

CALLING OFFICIALS IS HELPING OPPOSITION TO THE IRAN DEAL

JewishTimes

VOL. XIV NO. 10 — AUG. 21, 2015

**100s OF BILLIONS
TO IRAN MUST BE
STOPPED, BY YOU:**

CALL SENATORS/CONGRESS

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**OVER 1000
RABBIS SAY
KILL THE
DEAL**

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MUST DO TO
HELP KILL THE
IRAN DEAL**



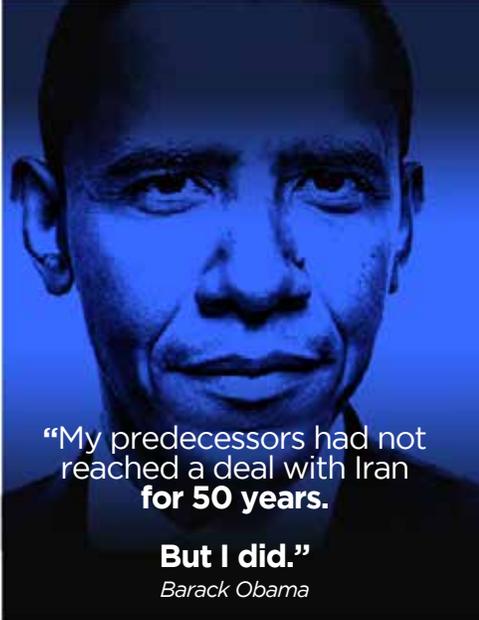
CALLS TO ACTION INSIDE. PLEASE ACT...



(Aug. 18, 2015 — Prime Minister Netanyahu)

"The ruler of Iran, Khamenei, said yesterday, **"We will take all measures to support all those who fight against Israel."** Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif said in Beirut a few days ago, at a meeting with the head of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, and I quote, **"The nuclear agreement has created an historic opportunity to stand against the Zionist entity."** What we have said all along is being seen as correct and accurate. The money that will flow to Iran in the wake of the nuclear agreement will serve it to strengthen the terrorist organizations operating against us, in its name and under its auspices, in the avowed goal to destroy Israel. I am here today at IDF Northern Command, along with the Defense Minister, Chief-of-Staff, GOC Northern Command and field commanders to closely observe the IDF's readiness against these threats. I was positively impressed both by the IDF's preparedness and by the determination of its commanders and soldiers. The IDF is strong. The State of Israel is strong. We are ready for any eventuality. Those who try to attack us - we will strike at them."

Our moral obligation is to kill the Iran Deal.

 <p>"My predecessors had not reached a deal with Iran for 50 years. But I did." <i>Barack Obama</i></p>	 <p>"Poor inspections, 100s of billion of dollars handed to Iran, and lifted sanctions...Iran's terror will live on for 50 years. But I won't." <i>Killed by Iran-sponsored terror</i></p>
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Aug 21

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CALL TO ACTION

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LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Shoftim: Asking the dead to pray for us?

Opinion: I believe Torah endorses asking the dead to bring our prayers to God. They are on the "other side" and can have more influence than us here. (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

Rabbi: Your suggestion that the dead “on the other side” have more influence over God, has no basis in Torah. We must be careful not to believe or repeat notions, unless they are based in Torah.

Rambam writes in his introduction to the chapter of Chelek (Tal. Sanhedrin chap. 10):

“The fifth principle of the 13 Fundamentals of our belief is that He, blessed be He, is the One fitting to serve and to make great and to make known His greatness, and to perform His commandments. And that we should not act this way towards anything which is below Him in existence, be they the angels, the stars or the planets, or the elements, or anything which is derived from them. And also it is not fitting to worship them in order that they should be intermediaries to come close to God. Rather, to God alone we should intend our thoughts and abandon everything else aside from Him. And this is the fifth principle that we are warned on, namely idolatry, and most of the Torah warns against this.”

Rambam could not be more clear, “...it is not fitting to worship them [creation] in order that they should be intermediaries to come close to God,” and also, “we should abandon everything else aside from Him.” No intelligent person needs anything else except for God. God created the universe, and therefore, He alone controls it. He created mankind, and He knows how to hear us and respond to us. There is no need, or ability in anything other than God, to hear and respond to our prayers.

Additionally, no source exists endorsing man to ask the dead to bring our prayers to God. So what does the Gemara in Taanis mean, that we go to the graves on Tisha B’Av so “the dead seek mercy on us?” This Gemara does not say “we ask them to seek mercy.” It says, “so the dead seek mercy on us.” This means when we visit the graves on Tisha B’Av and reflect on their perfected Torah lives, this helps us do teshuvah, repentance. We are inspired by them. The Rabbis wrote metaphors (mashal, medrash) and Rambam and his son and many others explained we must not view such stories as literal. “The the dead seek mercy on us” means the same thing as “Rachel coming out of her grave and seeking mercy.” She is not coming alive on her grave...no one ever saw her do this! Again, there is an idea here, medrash is not literal, as Rambam and others taught. Rachel coming out of her grave and seeking mercy for us, means when people pass by her grave, we reflect on her perfection, and this inspires us to do teshuva. So too the gemara in Taanis. We go to the graves to remind us of their righteous lives.... “as if” they were having an effect through prayer. But as they

are dead, we must not talk to them as Rambam explains. So it’s a mashal.

Think about this: if we do teshuva, God forgives us. If we do not do teshuva, God punishes us. So the fact that God forgives must come from “ourselves” and it’s not due to what another person does. If I keep sinning, Rachel’s prayers will not help me. This is what God says in the Torah (Deut. 24:16): “Fathers are not killed for their sons’ sins, and sons are not killed for their fathers’ sins; each man in his own sin is killed.” Therefore, it is against Torah – and common sense – to suggest the prayers of the dead obtain forgiveness before God. For if we did not stop sinning, their prayers cannot override God’s system of Reward and Punishment. However, we do recognize that Moses’ prayers were effective to halt God’s intended punishment of the Jews for their sins. How does this work? It was through Moses’ attainment of a higher level through his prayer to God, that the punishment was no longer necessary. Moses raised himself to a level where he could correct the nation, thereby obviating the need for God’s punishment. Similarly, had there been 10 righteous inhabitants of Sodom, they could have helped those wicked people return to God.

Thinking about the righteous lives of the dead tzaddikim, we are inspired towards teshuva. This is how visiting their graves improves us. But if we don’t stop sinning, we will receive punishment as God says. In all of Tanach we do not have any case where God endorsed the practice of asking the dead to bring our requests to God. God actually tells us not to inquire of the dead (Deut. 18:11). And although this is interpreted by the Rabbis as starving one’s self and going to the cemetery, or talking to bones, the plain explanation of the verse must be true too, and this prohibits an intended dialogue with the dead.

Rambam knew all Talmudic sources, and yet he said, “*Rather, to God alone we should intend our thoughts and abandon everything else aside from Him.*”

Now, there are a few Rabbis who argue with Rambam. However, as two opposite views cannot both be correct, how do we decide who is correct? I urge you to recognize that the most authoritative opinion, is God’s words. And I repeat, Torah does not endorse talking to the dead or the concept of an intermediary. In fact, Torah prohibits inquiring of the dead; it presents patriarchs, matriarchs, prophets and Rabbis who prayed to God alone.

Let us follow God’s words, when they conflict with the words of humans, who are not infallible...even if they are called “Rabbi.” ■



There are few moments in our lives when we can fundamentally improve world Jewry. One such moment is **now**.

These Senators are still undecided. We all must contact them **now**. Contact each Senator below and urge them to reject the Iran Deal:

Senator Michael Bennet (Colorado)
(202) 224-5852 or (303) 455-7600

Senator Ed Markey (Massachusetts)
(202) 224-2742 or (617) 565-8519

Senator Cory Booker (New Jersey)
(202) 224-3224 or (973) 639-8700

Senator Barbara Mikulski (Maryland)
(202) 224-4654 or (410) 962-4510

Senator Maria Cantwell (Washington)
(202) 224-3441 or (206) 220-6400

Senator Patty Murray (Washington)
(202) 224-2621 or (206) 553-5545

Senator Ben Cardin (Maryland)
(202) 224-4524 or (202) 224-1651

Senator Gary Peters (Michigan)
(202) 224-6221 or (313) 226-6020

Senator Bob Casey, Jr. (Pennsylvania)
(202) 224-6324 or (215) 405-9660

Senator Debbie Stabenow (Michigan)
(202) 224-4822 or (313) 961-4330

Senator Chris Coons (Delaware)
(202) 224-5042 or (302) 736-5601

Senator Jon Tester (Montana)
(202) 224-2644 or (406) 586-4450

Senator Joe Donnelly (Indiana)
(202) 224-4814 or (812) 425-5862

Senator Mark Warner (Virginia)
(202) 224-2023 or (804) 775-2314

Senator Heidi Heitkamp (N. Dakota)
(202) 224-2043 or (701) 258-4648

Senator Sheldon Whitehouse (R.I.)
(202) 224-2921 or (401) 453-5294

Senator Mazie Hirono (Hawaii)
(202) 224-6361 or (808) 522-8970

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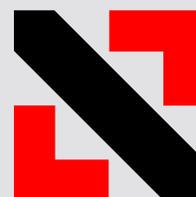
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1000+ Rabbis Against the Iran Deal

As of 8/23/15 9:02 PM



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<http://bit.ly/IJlBMn7>

Additional activism includes many Rabbis signing this letter:

“ We, the following Rabbis, are unequivocal in our rejection of the Iran Deal. As recently as today, Aug. 20, mass media reported Iran will not allow access of international inspectors at their nuclear facilities. Rather, Iran will conduct its own inspections. A terrorist regime who for years denied such facilities, is to now be trusted? This renders obsolete Pres. Obama's calming words “The deal is based not on trust, but on inspections.” Unbiased inspection is the core of the Deal, making the deal 100% ineffective. Compound this with releasing 100s of billions of dollars to Iran, and Israel's worries are justified; she is the target of Iran's venomous missiles and Iran-financed terrorists' arms caches stockpiled for the Jewish state's annihilation. In other words, we're giving money to Iran so they can murder Americans and Israelis. This is their declared charter.

The proper course of action is not to release sanctions with nothing in return, but to increase sanctions until Iran has no choice but to concede to a complete abandonment of nuclear weapons, a halt to the finance of terror groups, a halt to their own terror, dismantling of all centrifuges, and 100% transparent anytime-anywhere inspections. Only once these terms are met, will any release of sanctions be considered.

”

Rabbi Israel Chait

Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshiva B'nei Torah

Rabbi Asher Schechter

Rabbi Reuven Mann

Rabbi Torat Emes, Phoenix, AZ

Rabbi Marc Feder

Rebbi Rambam Mesivta

Rabbi Moshe Abarbanel

Rabbi Ilan Schimmel

Rabbi Chaim Weiss

Rabbi Mark Roth

Rabbi Elie Feder

Rabbi Joshua Maroof

United Mashadi Jewish Comm. of America

Rabbi Joseph Weiss

Rabbi Eric Zimmer

Rabbi David Markowitz

Rabbi Yonatan Sacks

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Founder, Mesora.org / USAIsrael.org

Rabbi Pinchas Rosenthal

Senior Dir. Manhattan Jewish Experience

Rabbi Robert Kaplan

Dir. Judaic Studies, David Posnack Jewish Day

OPEN LETTER — August 21, 2015

Dear Community Leaders:

Surah Leah Markowitz

My family and my community are quite concerned about the proposed Iran Deal; we are concerned for the safety of our family and our country as well as the safety of our brothers in Israel.

What concerns us more is the deafening sounds of silence and apathy we are witnessing in our community. Where are the Community Leaders? Where are our elected politicians? Our Spiritual Leaders? Our organizations? Where are the banners? The signs? The protests? And the Town Hall Meetings? This is a bill that can seal the deal and spell the fate of American/Israeli relations forever, forever being just 15 years away! The deal will tie America's hands behind their back should Israel need to defend itself against Iran. The deal will put a gun to the head of America in perpetuity and beyond. The deal will put \$150 billion into the hands of Iran. And when Iran creeps out and sneaks out and breaches its terms, in small or large ways, what will we do then? Iran will say, "Oops, my bad" and will promise to behave next time? We have already seen Iran misstep and nothing has been done more than a slap on the wrist. Will America really put its signature on this bill despite its imperfections and flaws? Have we grown that weak and that complacent? Will our administration be allowed to do so without even a peep from the Jewish people?

You and I did not live during the 1930's and 1940's but we are still feeling the affects and we are still defending our people, both as Americans and as Jews, and swearing "Never Will We Forget!" Have we FORGOTTEN? How are we sitting IDLY by? Where are our leaders? Where are our Rabbis? Where are our people? Where are the SPAM emails and mass phone calls to our community members that we should be calling our representatives on a daily basis to INSIST they vote against the bill? AM I MISSING SOMETHING? If I sound angry, I am not...I AM SCARED!!

Last week, my daughter and her 2 young children decided to take action. She and her children went to Cedarhurst to hand out flyers in an effort to call attention to the IRAN bill and urged citizens to contact Sen. Schumer to Vote NO to the bill.

When asked what the bill was about, six-year old Yitzy began to explain that Iran was building a bomb, and nine-year old Chani

finished by explaining that the US was giving a lot of \$\$ to Iran and in 10 years they will be able to build a bomb. Pretty scary to most...many had not been familiar with the issue at all. Others didn't know how they can help and felt helpless!

Perhaps most poignant and symbolic was when Chani handed out the flyer with "LEST WE FORGET" inscribed to an older woman in a wheel chair. The woman thanked her profusely, and added: "This means a lot to me" and with that, she rolled up her sleeve and showed them her #s from the camps. That speaks volumes. But how will her voice be heard?

When Yitzi heard the next night that Schumer came out against the bill, little Yitzi jumped up and down and loudly shouted, "SO THEY WON'T BOMB US NOW?" His relief was palpable, though you and I know he is WRONG! They will bomb us and they will do it with our money, with our funds and with our APPROVAL!

Dear Rabbis, what can we do? Please take a moment to guide me and my family and our community at large. Please urge everyone to contact their Representatives and to post on their facebook account a message to voice their concern. Post messages on their representatives' facebook accounts! Please urge our local representatives to hold town hall meetings and urge us all to attend! Let us not sit idly by lest, G-d forbid, we forget! Please let people know that:

Congressman Gregory W. Meeks, the U.S. Representative for Far Rockaway and Inwood (D-5th District), is undecided on whether he will oppose the Iran Deal. Here is a link to Congressman Meek's press release: <http://1.usa.gov/IUF5iwi>

Call Congressman Meeks to thank him for his service to the 5th District, to voice your concerns about the deal and to urge him to oppose the Iran Deal!

Washington, DC Office - (202) 225-3461
Far Rockaway - (347) 230-4032
Jamaica's District Office - (718) 725-6000

Respectfully yours,

Surah Leah Markowitz, Far Rockaway, NY

METAPHOR

God Prays?

THE RABBIS' RIDDLES

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

God has no needs, nor can any other being control His creation. So, what is prayer, that God might engage it in some conceivable manner? Also problematic is Rav Yishmael “seeing” God, “sitting on His throne.”



An intriguing Talmudic section, to say the least (Brachos 7a):

Rabbi Yochanan in the name of Rabbi Yossi ben Zimra said, “From where do we learn that God prays? It is stated, ‘I will bring them to My holy mountain and I will gladden them in the house of My prayers (Isaiah 56:7).’” “Their prayers” is not stated but rather “My prayers.” From here we learn that God prays.

However, [for] what does God pray? Mar Zutra ben Tuvia and Rav said [God prays as follows]: “It should be My will before Me that My mercy extinguishes My anger, and that My mercy overcomes My [other] traits, and that I behave merciful with My children, and that I judge them favorably over and above the law.”

[The Talmud continues on this topic...]

It was learned: I, Rav Yishmael ben Elisba, once entered the innermost chamber to offer incense, and I saw Akatriel Yab, God Master of Legions, as he was sitting on His throne, great and high. And [God] said to me, “Yishmael My son, bless Me.” I said to Him, “It should be Your will before You that Your mercy extinguishes Your anger, and that Your mercy overcomes Your [other] traits, and that You behave merciful with Your children, and that You judge them favorably over and above the law.” And God nodded His head [agreeing]. This teaches us that a blessing of a typical person should not be taken lightly.

We are startled by the suggestion of God “praying,” since God has no needs, nor can any other being control His creation. So,

what is prayer, that God might engage it in some conceivable manner? Also problematic is Rav Yishmael “seeing” God, “sitting on His throne.” First of all, incense smoke blinds our vision. Also, our metaphysical God is invisible, bodiless, and cannot sit! And where did this incense offering take place...and what is this chamber, if the Temple is not in existence? Finally, why is God called Akatriel?

This Talmudic lesson teaches that prayer is not merely the act of “requesting our needs”, which is inapplicable to God. The Hebrew word for prayer, “tefila” has the root “pilale”, meaning to assess. Tefila, or prayer, then, refers to the act of assessing ourselves, and our needs. This is followed by our presentation to God of our assessed needs. Personal requests typically take on the focus of prayer, for this is what we gravitate towards, as we have many needs. But we see from here that prayer is defined first, by self-evaluation. Of course, God need not assess anything; He possesses perfect and complete knowledge and foreknowledge. Applied to God’s relationship to mankind (as God was praying about man), self-assessment refers to God’s assessment of what is best for man. In other words, in this metaphor, God expresses His will for His creations: although man angers God, God desires to express mercy, which will allow man’s continued existence. God created man so we might always exist, not perish due to our sins.

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

Additionally, prayer connotes that a change is sought. This applies to God, who, by rights as Creator, may punish those who sin. Thus, God praying indicates God's desire to change from His strict justice, to mercy. To be clear, God praying is impossible. This metaphor means that just as when man prays, he seeks what will better him most, God too seeks what will better man the most. And this is His mercy.

We learn that prayer refers not exclusively to requests, but to evaluation. Thus, God "evaluated" His optimum behavior towards man. This was decided to be mercy. Why this trait? Because as Creator, God wishes His creations to exist..that is why He made them all. And as man corrupts his ways, mercy is required to allow his continued existence. Thus, prayer refers to the evaluation, as it were, for God's optimal behavior that will sustain what He created.

Rav Yishmael could not enter the Holy of Holies, certainly as this was long after the Temple's destruction. How then do we understand this metaphor of him offering the incense in the Holy of Holies? Rav Yishmael was not describing a literal incense offering, but what is akin to incense, and that is prayer. "Prayers were instituted in place of sacrifices[1]". Rav Yishmael's metaphor imparts a number of valuable lessons.

First, we learn that when one prays, he establishes a close relationship with God...as if standing in God's presence in the Temple offering incense. Maimonides too says that in prayer, one should view himself "as his heart is turned to heaven, as if he is standing in heaven[2]." This means that one must appreciate that our prayers are heard; nothing intervenes, as if we are standing before God. People seeking intermediaries must take this message to heart. We need only focus on our prayers, and God hears us fine. Written notes placed in the Wall or in Rabbis' graves, or praying at graves, and other superstitious practices are Torah violations, which cannot help God hear us better.

Rav Yishmael then describes God on His throne. Throne refers to sitting in judgement. Rav Yishmael is concerned that man receives a good judgement, from He who

sits in judgement. The highest prayer is when man mimics God, i.e., when man acts as perfect as God, Who prayed to show mercy to man. Rav Yishmael was able to recognize the most prized prayer, that being concern for mankind's continued existence. His prayer was not about himself, but about humanity. The man in the highest level emulates God; his values are identical with God's values. Thus, Rav Yishmael's prayer was identical to God's prayer. God's head-nod means He complies with Rav Yishmael; He will be merciful, since God desires this Himself, as seen from the first part of this Talmudic section.

I wonder if the name Akatriel means "I crown God", as in Rav Yishmael "crowning God" through praying to Him alone as the one who can bestow mercy on man. When we accept God alone, we effectively render Him the King. Our acceptance of His exclusive rule over the universe and man is an act of crowning God.

Why did God ask Rav Yishmael to bless him? This means God desires that man studies God, through His creation and His treatment of man. "Blessing God" means man can praise God's goodness after we study Him and His mercy towards mankind. This is God's primary request of man, that we strive to engage our intellects to study Him and come to appreciate and love God, expressed by praising Him.

Finally, the concept that we should not view lightly the blessing of any person means that man can possess certain accurate knowledge concerning God, expressed by God nodding to Rav Yishmael. It then follows that man can possess an accurate view of another person. So when a person blesses someone, he might very well be relating an accurate assessment, worth our while to investigate. ■

[1] Tal. Brachos 26b

[2] Hilchos Tefila 4:4



Iran denied the existence of nuclear facilities.
The Iran Deal will allow Iran alone to inspect
those facilities, and report to the US?

NO



Our numbers can sway Congress.
Call Undecided Senators below. Say “NO.”

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PARSHA

The Quest for Security

SHOFTIM

Rabbi Dr. Darrell Ginsberg

Many Jews today still cannot turn to God and place their security in Him. They seek out charlatans, at times claiming to be authentic representatives of Judaism.



Chamsa: Pop-culture idolatrous amulet thought to bestow *mazal*, "luck."

Quite often, we think of idolatry in its most extreme forms—bowing to idols or deifying a human being. While we are all acutely aware of the seriousness of the prohibition and while the Torah contains more warnings about idolatry than any other prohibition, we often neglect to consider the more subtle but no less nefarious ways in which idolatry may be practiced. If we are not vigilant, it is very easy to fall into the trap of participating in seemingly harmless actions that are, in actuality, idolatrous in nature. A perfect example can be found in the weekly Torah portion of Shoftim.

The Torah warns us to avoid the idolatrous ways of non-Jews in a sequence of verses listing such activities as seeking out the assistance of sorcerers, enchanters and necromancers. All of these, among others, are considered to be heinous sins. Ultimately, the Torah tells us (Devarim 18:13):

“Thou shalt be whole-hearted (tamim) with the LORD thy God.”

Many of the great commentators offer similar explanations of this directive. The Ramban explains that a person should believe that God alone is responsible for everything, and only He knows the truth of the future. Therefore, we can only seek out knowledge of the future from Him, via his prophets, and we must avoid people who would practice these sins. The Sforno echoes the Ramban. The Rashbam notes

that one should only seek out God and not the dead. The common thread is God’s admonition that we avoid all methods of seeking out knowledge of the future from anyone other than God.

When we turn to the Midrashim, we see a different emphasis. The Midrash speaks of a debate concerning tamim (Midrash Tanaim 18:13). The opinion of Rav Eliezer Hakefar is that one should not seek out (meharher) the ways of God. A person, when studying the world around him, should limit himself only to the created world, avoiding any investigation to that which occurred prior to the moment of creation. Rav Eliezer ben Yaakov disagrees, explaining that a person should avoid searching into yesurim, punishments from the Divine. The underlying message shared by these two opinions is the avoidance of pursuing knowledge of God and His ways.

On the surface, there appears to be two very different approaches to understanding the concept of tamim. Through the lens of the commentators, we are urged to abandon all other avenues and turn to God. Yet we are warned by the Midrash to forsake any attempt to understand Him. Can we reconcile these two divergent viewpoints?

A possible answer lies in first understanding a primal drive man possesses to seek out answers from someone like a

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sorcerer or enchanter. We are a species defined by insecurity. The fact that we live in a state of uncertainty, where knowledge of the world is limited and the power to control it an illusion, would seemingly justify this sense of insecurity. The commentators focus on knowledge of the future, and with good reason. Why are we so intent on knowing what lies ahead for us? We seek out those answers to help assuage this insecurity. The knowledge we gain creates a temporary satisfaction and a sense of control, albeit fleeting. Ultimately, man will continue to be frustrated by the inherent constraint that exists in his very being – his limited knowledge. Until he can come to grips with this reality, and become secure in his very being, he will search for ways to fill the void.

Why do we not immediately turn to God for help? It is clear that placing one's security in God is the ideal pathway for man to take. However, God is distant, qualitatively removed from us. He is not accessible in any normative manner. By definition, He cannot be understood. If one is pursuing knowledge to help alleviate insecurity, seeking out God would appear to be a non-starter. Recognizing this, God instructs us to speak with His prophets. He understands that the emotions brought about by insecurity are very difficult emotion to overcome. The prophet, rather than simply telling the seeker the future, teaches the individual important ideas from God. The objective is to use the knowledge received from God to help the individual begin to overcome the insecurity. Unfortunately, as we are being guided so strongly by this primal need, the answers of prophets at times are not satisfying. We turn to fortune tellers and other false, man-made guides, as they use a combination of seemingly miraculous actions combined with saying just the right thing to cater to the seeker's emotional state. They become "intermediaries" from God, a way for us to get the answers we crave from sources that are false. Since the answers so often fill the void of insecurity, a sense of momentary satisfaction emerges. Tragically, this entire approach is idolatrous, sacrificing the correct path for the quick fix of security.

The Midrash, though, has a different



Thinking they can improve their fate through a Rebbe's blessings, Jews reject God's Torah system of Reward and Punishment. In fact, such practices earn a person God's disapproval. Torah teaches we must repent if we wish God's help. Until we improve our character, we will not earn God's favor, but His wrath. No other practice helps; man's "blessings" cannot override God.

focus, demonstrated by the use of "meaharer". Rather than seek out knowledge for its own sake, the person is "merhaher". He is searching for answers to alleviate his gnawing insecurity. We study the physical world surrounding us through the prism of science, discovering more and more about this universe we live in. As we gain information and understanding, it is quite easy to assume we are truly comprehending God's act of Creation. We feel we can relate to God's intentions and grasp His "motives". The drive for knowledge, motivated by the need to gain security, leads to an inherent overestimation of man's abilities, and neglects the inherent limitations in comprehension that exist. This would appear to be the opinion of Rav Eliezer Hakefar. The other area of knowledge where man thinks he can gain insights into is God's interaction with man, expressed through Divine punishment. Should a person investigate his own actions when receiving such a punishment? Absolutely. However, a person should not turn his attention to seeking out God's intentions. Such a desire is fueled by a nagging belief that man must be able to understand everything.

Both the commentators and the opinions cited in the Midrash are dealing with man's seeking knowledge purely for the sake of providing security. We must be vigilant and aware of the misguided sense that since we have minds, we are capable of mastering knowledge, or comprehending God. Sadly, there are countless indications that we have not heeded the warnings of the Torah. Many Jews today still cannot turn to God and place their security in Him. They seek out charlatans, at times claiming to be authentic representatives of Judaism. Unfortunately, the information received is nothing more than deceit and manipulation. There are other Jews who are incapable of admitting the frailty of their own intelligence. They claim to study God, guided by the assumption that His ways can fall under the domain of man's intellectual capabilities. No doubt, the feeling of insecurity is a dominant one, forcing us to be honest with who we truly are. However, while indeed this is a challenge, abandoning it for the sake of the easy answer and a false sense of security, is to reject some of the most fundamental ideas about God. ■

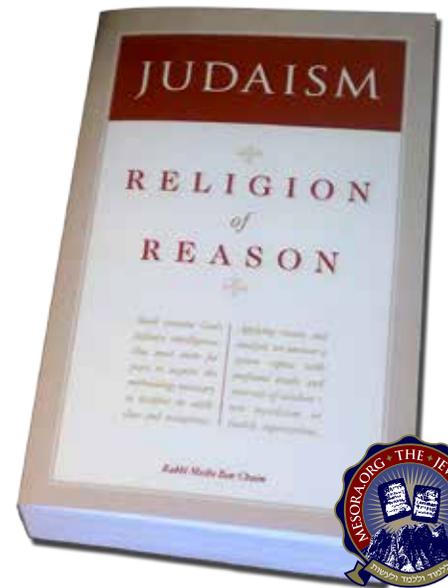
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Justice, Justice.

SHOFTIM

Rabbi Reuven Mann



This week's parsha, Shoftim (judges), focuses on the judicial system that the Jews were commanded to establish in Eretz Israel. Every society must have a court system to enforce its ordinances. A civilization based on justice for all its citizens requires two things. First, the legislation must be wise and righteous. However, developing a body of the most equitable and intelligent legal imperatives is not enough.

Equally important is that the statutes be implemented fairly and consistently. This is not as easy as it sounds. To achieve the proper level of enforcement, expert judges are required. These arbiters are the cog around which the entire system revolves.

First and foremost, judges must have the deep wisdom and knowledge necessary to interpret the law and apply it to the situation at hand. This is perhaps the most challenging task for the shofeit (judge).

The Torah says, "Justice, justice shalt thou pursue." It is tempting to ask, why did the Torah repeat the word "justice" in this injunction? It is known that every word in the Torah has a unique meaning.

In my opinion, Hashem knows that humans have a certain resistance to the ideal of absolute justice. Not everyone is capable of or inclined to make the prodigious intellectual efforts necessary to master all the intricacies of the halachic system of Jewish law. Pure genius is not enough! Every one of our great scholars, from Rashi to Rambam to the Vilna Gaon and Rabbi Soloveitchik, to name only a few, were people who spent virtually every waking moment immersed in Torah study.

Our history is illuminated by countless other great Torah scholars on the level of the chachamim (wise men) mentioned above. No other nation comes close to our historical record of producing great thinkers and sages, in fulfillment of Hashem's promise to Avraham, "Your children will be like the stars of the heavens."

Thus, the first requirement of being a worthy judge is to make oneself a true talmid chacham. This is the meaning of the first "justice" that we are commanded to pursue. However, the most profound knowledge of the entire system of halachah is not enough to achieve the goal.

Every judge is a human being who has his own experiences, emotions, needs, desires, and moral sensibility. He is also a member of society and is subject to the "mood of the times" and the social pressure to rule in a certain way.

The Torah warns, "Do not pervert justice, do not 'recognize' faces, and do not take bribes...." A bribe need not be a monetary payment. Even the approval of a distinguished personality and the fear of his opprobrium is enough to interfere with the absolute objectivity required of a judge. The ability to be aware of all his personal biases and to put aside any agenda he may have is the second "justice" that he must pursue.

In my opinion, the Torah would frown upon the present system of choosing U.S. Supreme Court justices. They are political appointees whom the President designates, essentially because they support his social ideology. Their task is to interpret the Constitution in a manner that conforms to the predetermined policy outcome. This is not interpreting the Constitution, but manipulating it to conform to politicians' agendas.

Rabbis must be cognizant of the adjuration to pursue justice. Today, there is great pressure to modify the Torah in accordance with the morality of the times: a morality that condones abortion, gay marriage, and other behaviors that the Torah regards as abominations.

We must renew our conviction in the absolute truth of Torah and have the courage to defend its principles, regardless of their unpopularity in certain circles. Only thus can we find favor in the eyes of Hashem.

Shabbat shalom. ■

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