

JewishTimes

VOL. XI NO. 21 — JULY 13, 2012

ORIGIN OF LIFE GOD VS. THE MULTIVERSE

Part V

CURSES WORK?

Part II

RED BENDELS

REJECTED

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More
Than

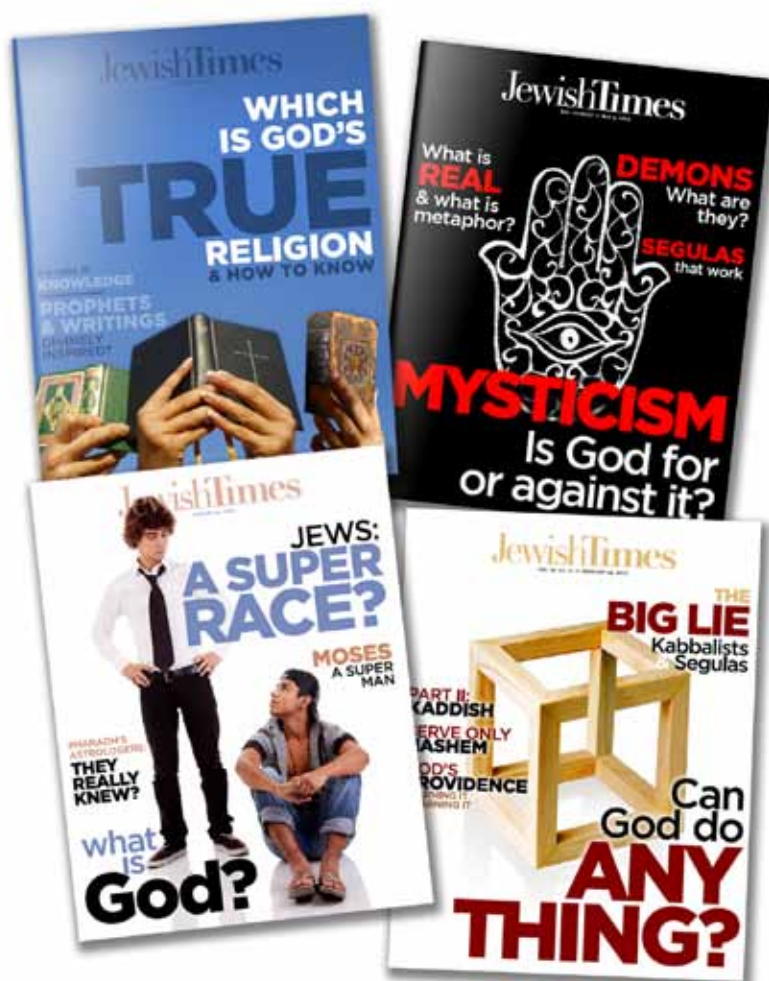
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LETTERS

Words are Not Powerful

Words do not have any "supernatural" power, but they do express intention. It is forbidden to use the Name of God in vain, because by doing so you empty it of meaning - in other words, you empty yourself of the fear you should have of God. To say that words can kill is a metaphor for the pain some words can cause. But "summoning supernatural beings" is an Abracadabra that has no meaning and therefore no effect, except in the imagination of those who believe in spells.

Some words do have power and influence, as King Shlomo says "Dabbar dibbur al ofanav", for the meaning they convey and the realm of notions they disclose. A good thought and a kind word can certainly change reality, and what really "angers" God is the stupidity of a person who talks nonsense.

Talking tongues is just a trick to make believe one is superior by pretending to have some secret knowledge, but if one speaks words of wisdom, his words are a balm to the soul. **-Elisheva Barre**

(continued on page 11)

Is Torah mystical... or rational, just like God's natural laws?

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REVIEWS



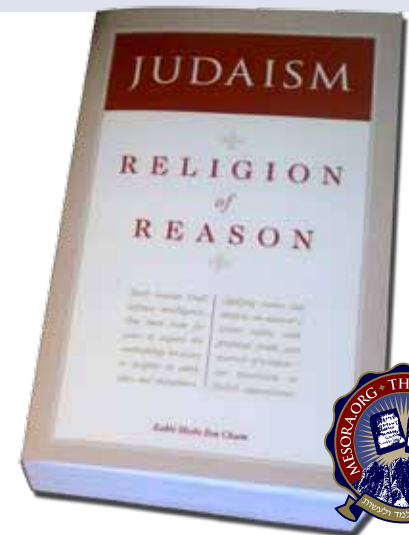
RABBI REUVEN MANN — *Rabbi, Y. Israel of Phoenix*

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim has written extensively on Jewish philosophy for many years. His ideas are rooted in a rational approach. He follows the great philosophers like Rambam and Saadia Gaon. He is opposed to all forms of "mysticism" and seeks to debunk all practices and beliefs which are rooted in superstition and contrary to reason. This work covers a wide variety of topics, of interest to contemporary; insightful analyses of Biblical narratives as well as the significance of many mitzvot. Rabbi Ben-Chaim demonstrates that Judaism can be harmonized with human reason. He is not afraid to ask the most penetrating and challenging questions as he is convinced that Torah is the Word of God and 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.



RABBI STEVEN WEIL — *Executive Vice President, The Orthodox Union*

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim asks critical, crucial and defining questions that any thinking Jew needs to ask. His method enables the reader to explore and engage our theology in a meaningful and serious way. Following the Rishonim, he forces us to define, weigh and analyze each phrase of chazal, showing there is no contradiction between an investigation of Science and an investigation of Judaism. Rabbi Ben-Chaim has written a work that addresses the thinking person of all faiths. This work speaks to the scholar and lay person alike and will help you 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.



RELIGION of REASON

by JewishTimes' publisher
Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim



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THERE ARE More Than

613

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

A reader asked that I explain why luminaries such as Maimonides and Rabbi Karo didn't prohibit singing Torah verses in their codes of Halacha. He said that although Rabbi Feinstein may have prohibited singing all verses, this does not conclusively indicate that this is, in fact, the "Law." My response follows...

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein zt"l "clearly" prohibited the singing of verses (Yoreh Daya 2:142). It's not a gray issue. This great mind completely understood this clear Talmudic portion: it is prohibited to sing a verse. Rav Moshe expressed that although the practice of singing scriptural verses is widespread, and even respected men engage in this practice, he states that it is certainly prohibited and he does not see a just reason for those who violate. Rav Moshe added that some might read Rashi as singling out Shir HaShirim "alone" as the only prohibited text. But Rav Moshe makes it clear that Rashi means to say that if Shir

HaShirim is prohibited, which is a song...certainly all other scriptural passages are prohibited.

It may well be that if Maimonides and Rabbi Karo didn't prohibit singing Torah verses in their codes of Halacha, perhaps the reason is that those codes are restricted to matters pertaining to the 613 commands and associated Rabbinic safeguards. But there is more that is incumbent on us, than just the 613. There are matters of Jewish "law," and then there is Torah "principle" and Torah "ideals."

Some are surprised to learn that there are real Torah "obligations," although not codified as one of the 613 "mitzvahs." A wise rabbi once taught that besides technical "mitzvah", Torah contains many fundamental, ideals and requirements.

In the opening of his Sefer Hamitzvos, Maimonides' Fourth Rule for categorizing something as "mitzvah" is to exclude general commands. "Guard all which I tell you...(Exod. 23:13)" and "And you shall watch all My statutes...(Lev.

19:37)" Maimonides states, do not qualify as part of the 613 since these commands do not have a specific act.

His Tenth rule is not to count as one of the 613, any introductory or preparatory information, like "taking" the flour to make the Showbread. Placing the Showbread on the Table is the command, but it obviously requires "taking" the flour and baking it first.

Other types of mandates that are not included in the 613 include ideals. God told Abraham "Walk before me and be complete (Gen. 17:1)." God teaches us too, to aim towards this level, as He included His mandate to Abraham in the Torah that He gave to all generations. Thus, the lesson is equally applicable to all of us, that we should seek to reach a level of complete devotion to God. This, of course, is of much greater importance than waving a lulav. Despite its not being counted as one of the 613, it is a level for which to strive. In our regular strides for Torah's perfection, it is as "obligatory" (if

(continued on next page)

not more), to be complete with God, as it is obligatory to keep kosher.

Wherein lies the difference in obligation between law and principle? Well, both target a benefit. Not fulfilling either, we equally forfeit the perfection of our souls. Laws or mitzvahs, are distinct in that their performance contributes to the general structure of Jewish practice, to Torah's identity, something essential to Judaism's continuation. In contrast, principles and ideals, like striving to be perfect, trusting God and others, are more subjective and even internal. They are not communally practiced. Yet, they are more important to one's soul than failing to eat meat on holidays, a mitzvah.

Therefore, to view the prohibition of singing verses as "less", as it may not form part of "law," but rather "principle," is akin to saying 10 is less than 5.

King David spoke of his tremendous trust in God, and God included David's words in His Torah. This means that this ideal of trusting God is of great value, even though it is not a mitzvah, for there is no specific mitzvah or "way" to trust in God. This takes on many expressions.

Being truthful is another most primary ideal or principle.

Rav Hai Gaon said "Anochi Hashem Eloheka", "I am God", written at the opening of the Ten Commandments, is not a "command." His reason: a command to recognize God belittles the obvious nature of God's existence!

The Talmud cites a case where a merchant was in the midst of his prayers, when a customer offered him \$X.00 for a gem he had on sale. As he was praying, the merchant could not speak, making the customer assume the silence meant the price was too low. To this, the customer raised his price. When the merchant completed his prayers, he told the customer he would accept

the initial, lower price; for in his heart, he accepted it when first offered. This level of perfection is not a mitzvah, yet the story is recorded for the purpose of aiming man towards this to level of truth.

Singing Torah verses belittles the purpose of Torah. This is why the Talmud says, "Torah garbed itself in sackcloth and stood before God and said, 'Your children have made me like a harp that is sung to by scorners'." There is no dispute in the Talmud about tragedy in treating Torah as a tool for emotional gratification through song. This explains why Nemukei Yosef, Maharsha, Rash and Raav Moshe Feinstein zt"l all cite this prohibition. Rabbi Akiva goes one further, saying one forfeits his afterlife for violating this prohibition (Tosefta Sanhedrin, 12:5). We conclude that a principle need not be in the Shulchan Aruch, for our great Rabbis to call it "prohibition." Additionally, it is no less harmful to violate a principle, than a law. Therefore, if the soul is equally or more severely harmed, we are wise to treat such violations of principle as "violations." That something is not found in the Shulchan Aruch, we must not view it as a "lighter" matter. In fact, Rabbi Akiva said one loses everything for singing Torah verses...his afterlife is taken from him.

Prohibition does not refer to law alone, as Torah and Talmud are replete with lessons based on Medrash and morality too; not just mitzvah. It doesn't matter that these Torah ideals are not found in the Shulchan Aruch. What matters is God's inclusion of such lessons, and the Rabbis' warnings. Pirkei Avos is not Halacha, yet it contains such vital truths as recalling our responsibility for our sins and uncountable values. There is no "mitzvah" to recall our sins. Yet, it is at the forefront of perfection; our objective. To suggest something is not prohibited, simply because it is not located in the Shulchan Aruch, is a



false statement.

We must adjust our perspective. Talmud is more authoritative than those who comment on Talmud. If the Talmud cites a case – even in metaphor – where the Torah is garbed in sackcloth and mourning due to the Jews' disgrace of her by singing the verses and not studying them, a real prohibition is being taught.

I will end with a lesson I recently heard from a old friend. A wise Rabbi lectured on Emunas Chachamim, trust in our wise Rabbis. We should not treat someone like Rav Moshe Feinstein as an "independent view", and suggest we need not follow him due to his sole position on this issue. First of all, I cited many Rishonim who agree with him. Second, Rav Moshe was an unparalleled mind. It is wise to investigate his reasoning and sources. Perhaps it is the very wise Rabbis who are lightyears ahead of anyone today, whose voice independent positions due to their brilliance, not due to – God forbid – their ignorance. ■

Human Nature

the Bris of Abraham

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by a student



The commandment of circumcision, or "bris milah", is an essential mitzvah which God transmitted to our forefather Abraham. In his Mishna Torah (Milah 3:8) Rambam teaches us that this commandment is extremely important. Rambam tells us that Abraham was not called "shalame", complete, or perfect, until he was circumcised. Rambam quotes Genesis 17:1, "Walk before me and be perfect." Therefore we can infer that prior to Abraham's circumcision he was in a state where he evidently was lacking perfection. The Rambam additionally states in law 9 that the commandment of a bris is extremely important because Abraham's bris is mentioned 13 times in the Torah, whereas the entire commandments of the Torah were only undertaken by three covenants.

A review of this Rambam raises several important questions. What is so essential about the commandment of circumcision that the Torah seems to view it as a more significant covenant than the covenant respecting the entire Torah? Furthermore, in what way was Abraham lacking perfection prior to his bris and what does circumcision accomplish? We must attempt to understand the concept of a "tamim", completeness, especially in view of God's commandment to Abraham to have a bris and "walk before Me and be tamim", complete.

Upon examining some of the halachik aspects of the act of the mitzva, the positive action of circumcision, we can gain some insights. There are two blessings made when

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performing the act of circumcision. The first blessing is made right before the action and it is the blessing of al hamilah. This is the blessing of the action of circumcision and like all blessings on an action, the blessing precedes the action and qualifies it. However, there is a second blessing which the mohel makes. This is the blessing of "lehachniso bivriso shel Avraham avinu", "to enter the child into the covenant of Abraham our father". There is a question amongst the Rabbis as to the nature of this blessing. If it is a blessing on the action, then it must precede the circumcision, like the first blessing. If it is a blessing of shevach, of praise, then it follows the circumcision, which is the basis for our praising God. The Rabbeinu Tam in Tosafos in Pesachim 7a states that it is considered a blessing of praise and thus recited afterwards. He states that the blessing is a praise to God for granting us the commandment of circumcision. We must also articulate that the circumcision is being done for the sake of God our creator and not for the sake of idolatry.

This Tosafos raises several problems. Why must we express that this commandment of circumcision is being done for God? Why is the commandment of circumcision the only Mitzvah that demands that we specifically mention that it is not done for idolatry? There is a law that the halachik action of slaughtering cannot be performed by a gentile because we are concerned that he will be performing the action for idolatry. It would seem that the blessing for slaughtering would be a more appropriate action for the pronouncement that it is not being done for idolatry. What is so unique about the commandment of circumcision?

To comprehend the significance of circumcision we must explain the concept of tamim. The Rambam in his Mishna

Torah in the Laws of Idolatry, at the end of chapter 11 discusses the positive commandment in the Torah of "tamim t'heeyeh im Hashem Elokecha". The Rambam teaches us that sorcery; witchcraft and divination are all false and nonsensical practices. These are primitive practices whereby man predicates his daily actions based upon some irrelevant external events. They are usually superstitious practices which appeal to man's instinctual insecurities. Amongst these practices are the individuals who state that "since my stick fell out of my hand, I cannot travel in that direction". A different example of a prohibited action is if someone says that said date is a good day for performing certain actions. If a person consults a charlatan who pretends to speak to the dead or pretends to predict the future, these are also forbidden practices. These practices appeal to the dark side of man's nature, the part that wishes to deny reality and satisfy instinctual urges by positing authenticity to these inane activities which are attractive to the instincts. They appeal to man's fantasy and create an illusion of great satisfaction. It would be foolish for modern man to deny the force of these emotions and posit that this type of behavior is only symptomatic of primitive man. One need only look at the appeal of horoscopes to dispel such a notion. A recent leader of the free world, the most powerful man in a supposedly sophisticated society, based his schedules on this nonsense. Maimonides advised us that all these activities are categorized as emptiness and vanity. The Rambam further admonishes against these practices and states that if anyone believes that these actions are true or contain wisdom, they are ignorant and lack knowledge. However, if someone has been fortunate to obtain wisdom he will know that these actions are false and are attractive only to foolish people whose minds are lacking intellectual clarity. The Rambam concludes that all these practices

are contrary to the Torah's commandment of "tamim t'heeyeh im Hashem Elokecha", "Perfect shall you be with Hashem your God".

There are two parts to human nature. One part is the reality-based part of the human mind. It is man's crowning glory, his divine image, and the part of man that can perceive wisdom and knowledge. The other part of man's nature is the primitive part of the mind which appeals to man's fantasy. It demands suspension of the critical faculty. In Judaism there is no room for this part of man's nature to guide his actions. We are commanded to love God. This means, as we recite in the Shema, to teach our sons and to know Torah. The only part of man

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that can relate to God and learn Torah is the tzelem Elokim, man's intellect. The prophets repeatedly have counseled the children of Israel to have knowledge of God. This can only be accomplished by a long searching process which begins with the part of man that perceives God's knowledge.

Therefore the concept of tamim means that man should guide his life based upon the part of man which can perceive God's knowledge. This part of the human personality must always retain control and exercise its force on the person's actions. One can only be tamim, complete, when the soul of man is not affected by the instinctual part of his nature. The ruling part of his soul must be the part of man that can recognize God. The state of tamim is only achieved when there is only one ruling principle in the soul, namely the tzelem Elokim. Nothing else can affect the person who is tamim.

Maimonides in his Guide to the Perplexed states that an uncircumcised person is more perfect physically. Since he is born that way he is more physically perfect. God created man uncircumcised, which must be a physically more perfect state respecting his physical existence. Circumcision reduces man's instinctual drive. It makes us less perfect physically but demonstrates that we must perfect ourselves spiritually. Milah signifies man's conquest over the instinctual part of his nature. Circumcision represents an institution in man which demonstrates a reduction of his instinctual drive. The instinctual part of man's nature is the source of his superstitious tendencies. Man's instinctual nature detracts from his being tamim. Therefore milah is the establishment of an institution in man, which installs in man the ruling element of his soul. This is the part of the soul which can recognize God. Therefore milah is the institution which signifies that man must guide his actions by chochma, wisdom, not the instinctual, and that one strives to be tamim, perfect.

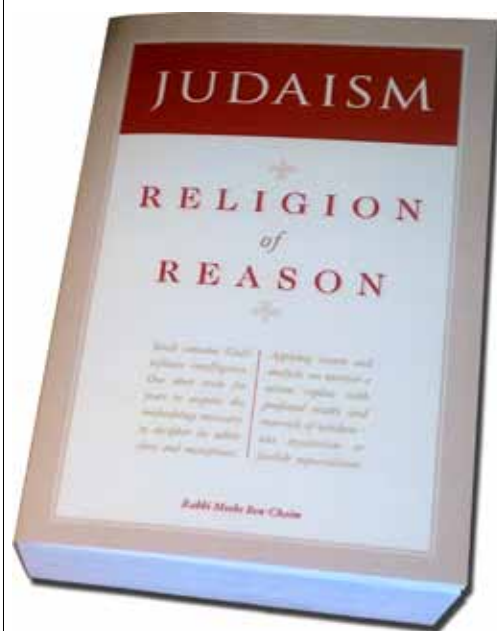
Circumcision is mentioned thirteen times in the Torah, compared to the

covenant of the very acceptance of the Torah, which is only mentioned three times. Circumcision is the institution which reflects that an individual's actions must be guided by the tzelem Elokim, intelligence. Acceptance of the Torah is only possible if there are individuals who are capable of dedicating their lives to its intellectual precepts. Therefore, milah is essential because it creates individuals who are tamim, complete and whose ruling part of their soul is the intellect. Only then is the system of Torah capable of being perpetuated.

The commandment of milah was given over specifically to Abraham. Abraham had the intellectual conviction to reject the primitive and pagan beliefs that pervaded his society. He had the intellectual courage to recognize God as the source of reality and deny the idolaters of his day. Therefore he was blessed with the institution of milah. The personality of Abraham was deserving of this institution. However, Abraham was not shalame, not complete, until he performed the Mitzvah of milah. He had to demonstrate through this commandment, that the ruling part of his soul was the intellectual. Through the performance of this mitzvah he rendered himself an adam hashalame, complete. Abraham demonstrated that all parts of his personality were subdued except the part of his soul which recognized and related to the creator. He thus became tamim and was able to walk before God.

We can now appreciate the Rabbeinu Tam's concept of the second blessing made at the circumcision. It is a blessing of praise which uniquely articulates that its objective is for the sake of God. Circumcision is the only commandment which, by its very performance, subordinates the instinctual forces in man. The very essence of its objective is the demonstration that we aspire to guide our own lives based upon the part of man that can perceive reality and relate to God. Therefore, we express our intentions that we are performing this unique commandment for the sake of God and not for idolatry, which appeals to the lower part of man's nature.

The importance of milah is also attested to by the fact that if one does not perform the mitzvah, he receives the punishment of excision, Kares. Similarly, if one fails to partake of the korban Pesach he is similarly punished. These are the only two positive commandments that if one fails to perform, makes him subject to kares. Circumcision is essential because it signifies that the individual, is one who is capable of living a life of Torah. The korban Pesach was commemorative of the exodus of Egypt and the birth of a nation dedicated to the principles of the Torah. Thus, both these mitzvos are essential components for the Torah system, milah insofar as the individual is concerned, and korban Pesach with respect to the nation. ■



**Being
“perfect”
with God**
(pg 269)

Powerless Red Bendels

A Pasuk in Parshas Balak (Num. 23:8) is relevant to the idea of the Red Bendel and other superstitions: "How can I curse if God hasn't cursed; how can I anger, when God hasn't been angry?"

Meaning, there can be no punishment based on a Red Bendel or lack thereof, when it violates God's anger. Furthermore, God is righteous, as He bases His anger or favor on sin and mitzvah; NOT such things as Bendels or mezuzas.

—*Jessie Fischbein*

Distancing Ourselves From Idolatry

I was told that Maimonides in his works on Avodah Zara lays out a negative commandment that it is prohibited to help or save any non-Jew in the land of Israel based on Deut.7. This seems very anti humanistic. What are the rules governing which kinds of non-Jews may live in Israel? Please cite sources.

—*Thomas*

Rabbi: My Mishneh Torah edition does not have a chapter 10:7...it ends at 10:6.

There, Maimonides explains the reason for not allowing idolaters to dwell or even pass through Israel, based on Exod. 23:33, "Do not let them dwell in your land lest they cause you to err when they serve their gods, for they will become a stumbling block to you."

Preventing idolaters from dwelling among us or in Israel completely removes any possibility of idolatrous influence affecting the Jewish nation, who are to be a light unto the world. God intends all men and women He created to follow truth, and not the worst sin of idolatry. This can only be achieved if the Jew is insulated from all idolatrous influence and are thereby raised purely in Torah so as to go out into the world and become this beacon.

But all this is not applicable if a gentile follows the 7 Noahide laws. Then he is no longer an idolater, and we dwell together, both following one Torah.

It is notable that in 10:5 Maimonides discusses the law to financially support the impoverished idol worshippers. This, we show kindness to all people, but we preserve our role as Torah teachers by overpowering the idolatrous influence from our cities. Ironically, this is done for the good of the world, and not for the Jew, as is God's will.



Loving the Unknowable God

Reader: I am still puzzled by your assertion that "knowledge is the sole catalyst for the love, which is expressed naturally as a result." While the proposition "knowledge is a sole catalyst for the love" is unproblematic, the further assertion that it is "the sole catalyst" strikes me as disputable. Even if one were willing to concede that knowledge is a necessary condition for love, this does not exclude the possibility that there can be other catalysts or factors that enhance, enrich or promote the loving-state.

For instance, I might love my son, and necessary for this love might be the knowledge that X is my son. But does this imply that the only thing that can promote or enhance this loving-state is more knowledge of my son? If my son does things for me and cares for me, this might enhance my love, but I would be hard-pressed to say that the cause of this love, is more knowledge alone, rather than the mere fact that he did things for me, simpliciter. (A further issue, though not one I will focus on here, is that it seems one can love another without having knowledge of him. For instance, I might think that this person is my son, and genuinely love this person, while it may be the case that my belief that this person is my son is mistaken. It thus seems possible to love sans knowledge.)

Another question I have on your knowledge-love doctrine is the following: We are commanded to love God. But we also know that God is beyond our comprehension; that we cannot have any positive knowledge of God. Yet, on your view, love of X can only come from knowledge of X. By modus tollens, does it not follow that we cannot love God, since we cannot have knowledge of God?

Rabbi: Even in your case, loving your son depends on knowledge of him, or knowledge of his acts. Without knowledge of him, you cannot love someone you don't know. And once you know him, without knowledge of his acts of kindness, you cannot increase your love. Loving someone you think is your son, who ends up not to be your son, still requires knowledge of that person, regardless of familial relationships. Erring in your knowledge of your true relationship does not remove the knowledge of that person, or his acts.

In terms of loving the unknowable God, what we love is not any positive idea of Him; that's impossible. But we love Him as the source of the universe and all the good He bestows, and primarily based on our increasing knowledge of His wisdom which we gain through study of nature and Torah. ■



Pinchas: POPULARITY

Rabbi Reuven Mann

This week's parsha, Pinchas, begins with Hashem's reward to Pinchas for taking revenge against Zimri, a leader of the tribe of Shimon, for his sin of cohabitation with a Midianite princess. Hashem bestowed upon him His "covenant of peace" which meant that he and his descendants would have the status of Kohanim. The main role of the Kohen is to instruct the people in Torah, perform the service in the Temple and facilitate peaceful relations among the people. The Torah recounts that when Aaron died he was mourned by the entire House of Israel in contradistinction to Moshe who was "only" mourned by the "Children of Israel." It would appear from this that Aaron was more beloved by the people than Moshe. This is not to say that his accomplishments were greater. Moshe Rabbenu was the faithful teacher and shepherd of the Jews. No one reached a higher level of prophecy or attained his level of humbleness. It is hard to imagine that anyone ever achieved a more perfect level of dedication to the nation. He had no desire for power and yet responded to Hashem's charge that he lead the people out of Egypt and prepare them to receive the Torah at Mt. Sinai. Even when they sinned he never lost his commitment to their welfare and adamantly refused when Hashem threatened to destroy them and create a new nation out of him. As great as Aaron was it is safe to say that no Jewish leader can come close to the level of Moshe Rabbenu. Yet apparently, Aaron, was more popular and beloved than his younger brother. An important lesson can be learned from this ie. popularity is not a barometer of one's true importance and accomplishments. Aaron and Moshe each had their specific role to play and interacted with the people in different ways. Moshe was the great

thinker, teacher and spiritual leader. His job was to elevate the people to an exalted plane and this inevitably required that he rebuke them when necessary. There is a certain, instinctive, resentment against great role models. They rouse us from our laziness and cause us to feel guilty about our failures. We often get caught up in our emotions and fail to appreciate that the genuine teacher of Torah has only our truest interests at heart. We have a different attitude towards the personality of an Aaron. He treats us with love and understanding and seeks to repair the damage we have caused in important relationships. He doesn't guide us with abstract and lofty teachings but with concrete suggestions and complimentary words of encouragement. We form a greater attachment to Aaron because we experience his compassion and helpfulness in a manner which impacts our most powerful emotions. The great leaders of the Jewish people are those who do not value or seek popularity. Moshe was only concerned with fulfilling his mission to render the Jews into a "kingdom of priests" and a holy nation. He only had their best interests at heart.

Aaron related to the people in the manner which was most suited to his task of facilitating peaceful relations and the popularity he experienced was merely a byproduct, not the goal. Pinchas' deed was based purely on his love of Hashem and desire to uproot a terrible evil from Klal Yisrael. He did not care about the anger and hostility it would engender. He was unconcerned with the opinion of man. All that mattered to him was the approval of Hashem. With that attitude he became worthy of Hashem's "Covenant of Peace."

Shabbat Shalom

CURSES

Part II

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: I really enjoy your website and have used it as a valuable tool for many years. I have some questions about what you wrote in last week's article, that words and curses are powerless. In light of your article and your previous one (mesora.org/domanscurseswork.html) can you explain Rashi's statement, "and from that curse, Rachel died on the journey (Gen. 31:32)". It seems that, according to Rashi, if Yaakov didn't say to Lavan, "whomever you find the idol with shall not live..." then Rachel would have not died on the way. Rashi, seems to say, that even if she deserved it, that Yaakov's words of a curse has some effect. Did Rashi believe that Yaakov's words have value? And if so, does that make it a valid Mesora? (I noticed you list Rashi twice as a fundamental Mesora of Judaism)

Rabbi: A wise Rabbi once explained. When Rachel heard Yaakov's response, "whomever you find the idol with shall not live...", she realized from Yakov's strong condemnation that stealing her father's idol jeopardized the lives of the entire family. This stress weighed heavy on her. And when she was weak during Benjamin's pregnancy, this stress took its toll and she passed away. So we are consistent: words have no power. This is explained psychologically.

Reader: Can you explain the gemara (Bava Kama 93a) "One should not take an average man's curse lightly," and it goes on to quote that Avimelech's curse was fulfilled in her Sarah's child, Isaac?

Rabbi: "One should not take an average man's curse

lightly." This means that if one curses you, he may be doing so, as he sees something unsightly in your personality, regarding which you are wise not to ignore (take lightly) but to correct it. No need to assume a curse possesses powers. The same applies to Avimelech (Gen. 20:16), but let's first understand that case...

Avimelech took Sarah to be his wife. He was under the impression that she was in fact only Abraham's sister, as this is the story Abraham and her presented as they traveled in alien countries. This story would protect Abraham from being murdered, as is done when a beautiful woman is found married, and the alien king desires her. Murdering the husband is the solution to obtain her as queen. But if the man is only a brother to the beautiful woman, they will offer him gifts, feeling certain that he will reciprocate such good will and be agreeable to his "sister" marrying the king. However, as the story went, God told Avimelech in his dream that she is married and to return her to Abraham. Avimelech did so. And to honor Sarah (as in a divorce where one grants a Ketubah sum of money) and not simply drive her out empty-handed as is the fame with concubines...Avimelech gave one thousand silver pieces to Abraham to "cover the eyes". This covering of the eyes refers to covering any false reputation that Sarah was a concubine. Avimelech meant to show he desired her properly, as a wife, and this sum of money he gave Abraham embodied the same treatment of a wife who is sent away honorably.

However, the Talmud records a Rabbinic saying, a medrash. They scripted a fiction that Avimelech was upset with Sarah for concealing her marriage. This caused Avimelech pain. He therefore cursed her seed, that just as Sarah concealed something, her seed too should have "covered eyes" as retaliation. Thus, Isaac became blind in his old age.

Now, of course Isaac didn't suffer for others peoples' actions. Nor did Avimelech have this conversation, as the plain reading is that he intended only good for Sarah by giving that silver. Neither do curses work. We explain this as follows...

The Rabbis are trying to teach us that there was some negative aspect to Abraham's and Sarah's story that they were siblings and not married. Although they had no other recourse and were properly justified to lie to protect their lives, nonetheless, a coverup generates negative feelings. In order to teach this negativity, the Rabbis scripted this dialogue, as if Avimelech's curse worked. But all this really means is that there was real basis for his ill feelings, as if a curse was real too! To give "reality" to the negative effects of lies, the Rabbis equate it with something "real"...Isaac's blindness. Perhaps, as the concealment by Abraham and Sarah was concerning marriage; Isaac as a product of that marriage, reflected the flaw of concealment in his blindness

Reader: In your article (mesora.org/Prayer-Sick.html) you concur that there is a value in praying for someone else who is sick. But, if words are not causative, what natural occurrence happens when we pray for someones health?

I looked for an article you may have written but could not find it...pardon me if you have already written about this already. Thanks for your time and Shabbat Shalom.

Rabbi: True, words are not causative, and neither is prayer. But in prayer, it is God who causes the change...not our words. But a curse is not prayer request, and God does not simply fulfill the words of any person's curse. ■



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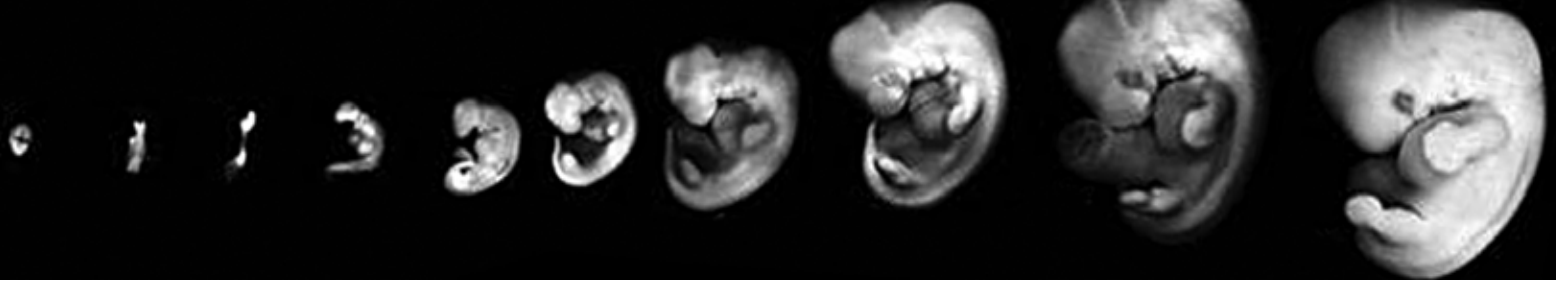
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God vs. the Multiverse V: The Origin of Life

RABBI E. ZIMMER, RABBI E. FEDER

We are going to make a short digression into biology and the problem (and attempted solution) of the origin of life. We want to make it very clear that we are not using the problem of the origin of life in our proof of God. We are relying upon the fine tuning of the constants of

nature and the initial conditions of the big bang. The reason we are introducing the proposed solution to the origin of life is because multi-verse physicists attempt to extend this type of solution to explain the phenomenon of fine tuning in the universe.

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The 'origin of life' problem can be roughly expressed as an 'origin of something as complex and special as DNA' problem. A short historical and scientific background on the theory of evolution will help explain why the unsupplemented theory of evolution cannot explain the origin of life itself.

The key development which enabled the theory of evolution to emerge, was the discovery that the age of the Earth was much greater than scientists historically had evidence for. The expansion of the known age of Earth based upon geological evidence in 1785 by James Hutton, and then further developed by Sir Charles Lyell in his book, *Principles of Geology* (1830), opened up the possibility for a much deeper understanding of the complexity of life.

Charles Darwin's supplied this understanding with the theory of evolution, in his famous book *On The Origin of Species* (1859). The modern version of Darwin's theory which includes genetics, called Neo-Darwinism, was developed around 1950. It is a very elegant, simple theory that explains the wonderful diversity of life, and gives you an appreciation for how an amazingly complex cell can emerge from the information encoded in DNA. (We are not taking a stance on whether or not Neo-Darwinism is entirely sufficient and complete to explain all the facts about life. That being said, there is definitely something right about it.)

The essential element of biological evolution is the self replicator (DNA),

which is something that makes near perfect copies of itself. The replicated copy is the next generation of replicator, which continues the process of nearly perfect replication.

It is necessary for the functioning of natural selection, that the process of replication not be perfect. Slight variations in each generation which arise from the "failure" to reproduce an exact replica (because of the occurrence of a mutation), are what allow the process of natural selection to act on those differences and select the fittest organisms for survival.

The key point is that it is intrinsically impossible to explain the existence of the first replicator itself (the first DNA molecule) through the theory of evolution. This is because evolution and natural selection only operate



once a replicator exists. In a sense, the science of biology begins after the first replicating molecule comes about (given the proper properties of the environment. See the first comment below for an elaboration of this point.)

Many biologists speculate that there was another, long forgotten, yet simpler replicator that was the ancestor to the first DNA. This pushes the problem back to how the first replicator emerged, as any replicator which is sufficient for evolution to operate on, would probably be a highly complex entity.

This problem is known as the origin of life problem. Any solution to it bridges the gap between chemistry and biology (between the inanimate and the animate). The biological theory of evolution cannot solve this problem. Where did the first replicator come from?

The main approach to resolving this problem is by invoking luck (chance). Since you only need to get lucky once (after you have the first replicator, biological evolution takes over), it becomes more reasonable to speculate that perhaps it all started by a lucky break. While this might initially sound like a very forced answer, the weak anthropic principle (which we'll explain) elucidates why it might be a fairly reasonable solution.

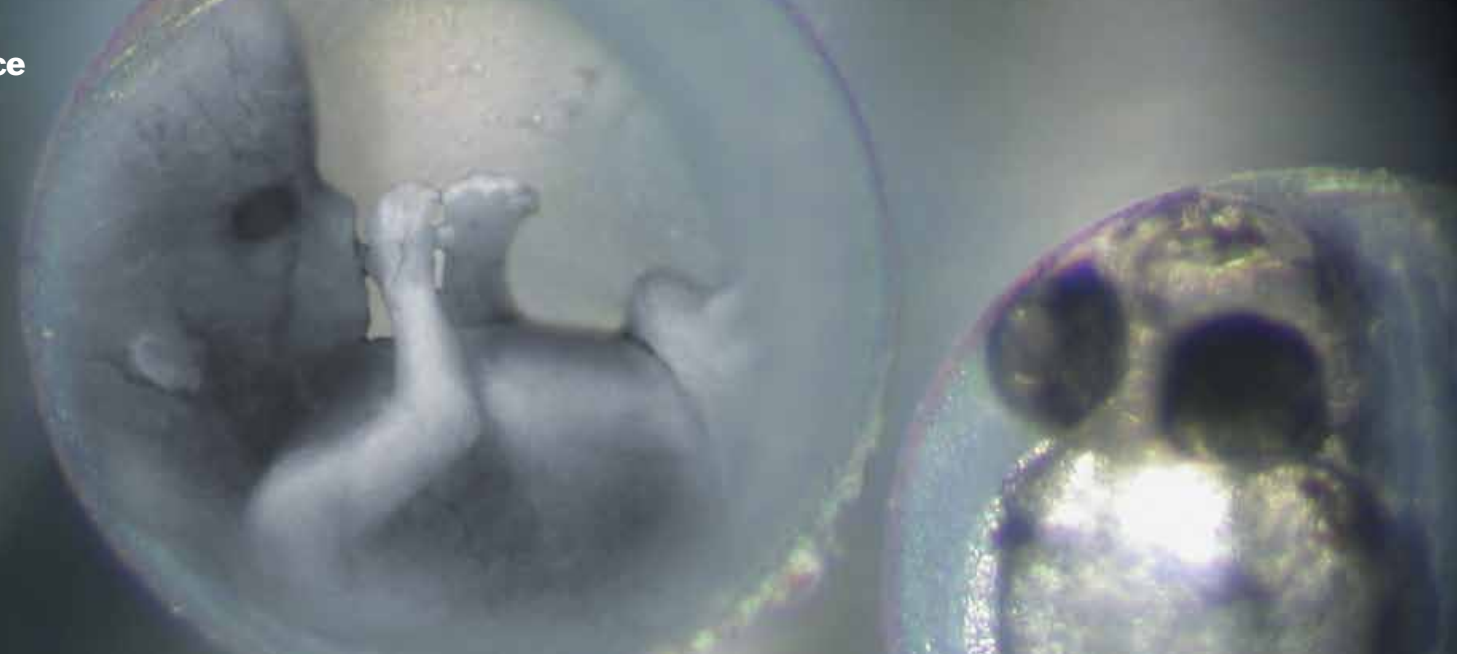
It is important to clearly understand the difference between the strong anthropic principle, which we used to refer to a teleological explanation (in post 3), and the weak anthropic principle, which is a very different type of causal explanation. Once again, labels are not as important as concepts.

It is speculated that perhaps there is some way that some inanimate thing should accidentally combine with

some other inanimate thing, and produce the first living replicator (an ancestor of DNA). Once we have DNA, the theory of evolution claims that the rest is just details. While the emergence of DNA by chance might seem highly improbable to occur, since there are many, many planets in the universe which are in theory hospitable to life, even something very unlikely may become probable given such a large number of possible tries.

A simple analogy makes this reasoning clear. If your odds of winning a lottery are one in a million assuming that you buy only one ticket, then your odds increase dramatically if you buy trillions of tickets. In fact, given enough tickets, your odds of winning become highly likely. If you win, you're not really as lucky as you may feel. The law of probabilities operates very efficiently when big numbers are involved.

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Should someone ask, "maybe it is likely for life to randomly occur once, but what are the odds that it would be here on Earth?" To that, the weak anthropic principle is invoked. Essentially, it says that there is an easily overlooked, causal relationship between an intelligent observer and the development of life. Namely, life is a necessary condition in order to have an observer even ask the question about why life is here on Earth. Only on those planets that life exists, is it even possible to have observers, and therefore we should not be surprised to find ourselves on a planet with life. There aren't any intelligent beings on planets without life. By this line of reasoning, it is superfluous to invoke a teleological explanation (i.e., the Earth was designed in order to produce the first DNA) in order to explain life on Earth.

It is not necessary to know the precise numbers of planets vs. the exact odds of a DNA molecule emerging by chance. You just need to match them to roughly the same order of magnitude (basically, that they're "closely" matched). Should those odds be close to the number of planets, we would have a good explanation for how life started. The fact that we are on the one planet in which it did occur is obviously not a question, as the existence of life is a necessary condition for us observing life and asking the very question in the first place.

As of yet, it is still unclear that the number of hospitable planets suffices, given that science does not currently have a well established theory for a chain of progressively more complex replicators that lead to DNA. The odds of getting a DNA molecule itself seem greater than the number of hospitable planets in the observable universe; but it is conceivable that we may find evidence of a simpler replicator that will allow us to compare its odds against the estimated number of planets, which is known to be a very big number. (By the way, the multiverse theory solves this problem too, as it posits a nearly infinite number of hospitable planets.)

The key conceptual point to take away from this for the next post is that this type of reasoning only works because there are known to be many planets that are hospitable to life. Therefore, even though it is highly improbable on any particular planet for life to spontaneously generate by chance alone, it can become likely if there are enough possible planets for it to occur on.

This line of reasoning is inapplicable if there is only one known planet. It is not a good explanation to say that a highly improbable event occurred, given that there was only one try. Before scientists observed the many, hospitable planets, it was not reasonable to say that life originated from inanimate matter through chance alone. That is too much of a coincidence to accept!

(This reasoning is also implicitly contingent on the very reasonable assumption that whatever happens on one planet does not affect the results of a different planet. If the results on all the planets were correlated to each other in a way that whatever happened on one planet also occurred on all the others, it would be equivalent to having a trillion copies of one lottery ticket. This point is very obvious and we only mention it because it will be important in the next post.)

The next 10 minute video is about the origin of life by biologist Richard Dawkins: tinyurl.com/7lzwd42

We highly recommend the first 3 parts as Dawkins is one of the best teachers of evolution around. We've learnt a lot from him.) We will only be embedding Part 3, as it nicely transitions into stage two of our posts about the multiverse. Dawkins first summarizes the contents of this post. He then distinguishes between the Many Worlds Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics which is not relevant to the fine tuning of the constants, and multiverse theory that is relevant for the fine tuning. He then discusses how physicists try to explain the fine tuning with the weak anthropic principle and the multiverse, though he acknowledges that it is only a satisfying solution for fine tuning if there are other independent reasons for postulating the multiverse (which Dawkins believes there are). ■



CURSES OF THE WISE COME TRUE

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM & MOSHE BARBANEL

And now, lift their sin, and if not, erase me please from Your book that You wrote (Exodus 32:32).” (“Book” refers to the Torah). Moses says this to God, attempting to obtain a pardon for the Jews’ Golden Calf sin. God responds to Moses, “Those who sinned against Me, I will erase from My book.” Is God disagreeing with Moses? It would appear that He is.

The Elders of Tosfos (Talmudic commentators) said that Moses made a bargain of sorts:

If you forgive me for breaking your tablets, forgive them, for You are not one who is biased in judgment.’ God responds: ‘Whoever sinned against Me will I erase. They caused you to sin Moses, and the sin of the Tablets is theirs (not yours). You acted properly, as they were not fit to receive the Tablets.’ Nonetheless, Moses’ name was erased from the entire Parasha of Tetzaveh, for [the name] ‘Moses’ is not found there. This was done because ‘the curse of the wise comes true, even if made on a condition.’

Of course, we need to understand Moses’ equation between his breaking the Ten Commandments and the Jews’ Golden Calf sin. But let us address the main idea: “The curse of the wise comes true, even if made on a condition.” Moses cursed himself, by suggesting his name be erased from the Torah if the Jews would not be forgiven. However, God seems to suggest that He will not uphold Moses’ wish of erasure, as He says, “the sin was the Jews’ as they caused you to sin, Moses.” Our

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obvious question is, if that is so, and God says Moses did not sin, why then does God erase Moses' name from the Torah, albeit in the single Parasha of Tetzaveh?

God says, "He who sins will I erase," and God did in fact erase Moses' name. How do we understand God's contradictory words: on the one hand He says Moses needs no pardon since the Jews caused him to break the Tablets. On the other hand, He erases Moses' name from Parashas Tetzaveh! I see only one possible answer: Moses' name deserved erasure. I do not mean that Moses sinned; there may be another reason why his name must be obscured. I will elaborate shortly. For now, let us line up the questions:

- 1) What is meant by, "The curse of the wise comes true, even if made on a condition?"
- 2) Why was Moses' name erased from Tetzaveh, as opposed to any other Parasha: is it due to its coming immediately prior to the Parasha containing the Golden Calf?
- 3) What was Moses' sin?
- 4) How does erasing his name address the issue?

KING DAVID'S CURSE

The Talmud cites another case where we apply an almost identical principle, "The curse of the wise comes true, even if made for free." (Here it is made for "free," while Moses' curse was made "conditionally.") Talmud Makkos 11a records that when King David was digging out the Temple's foundation, the sea threatened to flood the Earth – a metaphor. King David inquired if it was permissible to write God's name on a chard to be tossed into the sea, so as to contain it. None answered him. He cursed with suffocation anyone who knew an answer and remained silent. Achitophel then considered that since God's name may be erased from the Sotah's document to create marital harmony, certainly it could be erased in this case to save the world, and he instructed the King accordingly. King David did so, and all was saved. Nonetheless, later, when Achitophel saw his counsel to Avshalom was

disregarded, he hung himself, dying precisely in line with King David's curse of suffocation (Samuel II, 17:23). The Talmud teaches that although Achitophel heeded King David's threat, nonetheless, Achitophel seemingly died by the very curse of the king. We thereby support, "The curse of the wise comes true, even if made for free." But what is this justice?

We must be careful. We have a tendency to evaluate a Talmudic portion, or any part of Torah, based on our first notion. We may think that King David possessed the ability to curse. After all, he was a king, and it appears on face value that his "curse" came true. But this is a superficial and false view of a curse, which is merely the opposite of a blessing. No man has the ability to alter nature or someone else's free will by uttering words, as with a curse or a blessing. It is the infantile reading of stories like these, and a lack of knowledge of our fundamentals which leads to these false conclusions.

Let us approach this Talmudic portion intelligently. King David was human. He possessed no greater capabilities than any other person. So how may we understand that his curse "came true?" Looking at all the facts in the story, one stands out: Achitophel did not readily assist the king until King David made a threat. Why would Achitophel remain silent at first? It must be based on some reluctance to assist the king. We see later on as well, Achitophel counseled Avshalom, King David's son, on how to successfully rebel against his father, the king. A picture begins to emerge: Achitophel harbored some animosity towards King David, and this explains why he counseled the King's son on how to succeed over King David. David's threat of Achitophel shows Achitophel in the same light; Achitophel's animosity expressed itself in that case in the form of silence.

So let us explain the phenomenon: King David has no powers, yet Achitophel does in fact die the way the King cursed. How did this happen? The answer is, "observation." What do I mean? King David observed a negative

trait in Achitophel. His "curse" that anyone who withholds information die means that the king was pointing out that Achitophel possessed some negative trait, deserving of punishment. King David merely identified a flaw – which is described as a "curse." But the king's words cannot cause Achitophel's death. We even see that Achitophel hung himself! It was not David! So why does the Talmud attribute it to King David? The Talmud is agreeing with the king. When it says, "The curse of the wise comes true, even if made for free" it teaches that when the "wise" say something, they are observing reality accurately. This is why the Talmudic principle only applies to the "wise." What they say – be it a curse or a blessing – is in fact an accurate observation, but it is not causative. Thus, King David observed that Achitophel possessed a flaw, which he knew would cause him his own downfall. King David did not 'cause' Achitophel's death; Achitophel hung himself. But his death is euphemistically ascribed to the king, as if to say the king was right.

King David said whoever remains silent will suffocate. Why suffocation? It makes sense. Achitophel sinned by his mouth (throat) and King David knew that this type of life must cause his downfall. King David knew that a counselor (Achitophel) whose tools are his throat and mouth, and who is also deviant, would eventually, when using his mouth, suffer by it. (Anyone who is deviant who also functions in a specific capacity the majority of the time will find his end connected with that function.) King David may have assumed that Achitophel was too wise not to know this himself, and upon his own self-realization that he erred with his mouth, would kill himself in connection with it through hanging himself. Perhaps Achitophel suffered from a certain amount of guilt from using his counseling abilities for evil, to destroy King David. Perhaps his animosity towards the king was because of his role as king – a coveted position to say the least. Radak states that Achitophel hung himself because he knew Avshalom would not

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succeed without his advice. Therefore, the king would discover Achitophel as a rebel, and would seek to kill him. Achitophel saw the writing on the wall and preempted the king's decree of death. We conclude that King David's curse was merely an observation of what was probably inevitable. He knew that Achitophel's deviance used in counseling would bring him to his death. There is no causal relationship between man's words and reality.

MOSES' CURSE

Now, how does this apply to our case of Moses and the Jews? Moses too cannot cause a change in nature or people simply by uttering words. God alone controls the very natural laws exclusively under His guidance. God's laws were fixed before Moses or any Prophet entered the world's stage, so how can they change what God already completed? They cannot! However, we are forced to reconcile God's statement that the Jews sinned, and the fact that God did erase Moses' name, which appears to be a fulfillment of "Whomever sinned against Me I will erase." Moses' name required erasure...but why?

In Exodus 32:1, the people first demand to create a god (Golden Calf), as "Moses the man" who took us out of Egypt is gone. Moses, the "man?" Why the extra word? Of course he is a "man." But the Torah is offering a spotlight on the issue...and a direction to the answer. The Torah is pointing out the precise flaw: the people were overly attached to Moses, the "man." What does this mean? Look at what they did: they created a very physical Golden Calf. They became so attached to Moses' presence, they could not tolerate his absence for even a few hours longer than his scheduled descent from Sinai. They panicked, and immediately desired some physical icon to act as their head.

Perhaps Moses felt in some way that he contributed to their Golden Calf sin. Perhaps he was not clear in his words about his return; or maybe something else led them to such an act. We even learn that it was through Moses' prayer – a change in himself – that God pardoned the Jews. The fate of the Jews was bound to Moses' level of perfection. Evidently, Moses too realized his flaw. He asked specifically to be "erased," because he did not wish his flaw to act as a stumbling block for future generations. A righteous person, concerned with the welfare of future generations may use this logic so that his sins are not recorded. This explains Moses' specific request of "erasure." God replies, "Whomever sinned against Me, will I erase." It would seem that God agrees;

Moses name had to be erased. God complied and erased Moses' name in one Parasha.

There may be another understanding. Perhaps the dialogue went as follows: "God, if you do not forgive the Jews, please erase my name so I do not act as a stumbling block to future generations." God replies, "Moses, I do not erase someone simply because they wish to shield others. That is not why I will erase someone. I erase someone who 'sins against Me.'" It is for this type of sin alone that I erase someone."

WHY ERASURE?

Now that God erased Moses' name, we are taught that Moses sinned "against God" somehow. But a "sin" here does not mean a violation of some law, but that Moses – without guilt – was somehow connected to an error of the people. God said, "The people caused you to break the Tablets." God thereby exonerated Moses of breaking the Tablets, but not of some other matter. If we are careful with our reading, we do see that God adds two unnecessary words..."whomever sins against Me." This teaches an entirely new idea: God will erase someone who not only sins, but sins "against Him." Perhaps this means that if a man becomes too central, he is sinning against God...he "obscures God." We see the people had an attachment to Moses to the point that they could not tolerate his absence for a few hours. And God's response is perfect: He obscured Moses. When God says "I will erase the one who sins against Me," God means to say that He will remove from the Torah the person who sins against God, as one whose actions counter the focus of God. Not that Moses violated anything, but perhaps, somehow, Moses' existence obscured the Jews' focus from God onto himself. Not that Moses did so himself. It may have been the Jews' overestimation of his persona. It seems this is so, as they could not be without Moses "the man" for too long. But this does not mean it was the fault of Moses. God's use of the word "sin" may simply indicate that Moses somehow contributed to a negative state in the Jews. Similarly, Moses' grave was hidden from the Jews, so they could not outlet this sinful, over attached emotion after Moses dies.

We can resolve the contradiction found in the Elders of Tosfos: God indemnifies Moses of the Golden Calf sin. Yet, God erases Moses' name from one section, teaching that Moses somehow obscured God from the focus of the Jews, and therefore, the only remedy is to obscure Moses, allowing God to reemerge in "full view." This explains God's description of

Moses as he who "sins against Me." But again, I do not mean a violation deserving of punishment. Thus, Moses own self-curse took hold, as he was correct that one who "sins" must in some way not harm future generations. So, inasmuch as God erased Moses' name, He shielded future generations, as was Moses' wish. Moses' curse, "even for free" (he really did not sin with the Calf) still took hold, and he was erased. Thus, erasure of Moses' name is the correction required, as "name" represents one's 'identity', and it was Moses' very identity which obscured God's.

Moses, just like King David, observed a flaw, albeit in himself. But he did not bring anything upon himself through mere words. It is important that one understands clearly from these two accounts that man possesses no ability to curse or bless in the commonly misunderstood sense. Man's true curses and blessings are only observations about negatives or positives in others. When man curses someone, he is simply defining a negative trait, but his words cannot and do not effectuate any change in reality. What a wise man does when he curses, and this is only an act of a wise man, is to unveil a poor character trait in another person. Perhaps the person will desire to abandon this flawed character. Similarly, when someone blesses another, all he is doing is describing a positive element, which causes the person to cleave stronger to that positive trait.

We learn that God's will is that man is not elevated above Him. Many Jewish communities today make such a fuss over Rebbes and their blessings. Certainly we have proved that man has no powers. But from our study in this area, it would appear that excessive dependence on man, any man, even Moses, obscures our focus on God and must be avoided. Nothing may steal man's attention away from God. This theory also explains why King David could not build the Temple: his popularity due to numerous military victories would overshadow the Temple's status as "God's" Temple. There was nothing wrong with his bloodied hands, as he fought on behalf of God's fame, not his own. But when the people exalted him for his "tens of thousands," they bestowed fame upon King David, and this threatened to steal the focus away from God. This could not be tolerated. God gave the Temple's construction to King David's son, not as a penalty, but actually a deferred recognition of King David's zeal.

Our last, unanswered question: Why did God erase Moses name from Tetzaveh, as opposed to any other Parasha? ■

THE TOCHACHA OF



YIRMIYAHU

RABBI DR. DARREL GINSBERG

Typically, the weekly haftorah reflects certain themes from the parsha. However, this week we begin the ten special readings that coincide with the fast of the seventeenth of tamuz. The first three focus on tochacha and puraniyos, while the remaining seven deal with nechama for the Jewish people.

The first of these readings comes from the first chapter of Yirmiyahu. The ideal way to describe the prophecy of Yirmiyahu comes from the title of the Malbim's commentary: "Tochachat Yirmiyahu", or the reproof of Yirmiyahu. In other words, the entire scope of his prophecy would be admonishment. In this first chapter, Yirmiyahu is presented with a difficult mission. We do not actually learn much of the rebuke itself, which can be found in the 51 other chapters. Instead, we are introduced to how his tochacha would emerge, and how God desired for this unique prophet to deliver His message to the Jewish people.

The initial prophecy between God and Yirmiyahu offers an interesting back and forth (Yirmiyahu 1:4-10):

"And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying: Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee, and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee; I

(continued next page)



have appointed thee a prophet unto the nations. Then said I: 'Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak; for I am a child.' But the LORD said unto me: say not: I am a child; for to whomsoever I shall send thee thou shalt go, and whatsoever I shall command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of them; for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD. Then the LORD put forth His hand, and touched my mouth; and the LORD said unto me: Behold, I have put My words in thy mouth; See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, and to destroy and to overthrow; to build, and to plant."

An initial review of these verses indicates a resistance by Yirmiyahu to accepting the role as prophet due to his age. Rashi, however, offers an entirely different view of this back and forth. He explains that the role for Yirmiyahu was designed way back during the time of Moshe. The Torah explains that a prophet will rise from amongst the Jews who will be "like you", which Rashi understands to mean like Moshe. Thus, Moshe gave tochacha, and so too would Yirmiyahu. Additionally, Moshe's prophecy extended over forty years; Yirmiyahu's prophecy would cover this same amount of time. Yirmiyahu responds that he is in fact a young lad. In this context, according to Rashi, Yirmiyahu was referring to his "resume". The greatest of all prophets began his tochacha close to his death. Moshe had accomplished numerous miraculous feats prior to his admonishing of the Jewish people, including taking them out of Egypt, splitting the sea, bringing the Torah, and so on. Now, at the end of his life, with his list of accomplishments backing him up, he proceeds to engage in reproof. Yirmiyahu asks God, what exactly have I accomplished? I am at the beginning of my service as a prophet, and now I am to deliver tochacha to the Jewish people?

Sounds like a fair question. God's response does not seem to be an answer at all. As we see above, God "touches" Yirmiyahu's mouth, placing words within his mouth. How is this supposed to answer the concerns raised by this prophet?

Going back to the first analogy between Moshe and Yirmiyahu, there is another troubling aspect to Rashi's explanation. In comparing anyone to Moshe, one would expect more essential features of Moshe's personality or achievements to be at the forefront. Instead, we see two seemingly superficial aspects – that Moshe admonished the people and was a prophet for forty years. There were other great people prior to Yirmiyahu who, through prophecy, admonished the Jews. Furthermore, what is so significant about forty years? Again, this seems to be a completely

accidental aspect to Moshe's prophecy.

When we look at the tochacha given by Moshe to the nation (found throughout Sefer Devarim), there is something beyond the fact that the greatest prophet was delivering these ideas. Moshe was the first to be the vehicle for rebuke for the entire Jewish nation. Never before had a person been entrusted with such a task. As such, his reproof serves as the prototype for all future tochacha. The analogy therefore is noting that Yirmiyahu's tochacha would follow the model set forth by Moshe. In terms of the second part of the analogy, what is the significance of forty years? There are times in Jewish history when a prophet steps forward to deal with a crisis or some other crucial event taking place. His prophecy therefore is tied to that moment in time. Other times, a prophet delivers his message for a short period, until his mission is complete. Moshe, though, was neither of these. He was a prophet for an entire generation, taking the Jewish people who left Egypt through the desert for 40 years. His impact (obviously) was critical in forging the identity of the nation. Yirmiyahu would be this type of prophet. He would stand and deliver the messages of God through three different kings, through an entire generation of the Jewish people. His prophecy would impact the Jewish nation in a profound way, a different quality of prophecy and tochacha.

Yirmiyahu responds to this with a very rational argument. As his prophecy was one following the model established with Moshe, both in content and in generational impact, it would make sense to follow the process as much as possible. Therefore, when looking at Moshe, we see him delivering admonishments at the end of his life. His resume was replete with miraculous events. Why should Yirmiyahu begin in a different manner? Wouldn't this be in direct contrast to the way Moshe's prophecy was established?

As we mentioned above, God does not directly answer his question. Presumably, one can infer from this that miraculous accomplishments are not necessary for this type of prophecy, and therefore secondary to the process established with Moshe. However, one could ask, why not? It would seem Yirmiyahu may have been more "successful" had he entered into the scene a well-known prophet. It could be that miraculous accomplishments as the pre-condition for rebuke is not objectively beneficial, but is something evaluated based on the situation. A prophet who performs miracles indeed helps validate his stature as a man of God, and therefore delivering God's messages contains a quality of authenticity the people seek. At the same time, the miracles can become the focal point of the prophet, as people look to deify the prophet, rather than heed the important ideas he is bringing to them. When rebuking serves to strengthen the nation, to ensure they do not slip, the miraculous events merely function to validate. When rebuking serves to bring to light the present defective state of the Jewish people, where they have thrown to the side the derech Hashem, the miraculous resume may be a detriment. The message must be the center of attention, without distraction. God's response to Yirmiyahu, then, is telling him this concept. His prophecy was to be different than Moshe's. The validation that emerges through the miraculous would not play a role in this prophecy. He would "simply" be delivering the message of God, and the tochacha would be clear.

We cannot begin to imagine the challenge facing Yirmiyahu in accepting this mission from God, as his entire prophecy was to be defined as one of tochacha. His words would not be characterized by comfort or pleasantries, or visions of happiness. In this first chapter of Yirmiyahu, the first of the three readings dealing with tochacha, we see how his prophecy was to be established. We also see how his tochacha was to impact the Jewish people in a profound way, an impact we can appreciate even today. ■

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