



TAROT CARDS, CHAMSAS, RABBIT'S FEET, & RED BENDELS.
All are idolatrous devices.

"THE TORAH FORBIDS ONLY THAT WHICH IS FALSE." Ibn Ezra:
Lev. 19:31

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Parashas Kedoshim

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"You must, every person, fear your mother and father. And my Shabbat you must observe. I am Hashem your G-d." (VaYikra 19:3)

We are obligated to honor and fear our parents. The mitzvah of honor requires that we care for our parents. We must assure that our parents have sustenance, clothing

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Kedusha

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by a student

A very central theme throughout Judaism is the concept of kedusha, sanctity. Although the term seems rather abstract as Torah Jews we are commanded to constantly strive to be kadosh, to be holy. In Leviticus chapter 19 verse 2, we are commanded to be kadosh because: "I the Lord your God am holy." Chazal teach us that kedusha means to be "poresh mey arayot", abstain from the sexual prohibitions. This implies that if not for this commandment, there would be no reason for one to live a moral life style. Throughout the generations, the greatest philosophical minds without the benefit of the Torah have come to the same conclusion, based upon their rational faculty. The best life is one of abstention from the physical pleasures. It would therefore seem that the Torah is redundant.

The Torah additionally instructs us to be holy because God is holy. This creates a dilemma based upon our aforesaid definition. If holy means merely to be "poresh mey arayot" what relevance does it have respecting God?

The concept of a poresh must have greater significance than simply abstaining. Pure abstention infers that the person is withholding something from himself. This would imply that the person really has the desire to do the prohibited action but he is just controlling himself. Such an idea would be nothing more than an



The Fortune Teller, Georges La Tour, 1635

Heathen practices of fortune telling - a major theme in this week's parsha

exercise of self-restraint and denial. The Torah's concept of a poresh is not so trite. The essence of a poresh is an individual who is poresh because it is a reflection of his true nature. His energies are no longer attracted to the areas of the arayot, to the physical, but flow naturally to the area of chachma, wisdom. Insofar as ones essence is truly that of a poresh, he partakes of the "tzelem elokim". The "Boreh Olam" by his very nature, is extraneous to, and not limited by, the physical. Thus, in order for one to be a poresh from the Torah perspective, requires great intellectual conviction, whereby all ones energies flow to the acquisition of knowledge.

There is a critical distinction between the Torah's concept of "prishah" and that of the

philosophers. The philosophers, although they advocated a lifestyle of "prishut", it was based upon their appreciation of human nature. They recognized that human nature has two components. Man has an instinctual nature and an intellectual nature. Based upon their investigation of human nature they concluded that man can only achieve true happiness, in the pursuits of his essential intellectual nature. They therefore preached a lifestyle of "prisha". However to the Torah Jew the concept of "prisha" has much greater significance. We are taught that if we lead a lifestyle of "prishus", then we can have a relationship with G-d. We strive to mold our nature to be essentially a Poresh, and attain "kedusha" in order that we can relate to Hashem. In Judaism there is a

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Kedusha

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by a student

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metaphysical dimension if one is a true Poresh. This metaphysical relationship with the creator is only possible when one is a poresh. If one succeeds in redirecting his energies so that they naturally flow to chachma, only then will he relate to the creator, the source of reality. If a person abstains from the physical because of fear of punishment than he is not truly a poresh. Such a person is still guided by the pleasure principle. The fear of punishment is merely a means to control the person from being punished, and thereby remain in a state of pleasure. He is abstaining from the physical prohibition only because he feels that indulging said physical desires would ultimately cause him greater physical pain. However a talmid chacham is naturally drawn towards the principles of the Torah. He is in a unique state, whereby his energies naturally flow to the metaphysical. Thus we can appreciate the Torah imperative to be kadosh because "ki kadosh ani Hashem Elokaychem". At such a high spiritual level a person can relate to God as his energies naturally flow to chachma.

Chazal agree with the philosophers, that the life of the ideational is the best life since they hold that "kol d'racheha darchay noam", all the ways of the Torah are pleasant. It would be absurd that Hashem would command man not to live life the best way. It is obvious that God desires man to achieve happiness by living life in line with his essential nature. However the Torah recognizes that by living a life of chachma one initiates a relationship with the creator. God, who is not physical and whose essence is mirrored in the world of the ideational, commands that man aspire to live a life based upon the intellectual dictates of the Torah not predicated on the physical. Only then is one able to approach God through chachma. Since God is not subject to

physical whims and passions so too man is directed to be kadosh because "ki ani Hashem Elokaychem kadosh". We are taught that Chazal did not fully partake of the pleasures of this world. This does not mean that they essentially sought an austere existence. They did not believe in repressing their desires simply because they felt there was a virtue in moral restrictions. This philosophy is characteristic of Catholicism which venerates the lifestyles of priests and nuns. Nor did they have an emotional repulsion to pleasure. Quite the contrary is true because we are taught "ei efshar bli basar chazer"; one should not refrain from eating pork because he doesn't like it. The proper attitude is for one to say that he really desires pork but that he is not having it to demonstrate his acceptance of the mitzvos. He struggles to elevate his behavior from purely the instinctual to the level of kedusha which is based upon man's true nature, his tzelem elokim. Maimonides in his Mishna Torah in his book on kedusha incorporates the laws of the forbidden foods and prohibited sexual relations. His point is evident. One can only attain kedusha by channeling his energies from the basic instinctual drives of man, the sexual and appetitive and directing them to the intellect. This does not mean denial of the physical but rather an appreciation of the life of a talmid chachom.

Chazal did enjoy the benefits that God offered in this world. We are told that Rabbi was very wealthy and there was nothing lacking from on his table. However, he did not direct his energies to the physical. He had the blessings of the physical world which he did not deny, but his energies were not drawn to the physical. He lived the life of a kadosh as evidenced by his appellation. His energies naturally flowed to chachma.

Whereas by Iyov, Chazal tell us that the reason Iyov lost his wealth was because he had an over attachment to materialism. He viewed it as an end in and of itself. However, after he realized that the physical was only a means to relate to Hashem, not an end, was he capable of regaining his riches. After

learning this lesson and redirecting his energies, he used his prosperity simply as a means in Avodas Hashem.

The Vilna Gaon explains the concept of "pas bemelach tochal", that one should subsist on bread and salt. This is not to be taken literally as espousing an austere existence. The Gaon explains that at the beginning of one's learning he must "pas b'melach tochal". This means that if one is to succeed as a talmid chocham, it demands total commitment. If one is fortunate to live a life of kedusha his energies must naturally flow toward chachmas hatorah.

Rashi teaches us that the parsha of Kedoshim is so basic that "kol goofay hatorah teluyin bah", all the basic principles of the Torah are summarized within it. This obviously can not be taken literally for most of the 613 commandments are not within the parsha of Kedoshim. Rashi is expressing the importance of the concept of kedusha. It is such a vital and essential concept to the Torah observant Jew, that adherence to its basic principles can lead one to perfection as a Ben Torah.

Therefore, the mitzvah of kedusha is an extremely valuable concept in Judaism. The imperative of kedoshim teheyoo must be appreciated in the proper perspective. We must be scrupulous in our pursuit of true kedusha. If one abstains from being a zolell vesorah, a glutton because of health reasons, he is not fulfilling the commandment. He is simply pursuing one desire in favor of another. His desire for longevity has displaced his appetitive desires. Such a person's energies are still rooted in the physical pleasures. True kedusha requires a painstaking process where one works to channel his energies to the learning of Torah and its teaching. Ultimately he can aspire to kedusha where his energies will naturally flow to chachma since the learning of Torah will give him the greatest pleasure. Thus, he will obtain true kedusha and be blessed with an appreciation of "ki kadosh ani Hashem Elokaychem" and be fortunate to have a metaphysical relationship with the creator. □

Witchcraft

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

In this week's parsha, Kedoshim, we read of the commands regarding Nichush and Onane; not to follow the heathen practices of setting signs, setting times as good or bad for our activities, or inquiring of fortune tellers and the like. An example of setting a sign would be if a person, whose food falls from his mouth says, "this is a sign that...". Another example is if a black cat crosses your path, and you therefore gauge your actions because of this event. Both are prohibited.

Why did the Torah group together setting signs and setting times? Also, why was fortune telling and speaking to spirits grouped together, and why were these given the additional command not to "inquire"?

The flaw in these activities is the regression to the infantile state of insecurity. In such a state, one seeks security from the external world, instead of engaging one's own mind to determine which activities he should do. (Our article on Idolatry goes into detail of the basic definitions.)

The Torah's way of life is where man uses his mind to arrive at conclusions. He engages the world, determines his needs, and plans the best route. However, what these aforementioned individuals do, is abandon thinking, and look at coincidental phenomena as if they are "willed", and happening as a message; "This cat crossed my path, that must be a sign". "If I wear a red bendel, I will be protected". How foolish they are, and how contrary to God's plan. God endowed us with intelligence to understand that He alone controls all.

When describing those who believed in demons (Lev. 17:7), Ibn Ezra says, "Fools see demons." Meaning they are not real, but phantasms. Ibn Ezra says further, "Anyone who seeks them and believes in them, estranges himself from his God. Can one think that there is anyone that can do good or do bad except for God, the Honored

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Parashas Kedoshim

RABBI BERNARD FOX

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and that their needs are met.[1] We must also fear our parents. The mitzvah to fear our parents obligates us to act towards them with awe. There are many expressions of this obligation. We may not sit in a parent's chair. We may not refer to our parents by their first names.[2]

The obligation of honoring our parents is fulfilled during their lifetimes. We only have the opportunity to provide for our parents during their lives.[3] The mitzvah of fearing our parents extends beyond their lifetimes. Even after our parents have passed away we must still behave with reverence. For example, we still may not refer to them by first names.[4]

This distinction is indicative of a basic difference between the mitzvot of respect for and fear of our parents. Respect is directed to our parents as individuals. As long as these individuals are with us, we can fulfill this command. The mitzvah of reverence for our parents as individuals. It continues to exist and guide our behavior even after the individuals are no longer with us. It is an obligation to behave with reverence towards parenthood. Our parents will not always be with us. Nonetheless, we must continue to display our appreciation for the role of the parent. This obligation demands that we continue to behave with an attitude of awe, long after our individual parents have departed.

“You must not eat on blood. You must not act on the basis of omens. And you must not act on the basis of auspicious times.” (VaYikra 19:26)

Parshat Kedoshim includes many prohibitions regarding occult practices and superstitions. We are not permitted to base decisions upon

omens or adopt behaviors associated with the occult.

Maimonides includes all of these prohibitions in the section of his code devoted to idolatry. He explains that superstitions and occult practices were used by the idolaters to deceive their followers. He further explains that it is incorrect to maintain that there is any value or wisdom to these practices. Superstition and occult ritual are foolish and of no benefit.[5]

It is readily understandable that belief in the occult is associated with idolatry. However we need to understand the relationship between superstition and idolatry.

Superstition is based upon human imagination and fantasy. It attempts to create order and security in an ever-changing world. The primitive seeks omens and other sources of protection. Superstition involves a flight from reality. Truth is too harsh. Fantasy provides solace.

The Torah requires that we approach life and the universe with wisdom. We must attempt to understand reality and find truth. This search, honestly conducted, inevitably results in an appreciation of the Creator and His Torah.

Superstition is therefore antithetical to the Torah perspective. Escape from reality results in an outlook that has no basis in truth. Any theology resulting from this fanciful and fantastic perspective is a projection of the individual's imagination upon reality.

Idolatry and superstition have identical roots. The idolater does not base religious beliefs upon wisdom and truth. Inspection is replaced by projection. The theology of the idolater is an expression of the imagination not tempered by serious thought. The connection is now clear. A person guided by superstition has succumbed to the very attitude that underlies idolatry.

“Before the elderly you should rise. And you should give respect to the wise. And you shall fear your G-d. I am Hashem.” (VaYikra 19:32)

We are required to respect the wise. This requirement dictates that we stand in the presence of a scholar. This law applies even to a

scholar that is not one's teacher. Maimonides explains in his Mishne Torah that this obligation is derived from our passage.[6]

There is an additional obligation that applies to one's teacher or rebbe. Maimonides also discusses this requirement in his Mishne Torah. He explains that one is obligated to respect and fear one's parents. Similarly, one is required to fear and honor one's teacher.[7]

These are two obligations of respect for scholars are separate requirements. The obligation to respect the wise differs from the obligation to respect and fear one's teacher. For example, we only rise for a wise person, when this individual enters into our immediate vicinity. Once the scholar passes our four cubits we may sit.[8] This is not the case when dealing with one's teacher. We must rise as soon as the teacher enters into our vision. We remain standing until the rebbe passes out of our field of vision. [9] In addition, there are various other expressions of respect required in dealing with one's teacher. We are not required to express these forms of respect towards other scholars.

It is clear that the level of respect and awe required towards one's rebbe is greater than the respect due a scholar. This is reasonable. One has personally benefited from the knowledge of one's teacher. It is understandable that a higher form of respect is required.

Maimonides makes an astonishing statement that seems to contradict this reasoning. He explains that the teacher can exempt the student from the obligations of respect and awe. Nonetheless, the student remains obligated in the forms of respect due a scholar.[10] Under no circumstances can the honor due a scholar be dismissed. It is odd that the more elaborate obligation due one's teacher can be ignored. But the lesser respect due a scholar can never be dismissed!

Maimonides provides an important insight into his reasoning. In beginning his discussion of the obligation to fear and respect one's teacher, Maimonides explains the reason for this requirement. He explains that the obligation to honor and fear one's teacher surpasses the

requirement to respect and fear one's parents. Parents bring us into this world. However, the teacher provides us with the opportunity to achieve everlasting life in Olam HaBah.

These comments suggest a basic difference between the obligation to honor the scholar and the requirement towards one's teacher. The obligation to honor the scholar is an expression of our appreciation of wisdom. Because we value wisdom and thought, we honor those who possess these invaluable assets. It follows that these individuals cannot forgo this honor. We are not honoring the individual scholar. We are showing our respect for the wisdom the scholar represents.

In contrast, Maimonides compares our obligation to our rebbe to the requirement to respect and fear our parents. This obligation is an expression of appreciation to the individual for the gift we have received. We are required to show a deep and pronounced appreciation. This consideration dictates the respect and awe due our teacher be expressed in many forms and emphatically. However, the obligation is fundamentally an obligation towards the individual who has provided us with wisdom. This means the rebbe can forgo this honor.[11] ■

[1] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Mamrim 6:3. [2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Mamrim 6:3. [3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Mamrim 6:3. [4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Mamrim 6:3. [5] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Avodat Kochavim 11:16. [6] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Talmud Torah 6:1. [7] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Talmud Torah 5:1. [8] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Talmud Torah 6:1. [9] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Talmud Torah 5:7. [10] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Talmud Torah 5:11. [11] See Rav Yizchak Zev Soloveitchik, Chiddushim on Mishne Torah, Hilchot Talmud Torah. ■

Witchcraft

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

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and Awesome?" Ibn Ezra clearly states that there are no powers, only God. Besides God, man is the only other influence over his life.

With minimal reasoning, these prohibited practices of imagined security can easily be shown as fallacious. Ask someone, "Is a cat knowledgeable? Does this stray recognize you? If it was a brown cat would you feel the same?" The answers to all these questions will be no, and the person should see his error. Again ask, "If the bendel was green, would it protect you? If it was half red and half blue? If you wore it on your head and not your wrist? If it was made of metal and not thread?" These questions will place the person in a position where he realizes he has no reasoning for his actions. It will then make sense to him to abandon such foolish practices. (See Tosephta Shabbos, Chap 7 for the prohibition against red bendels.)

To answer our initial questions, Nichush and Onane are attempts to establish a false sense security. One seeks assurance that his actions he will commence or abandon are the 'right' moves. Nichush and Onane are grouped together as the violator of these sins feels self sufficient to interpret events himself. However, fortune telling and speaking to spirits is a phenomena where one individual would seek counsel from another who feigned to be a mystical enchanter or warlock with "powers" or connection with spirits. This expression of idolatry is where the seeker needs another person to assist. He is more infantile in that he cannot determine matters independently. He needs the psychological comfort of another who will direct him. This is also why we are forbidden to inquire, as this act of inquiring is the expression of a need for another human figure.

Torah commands man to utilize his intellect to realize the fallacy of

these sins, and to live his life independently, abandoning the childhood need for security.

There are no powers, only God. This follows reason. God created everything. Nothing that can override His control of man's affairs. God also says that each man is punished for his sins, and rewarded for his good. This can only be true if man is free from all imagined "forces", and he alone is to blame when he sins. Reward and punishment are true fundamentals of Judaism. If one deserves God's punishment, wearing a red bendel, or following other superstitions prohibited in our Torah, cannot stand in the way of God's punishment. □



Does Idolatry WORK?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

If you were told that idolatry actually worked, would you believe the person? Let's say that the person was a Jew? Perhaps the person was even a Rabbi? This is exactly what the Talmud takes up in its discussion on page 55a of Avoda Zara.

There are two incidents regarding which, two different Jews asked Rabbis what their opinions were, as both incidents seemed to imply that idolatry was in fact effectuating change in the world:

Case 1:

"Zunin (a Jew) asked Rabbi Akiva, 'Both of our hearts know that there is no truth to idolatry, however, there was this cripple (dislocated joints acc. to Rashi) who entered into a church, and left in a recovered state.'

Rabbi Akiva responded: 'I'll give you an analogy, there was this trustworthy man by whom all residents of his town would deposit their goods without witnesses. There came a man who normally used witnesses, but didn't on one occasion. The trusted man's wife came and said, 'let's deny his goods, (as he has no witnesses to testify we received them). The trusted man responded to his wife, 'shall we throw away our

livelihood because of this one fool?' So also is the way with disease, they are to visit man for a certain time, and they are to leave at a certain day, at a certain hour, through a certain means, and by a certain medicine. Now, should they abandon their oath (their natural course) and remain because at this moment this fool entered into a church?'"

This case is the explained very simply by Rabbi Akiva as "coincidence". It just so happened that when the cripple left the church, his ailment was expiring at that very moment. Such coincidences do happen. God's perfect laws of nature therefore are not suspended in such circumstances to merely accommodate the fool and deter them from idolatry. Rather, nature continues to adhere to its laws as has been designed by God (adherence to their laws is euphemistically referred to as their "oath"). This teaches that God desires that man change himself to follow reality, and not the opposite, that God should change reality (nature) to follow man.

Case 2:

"Rava the son of Rabbi Isaac asked Rabbi Judah, There was a church in our town, and when the world needed rain, their god appeared in a dream and told them, 'kill a man, and I will cause the rain to come.' The people killed a man, and it rained.'

Rabbi Judah responded: 'Had I already died, you would not have learned what I did from Rav. He

taught, 'why does the Torah teach (Deut. 4:19) 'Lest you lift your eyes to the heavens and see the sun, moon and stars, all the hosts of heaven, and you turn aside and prostrate yourselves to them and worship them which God has smoothed them out for all nations under the entire heavens'. Rabbi Judah continued, 'This teaches that God made their ways smooth so as to remove them from the world.....'.

A few questions present themselves when we contrast these two cases. We must keep in mind that this section of Talmud is bringing two cases which are dealing with the same area, but each must have a unique, new insight not taught by the other:

1) Why didn't the first case answer this second question of Rava? Isn't this Case 2 also coincidence? 2) How do we define "coincidence"? 3) In case 2, did their god actually appear? 4) How would a wise man interpret the Case 2, had he lived in that town at that moment when it rained? Would he say that their god is real and actually caused rain? 5) What is the meaning of "God made their ways smooth so as to remove them from the world"? What type of justice is this of God? Do we not also ead that "God does not desire the death of the sinner, but rather, in his repentance"? 6) Who made their ways "smooth"? God? Was this teaching that God actively makes it "smooth" for a idolater to keep to his path? Or is it referring to another party?

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Does Idolatry WORK?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

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A distinction between the two cases must be made clear. The Talmud does not record two cases if they deal with the same phenomena. This section of Talmud is discussing the phenomena of "relation".

If we look at two extremes, we see that phenomena either are related to each other, or they are unrelated. There are no quantitative levels inbetween these two. Just as an object is either in motion or at rest, there is no partial motion. A falling leaf is in motion just as much as a fired bullet. Only in speed do they differ, but they equally partake of motion. In "relation" as well there are two poles, either something is or isn't related to something else.

The assumption of relation is precisely where these two Jews questioned.

Before we answer, let us define what is and what isn't "relating". When someone throws a rock which hits glass, and simultaneously the glass breaks, we say the rock caused the glass to break. There is a relationship. As long as we can trace a cause and effect to natural laws of physics, and an effect follows a cause based on the laws operating at hand (glass breaking is immediate, while poison may take years) we then say there is a relationship. If however one throws a rock at glass but the glass does not break until 20 years later, we do not say the rock caused the glass to break. The time lapse divorces the rock from attaining the status of cause.

Let's apply these rules to our cases: The first case is an example of what we call "coincidence". We define coincidence as "the simultaneous occurrence of two or more unrelated events." For example, if someone throws a ball and simultaneously a shooting star appears in the sky, we say this is coincidence that both occurred at the same moment, as they are not related by any natural laws. If however one throws a ball and sprains their arm, we do not call that coincidence, as the relationship is clear.

This is Case 1. There is no physical relationship between one entering a church, and one's body being healed. (We are barring psychological causes as

we are elucidating this Talmud strictly according to the text.) Here, man creates a relationship in his mind which is not in line with physical law.

If the second case were strictly coincidence, it would not have been recorded, as the Talmud is not redundant in its teachings. One may then ask, "Am I to say there is some relationship between killing a man and rain falling?" The answer is of course patently no. But it is also not a case of coincidence as the two events did not occur at the same moment. Here, two events happened in succession. Normally we would not assume a relationship between two events which happen, even close in time. However, the element of a "prediction" fools man into believing a relationship exists.

So there are two mistakes man makes when interpreting phenomena: Case 1) He either associates two unrelated events based on the fact that he witnesses them occurring at once. Case 2) Man assumes relationships exist if their is close proximity in time to one another. Man assumes a link between the two events due to an element of forecast. In both cases however, man has erred, and there is in fact no relationship.

When the Rabbis began elucidating this area, they understood well that idolatry is false. There is only One Force in the universe, the Creator of heaven and earth and all forces in them. However, the Rabbis, as always, analyze an area and present categorical findings. They saw two distinct categories when it came to explaining away assumed effects of idolatry.

But we may now ask why a fool believes this?

This is what I believe the words, "God has smoothed out" come to teach. God designed man's psyche in a way where he always has the ability to freely select intelligence as a way of life. God does not desire that man is "forced" into this selection. Say for example, man were always frustrated by his desires, i.e. he couldn't overeat due to immediate stomach pain, he couldn't oversleep due to sudden headaches, he couldn't have intercourse more than once a week due to illness, etc. In this scenario, man would not be abstaining from desires and lusts based on an analysis of fact, but from adverse reactions. Internally, he would still be craving these desires. This is the central point.

God desires that man select a path in

life based on intelligence, and without a choice, he is not selecting. If one cannot leave a lifestyle, he is not there by choice. He need not analyze the good of such a life, as he has no other option, so analysis is of no practical value. A true philosopher might analyze such an existence, but the Torah must be for all men, not just the rare philosophers.

Getting back to Case 2, the person did not create the relationship without external stimuli. Something besides himself contributed to the assumed relationship. In such a case, there is a choice;

1) The individual can believe what he sees on the surface, that is, he can follow what is "smooth" in his own eyes. God is not smoothing it out, but God designed man that this "smoothness" of explanation is available to mankind. Emotions have appeal, although they provide wrong conclusions, and false relationships.

2) He can follow wisdom. The wise man will see that someone had a dream - which was his own fantasy. There are no other gods. This wise man would try to stop them from killing an innocent man, as his mind tells him that there is no relationship between the murder and rain, regardless of the fact that it rained, wisdom dictates his thoughts and actions. The wise man knows idolatry is false, but the average man doesn't. Succession removes this case from the definition of coincidence, enough so, that onlookers will follow their fantasies for idolatry.

Someone had asked, "Why would God want to 'smooth out their ways to remove them from the world'? This seems to imply that God purposely made idolatry work so as to remove man from following Torah ideals."

God did not make the phenomena misleading and smooth, rather, He made man with the ability to project smooth and appealing interpretations. To "remove them from the world" is not God's goal, as we see from the quote, "God does not desire the death of the sinner, but rather, in his repentance". To "remove them from the world" refers to the numerous phenomenon of desires which appeal to man as "smooth", so as to act as the other choice for man. Without smooth, or attracting emotions, man has no choice. So God making them smooth to "remove them from the world" is semi-allegorical for "God made the purpose of the emotions (not

God's goal) attractive to man". God's goal is that man choose between what satisfies his emotions, and what is right according to his mind. This is the plan for mankind, that we have both emotional drives, and intellectual curiosity, (the yetzer hara, and yetzer hatove) and we must choose between them.

In summary, both cases are dismissed by the Rabbis, as they are examples of man drawing untrue relationships.

Man creates relationships in his mind, as this is where relationships truly exist. Relationships perceived accurately follow the laws of reality. A real relationship is one where there is perceivable, physical interaction. When there is no contact, can we say there is still a relationship? Our Talmud teaches that we cannot suggest so. These are the only two ways where man creates inaccurate relationships. I say "only", as the Talmud exhausts all the possibilities. In Case 1, the relationship is baseless, as a simultaneous occurrence does not suffice to create a relationship between two events. All that is similar between these two phenomena is their timing. But there is no physical contact. As is seen from the shooting star example, Case 1 deals with coincidence in time. This relationship is drawn between two real phenomena, but they in fact have nothing to do with each other.

In Case 2, man draws a relationship based not on simultaneity, but on successive events linked together in man's mind by the presence of a forecast which removes this second case from being categorized as coincidence.

One may also add that "dreams" are not considered "events" as they happen in one's mind, not in reality.

Therefore, there isn't even a second "event" to talk about. ■

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A Reader's Questions: Maimonides' Laws of Idolatry

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: I have several questions concerning (in one way or another) the Rambam's views on idolatry: 1) How is it possible that one transgresses this prohibition if he considers the possibility that "perhaps the Torah is not from Heaven" (as stated in 'Laws of Idolatry' 2:3)? Aren't we obligated to establish the principles of the Torah based on proof and intellectual investigation? And doesn't all intellectual investigation of the validity of a certain idea, by necessity, involve leaving that idea in doubt until it is verified? And if you say that prior to intellectual verification, we must not leave that idea in doubt, but rather, believe in it until we prove it -- isn't that considered faith? Basically: if one is to live his life by not fully accepting the beliefs of the Torah until he verifies them with his intellect, isn't it inevitable that he'll violate this transgression?

Mesora: You are quoting a law written by Maimonides' (Idolatry, 2:3) which says the following: "...And not idolatry alone is it that we are forbidden to turn afterwards in thought, but all thoughts which cause a man to uproot a fundamental of the Torah's fundamentals, we are warned not to entertain on our hearts, and remove our knowledge towards it, and consider, and be drawn after the imaginations of the heart..." Maimonides continues, "And if all men were drawn after the thoughts of their hearts, we would find the world would be destroyed, because of his (man's) weakness of knowledge."

"Imaginations of the heart" and "thoughts of the heart" are what Maimonides rightfully classifies under idolatrous prohibitions. He does not say we must not study rationally. Of course man must hold false notions until his rational studies eventuate in true knowledge, stripping him of erroneous opinions. This must happen to each member of mankind. There is no escaping this as you stated. But the prohibition here is to follow "imaginations", not rational study. Our minds were given for the very purpose of rational study. We must involve ourselves in analytical thinking as much as possible, this is Torah. What we must not do is follow idle speculation which, without Torah guidance towards truth, will lead us to believe the baseless, emotional inclinations of our hearts.

It is for this reason that Maimonides subsumes this prohibition under his Laws of Idolatry. Idolatry is the very result of man's subjective, emotional imaginations. Both idolatry and imagination are two points along the same path. Idolatry is just a few steps down that path, after man allows himself to sinfully entertain his fantasies as truths.

Maimonides also teaches us that not only are the formalized 'actions' of idolatry prohibited, but even the very thought processes leading to idolatry are equally prohibited, even though man's thoughts and fantasies can take on myriads of forms. Sometimes Jewish law prohibits a discreet form, like eating specific animal species for example. Those acts are prohibited, and eating other animals are not. But sometimes Jewish law prohibits not the action

for itself, but due to its inevitable result of philosophical corruption, as in our case. What is being averted in this case is the result of a philosophically crippled individual who denies fundamentals necessary for the appreciation of God and His Torah. Since there are many paths which lead to such corruption, and it is impossible to formally isolate and prohibit man's thought patterns, therefore, the category of "idle speculation" is prohibited, not specified thoughts.

Reader: The Rambam states (2:4) that "idolatry opposed all commands" If that is the case, I assume that by studying the practices of idolatry, we will gain a greater understanding of the primitive emotions which the Torah seeks to help us remove -- but how can we accomplish this if we are prohibited from looking at, or even thinking about the accessories and philosophy of idolatry?

Mesora: Rashi (Deut. 18:9) openly states that man should study the idolatrous practices to teach his son how harmful they are. Again, Maimonides says that the prohibition is for man to simply follow the thoughts or imaginations of his heart. But rational analytic study is obligatory, more than any other activity, "Study of Torah is equal to all other commands" (Mishnayos Payah, 1:1) And part of Torah study is the study of human psychology, including idolatrous tendencies and their roots of origin in man.

Reader: In 2:5, the Rambam (according to my understanding) says that we must treat all heretics like non-Jews. But how are we to know if a person is truly a heretic. Don't we also say that Jews who were raised with incorrect ideas are like a "an infant born to ignoramus" - and therefore not culpable? Does this mean that the Rambam himself would consider other Rishonim who didn't agree with his view of the "13 Fundamentals" as heretics (for example, the fact that the Rambam holds that the ultimate reward of the Future World is physical)? And furthermore, what practical implications does this have? For example, I attend a shul with many people who are new to Judaism, and as such, might not have sufficient knowledge of the Torah's Fundamentals -- does this mean, for example, that I shouldn't count them in a minyan, or that I shouldn't say amen to their blessings? That seems like an awfully severe judgment to make on innocent Jews with proper intentions, who merely lack information due to their limited exposure.

Mesora: Maimonides would not say that a difference of opinion about the future world - Olam Haba - makes Rambam a heretic. Only the denial of what Maimonides classified as "fundamentals" earns one a status as a heretic. But Rambam certainly agreed with the future world, he merely had a different conception of its parameters.

Regarding your estimation of others, we don't accuse anyone of being a heretic, or any other insulting label, if we are simply ignorant of their beliefs. Only once a heretical opinion is pronounced does the person attain that status of heretic.