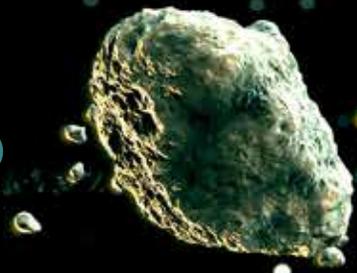


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Universe

STARTLING LESSONS OF THE

PARSHA

Imitating
God

LETTERS

What lesson did
Moses repeat
8 times?

LETTERS

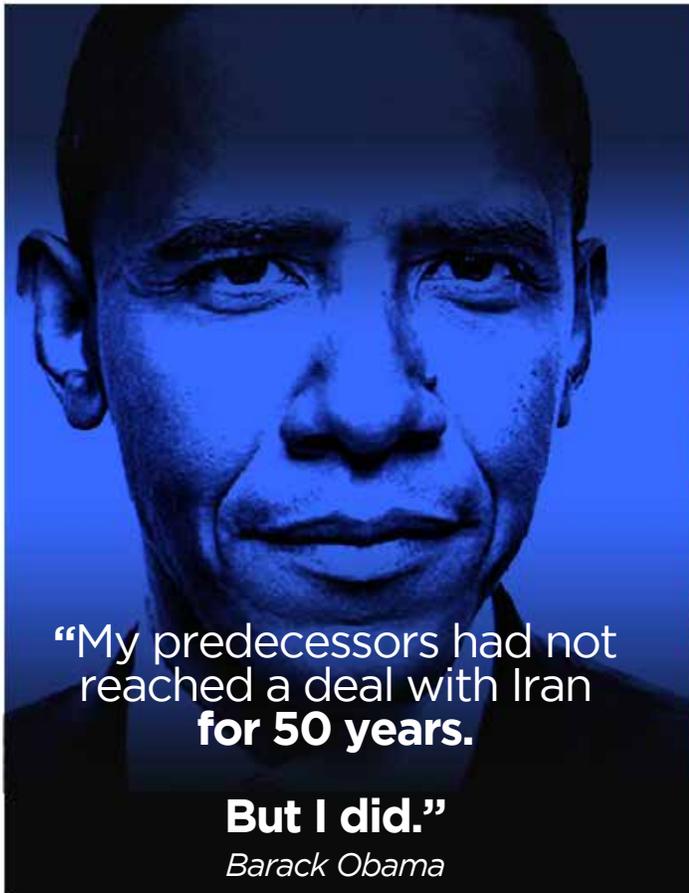
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The Journal on Jewish Thought



3 Letters

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

- 1) 8 times Moses repeats that God spoke "from amidst the flames." What's the vital lesson?
- 2) Who can teach Torah and how do gentiles fit in?

12 Imitating God

RABBI BERNIE FOX

Human perfection is modeled after God's ways. Rabbi Fox discusses the significant behavior of imitating God and its applications based on this weeks Parsha.

6 The Universe

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The existence of the universe raises fundamental questions and astonishing insights debated for 1000s of years. We discuss the primary lessons.

15 A Proven Religion

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Rabbi Mann explains why Revelation at Sinai is required for a Torah lifestyle, expounding its core principle.

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LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

What is the proof of God, and the Torah given to the Jews?

Reader: Where, in the Torah, is it recorded that three million Jews were present at Mount Sinai and heard the voice of God?

Rabbi: Numbers (Bamidbar) records the population of males over 20 years of age to be 600,000. Include males below 20 and all females and you arrive at approximately 2-3 million people. This was recorded shortly after the event of God's revelation at Sinai, so this population was present at Sinai. Sources for the Jews hearing God's voice are: "Guard yourselves and guard your souls exceedingly, lest you forget the things your eyes saw (Deut. 4:9)", "Has any nation heard the voice of God speaking from amidst fire like you have heard, and lived (Deut. 4:33)?" "You have been demonstrated to know that God is Elokim, there is no other besides Him (Deut. 4:35).", "From the heavens He made heard His voice to prove you, and on land He showed you His great fire and His words you heard from amidst the fire (Deut. 4:36)."

In this weeks Parsha, VauEschanan, I counted at least 8 times Moses reminds the people that they heard God's voice "from amidst the fire." What is this vital message, which demands such repetition?

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You know, Moses is referring to God's giving of the Ten Commandments and His Torah upon Mount Sinai, where the nation of 2-3 million heard a voice from amidst the blazing mountain. God orchestrated this event as an eternal proof of His existence, His only religion, and His selected people. The proof is derived from the impossibility of any intelligence to exist in fire. In all other elements, we find life. But nothing can survive in flames. As the nation heard intelligence from "amidst the flames", it was proved to them that an Intelligent Being exists, Who is not a biological organism (a being that perishes in an inferno). This intelligent being, Who is not of the physical world, communicated laws to a nation of 2-3 million Jews. Moses reminds the Jewish nation 8 times that they all witnessed this. Had they not witnessed it, they would not follow Moses, and we would not have this communication as the sole Jewish account of that moment in history. Had Moses lied, those people would not abandon their true history in place of such an amazing story. But as we possess only one Jewish history, and unanimously, all Jews agree this is our sole history, we know Revelation on Sinai to be 100% truth. The Jews did not rebel when Moses reminded them that they witnessed Revelation.

Such a story cannot be fabricated and reach us 3300 years later as unanimously accepted history. For if today, someone gathers a nation and tells them "Don't forget the voice that you heard emanating from flames on this mountain", they would view the person as delusional, requiring psychological help. They would not abandon their collective history, and as a nation, embrace the delusional person's views. And while other religions are "believed" to contain miracles or to be of divine origin, not one other religion claims masses witnessed miracles, and certainly not God talking. Christianity and Islam knew they could not get adherents, had they made up such lies. So they concoct claims, of course without any masses, since their claims are lies. They used the

sword to persuade people to accept their dogma. In contrast, Judaism asks people to use their intellects to determine which religion is the proven word of God.

Without witnesses, one is foolish to accept as true, any claim on any topic. It matters none that other religions have millions or billions more followers than Judaism. Egypt too had numerous followers of their beliefs in sun gods, moon gods, stone gods and iron gods. Do you feel a stone created the universe, that cats or beetles have protective powers, or that a cast metal figurine of a falcon suddenly gains powers once that metal ore was formed into a bird form?

People are insecure. They fabricate religions to soothe their imaginations of a safe and bright future. But the intelligent person searches for proofs for all he believes, starting with his religion and his view of the universe. How did the universe get here? What created it? What created me? What does this Creator want for me? What will truly make me happy...will ignoring truth help, or hurt me?

The intelligent person readily concludes that the world operates with fixed laws, and only by watering my field and feeding my animals, will I eat. Minerals and vegetation possess properties that are well-suited for some purposes, but fail at other objectives. Wood and metal nails are well-suited for shelters, but poor choices for garments and food. As the intelligent man explores, he arrives at not only practical truths, but moral and intelligent truths that he finds pleasing to ponder, to share and probe further.

The bottom line is that "truth" guides the intelligent man, and it is only in the search for truth that one complies with reality.

Moses repeated the truth of God's revelation 8 times. He wished that his fellow Jews enjoy a life of truth, which is the life of Torah. If we are wise like Moses, we too will adhere to Torah, for our own good. ■

Who Can Teach and Learn Torah?

Reader: It is mentioned on this site that only Jews (not limited to Levites) teach the Torah. However, in Deut. 17:9 it is talking about the Levites instructing, so how does that relate to "any" Jew teaching the Torah? Shouldn't it only be a Levites? I am trying to determine whether to continue to be a Christian because there is evidence that is making me doubt it. Now I'm not sure how to look for the truth when I don't know if a website is written by a Levite or even if I can find one in my town. Also, can a non-Jew study Torah? Thank you for your response.

Rabbi: Good question. The enforcement of only Jews teaching Torah is a means to secure meticulous Torah transmission. For if gentiles who are not obliged to observe except for 7 commands, would be teachers of all other 606 commands, we cannot be sure they have fully studied what is inapplicable to them. This lack of study would corrupt the Torah educational process, and Torah.

The Torah's words relating to Levites being teachers is referring to the tribe, which did not own land or work. The Levites' role is to teach. God designed the Jewish nation in a manner where there is a group, the Levites, who secure the transmission of Torah. However, their role does not exclude from teaching, people from other tribes. Throughout time, our greatest teachers were not Levites. Consider King David and Solomon, the Prophets, and countless Talmudic sages. So I would read "You will come to the priests, the Levites and to the judge..." to mean that these were the "institutional" teachers in Jewish society. But this does not preclude other Jews from teaching. In fact, this very verse includes a "judge" who did not have to be a Levite.

A non-Jew may study Torah relating to their Noachide laws, in which one can spend his or her lifetime learning. And as a non-Jew may take on almost all other laws, they are permitted of course to study those additional laws too, equal to a born Jew, so they might fulfill them properly. ■



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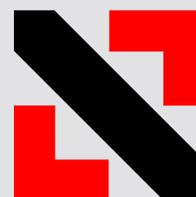
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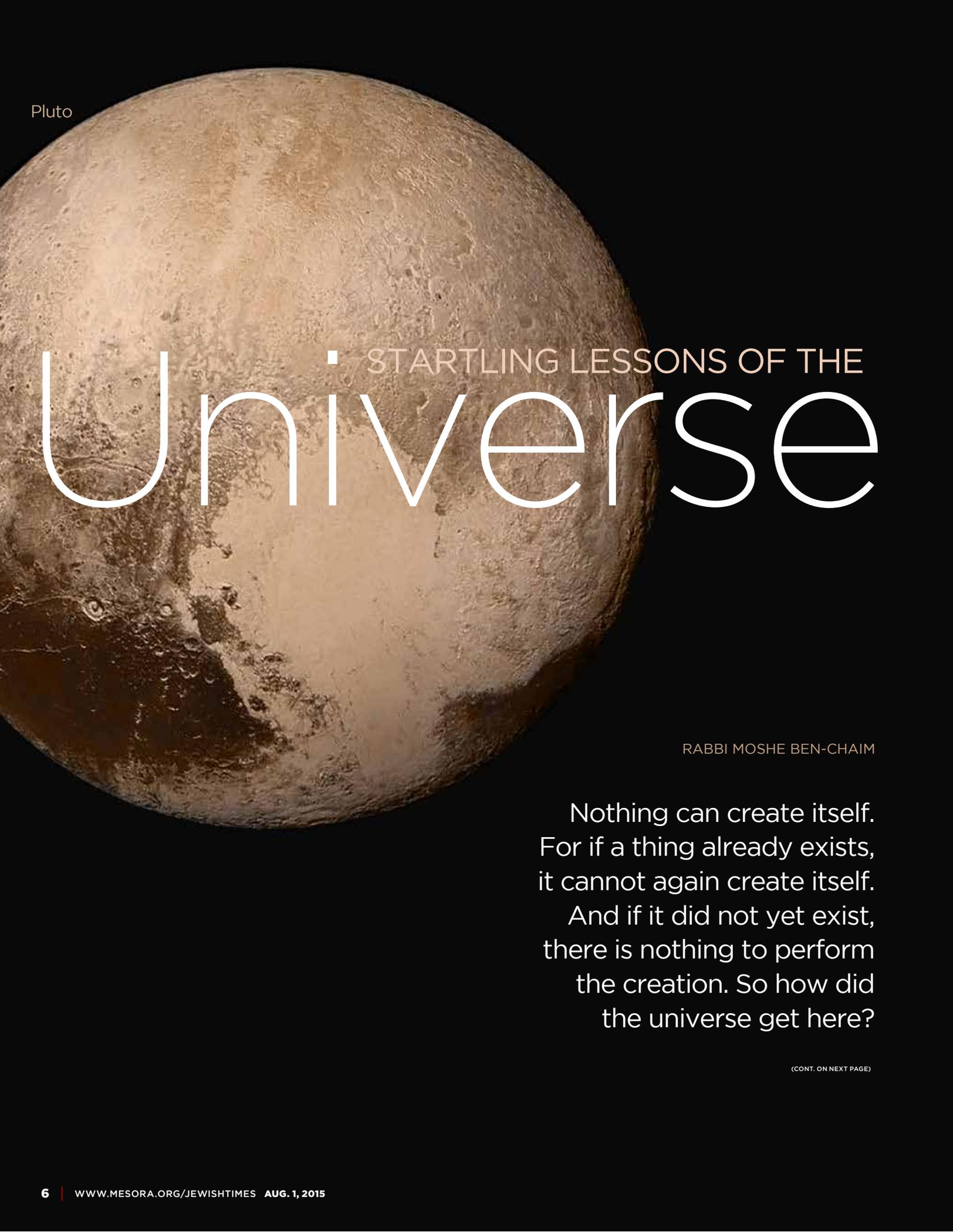
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▪ STARTLING LESSONS OF THE
Universe

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Nothing can create itself.
For if a thing already exists,
it cannot again create itself.
And if it did not yet exist,
there is nothing to perform
the creation. So how did
the universe get here?

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Something other than the universe must have caused the Big Bang, the birth of the universe. Wise scientist do not postulate anything prior to creation. For they rightfully accept ignorance concerning anything that our senses cannot detect, and prior to the “beginning” is beyond our senses. The Talmud (Chagiga 11b) agrees with these scientists. Other scientists propose a “multiverse” theory. This theory suggests an infinite number of universes, where the chance of one that perfectly functions for human life (our universe) was bound to happen. Using statistics as a crutch, such a theory attempts to remove God from the picture. These scientists suggest either an eternal chain of universes, or that something created the first in the endless series. The eternal chain theory is false, for we could never reach the present. The second theory demands God. And once we recognize the need for God to cause the numerous universes, why would this omnipotent Being play dice with the universe, when He can simply create a perfect universe the very first time? Also, a theory of infinite universes developed to escape the need for a God, begs the question: what causes infinitely varying designs of universes? Why can't there be infinite universes of identical design? The multiverse theory actually requires a “Designer” in order to ensure that all succeeding universes purposefully differ from preceding ones.



Others suggest the universe always existed. These include Aristotle and Plato. Aristotle says the universe as we see it, always existed in this state. But he holds the universe was not God's will: it is merely a natural result of God's existence. Plato suggests matter was eternally present, but that God molded that matter into a designed universe. These thinkers are closer to the truth than scientists who do not attribute the universe's existence to God. But both Aristotle and Plato claim matter existed eternally.

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This is quite apropos to the 9 Days which just ended. Last Shabbos we read Jeremiah's (chap. 2) prophetic accusation of the Jews, as compared to other nations. Jewish leaders became corrupt; our prophets lied to the nation that the god Baal communicated with them, the Jews left off serving God and exchanged Him for deaf and dumb idols. Jeremiah described how other nations never exchanged their gods, while the Jews were doubly evil by doing so: the Jews experienced real goodness from God's providence. In contrast, other nations would, when pasture was exhausted by their flock, loyally carry their lifeless stone gods on their backs from place to place for better grazing. A wise Rabbi taught, other nations were proud of their heritage; the Jew was not. The critique: the Jews denied reality of the Exodus, the 10 Plagues, the Manna, the Well, the pillars of cloud and fire, and numerous historical truths where God benefitted us. Despite this, the Jews abandoned God. The other nations had a better reason to do so, since their gods never answered. Yet, we were the nation who denied reality, who denied God. When good is experienced, and yet, the recipients reject that goodness, the sin is all the more egregious.

For our sin of idolatry, God allowed our enemies to kill us and destroy the first Temple. How can we reverse the tide back towards acceptance of God and a rejection of atheism, non-religious life and the belief in idolatrous mystical beliefs? It is only through knowledge. So let us learn...

Maimonides teaches that the natural laws of creation seen in their current state today, did not operate during that thing's formation. The example he gives is of a human that requires daily air, food, and excretion. Yet, although for 9 months, the orifices enabling these bodily functions were not operational, the embryo lived. And even prior to the formed embryo, the interdependency of organs did not yet function, yet, they lived. How the body functions now is not how it functioned during its formation.

Scientists accept a Big Bang where debris becomes a sun of a precise size and temperature. An Earth and a moon "end up" somehow at sizes and distances relative to each other, and to the sun, that are perfect for animal and plant life. Slight deviations in these measurements would end life. Somehow, plant and animal life contain nutrients that perfectly satisfy as food for animal life. Somehow, from chaotic explosions of brute

matter, one species develops a spiritual element. But no one proposes exactly how a spiritual element emanates from a physical one. (Einstein marveled that the human mind can perceive the intelligence in creation) Species somehow developed genetic structures that produce a circulatory system, a digestive system, the ability to heal, eyes to see, and a host of marvels that help perpetuate the species including sperm and eggs. All by accident? And what about natural "laws?" What caused their design and sustained patterns? Aside from the need for precipitation, an atmosphere, and that a weather pattern "developed by accident" and addresses this need, what guides all laws to "continue?" What determines that each object that reproduces, reproduces its own kind? Look at this page: would you accept that this could be created by random ink drops thrown at this paper? Yet, this is nothing in comparison to the design evidenced in the universe. And yet, scientists suggest a random cause of the universe. And if the universe developed randomly, as Maimonides asks, why do we not see randomness exhibited in the natural laws governing species, gravity, etc?

Clearly, there exists a Designer. During Creation, natural laws were not yet set; they were actually undergoing creation. So, as Maimonides teaches, the current laws of the universe do not dictate how matter was formed. And this makes sense, since the very formation of all creation, was not through itself. Therefore, the laws that belong to all creations now, were not yet existing at its creation: other forces were at work. Therefore we are unable to view current laws and suggest they operated during Creation. But what we do know, is that Creation was not unguided, as explosions occur today, without an objective and design. There is simply too much perfection and design to suggest the universe is an accident. Therefore, scientists err when attempting to explain the origin of the universe based on laws witnessed today, the only laws we detect. It is as if a child suggested he was eating, excreting and breathing in his mother's body. So too the universe, but I will explain through a few astonishing points...

Matter requires creation; this law is part of its very design. Now think...as a law too is a created thing, the "need to be created" is only applicable to matter and its laws...not to the Creator. The Creator is not subject to the laws that He created. Thus, the need for creation as a means to exist, does not apply to God, Who created that very law. Think over this point.

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The next point is this: as matter requires creation, it was made either from some previous matter, or from nothing. For we cannot suppose Z was made from Y, and Y from X, and X from W, ad infinitum back in time. If so, we never reach the “original cause,” as there is no original cause in an eternal chain, and thus, nothing could exist. Think this through as well. These are not small points. Point #1 is that God does not require creation to exist; this need applies only to created things. Point #2 is that if there was not an Original Cause of all else, then nothing would exist. Suggesting an infinite chain of causes is an impossibility. We conclude that there must have been some first matter, before which, no matter existed. This, Maimonides teaches, is the view of the Torah, that God created the universe from nothingness, *creatio ex nihilo*.

The other theory (Aristotle, Plato) of matter having existed eternally would mean that God did not design it based on His will. Maimonides teaches a desire to create, must precede its creation, and thus, matter did not always exist. Other arguments against eternal matter include the impossibility to alter that matter through miracles (which we know are historically proven). Now, since according to this view, it was not God’s will that the matter existed, it therefore exists external to God’s desire, as a “natural result” of God’s existence, like a shadow, and thus, its design was not due to God’s will. Therefore, God could not have altered natural law to create all the miracles He truly performed, had matter been eternal as God is eternal. Thus, we conclude matter was created by God’s will from nothingness.

The quandary of the scientist is that he cannot move past nature; he does not see anything in the universe that came from nothing. So he accepts a baseless theory of an eternal universe, because of his mind’s limitations. That’s not a good reason to accept a theory. But even with our limitations, man can arrive at this most fundamental truth, as we learn from Abraham. Even though he was raised in an idolatrous culture, Abraham’s mind was able to recognize and become more attached to truth and reality, than to idolatrous fantasies and peer pressure.

There are 2 paths before us: imagination and reality. Tisha B’Av recalls the Jews who succumbed to their idolatrous fantasies. This was more attractive to their weak minds than follow-

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ing the truths of God's goodness they knew He performed. Recognizing God through the universe is a primary tool for mankind to return to its senses. A few words of Maimonides are appropriate here (Guide, book ii, chap xxiii):

You will, however, be able to decide the question, as far as necessary, if you free yourself from passions, ignore customs, and follow only your reason. But many are the conditions which must be fulfilled. First you must know your mental capacities and your natural talents: you will find this out when you study all mathematical sciences, and are well acquainted with Logic. Secondly, you must have a thorough knowledge of Natural Science, that you may be able to understand the nature of the objections. Thirdly, you must be morally good. For if a person is voluptuous or passionate, and, loosening the reins, allows his anger to pass the just limits, it makes no difference whether he is so from nature or from habit, he will blunder and stumble in his way, he will seek the theory which is in accordance with his inclinations. I mention this lest you be deceived; for a person might some day, by some objection which he raises, shake your belief in the theory of the Creation, and then easily

mislead you: you would then adopt the theory [of the Eternity of the Universe] which is contrary to the fundamental principles of our religion, and leads to "speaking words that turn away from God." You must rather have suspicion against your own reason, and accept the theory taught by two prophets [Abraham and Moses] who have laid the foundation for the existing order in the religious and social relations of mankind. Only demonstrative proof should be able to make you abandon the theory of the Creation: but such a proof does not exist in Nature.

Maimonides teaches that nothing in the observable universe directs us to abandon the theory of Creation. He also teaches that we must examine and manage our own emotions and loyalties, for these can corrupt clear thought, allowing us to accept fallacy and opinions that cater to our instincts. Maimonides does state that if the eternity of the universe was proven, we would have to reinterpret Genesis[1]. Thus, he does not view an eternal universe as impossible, but rather, as unproven. ■

[1] Guide, book ii chap xxv, last sentences





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VAU'ETCHANAN

Rabbi Bernie Fox

When you shall beget children, and children's children, and you shall have been long in the land, and shall deal corruptly, and make a graven image, even the form of any thing, and shall do that which is evil in the sight of Hashem your G-d, to provoke Him. (Sefer Devarim 4:25)

1. Moshe teaches Bnai Yisrael that Hashem forgives our sins

Parshat VaEtchanan continues the presentation of Moshe's final address to Bnai Yisrael. In his address, Moshe instructed the nation in mitzvot he had not previously communicated. He added details regarding some mitzvot previously presented. He admonished the nation to observe the commandments. He explained that the nation's future will be determined by its faithfulness. Observance of the commandments will lead to blessings of abundance and success. Abandonment or neglect of the Torah will be punished with devastation and exile.

However, Moshe's presentation began with a review of Bnai Yisrael's experiences since leaving Mount Sinai. Moshe described the sins of the nation and he placed special emphasis upon the sin of the spies.

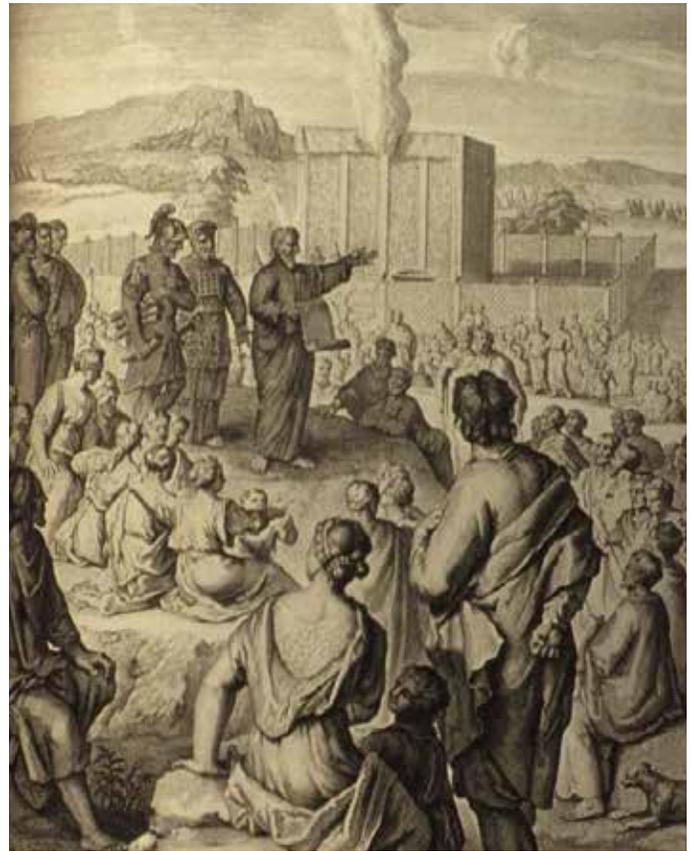
Why did Moshe present this review of the nation's failures? One reason is that he wished to prevent these failures from recurring. He reviewed, evaluated and outlined the consequences of the nation's

sins. He hoped that through understanding these sins and recognizing their terrible consequences, the people would be less likely to repeat these or similar behaviors.

Nachmanides acknowledges that this was one of Moshe's objectives. However, he explains that Moshe had another purpose. The main body of his address consisted of two components. Moshe completed his presentation of the mitzvot and he warned Bnai Yisrael of the consequences associated with the observance or the neglect of the commandments.

Moshe feared that these two components would be received poorly. The people would understand that they are expected to observe the commandments scrupulously. They would realize that terrible consequences would befall them if they failed. They would despair. They would conclude that their destruction and exile are inevitable. They would reason that they could not succeed in achieving perfect observance of the commandments. Hashem's punishment for their failure would be terrible and immediate.

Moshe addressed this fear with his review of the nation's experiences since departing Mount Sinai. They had sinned. Some of their sins were horrible. Yet, they stood



poised to enter the Land of Israel. Despite the enormity of their wrongdoings, Hashem had forgiven them and spared them. Moshe was acknowledging the people's fears and communicating to them that although they would inevitably sin, they could be assured that Hashem would forgive them and spare them[1].

In your distress, when all these things come upon you, in the end of days, you will return to Hashem your G-d, and hearken unto His voice. For Hashem your G-d is a merciful G-d. He will not fail you, neither destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore unto them. (Sefer Devarim 4:30-31)

2. Moshe's vision of Bnai Yisrael's future failures

One of the most moving and disturbing portions of Parshat VaEtchanan is Moshe's vision of the nation's future. He explains that after the Bnai Yisrael settles the Land of Israel and becomes accustomed to being rooted in the land, they will stray from the worship of Hashem and adopt idolatry. They will be punished severely. Bnai Yisrael will be exiled from the land and dispersed among the nations.

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This vision does not seem to accord with the message that Moshe hoped to achieve. He is not merely outlining the consequences of abandoning the Torah. He is foretelling that the people will fail and experience the terrible punishment of exile. Where is the message of assurance that Moshe wished to communicate?

3. Moshe's message of consolation

In order to reconcile Moshe's vision with the intent that Nachmanides attributes to him, the next portion of Moshe's vision must be considered. Moshe tells the people that in their bitter exile, and in the distant lands of their dispersion, they will return to Hashem. When they seek Hashem and turn to Him, He will respond and He will redeem them. According to Nachmanides, it seems that it is this message of inevitable redemption that is the essential element of Moshe's vision. In other words, Moshe understands the people's anxiety. They fear that they will sin and experience terrible consequences. Moshe does not dismiss their fears. Their fears rest upon an honest and frank assessment of their failings. Instead, Moshe tells the nation that its fears are deserved. However, they can also take courage from the inevitability of their redemption. Hashem will never abandon them or forsake His people.

Why will Hashem never abandon these people? Why will the enormity and consistency of their sins not eventually completely alienate Hashem from Bnai Yisrael? Moshe explains that this is a consequence of the covenant that Hashem made with our patriarchs. Moshe then elaborates on this covenant and its implications. He reminds the nation that they were redeemed from Egypt though wonders never before observed by humanity. Hashem performed these wonders as an expression of His love for our forefathers. This same covenant and love assures the ultimate redemption of Bnai Yisrael from the exile that Moshe envisioned.

4. The meaning of Hashem's attributes

The Shema is recited daily. Its first paragraph is presented in the latter portion of the parasha. The first passage declares the unity of Hashem. Maimonides explains that the unity of Hashem is one of the fundamental principles of the Torah. He explains that the unity of

Hashem does not merely mean that there is only one G-d. It means that Hashem is an absolute unity. He is not subject to division. He does not have parts[2]. Also included in our understanding of Hashem's unity, is that He does not have qualities or characteristics.

How do we reconcile this to the Torah's ascription of various characteristics to Hashem? If Hashem does not have characteristics, then how can the Torah describe Him as just, kind, charitable, or merciful? The answer to this question is very important. We cannot know Hashem's nature and the Torah does not mean to suggest that He possesses these characteristics in the traditional or literal sense. Instead, the Torah is describing patterns of behaviors. Hashem conducts Himself with justice, kindness, charity, and mercy. [3]

This raises an important question. The characteristics that the Torah ascribes to Hashem are not literal characteristics. They are descriptions of patterns that can be identified in Hashem's behavior. Why is it important for the Torah to identify these patterns? Why does not the Torah simply acknowledge that Hashem's nature is unknowable? Why does it substitute for the unknowable a description of Hashem's behaviors? This issue deserves extensive discussion. However, one aspect of that discussion will be explored here.

For if you shall diligently keep all this commandment which I command you, to do it, to love Hashem your G-d, to walk in all His ways, and to cleave unto Him, (Sefer Devarim 11:22)

5. Imitating Hashem

The Torah commands us to travel in the ways of Hashem. According to Maimonides this is one of the Torah's 613 commandments. What is the meaning of this directive? Maimonides explains that this commandment requires that we imitate Hashem's behavior. In other words, Hashem's behavior provides a model for our own ethical and moral conduct[4].

We can now appreciate the importance of the Torah's descriptions of Hashem's behavior. These descriptions do not reveal to us Hashem's true nature. His nature is beyond our understanding. However, these descriptions of His behavior do provide us with a guide for our own conduct.

6. Imitating Hashem's forgiveness

Our parasha provides an illustration of this concept. As explained above, one of Moshe's objectives was to respond to the nation's anxiety. They understood the terrible consequences they would experience if they would be unfaithful to the Torah. They feared that at some point, they would fail to be faithful to the Torah. These consequences will befall them. Moshe assures them that even when they are exiled and dispersed among the nations, they will not be abandoned by Hashem. He will redeem them from their exile and restore Bnai Yisrael. Hashem created a covenant with the patriarchs and because of this covenant and His love for the patriarchs, He will never forsake their descendants.

In other words, despite our unfaithfulness, Hashem will not abandon us. Instead, He will await our repentance. When we reach out to Hashem, He will respond with His forgiveness and answer our prayers.

When we are wronged by an individual, we find ourselves in Hashem's place. How should we respond to the harm that has been wrongfully committed against us? Should we sever our relationship with the person who wronged us? Should we recognize that despite our conflict and the wrong endured, we remain bound by our brotherhood? Should we yearn for the restoration of the bonds of friendship and fraternity?

We are commanded to follow in the ways of Hashem. This commandment tells us that the answer to our question is found in the study of Hashem's behavior. He does not cast away His people. He awaits their repentance and when His children call unto Him, He responds with love and compassion.

This should be our model. Others will wrong us. But even when we are treated unjustly or insensitively, we should yearn for the restoration of the bonds of love and compassion with our estranged brother. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Devarim, Introduction.

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

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Moreh Nevuchim, volume 1, chapter 52.

[4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Aseh 8.

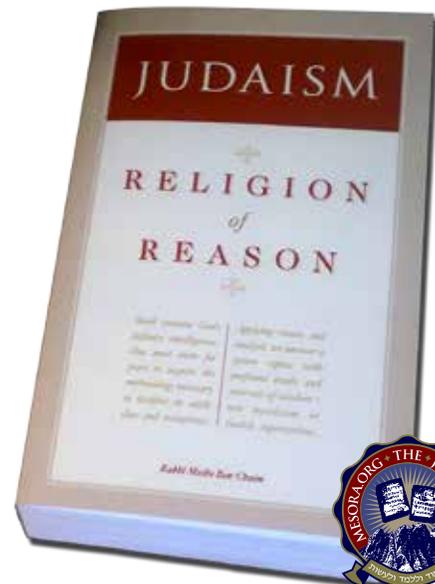
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| Astrology | Red Bendels |
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| Demons | What is God? |
| Bashert | "Jewish" Souls |
| Evil Eye | Talmudic Stories |
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PARSHA

You Have Been Shown to Know

VAU'ETCHANAN

Rabbi Reuven Mann



In this week's Parsha, Vaetchanan, Moshe continues his final admonitions to the Jewish people. He reminds them of the unique foundation of their religion by stating "You have been shown to know that Hashem, He is G-d, there is none other beside Him." Two questions arise. First, what is the meaning of "shown to know?" Secondly, is it not redundant to assert that there is no other G-d beside Him? It is very interesting to note that Moshe did not call upon the Jews to have "faith" in Hashem and His Torah. He did not ask them to put reason aside and simply trust their feelings. Judaism is not based on ordinary, unsubstantiated faith as is the case with all other religions. In Exodus Hashem told Moshe, "Behold I will come to you in the thickness of the cloud in order that the nation will hear when I speak to you and also in you will they believe forever." Hashem was making a "one time appearance" before the entire people who would be gathered at a mountain engulfed in flame, thick cloud, super natural sounds and hear a voice from heaven proclaiming the Ten Commandments. This was done in order to remove any doubts as to His existence and the veracity of the Torah. By revealing Himself in such a blatant "face to face" manner Hashem relieved the Jews of any need to rely on faith in order to serve Him.

One may ask: Why was Sinai necessary after the Jews had experienced the great

miracle of the splitting of the Red Sea and the complete destruction of the Egyptian army? That event had a profound effect on the Jews who "saw the Egyptians dead on the beach and believed in Hashem and His servant, Moses." If the people had achieved Emunah in Hashem and Moshe why was there a need for the Revelation at Sinai whose stated objective had, seemingly, already been achieved?

It would appear that the type of faith attained by the Jews as a result of Kriat Yam Suf (splitting of the Red Sea) was not deemed sufficient to serve as the basis for our obedience to Hashem. That kind of faith was not based on sober, rational thought and analysis. It was, rather, a natural emotional response to experiencing a miraculous deliverance from the jaws of one's enemy. The impact of such an event is profound and produces a powerful sense of belief and gratitude. However, it is not the appropriate basis for religious commitment. Emotional experiences can generate powerful feelings but they tend to have a short "shelf life." It doesn't take long for other experiences to produce contrary emotions which can neutralize one's faith. Hashem wanted the Jews to know that He exists and that His authentic revelation can be found in the Torah of Moshe. He therefore gathered them together to personally witness as He addressed them from Heaven and singled out Moshe as His special

emissary. Hashem, thereby, relieved the Jews of the need to believe. Moshe exhorted them to use their minds, by remembering the great event which they had witnessed with their own eyes. They were not asked to have faith but were "Shown to Know" that Hashem is the true G-d. Judaism is thus the only religion that is founded on knowledge and appeals to people to study the relevant historical phenomena in order to arrive at the conviction that "Moshe is true and his Torah is true."

We can now understand why it is necessary for the verse to say, "He is our G-d, there is no other." Faith, based on emotion is not completely satisfactory to the mind. Thus, while people believe, they also harbor doubts, are not completely secure and, therefore, search for other deities, miracle workers, lucky charms, etc. Emunah rooted in absolute conviction in Hashem leads to a way of life based on "Be wholehearted with the L-d your G-d." Our exclusive service of Hashem is sufficient to provide for all our needs. We are free of all superstition and belief in imaginary deities which can be of no help. "He is our G-d there is no other" is a message every Jew must take to heart as we complete the observance of another Tisha B'av. This could be the beginning of redemption, may it occur speedily and in our time.

Shabbat Shalom ■

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