabbi Ben-Chaim has written a work that addresses the thinking, seeking person of all faiths. This work speaks to the scholar and lay person alike. Once again, one may not agree with specifics within the book but at the same time will appreciate it and gain insight into how the great Rishonim define how we view the world. Rabbi Ben-Chaim's website, Mesora.org is a very serious tool and resource for thinking human beings who want to engage and explore the Almighty, the Almighty's universe and do so within the realm of wisdom, rationality and intellectual honesty.



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IS TORAH AN OPTION OR NOT?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Do we have a choice to follow Torah? Of course, all individuals possess free will. What I ask here is something different: did God present to man the Torah lifestyle as an option, or as an inescapable obligation?

Reviewing history, Adam and all Noahides were not given their commands by choice. Adam was commanded – without option – not to eat of the fruit and not to violate idolatry (Sanhedrin, 56b). Noahides have no choice regarding their laws (ibid). When I say “no choice”, I mean that disobedience meets with punishment, regardless of a Noahide accepting God’s authority and system. Noah’s sinful and uncorrectable generation was killed, and Babel’s generation met with dispersion as their correction. Egypt was destroyed for not following God, as were other peoples. This teaches that these societies were in

violation, as God previously warned them not to violate (Sanhedrin 56b). All these cultures and peoples had no defense, had they claimed they never accepted God’s laws. Violation was met with punishment regardless of their acceptance.

In Mara, en route to Sinai, the lesson of punishment is again taught. The Jews had thirsted three days and the waters finally located at Mara were bitter and undrinkable. The waters were then made sweet through a miracle, and they drank. Moses then instructed the people (Exod. 15:26):

“If you will listen to God’s voice, perform what is upright in His eyes, heed God’s commands and guard His statutes, then God will not place any of the sicknesses upon the you that He had placed upon Egypt”.

Up to this point, all seems consistent: all members of mankind were not presented with an option to decline God’s Noahide laws, where such a rejection would exempt them from punishment. The contrary is true: God punished man for rejecting God’s Noahide laws, whether mankind accepted them or not.

However, in Exodus 24:7 we read of Moses’ recital of many laws before the Jews; and the Jews’ subsequent response of “Naaseh v’Nishma”, “We will do and we will listen”. Does this imply that here, man was offered an option? In Mara, the Jews were taught laws, and in Exodus 19:1-8, when the Jews first arrived at Sinai, Moses presented the elders with God’s treaty of the Torah:

“In the third month of the exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt, on this day they came to the Sinai desert. And they journeyed from Rephidim and they came to the Sinai desert; and the Children of Israel camped in the desert, and the Jews camped facing the mountain. And Moses ascended to God and God called to him from the mountain saying, “So shall you speak to the house of Jacob, and tell the Children of Israel: You have seen what I have done to Egypt and I carried you on eagle’s wings and I brought you to Me. And now, if you certainly listen to My voice and guard my covenant, then you will be to Me a treasure from all peoples, for unto Me is the entire Earth. And you will be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you shall speak to the Children of Israel”. And Moses came and called to the elders of the people and he placed before them all these words, which God had commanded. And the entire nation answered as one and they said, “All that God has spoke we will do”. And Moses reported their response to God.”

Did God tell Moses to offer the Children of Israel a “choice” of accepting Torah? And had the nation rejected the Torah, would they be exempt from punishments for violating what is written? This would be completely inconsistent with God’s relationship with Noahides, who had no option.

Later in Deuteronomy (Deut. 29:14) another Torah bris (treaty) is created between God and the Jews prior to entering Israel: *“And not with you alone do I make this bris and this curse, but with all standing here with us today before Hashem our God, and with all those who are not here*

(continued next page)



today". Now it appears the Jews are in receipt of an imposed system; one that is obligatory even upon future generations not yet alive to decide for themselves. Certainly this proves that Torah is not optional.

Regarding this latter treaty we learn of horrific curses for our violation, and the response of the nations (Deut. 19:23):

"And all the nations will say, 'On what account has God done this to the land? What caused this great, heated fury?' And they will answer, 'On account that they [the Jews] abandoned the treaty of God of their fathers which He made with them when He took them out of Egypt. And they served other gods and they bowed to them'..."

What new consideration demanded this new Torah treaty where God would lay waste to the land? Why was the land brought into the equation? And which way is it: is Torah a choice, or an option?

God's Relationship with Mankind

It was an act of great kindness that God created our species. For mankind can arrive at such a deeply fulfilling existence through studying God's wisdom. Man alone possesses intelligence; engaging it is God's intent for us. This is where we will find the deepest gratification. By commanding Adam not to eat of the fruit and abstain from idolatry, God taught mankind that we are servants, and thus, God's instructions are to be heeded. We must not freely engage in all physical desires (prohibition of fruit) and we must view our relationship with God as a servant before his only Master (idolatry). God's act of "commanding" Adam laid down the rule: He is the Master and we are servants. But of course, God does not need man, or anything. His creation of our species is for our benefit alone; not His. We should view His plan for us as our only choice. It is the greatest good He can offer us, as He clearly indicates which choices we must make; those that

lead to happiness and success. He is like a teacher giving us the answers before the test. Yes, ultimately we choose all our actions. But this does not mean that no repercussions and unhappiness await the wrong choices. On God's words "And guard my treaty [of Torah] (Exod. 19:5)," Sforno comments: "In the manner that I will not need to do to you as I have done to Egypt". Meaning, if we did not follow the Torah we would suffer the consequences. Sforno teaches that Torah was not an option.

Ramban (Exod. 19:7) "Choose for yourselves today if you will follow the Torah"

The obvious question is this: if the Jews were not being given the option of following or rejecting the Torah, for what reason were they 'presented' with it, and for what reason did they respond "Naaseh v'Nishma?" This seems to be a response to an option. Let's read the exact words again, which the Torah records upon the Jews' arrival at Sinai:

"And Moses came and called to the elders of the people and he placed before them all these words, which God had commanded. And the entire nation answered as one and they said, "All that God has spoke we will do". And Moses reported their response to God."

There's one more source that sheds light on our question. Talmud Avoda Zara 2b, quoting Havakuk 3: 6 says that at one point in history, "God arose, assessed mankind, He 'saw' and released the nations from their 7 Noahide commands." The Talmud asks, "What did God 'see'?" The Talmud answers, "He saw that the nations abandoned the Noahide laws, and therefore God released them from their obligation." We know this release is not literal, so how do we understand this?

The Talmud concludes that as the nations abandoned Noahide laws, any future Noahide who followed the laws would be

considered as one "not commanded". This means that once the chain of transmission of Noahide law was broken, no future Noahide could say he was "following God", since the transmission that God commanded these laws was lost from society. As such, man's adherence to any of these "laws" would not be out of obedience to God, but of societal practicality, "as if" God released them. Thus, such individuals could not be rewarded as "followers of God". It is only one who knows that he is adhering to "God's will" who truly lives as God desires.

It was for this reason that God gave Adam at least one command. For without any command, Adam would not know from nature alone that he is to serve God. But now commanded, Adam's actions can be rightfully considered as "following God". So God never released the Noahides from their laws. The Talmud is teaching that when the transmission of Noahide law was lost, people's acting in line with the Noahide laws were viewed as if not commanded, since they were not following "God's word", but rather, society.

Similarly, most scientists today study the universe without a yearning to draw closer to the Creator. They are content to solve problems and discover new laws. This alone is intriguing, as they are using their minds, and they are amazed at what they find. Yet, tragically, they miss the mark. Moses was different, as he asked God to unveil more of His nature, "Show me Your honor (Exod. 33:18)." Moses thirsted to learn about the Creator, not only the creation. This offers man the most fulfilling existence. Following or studying ideas without the appreciation of the Designer, falls infinitely short of our purpose, and our fulfillment. We have the capacity to establish a "relationship" with the Creator. Maimonides teaches (Hilchos Teshuva 7:7) that a sinner might be disgusting, distant and abominable before God one day, but with repentance, he becomes loved and desirous, close and beloved. This teaches that we are to strive to establish, and maintain a 'relationship' with God.

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Love of God is the highest expression of human perfection. Without God as our focus, the greatest scientist does not fulfill his role for which he was created. Nor does he reach the level of fulfillment possible for him. A wise Rabbi would say this after uncovering a new idea in Talmud: "Let's enjoy the idea". He would add that one's studies must eventuate in an appreciation for God, and not stop at the idea alone.

Perhaps this is why Moses placed before the Jews all these words, which "God had commanded." And also why the entire nation answered "All that God has spoken" we will do. Moses and the nation realized the core issue: the Torah system "emanates from God", He is the focus, and our drawing near to Him is our objective. The answer of "Naaseh v'Nishma" was not stated as a response to an option, for the Jews and no people were ever given an option. "Naaseh v'Nishma" was stated as a realization that as God commanded us in Torah, this is the sum total of human life. "We will do" was the Jews' expression that without Torah, life is truly meaningless.

Immediately after this statement, God tells Moses He will orchestrate Revelation at Sinai so the people possess proof of the system as truly divine. God thereby gave us the means by which that generation, and all future generations, would have proof of the Torah's divine nature. We would have all that is necessary to arrive at a love of God. It is significant that prior to the overwhelming event of Revelation, the Jews had already agreed to the Torah system, based on the fundamentals taught to them prior to that event, and their salvation. And although Moses presented God's words to the elders, it was the entire nation that responded and accepted Torah.

So all is consistent: from Adam through Noahides and through Israelites, all systems and laws were given without option.

Rabbi Elazar Hakfar stated (Avos 4:22):

"Against your will you are formed, against your will you are born, against your will you live, against your will you die, and against your will you are destined to give a judgment and accounting before the King, King of all kings, the Holy One, blessed be He."

Some may ask, "What justice is there in a system that is thrown upon mankind, without option?" The response is as follows. Man cannot say he will reject Torah, and have any claim that "Since I

never accepted it, I should not be punished". For both Torah, and human life are God's creations. To say "I will live without Torah", is to say that I wish to enjoy one of God's creations – my own existence – but abandon the other creation – Torah. However, God did not create us to live with abandon. We have free will to do as we wish and reject Torah. But we must be honest that we are unjustified, we waste our lives, we violate God's will...and we will suffer the consequences. If we are realistic, we will agree that our coming into existence was not up to us, so the terms of our continued existence to are not open to discussion.

To reiterate this subtle point, it is a contradiction to reject Torah. By doing so, you desire to enjoy God's creation of your being, while rejecting His Torah.

Throughout time, with no favoring of one people over another, God made man's mission clear, and without option. This is for our good. But we will only realize this good with Torah study. If we avoid honest inquiry into the mitzvos and ideals, into the beauty of the halachik system...we will be frustrated with every fast, with every holiday, and with all mitzvos that take us away from our emotional drives and plans. That is why people are non-observant: they have never witnessed the enjoyment of study, or the philosophy of Torah that rings

true and clear. They are convinced that their lifestyle cannot be improved. They fear any detachment from their pleasures, and they are weak and not courageous enough to trust those wiser than they are.

God is equally concerned with all mankind. This explains the response of the nations when God uses the Land of Israel as a tool for education. When the Jews observe, all will go well, with great blessings. This endorses the Torah's bountiful promises. And when we disobey God and violate His Torah, we suffer such severe consequences about which the nations say, "On account that the Jews abandoned the treaty of God of their fathers which He made with them when He took them out of Egypt." God desires the Jews to function as a "treasure from all peoples", "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation". Our downfall is equally a testament to the Torah's truth.

I say this many times: you have one life; don't waste this one chance. And if you know of others who at present do not observe Torah, do all in your power to attract them, create strong friendships with them, and enlighten them so you give them everlasting life. And don't stop at one person; create classes at regular intervals. God taught you, now you must teach others. Rabbi Meir said, "One who learns Torah and does not teach it, upon him it says, "The word of God he despises (Talmud Sanhedrin 99a)"" ■

Life in a Jar

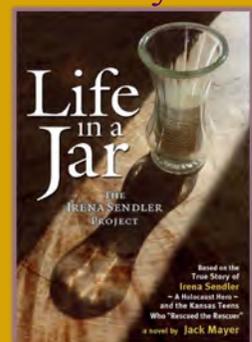
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Be Strong, Be Strong.



This week we read Parshiot Vayakhel and Pekudei and thus complete the second Book of the Torah, Shemot. At the conclusion of each of the Five Books of the Torah it is a custom for the congregation to arise and proclaim “Chazak, Chazak Venischazeik (Be Strong, Be Strong and let us be strengthened).” This statement is then repeated by the Reader. The questions arise, what is the reason for this recitation, why is “Be Strong” repeated and what is the meaning of “and let us be strengthened?”

The Talmud in Brachot states, “Four things need chizuk (strengthening): Torah, good deeds, prayer and derech erez (courteous behavior).” The meaning of this is that certain activities are contrary to our natural disposition and we therefore become lazy and perfunctory in their

performance. There is nothing in Judaism which is more consequential to religious perfection than the study of Torah. Everything hinges upon diligence in this area. The Rabbis say, “An ignoramus cannot be truly pious.” We must be conscientious in the pursuit of knowledge and expansion of our intellectual horizons. The public reading of the Torah on Shabbat is for the sake of engaging the entire community in a collective act of Talmud Torah. The need for chizuk can be seen in the resistance that many congregants implicitly express by their failure to observe this mitzvah properly. Halacha prohibits any talking or distraction during the Torah reading. Yet in many synagogues it is a great challenge to keep the noise level down so that the recitation can be heard.

Judaism maintains that here is no greater joy than intense study of Torah. However,

it is a unique type of experience which does not come naturally. It requires a great deal of intensive effort over a long period of time. Love of Torah is an acquired taste. No one becomes a Torah scholar without experiencing a great deal of frustration, and disappointment along the way. Mental effort, objective analysis and honesty in acknowledging one’s mistakes are some of the virtues that authentic Torah scholarship requires.

This explains why Torah is one of the things that require chizuk. One must be strong to not surrender to laziness and to forego the instant gratification that serious study demands. This lesson is incorporated into the public reading of the Torah. When we conclude a unit of study i.e. a Book, we have a natural sense of accomplishment. This is the appropriate moment to express the idea that Torah learning requires strength. The congregation exhorts the Reader (who in this context fulfills the role of teacher) to be strong i.e. we recognize your great efforts in mastering Torah and urge you to continue. We say “Be Strong” twice. The reason, in my opinion, is that we study for the sake of action. One needs to make the effort to base his behavior on the ideals he has learned. Thus, we say “Be strong” in your study and be equally strong in your effort to live according to the wisdom of Torah. We then say, “Venischazeik,” let us be strengthened. The Torah scholar cannot keep his knowledge to himself. He must be a source of wisdom and inspiration for the entire community. We are praying that he will be strong and successful and that as a result we will partake of that strength and elevate our lives by the proper study and practice of Torah.

Shabbat Shalom. ■

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thereof, and five cubits the breadth thereof, four-square, and three cubits the height thereof.... And he made for the altar a grating of network of brass, under the ledge round it beneath, reaching halfway up. And he cast four rings for the four ends of the grating of brass, to be holders for the staves. (Sefer Shemot 38:1-5)

1. The staves and their holders

Parshat VaYakhel describes the actual fabrication of the Mishcan – the Tabernacle – and its components. The Mishcan accompanied Bnai Yisrael during their travels in the wilderness. The Mishcan was designed as a transportable structure. Each time Bnai Yisrael was instructed to embark upon the next stage of their journey, the Mishcan was disassembled. Upon reaching their destination, the Mishcan was reassembled. The function of the Mishcan as a transportable structure was reflected in its basic design and in the design of many of its internal components. The structure was composed of curtains draped over upright boards. Its courtyard was also composed of curtains. These were hung from poles. Many of the internal components included in their design integrated rings. Staves were inserted into these rings. These staves were used to carry the components when Bnai Yisrael traveled from one encampment to the next.

The above passages describe four of the Mishcan's components that include in their design these integrated rings. These components are the Aron – the Ark, the Shulchan – the Table upon which the Shew Bread was displayed, the Mizbe'ach HaKetoret – the Incense Altar, and the Mizbe'ach HeNechoshet – the Brass Alter – upon which sacrifices were offered. In describing the Shulchan, Mizbe'ach HaKetoret, and Mizbe'ach HaNechoset, these rings are consistently described as batim la'vadim – holders for the staves. However, in describing the rings that were included in the design of the Aron, this description is omitted. Instead, the Torah describes the placement of the rings at the four corners of the Aron and the insertion of the staves into the rings. These rings are not described as holders for the staves. Why does the Torah carefully describe the function of the rings of the Shulchan, Mizbe'ach HaKetoret, and Mizbe'ach HaNechoset as holders for the staves and not include this description in its discussion of the fabrication of the Aron?

And Bezalel made the Ark of acacia-wood: two cubits and a half was the length of it, and a cubit and a half the breadth of it, and a cubit and a half the height of it... And he cast for it four rings of gold, in the four feet thereof: even two rings on the one side of it, and two rings on the other side of it. And he made staves of acacia-wood, and overlaid them with gold. And he put the staves into the rings on the sides of the Ark, to bear the Ark. (Sefer Shemot 37:1-5)

And he made the Table of acacia-wood: two cubits was the length thereof, and a cubit the breadth thereof, and a cubit and a half the height thereof.... And he cast for it four rings of gold, and put the rings in the

four corners that were on the four feet thereof. Close by the border were the rings, the holders for the staves to bear the Table. (Sefer Shemot 37:10-14)

And he made the Altar of Incense of acacia-wood: a cubit was the length thereof, and a cubit the breadth thereof, four-square; and two cubits was the height thereof; the horns thereof were of one piece with it.... And he made for it two golden rings under the crown thereof, upon the two ribs thereof, upon the two sides of it, for holders for staves wherewith to bear it. (Sefer Shemot 37:25-27)

And he made the Altar of Burnt-offering of acacia-wood: five cubits was the length

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the passage. According to the Sages, the closing phrase in the above passages is an admonition. Hashem commands Bnai Yisrael to not remove the staves from the Aron. In other words, the removal of the staves is prohibited.

This explains the unique design of the Aron's staves. The staves of the other components were intended to be removed when the objects were set into their proper place in the Mishcan. Therefore, the staves of these objects were designed for easy removal. The staves of the Aron were not to be removed. Their removal was prohibited. Therefore, these staves had a unique design. Once inserted into their rings, the Aron's staves could not be easily removed.

The commentaries offer a number of interesting explanations for the prohibition against removing the staves from the Aron. Many are related to another unique law of the Aron. Unlike the other components of the Mishcan which could be transported by wagon, the Aron was carried by the Leveyim. In other words, whereas the staves attached to the other components of the Mishcan were used only to move and lift these objects onto wagons the Aron was transported through the wilderness by the Leveyim who carried it by its staves.

Maimonides explains that because the staves were essential to the Aron's transport, they could not be removed. The Aron was designed to be transportable and the staves were essential to this function. If removed, the Aron would be incomplete.

Rabbaynu Yosef Bechor Shur offers a similar explanation. He explains that because of its sanctity, we are commanded to treat the Aron with extreme respect. We are not to handle it unnecessarily but only to the extent absolutely required. Therefore, in order to limit contact with the Aron – as is consistent with its sanctity – the Torah prohibits removal of its staves. The Torah is preventing the unnecessary contact that would occur if the staves were removed with each encampment and then reinserted with each new stage of the journey through the wilderness.

Don Isaac Abravanel provides one of the most interesting explanations for the prohibition. He suggests that the staves of the Aron were not merely a feature included in the Aron's design in order to facilitate its transport. Instead, the staves were included in the Aron's design because it is prohibited to make direct contact with the Aron. The admonition against removing the staves reinforces the prohibition against making direct contact with the Aron.

And you should bring the staves into the rings on the sides of the Aron to carry the Aron with them. In the rings of the Aron should be the staves. They should not be removed from it. (Sefer Shemot 25:14-15)

2. The unusual design of the Aron's staves

The above passages describe the staves that were inserted through rings of the Aron. Chizkuni suggests that the above passages seem to contain a contradiction. The Torah explains that the staves were inserted through the rings. This implies that the staves were fashioned so that they could be inserted through the rings but they were not fixed to the rings. However, the Torah then states: In the rings of the Aron should be the staves. This statement implies that they were permanently fixed to the rings and could not be removed. Based on the comments of the Talmud, Chizkuni explains that the two statements can be reconciled. The staves were fashioned with thick ends which tapered toward the center. The diameters of the staves at their ends were nearly the same as the inner diameters of the rings. The staves were forced through the rings. Once the thick ends of the staves were forced through the rings, the staves were able to move freely within the rings. In short, the staves of the Aron were uniquely designed. They were fashioned so that once inserted into the rings of the Aron, they could not easily be removed. This design feature was not applied to the staves of any of the other components of the Mishcan. Why did the staves of the Aron require this unique design?

The answer to this question is provided by the above passages. The Torah explains that the staves are not to be removed from the Aron. Chinkuni explains that the simplest interpretation of this statement is that the Torah is telling us that the staves of the Aron need not be removed when the Mishcan is erected. In contrast, the staves of the other components should be removed. Chizkuni explains the reason for this distinction. The other objects that featured staves were located in parts of the Mishcan or its courtyard to which access was allowed. The nation offered its sacrifices upon the Mizbe'ach HaNechoset situated in the Mishcan's courtyard. The Kohanim were allowed access and performed services in the outer compartment of the Mishcan. The Shulchan and the Mizbe'ach HaKetoret were located in this compartment. The staves were removed from the components located in these areas in order to facilitate the movement of the people who were provided with access to these areas. The Aron was located in the inner compartment of the Mishcan. This compartment was the Kodesh HaKadashim – the Most Sacred. Only the Kohen Gadol – the High Priest – was allowed access to this area and only on Yom Kippur. Because access to the area containing the Aron was so limited, it was not necessary to remove the staves from the Aron.

3. The prohibition against removing the staves from the Aron

However, as Chizkuni acknowledges, the Sages provided a different interpretation of

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4. The relationship of the Aron to its staves

Each of these Sages is explaining the prohibition against removal of the staves from the Aron. However, they do not share the same perspective on the relationship between the staves and the Aron. According to Maimonides, the staves are an integral component of the Aron. Their removal renders the Aron incomplete. Bechor Shur and Abravanel do not agree with this position. According to both, the prohibition against removal of the staves is predicated upon the staves separate identity from the Aron. Abravanel argues that the staves may not be removed because the Aron may not be touched. The staves – which are not part of the Aron – make it possible to move and transport the Aron. Bechor Shur's position is similar. He seems to agree that the staves are not an integral component of the Aron. He does not contend that their removal would render the Aron incomplete. Instead, he argues that the staves may not be removed because their removal would result in unnecessary contact with the Aron.

Now, the Torah's description of the rings holding the staves of each component can be explained. In discussion the Shulchan, Mizbe'ach HaKetoret, and the Mizbe'ach HaNechoset, the Torah refers to the rings as holders for the staves. This description is appropriate because the staves were not intended to be a permanent component of these objects. In other words, this description implies that the rings are designed to hold the staves which are not themselves part of the component. The staves are inserted into their rings – which act as their holders – and then removed.

This description is not appropriate for the rings of the Aron. The Aron's staves are a permanent element of its design. They are never removed. Therefore, the Torah does not describe the rings as holders for the staves. Instead, the Torah describes the Aron, its rings, and staves as a single integrate whole.

It is notable that Maimonides' position, described above, most accords with this description of the rings. According to Maimonides, the Aron, its rings, and staves are quite literally a single integrated entity. According to Maimonides, removal of the staves actually renders the Aron incomplete. However, According to Bechor Shur and Abravanel, the staves are technically not a part of the Aron. They may not be removed and there exists a very high degree of integration between the staves and the Aron. However, the staves are not an actual component of the Aron. ■



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Haftoras Parshas **PARAH**

Rabbi Dr. Darrell Ginsberg

This Shabbos, we read Parshas Parah, where the focus is on the para adumah, the red heifer used to purify those who have come in contact with the dead. Subsequently, the haftorah deals with the prophecy of Yechezkel, where, as many commentators point out, there is reference made to God purifying the Jewish people with water at the time of redemption. While the verse itself (as we will soon see) seems quite poetic, it is difficult to understand when taken out of the context of the prophecy. We will take a general look at the prophecy, which will help us understand what is taking place here, and how this verse is a pivotal part of the overall process of redemption.

The prophecy begins with a recounting of the sins committed by Bnei Yisrael, culminating with the following statement by God (Yechezkel 32:20):

“And when they came unto the nations, whither they came, they profaned My holy name; in that men said of them: These are the people of the LORD, and are gone forth out of His land.”

After this, another prophecy emerges, where God speaks of the coming redemption. It begins with God making what would seem to be a provocative declaration (ibid:22-23):

“Therefore say unto the house of Israel: Thus saith the Lord GOD: I do not this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name, which ye have profaned among the nations, whither ye came. 23 And I will sanctify My great name, which hath been profaned among the nations, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the nations shall know that I am the LORD, saith the Lord GOD, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes.”

God then moves into the specifics about how His being profaned will be rectified (ibid 24-27):

“For I will take you from among the nations, and gather you out of all the countries, and will bring you into your own land. And I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.”

God then speaks of other changes and different brachos that will emerge in the Land of Israel (due to a lack of space, these other verses will not be). He concludes this prophecy much like it started (ibid 32):

“Not for your sake do I this, saith the Lord GOD, be it known unto you; be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel.”

One overall theme throughout this prophecy concerns the resolution through geula (as this clearly is referring to the time of the geula) of the chillul Hashem that emerged via the Jews living among the other nations. However, what is fascinating is the language God uses in His “drive” to redeem the Jews – essentially, it has nothing to do with Bnei Yisrael, and everything to do with God’s Name. How do we understand this overall objective?

There is another troubling tendency throughout this prophecy, one that seems to undermine a basic tenet of the future geula. Throughout this prophecy, God is directing all the action--“I will take you...,” “I will sprinkle...”—and so on. The implication from this is that the Jewish people play no active role in the coming geula. It is almost if we just sit back and wait for it all to happen. At the same time, as the Rambam writes (Hilchos Teshuva 7:5), the Jewish people are only redeemed through teshuva. In other words, there has to be some active effort by Bnei Yisrael to merit this result. How do we resolve this contradiction?

Finally, there is the specific verse about God’s sprinkling of water on us. Clearly, this is not to be taken literally – so how do we understand this description? As we will soon see, the Redak offers an enlightening explanation that helps resolve this problem.

Before introducing an explanation, it is critical to approach this area in a very careful manner. There is a temptation that can emerge when analyzing the geula that leads to a focus on the specifics of how events will unfold. We are warned by many talmideichachamim not to dwell on the particulars, but instead just understand and internalize the reality of the geula. However, at the same time, there are important prophecies that are, in essence, public knowledge. Therefore, one could conclude that the benefit of analyzing the geula comes from understanding how it compares to our present state, and how it reveals more about God’s hashgacha, His unique relationship to Bnei Yisrael. In other words, if we gain more in our knowledge of God, then this study becomes very constructive.

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Let's establish first the nature of the chillul Hashem being discussed in Yechezkel's prophecy (this general idea was discussed in the articles on kaddish, as I am sure everyone remembers). The destruction of the Bais Hamikdash and subsequent galus was a punishment inflicted on the Jewish people, a clear manifestation of schar v'onesh. However, the direct consequence of this state is the inability of the Jewish people to sanctify the Name of God on a truly global scale. Furthermore, it is clear evidence of our straying from God. We are scattered throughout the world, lacking a Bais Hamikdash, and therefore we carry the stains of our sins, our inability to adhere to God's way, every second we exist in galus. The world may view the Jews as survivors, but we are not viewed as ohr lagoyim, the light onto the other nations. Therefore, the chillul Hashem is a constant, and will continue until the redemption.

With this in mind, we can answer the above contradiction. No doubt, Bnei Yisrael must engage in repentance prior to the redemption. This return to God lay solely in the hands of the Jewish people. We have bechira, free will, and our exercise of it is what can bring about the geula. While this will help remedy our own relationship with God, it will not be enough to correct the defect of the chillul Hashem that exists. For that to occur, God must intervene. This could be why the entire prophecy is set up from the perspective of God. He will intervene to aid in correcting the chillul, as we cannot do this independently. However, the initial process to merit such an intervention requires us to complete teshuva.

According to the prophecy, we are to return to Eretz Yisrael first, and then the water is sprinkled on us. The significance of being in Eretz Yisrael is important for many obvious reasons. In this prophecy, the importance is on the united nation that will now exist, a cohesion that cannot exist when we are in exile. Throughout this specific prophecy, God refers to Bnei Yisrael as Beis Yisrael, a singular type reference. Once we return, we are looked upon as a nation, a unified group, rather than scattered individuals belonging to a specific religion. This perception will seem to have a profound effect on the nations of the world, as the correction of the chillul Hashem now begins. Once unified, we see the idea of the water being sprinkled onto the Jewish people. What does this refer to? The Redak presents a non-literal explanation for this description. Much like the waters of the mikveh are metaphorical – “purify” – those who are tameh, so too we will receive a complete kapara, or forgiveness, from God for our past sins. It will be a complete change. In the context of the united nation, this explanation is quite beneficial. As individuals, we have the ability to do teshuva and achieve kapara. However, there are sins that the nation as a whole is responsible for. For example, when we see the sin of the golden calf, we see God treat the nation as an entity, rather than isolated individuals. Beyond the overall culpability of the nation in this sin, we see an idea that the nation is now identified with this tragic event. It was the error of the nation, rather than of the individuals. These defects of the nation can only truly be completely repaired once we are together and functioning as a nation. And with our relationship with God repaired, we are now able to re-engage in our roles as sanctifying the Name of God. ■

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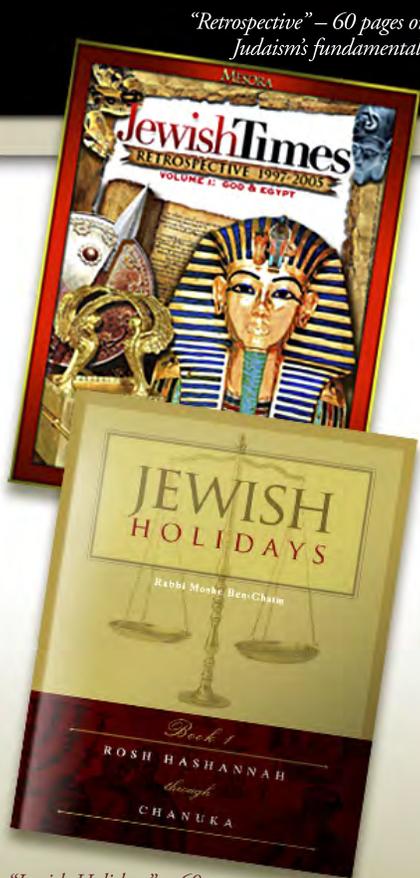
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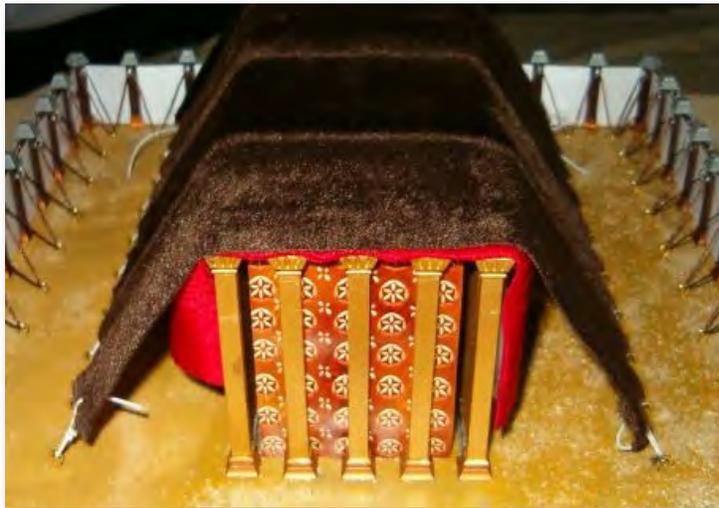
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the Tabernacle's Covering

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

And Moses raised up the Tabernacle, and he gave it its sockets, and he placed its upright beams and he gave its [horizontal binding] poles, and he raised its pillars. (Exod. 40:18)

Sforno comments that the words “And Moses raised up the Tabernacle” refer to the woven covering alone. Meaning, since the Tabernacle’s four structural components make up the remainder of this verse, the item referred to by “Tabernacle” must be something other than sockets, beams, poles and pillars. Sforno says what Moses first raised up was the woven covering, referred to by “Tabernacle” in this verse. Sforno states this again in Exodus 21:1, “And the Tabernacle, make 10 sheets...” where Sforno comments, “The sheets were referred to by the name Tabernacle.”

Sforno says this covering was the “essence” of the Tabernacle structure, but in

what manner? Not only that, but Moses somehow held the coverings in their place (or they were suspended by a miracle, says Sforno) and then Moses assembled the Tabernacle’s rigid components underneath it. This is an intriguing method of construction. Sforno means to say that the Tabernacle’s essence – the covering – must be erected first, presumably to indicate its primary role. We wonder: when is greater value given to a covering or a roof than the structure beneath? Keep this question in mind.

The covering was composed of 10 equal-sized sheets; 5 stitched together, and the other 5 stitched together. These two sets of 5 sheets were joined into a single covering of 10 sheets via gold clasps. This point, or seam, where they joined by clasps was positioned exactly over the Paroches curtain, which later was suspended and separated between the Holies, and the Holy of Holies. Thus, the covering – before all else was placed under it

– was to bear this distinction of the soon-to-be-created two rooms. It would appear from this that at the very commencement of building the Tabernacle, the lesson of the two rooms was essential. We might say Tabernacle cannot – at any point – be disassociated with whatever concept these two rooms teach. Additionally, Exodus 26:6 states when joining these two sets of 5 sheets, that the Tabernacle then became “one.” This verse suggests the combination of the two rooms creates a unity of some sort. What is this unity...this “one?”

We must also note that the cherubim – birdlike figures with children’s faces and wings – were embroidered into these coverings. What are cherubim? Maimonides explains them as angels[1], the vehicle of prophecy:

“Naturally, the fundamental belief in prophecy precedes the belief in the Law, for without the belief in prophecy there can be no belief in the Law. But a Prophet only receives Divine inspiration through the agency of an angel. Comp. “The angel of the Lord called” (Gen. xxii. 15) “The angel of the Lord said unto her” (ibid. xvi. 11) and other innumerable instances. Even Moses our Teacher received his first prophecy through an angel, “And an angel of the Lord appeared to him in the flame of fire” (Exod. iii.) It is therefore clear that the belief in the existence of angels precedes the belief in prophecy, and the latter precedes the belief in the Law.

...the belief in the existence of angels is connected with the belief in the Existence of God; and the belief in God and angels leads to the belief in Prophecy and in the truth of the Law. In order to firmly establish this creed, God commanded [the Israelites] to make over the ark the form of two angels. The belief in the existence of angels is thus inculcated into the minds of the people, and this belief is in importance next to the belief in God’s Existence; it leads us to believe in Prophecy and in the Law, and opposes idolatry. If there had only been one figure of a cherub, the people would have been misled and would have mistaken it for God’s image which was to be worshipped, in the fashion of the heathen; or they might have assumed that the angel [represented by the figure] was also a deity, and would thus have adopted a Dualism. By making two cherubim and distinctly declaring “the Lord is our God, the Lord is One” Moses dearly proclaimed the theory of the existence of a number of angels; he left no room for the error of considering those figures as deities, since [he declared that] God is one, and that He is the Creator of the angels, who are more than one.”

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God doesn't talk directly with man, other than with Moses. All other Prophets received God's communications via angels. And Maimonides teaches that even Moses' first prophecy was via the angel, in the burning bush prophecy. Prophecy is essential for validating Judaism; without a belief in prophecy, we deny Revelation at Sinai, for this event included Prophetic elements. And prophecy relies on the angels, or cherubs. So to accept the truth of God and His only religion, man must accept cherubim, which are angels.

What are angels? We do not know their true natures, but suffice it to say that one type of angel is a metaphysical being that communicates God's will to man. With this background, we can begin to address our questions.

The Temple's two rooms – the Holies, and the Holy of Holies – correspond to the two “areas” of knowledge: 1) what man can know, and 2) what man cannot know. Thus, man is punished with death for entering the Holy of Holies. Entering here is akin to saying “I can approach God; I can know what He is.” But God told the greatest man ever – Moses – “No man can know me while alive (Exod. 23:20).” Therefore, it is vital that we accept our complete ignorance of what God is. Even the High Priest must light smoky incense in the Holy of Holies upon his once-a-year visit, to establish this “cloud” between him and God.

Nonetheless, the priests do enter the Holies daily. This conveys the idea that there are areas of knowledge open to mankind's exploration. We must know that the world requires a Creator, who rested on the seventh day; conveyed through the seven-branched Menorah in the Holies. We must know that God is omniscient, all-knowing, so an incense Altar indicates God “knows” man's sacrifices. And we must know that God is omnipotent, all-powerful, so a Table with twelve bread loaves indicates His ability to sustain the Tribes. Thus, we enter the Holies, but never the Holy of Holies. Our approach to understanding God's universe is two-pronged: 1) we accept there are areas open to human investigation, and also, 2) there are areas we cannot penetrate, indicated by the Paroches curtain that restricts entrance into that room housing the Ark and the cherubim. Just as we do not know what God is, we also cannot know what angels are.

What is unapproachable is placed in that unapproachable room. This explains why the cherubim were in the Holy of Holies, as were the Tablets of the Law that target God's knowledge.



Two Realms of Knowledge

Our objective is to arrive at a love for God through the study of matters available to human intelligence. God revealed great wisdom in His creations and in His Torah. But as created beings, we cannot grasp the Creator Himself. Even the angels praise only God's “name” and not Him directly: “Baruch kivode Hashem mimkomo: Blessed is God's honor from His place.” His honor is what is blessed, for even angels cannot bless God Himself, the unknowable One. Additionally, our Kedusha (Isaiah 6:3, Ezekiel 3:12) cites the angel's admission that God is “kadosh,” separate, or rather, unknowable.

So crucial is this notion, that upon Moses' construction of the Temple (which exists to impart knowledge to man) the coverings were raised first, constructed of two joined halves: the half that covers the Holies, and the other half that covers the Holy of Holies. Immediately, we are confronted with this truth that knowledge has two realms, and one is off-limits to man. This lesson is particularly required in Tabernacle, where one might be misled to believe God is actually

“there” occupying space. For God said, “You shall build be a Temple and I will dwell among you (Exod. 25:8).” King Solomon too was aware of this danger, so upon his completion of the Temple, he said, “Can God truly be on Earth? The heavens and heavens of heavens cannot contain You, how much less this house that I have built (Kings I, 8:27).” He wished to warn the people, lest they believe God occupies space. So we fully appreciate the need for man to be reminded – especially at the Temple's inauguration – of what is beyond human apprehension.

If we assume that we have fully exhausted any area of knowledge, we fool ourselves. For if we perceive true knowledge, we sense there is so much more awaiting discovery...but we also know we will never tap the full depths of that knowledge. Albert Einstein said, “My religion consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable Superior Spirit who reveals Himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble mind.” Einstein attested to this very point: God's wisdom is unlimited, and we are very ignorant. Maimonides said, “Know that for the human mind there are certain objects of perception which are within the scope of its nature and capacity; on the other hand there are, amongst things which actually exist, certain things which the mind can, in no ways grasp; the gates of perception are closed against it.”[2]

When we do arrive at a truth, it is accompanied by the realization that we have only scratched the surface; this truth leads to even greater wisdom, much of which we will not uncover. And this must be, since knowledge by definition is a reflection of the Creator, who is unlimited. Thus, the knowledge we perceive must reflect this “illimitable Superior Spirit.” In this manner, knowledge is identified with the Source of that knowledge – God. And this must be our objective in the pursuit of wisdom, to know God. Thus, the covering was not one unified set of 10 sheets. It was made of two sets of 5 sheets each, as stated. They are joined together. This joining is to indicate that attainable knowledge – 5 sheets covering the Holies – is inherently related (clasped) to the other area of unknowable truths – 5 sheets covering the Holy of Holies. Meaning, our studies must always target an appreciation of God. And in this fashion, the joining of the 2 sets of sheets makes “one” Tabernacle. One, referring to a unified approach to wisdom. This approach demands that drawing close God (Holy of Holies) must always be the objective of our study (Holies), not that we study an area for itself, so that we might merely better manipulate the world and its resources.

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A Covering over What?

It is therefore quite fitting that Sforno holds these coverings to be of central importance. We asked where else a covering is more important than the structure below it. But think about the word “covering.” Isn’t that the idea we just explained? There are areas of knowledge that are “covered.” This may be Sforno’s message. Perhaps he has intimated that these sheets are to teach us the idea of “concealment.” Meaning, Tabernacle is to educate man, and a primary lesson is that certain knowledge is concealed. Therefore, the Tabernacle’s covering is a lesson itself, and the rigid structure beneath it is merely there as a frame to support this covering. Therefore, the covering must be erected first, indicating the primary importance of the Tabernacle. Intriguing. This covering is to teach man to accept that there are matters beyond his grasp... “covered” matters.

But you may ask: “I understand why the Holy of Holies is covered, but why cover the Holies? Was this area not open to human comprehension?” Yes, but even those ideas derived from the Holies first require a process of analysis, so these ideas too are initially “covered!” All knowledge increase is accurately described as an act of “uncovering.”

We can now suggest why the cherubim were embroidered in both sets of sheets. Perhaps not just prophecy, but even knowledge attained in our waking state, knowledge of all areas, might require a system of angels, through which we obtain new insights. How is it that one second we are clueless, then later one we make a discovery? If the knowledge was not with us beforehand, how did it arrive in our minds later on? This might explain why the covering is the proper item to display forms of cherubim. But there is yet an additional facet to the complementary nature of the knowable and the unknowable...

Knowledge Demands Recognition of God

Only with the acceptance that all we know emanates from God do we know anything at all. There is an intimate relationship between these two areas of knowledge: the knowable and the unknowable, just as these two sets of sheets are related. If one does not know of

God, then all of his knowledge is false. For he is unaware that what he discovers was created by God, and by definition, his knowledge is bereft of its primary truth. Knowledge is only knowledge if our minds view that knowledge as part of God’s will. Otherwise, we simply possess a means to manipulate the world. For example, an atheistic doctor might cure cancer, but his understanding of life is not related to the Creator. Thus, his scientific knowledge fails to reach its objective. He has failed. An expert agriculturist who does not view food to sustain human life so man can discover his Creator also fails to attain real knowledge. Although both doctor and scientist assist others, they are ignorant of what life is, as they fail to realize the human objective of relating to God... the very purpose of our creation.



Angels: Gold vs. Emroidered

Angels exist in the metaphysical world, not on Earth. This is expressed by the gold cherubim being limited to the Holy of Holies, unapproachable by us sensually. Is there something to be derived from the fact that the cherubim in the coverings were merely representative diagrams, but not real gold figurines?

All of our experiences are as sensual beings, and even our encounters with angels in Prophetic visions must be a filtered presentation of those angels. For we cannot

relate completely abstractly, even in dreams, as we are physical and they are not. We cannot relate to purely metaphysical angels. Human imagination presents the angel to a Prophet at times in the form of a man, “And three men stood upon him... (Gen. 18:2).”

Although there exist “real,” metaphysical angels... the Prophetic vision is a representation for man’s sake. This parallels the “real” gold angels over the ark, while only illustrations are embroidered in the curtains. The curtains represent human knowledge and how we relate to it. But beyond this world, real angels exist in their full “form,” just as in the Holy of Holies, there are golden angel forms. Thus, the illustrated angels woven into curtains and the gold angels in Holy of holies, stand in direct relation to angels in prophecy and true angels. The curtains and gold figures parallel reality to educate us.

Maimonides writes [3]:

We have already stated that the forms in which angels appear form part of the Prophetic vision. Some Prophets see angels in the form of man, e.g., “And behold three men stood by him” (Gen. xviii.2); others perceive an angel as a fearful and terrible being, e.g., “And his countenance was as the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible” (Judges xiii. 6); others see them as fire, e.g., “And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire” (Exod. iii. 2). In Bereshit Rabba (chap. 1.) the following remark occurs: “To Abraham, whose Prophetic power was great, the angels appeared in the form of men; to Lot, whose power was weak, they appeared as angels.” This is an important principle as regards Prophecy; it will be fully discussed when we treat of that subject (chap. xxxii. sqq.). Another passage in Bereshit Rabba (ibid.) runs thus: “Before the angels have accomplished their task they are called men, when they have accomplished it they are angels.” Consider how clearly they say that the term “angel” signifies nothing but a certain action, and that every appearance of an angel is part of a Prophetic vision, depending on the capacity of the person that perceives it. ■

[1] “Guide,” book III, chap. XLV

[2] “Guide,” book I, chap. XXXI

[3] “Guide,” book II, chap. V