

JewishTimes

VOL. XII NO. 10 — MARCH 15, 2013

DO YOU KNOW
WHY THESE

10

DEFINE
JUDAISM?

**MYSTICISM VS
MAIMONIDES**

Torah Rejects
a Mystical View

**BREAKING
BONES**

The Chinuch's
Primary Lesson

**SPIRITUAL
SELF RELIANCE**

Rabbi Mann
on the Parsha

**INTERMEDIARIES:
GOD'S REJECTION**

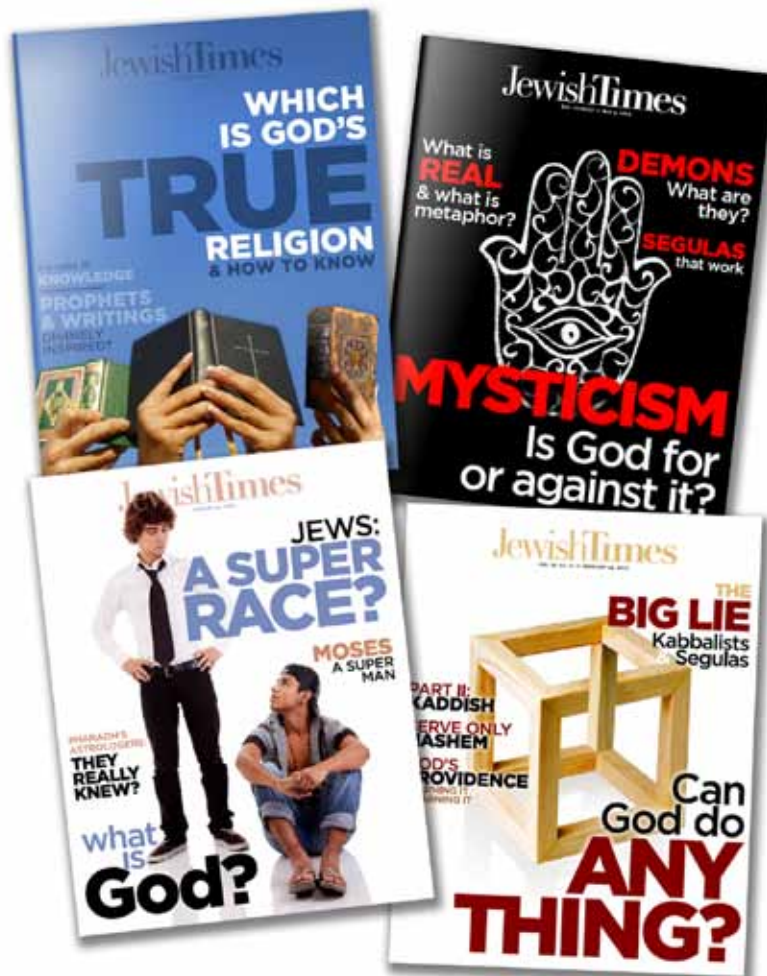
Lessons from the
Torah's verses

Why advertise with us? Up to

25,000 VIEWS

Reason #2: Low Rates

www.Mesora.org/Advertise
ad@Mesora.org (516)569-8888



JewishTimes

The weekly journal on Jewish thought

Since 2002, thought-provoking original
articles on Judaism, science, Israel and politics.



JewishTimes
Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought

The Jewsihtimes is published every Friday and delivered by email. Subscriptions are FREE. To subscribe, send any email message to: subscribe@mesora.org

Subscribers will also receive our advertisers' emails and our regular email announcements.

Contacts

We invite feedback at this address:
office@mesora.org
Ph(516)569-8888

Advertising

<https://www.Mesora.org/Advertising>

Donations

<https://www.Mesora.org/Donate>

Content at Mesora.org

Jewishtimes Archives

<http://www.Mesora.org/JewishTimes>

Philosophy Archives

<http://www.Mesora.org/Philosophy>

Weekly Parsha Archives

<http://www.Mesora.org/WeeklyParsha>

Audio Archives

<http://www.Mesora.org/Audio>

Interactive Classes

<http://www.Mesora.org/TalkLive>

Search

<http://www.Mesora.org/Search>

Articles may be reprinted without consent of the JewishTimes or the authors, provided the content is not altered, and credits are given.

C O N T E N T S



Mar. 15

3 Letters

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

- 1) What is the method for dealing with hardships? What is the Torah's view on why we receive them?
- 2) How does Torah respond to mysticism vs. the Miamonidean rational approach?

4 The 13 Principles

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Why have they been accepted as Judaism's core fundamentals?

10 Spiritual Self Reliance

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Rabbi Mann reviews the parsha's messages of sacrifice and teshuva.

11 Leaving Subjectivity Behind

RABBI DR. DARRELL GINSBERG

The Chinuch addresses the law of breaking the bone of the Paschal Lamb, but enlightens us to a primary message in our numerous commands.

13 Intermediaries

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

God just gave the Jews the 10 Commandments, including the prohibition of idolatry. Why then does He wait to give the prohibition of intermediaries, instead of including it in the general law against idolatry?

14 Authentic Learning

RABBI BERNIE FOX

Fundamentals in the Weekly Parsha.

LETTERS

Dealing with Misfortune

Reader: I received this email from a Torah website, but do not understand what they wrote:

"When someone is faced with tragedy and asks, 'Why did God do such a thing?' often the question is not a question at all, but an implied statement: 'God should not have done such a thing.' True questions are an admission of our own smallness, of our limitations in comprehension. Questions are not a lack of faith. But to think that the question is the answer, that is a lack of faith. The difference is whether we doubt ourselves (that is, our ability to comprehend everything) or if we doubt God."

Rabbi: The author means that "Why did God do such a thing?" is usually vocalized as a wrongful complaint against God's justice. It is not a question, which would be acceptable behavior. When life doles-out unfortunate circumstances, people say "Why did God do such a thing?" with no interest to learn why. If however, one said this as a commencement to introspection or examination, to study God, that would be proper. This is the meaning.

(continued on page 9)

DO YOU KNOW WHY THESE

13

DEFINE JUDAISM?

Fundamentals

Reader: “There were several great Rabbis during the middle ages. What is it about Maimonides’ 13 Principles that made them the fundamental ‘standards’ of Judaism?”

–Thank you.”

Rabbi: Maimonides writes at length in his Commentary on the Mishneh, Sanhedrin chap. 10, (chap. 11 in the Talmud, p. 90a). This chapter is where we find the Mishneh and Talmud (the Oral Law) addressing the Afterlife: those who are and are not entitled. This topic is clearly most vital. So it is not Maimonides alone who saw it crucial to highlight those matters that earn and forfeit our Afterlife (the 13 Principles); the Oral Law received at Sinai discussed this first.

Maimonides was overly-generous in his toil to collect concepts throughout Talmud and consolidate them in his commentary. After citing his 13th Principle (reprinted at the end) he is emphatic that 1 or even 10 readings of his Principles will not yield the proper understanding of his words: “God knows such a person has fooled himself.” He states that one who errs in even one of his principles is considered outside the category of “Jew,” deserving the harshest ridicule.

By anyone's standards, Maimonides deserved the praise “From Moses (the lawgiver) to Moses (Maimonides) none arose like Moses.” Moses Maimonides greatly surpassed other Rishonim. His brilliance in writing like the Torah's style, where his words require decryption and analysis,

(continued on next page)

set him apart. Add to his, his mastery of Talmud witnessed in his Mishneh Torah and the Commentary on the Mishneh, and his keen and precise philosophic insight seen in his Guide. Therefore, we must not take this giant's words lightly, for he was gifted beyond imagination, not writing for any motivation other than helping each and every Jew attain the true gift God wishes for us all: an eternal life of the soul engaged in God's wisdom. When someone like Maimonides says these 13 Principles are vital, we appreciate the gravity of such a statement, knowing who he was. But not on authority alone do we view his Principles as crucial. The subject matter is clearly central in Torah, Mishneh and Talmud, all address these topics of the 13 Principles prior to Maimonides.

First and foremost, we must recognize God exists. This is Principle 1. We must understand God the best we can, as the exclusive Creator of all other existences. He alone caused all, and nothing caused Him. All existences rely on Him to be, and to continue. Without this knowledge, we have no knowledge at all. We are akin to a scientist who thinks the world possesses independent or eternal existence. This omission of God in the scientific world leaves scientists with no true knowledge of the universe as a "Designer's plan," which the 4th Principle underscores by stating the God was "first." For if God caused all, doesn't this mean He was first? The answer is yes, but as Rabbi Reuven Mann stated, one might admit that God was first, but not admit God "willed" the universe. The 4th Principle is that God willed the universe, thereby rendering Him first. Understanding that God willed the universe, demands our search for purpose and meaning in Creation. Without this concept, Creation does not offer mankind any insight into a Divine Mind, or the yearning for this knowledge. It renders our curiosity futile, which is against our design, to arrive at deep and satisfying answers. It would lead to apathy and a frustration in not being able to satisfy our most central faculty – our intellect. And this in turn would ruin our emotional lives as beings who crave understanding. Without knowing God planned mankind's existence, and the universe as our tool to

uncover God's wisdom, man would not be compelled to seek out God and establish a relationship with the Creator. Repentance and prayer would be futile. (Plato and Aristotle subscribed to the notion of God as the cause, but not as the planner of matter.) We now appreciate the significance of the Principle 4.

Maimonides' 2nd Principle teaches God's unity, or indivisibility: "Listen Israel, God is our God, God is one." But His oneness is not like one of a group or category under which we might classify Him. He is also not one like one of His creations that can be divided into parts. He is unlike any concept of one that we witness in the universe, so we must not think of Him in physical terms, which is the 3rd Principle, that He is not physical or related in anyway to the physical created world. God stated, "To what shall you equate Me that I shall be similar (Isaiah 40:25)?" As humans, we tend to project our limited understanding onto God. We are insecure in our complete ignorance of God's essence, so we wrongly force God into a familiar and more comfortable form we can imagine. Maimonides teaches here, that we must not assume God is subject to any physical trait or phenomenon, like motion, occupying space, having a location, size, division, happiness, speech, sight, etc. All such references in Torah verses aim to teach another idea. Torah speaks in human terms as a method for us to merely start on the path towards true understanding. But we must eventually mature and understand such terms as metaphors. God cannot speak, as He possesses no physicality or mouth. His "speech" is either an audible but created sound, or it is a prophetic phenomenon; neither emanating from a physical apparatus. He has no eyes, so He does not "see," yet He is fully aware of all He created through a higher level of knowing that does not rely on feeble eyes. His is not "on" Earth or "in" heaven, for He does not occupy space or location...only physical bodies can do so. And if we find statements where God was "angry," it means man did not perform God's will at that moment. But God has no emotions, since emotions are a creation,

and God is not governed by what He created. All other such terms must be understood in this manner. Our concepts of what God is and isn't are at the core of our lives as seekers of truth, and Torah observers. If we err as to what God is, we do not pray to the true God, so He will not answer, which would endorse a false god.

Principle 5 is that we must serve and praise God, and follow His commands. And we must not serve or glorify anything else, from the spheres, stars or planets, to the angels. For all these have no independent will outside God's will for them, and servitude to such existences is both unfitting, and futile. God alone deserves praises, and has will; He alone can answer and assist man. Of course, serving God is truly serving ourselves, as a wise Rabbi once said, for serving Him and performing His will is the greatest life we can enjoy. All of Torah is to benefit man to the greatest degree, and in no way can man or any created thing benefit God.

We must also not view anything as an intermediary to God, for God can answer man wherever he is. The act of resorting to intermediaries, whether they be the sun, moon, people, objects or places, destroys our perfect view of God as omniscient and omnipotent. And part of serving God is to make known His greatness, for the benefit of all humans. If we fully grasp this principle, we will abandon superstitions and segulas, for God hears our prayers and can deliver. He needs nothing else. Nor do we.

Principle 6 is to accept prophecy. This is essential so as to accept that Torah is from God. Principle 7 is that Moses' prophetic level surpasses any other prophet. Without this principle, one might suggest a new prophet will override the Torah Moses gave us. Not only does this destroy Torah, but it casts derision on God, as if He didn't anticipate changes that Torah would require.

Principle 8 is that the Torah is from God. Without this truth, other religions compete with Judaism. Principle 9 is the completeness of the Torah: Torah is from God and therefore is not lacking. We cannot add or take away from it...not from the written Torah or from

(continued on page 7)

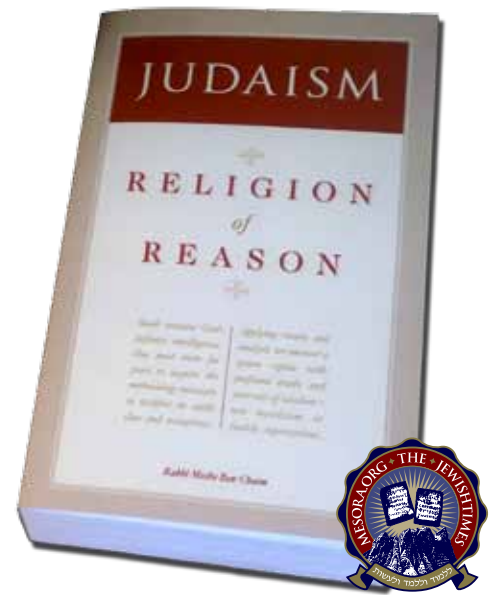
Is Torah mystical... or rational, just like God's natural laws?

It's time a book unveiled the truth.

Is Torah a set of incomprehensible mystical beliefs, as kabbalists suggest...or perfectly reasonable and brilliantly insightful?

Finally learn directly from Torah texts and our greatest Rabbis, precisely why mysticism is false, not Torah, and not God's will.

Religion of Reason unveils widespread "Jewish" mystical beliefs as false, and prohibited. Torah is presented in its rational and provable nature...just like God's natural laws. There are no powers besides God, and He prohibits belief in mysticism. Cryptic Talmudic stories are explained metaphorically offering astonishing insights as intended, and beautiful insights into many Parshas are revealed. Finally, Jews can understand the falsehoods they have accepted, and abandon them in place of true Torah.



RELIGION of REASON

by JewishTimes' publisher
Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

REVIEWS



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

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



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

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim asks critical, crucial and defining questions that any thinking Jew needs to ask. His method enables the reader to explore and engage our theology in a meaningful and serious way. Following the Rishonim, he forces us to define, weigh and analyze each phrase of chazal, showing there is no contradiction between an investigation of Science and an investigation of Judaism. Rabbi Ben-Chaim has written a work that addresses the thinking person of all faiths. This work speaks to the scholar and lay person alike and will help you gain insight into how the great Rishonim define how we view the world. Rabbi Ben-Chaim's website, Mesora.org is a very serious tool and resource for thinking human beings who want to engage and explore the Almighty, the Almighty's universe and do so within the realm of wisdom, rationality and intellectual honesty.



PARTIAL CHAPTER LIST

Astrology	Red Bendels
Reincarnation	Kabbala
Praying to the Dead	Mysticism
Superstition	Miracles
Demons	What is God?
Bashert	"Jewish" Souls
Evil Eye	Talmudic Stories
Rebbe Worship	Metaphors
Segulas	Belief vs. Proof
Satan	Do Rabbis Err?
Angels	Gentile Equality
Western Wall Prayers	Man's Purpose

Free 33-pg Preview:

<https://www.Mesora.org/ReligionofReason>

the Oral Torah, as it says, “Do not add to it and do not take away from it.” (Deut 13:1).

Principle 10 is that God knows man’s actions and does not remove His eye from them. This is necessary if we are to appreciate God’s justice. This brings us to Principle 11: “God gives reward to he who fulfills the commandments of the Torah and punishes those that transgress its admonishments and warnings. And the great reward is the life of the world to come and the punishment is the cutting off of the soul [in the world to come]. And the verse that attests to this principle is (Exodus 32) “And now if You would but forgive their sins - and if not erase me from this book that You have written.” And God answered him, “He who sinned against Me I will erase from My book.” This is a proof that God knows the sinner and the fulfiller in order to mete out reward to one and punishment to the other.”

This principle compels man’s selection of his fate, and can lead to eternal life. With no repercussions, man might not adhere to Torah and the search for God, and simply indulge his lusts, until he destroys himself here, and forfeits the next world. But with repercussions, man might be motivated to follow the Torah system, and eventually come to follow mitzvos and engage Torah study out of a pure love of the beauty, perfection and enjoyment Torah offers. Additionally, when man knows he is rewarded or punished, society benefits from deterrents, and motivations towards the good.

But we must add that this reward and punishment is a natural result of man’s selection. By ignoring a life of wisdom, there is nothing to sustain the soul – it perishes upon biological death. But if man selects the true good, the unparalleled pursuit of God’s wisdom, his soul is nourished here, he enjoys the most gratifying experiences on Earth, and his soul is given eternal life through this process. We then realize that the reward of the next world is of the same character as the best life here: an existence of wisdom, but on a far greater level. Thus, God grants man even while on Earth, the ability to engage in the highest degree of existence.

Principle 12 is to confirm the coming of the Messiah. Rabbi Reuven Mann taught this is part of our knowledge of God (13 Principles concern knowledge of God) for in the messianic era, God will finally complete the perfection of the one creation still imperfect – mankind. This era will usher in a change where a livelihood will be attained with ease, and the focus of life will be wisdom, as originally intended prior to Adam’s sin. Mankind will finally achieve perfection, and this renders our view of God as not lacking, as in creating an imperfect human species.

And Principle 13 is conviction in Resurrection. During the messianic era, God will resurrect man. This will of course confirm for man, God’s abilities. It will also offer that generation the wisdom of our greatest leaders who will return. Furthermore, a wise Rabbi once stated that this will enable “all” of Israel to be recipients of God’s goodness, which cannot be done while most of Israel are dead.

We now understand why the Torah and one of our greatest minds focussed on these principles. Principles 1-4 concern our knowledge of God. Principle 5 concerns man’s obligations. Principles 6 and 7 concern prophecy, indispensable for communication between God and man. Principles 8 and 9 concern the perfection of the Torah. Principles 10 and 11 concern God’s relationship with man. And Principles 12 and 13 concern the future and eternal perfected human state on Earth.

Thus, Maimonides’ 13 Principles distill fundamentals: primary truths about the Creator Himself, His perfect system with mankind (Torah), and the Creator’s reward for our following this system, plus the promise of a perfected world. Nothing else is more basic and vital. This is the answer to your question. This explains why all intelligent people subsequent to Maimonides accepted these as core principles.

Here are Maimonides’ final words on his commentary:

“And when the person will believe all these fundamentals and his faith will be clear in them he enters into the nation of Israel and it is a mitzva to love him and to have mercy on him and to act to him according to all the ways in which God commanded us regarding loving your neighbor. And even if he did all of the sins in the Torah due to desire of the emotions, and from his physical aspect’s conquering him, he will be punished for his sins, but he still has a share in the world to come and is among the sinners of Israel. However if he rejects one of these fundamentals, he leaves the nation and is a denier of the fundamentals and is called a heretic, a denier, etc., and it is a mitzva to hate him and to destroy him (financially - not physically to kill him. And not to steal either). And regarding him it is said (Psalms 139) “Behold will not the enemy of God be my enemy?”

I have expounded at length many things and I have left the topic of my composition but I have done it for I saw a need in the dealings of the fundamentals of faith and I have gathered together many different and spread out areas. Therefore know them and succeed in understanding them and review them many times and know them very well [i.e. not just memorization but to understand fully and to be able to support them and know their proofs]. Therefore if after one or ten times you think you have understood them, God knows that you are just involved in falsehood. Therefore do not read them quickly because I have not written them as it suddenly entered into my mind. But rather, after a deep and careful study of the whole area and after I have seen many clear and true ideas and I have seen what is proper to believe of them [as the fundamentals] and I have brought proofs and logical demonstrations for each and every one of them. May it be God’s will that I have been correct that He helped me through this area on the good path and now I will return to my explanation of this chapter [in the Talmud].”■



Project: Develop name, font selection, complete GUI, icon set, and branding for a new music player including desktop and mobile versions. "TRAX" was developed in one week, including all screen transitions and user interaction.

PROFESSIONAL DESIGN

Industry leaders
request our print
and interactive
design.

PROFESSIONAL RESULTS

We increase sales.
Our social strategies
sustain 600% growth.

We'll grow your
business too.

SERVICED FIRMS

ABN Amro
A&E Television
Breyer's Ice Cream
Burger King
Chanel
CNBC
Conde Nast
Disney Films
Entenmann's
Gloria Vanderbilt
Kawasaki
MasterCard
MoneyLine
NEC
Nova
Oscar de la Renta
Pepsi
Pizza Hut
Ralph Lauren
Taco Bell
Trade.com
W Hotels
Warner Bros.
XChange Tel.



NYDESIGN.COM

Building loyalty and sales
through design strategies

DESIGN

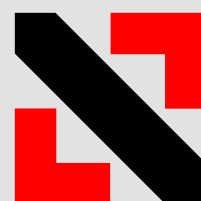
- Branding / identity
- Sites / touchscreens
- GUI / flowcharting
- Wire frames
- Package design
- Editorial design
- Illustration, icons

STRATEGY

- Business strategies
- Business plans
- Metrics analysis
- Contract drafting
- Copy writing
- Presentations
- Interactive demos

PROMOTION

- Advertising
- Banners
- Promo materials
- App planning/design
- Social networking
- Email marketing
- Landing pages



NYDESIGN.COM

info@nydesign.com
516.569.8888

But we must add that this email implies that all unfortunate occurrences, are God's doings. The author has not proved this, and actually, Divine Providence depends on one's level of perfection, as Maimonides teaches from the Torah's verses. Maimonides also writes that most problems are self-inflicted. Blaming God distorts the reality that most times, our problems are due to our poor choices. If however, we become very ill, or experience something we did not cause, it could be God's rebuke of our ways, or it could be nature or chance, from which we have not earned God's protection. See Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed for his chapters on justice and providence. ■

Mysticism vs. Maimonides' 13 Principles

Writer: "We should reevaluate our exclusive focus on the Maimonidean approach to God (13 Principles), and include mystical approaches that allow for a more interpersonal and passionate religiosity."

Rabbi: What is meant by a "mystical" belief? It refers to accepting as true, inexplicable matters that are undetectable by the senses. The mystic assumes a thing to be real, without validation. Aside from the argument that no sane person would allow a mystical voodoo doctor to operate on his body, if we accept mystical approaches in Judaism, we must accept the mystical views of Christianity and all other religions. Basing one's self on mystical views alone, there are no grounds to distinguish.

However, the reason intelligent people do not accept other religions, is due to the very real proof offered by Revelation at Sinai. God granted mankind a real event we could witness, that removed all doubt concerning

which religion is the only God-given religion. Clearly, God does not wish man to rely on mystical belief – a provable event was required since God wishes all doubts are removed. Moses reiterates this as he tells the people to never forget what their eyes saw (Deut. 4:9) referring to Revelation. He did not allow the Jewish nation to resort to flimsy mystical beliefs, or a life bereft of proof. Moses demanded the Jews confirm what they witnessed; and thereby live based on proof.

If a Christian claims he "spiritually feels his god," what must be our response? As Christian credo violates the most egregious sin of idolatry, we must dismiss any "spiritual feeling" as false, for God does not encounter a sinner (Exod. 33:3). Also, a "spiritual feeling" is not a barometer of reality. Such feelings are mere wishes or projections, equivalent to dreams of the night. A spiritual or mystical "feeling" described by any Jew is equally psychotic. We see nowhere in Torah that God is "felt"; no events are found in Torah describing a "spiritual feeling." This is because God is not found in the sphere of human emotion or through the senses, but only through the mind, and only through the study of His creations and His Torah. (Love of God is not an "encounter" with God, but our internal admiration of, and preoccupation with Him.) This explains why prophecy – the only union between man and God – is an "intellectual" union. It occurs only with intelligent people who have perfected their ideas. God cannot be felt; He can only be known. For if feelings can place us in touch with God, Moses would not have asked God to show him His true nature, or glory (Exod. 33:18) through an educational means. Moses could have simply "felt" God, according to this false view. And if one suggests that God's "shechina" was a physical light or cloud, the response is that those elements are not God Himself, but creations – no different than air or water – that God presents to the nation to indicate His providence over them.

Our prophets prayed to God and did not assume a sense of "spirituality" or "presence" of God...they didn't simply "feel" God was with them, but actively requested

God's help when in need. In fact, Moses says that the only way God's presence would be known is through demonstrable events that distinguish the Jewish nation from others: "And how will it be known that I have found favor in your sight – myself and my people – is it not with Your traveling with us that I am my people might be distinguished from all nations on the face of the Earth (Exod. 33:16)?" This means that without demonstration, one cannot say God is with him. Yes, we believe God will protect the righteous individual as He has done throughout the Torah. But as Jacob said, "I have grown small... (Gen. 32:11)," Jacob felt that perhaps he was not currently worthy of God's salvation. Why didn't he – a prophet – feel assured of this "spiritual" sense that God was with him? Why did he pray? The answer is clear, if we study God's words. Jacob and all other prophets could not know when God was with them, and therefore required prayer to gain God's help. Feelings do not measure if God is with us or not. God says otherwise, through recording His valued prophets' words in the Torah.

Maimonides' 13 Principles are sound; the writer offers no explanation for dismissing them. Interpersonal Jewish life is not compromised in the least when following his 13 Principles. Followers have quite passionate relationships with friends and family. In truth, when one follows his mind – the only method for arriving at 100% conviction – only then can he or she attain the highest degree of passion. For passion is proportionate to conviction, while belief alone (and certainly mystical notions) cannot offer man 100% conviction. By definition, mysticism offers no proof.

I say, we must reevaluate mystical approaches, for they cannot allow for a more interpersonal and passionate religiosity. Despite the number of adherents, mystical approaches remain without validation. As we would not trust our bodies to a mystical voodoo doctor, we must not trust our more vital component – our soul – to mystical notions. Instead, let us follow God's Torah verses and prophets that allowed for no mysticism, and reject superstition and all forms of baseless beliefs. ■



SPIRITUAL Self Reliance

RABBI REUVEN MANN

This week's parsha, Vayikra, begins the third Book of the Torah. The main theme of the first part of this Book is that of Sacrifices. When the Temple existed animal sacrifices were offered on a daily basis on behalf of the entire community. There were many different types of sacrifices for the individual or community. A major theme of the sacrifices is that of atonement for sin. The Torah's attitude toward sin is unique. There are certain non Jewish faiths which claim that man is evil by nature. One may ask, if man is the Creation of G-d how can he be said to be evil? This belief constitutes a defamation of the Handiwork of the Creator. Judaism, of course, rejects it out of hand. According to our religion man cannot be said to be evil by nature. Nor is it true to say that he is good by nature. How would we classify man in terms of his "natural state?"

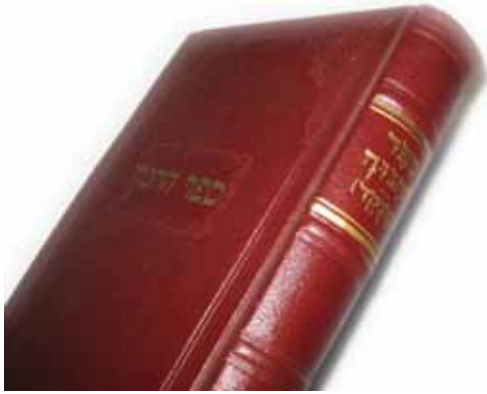
Our view is that man is a complex creature with powerful instinctual drives that propel him in a certain direction. However, he also possesses the power of reason which enables him to pursue truth. By nature, man is a creature of conflict torn between his emotional desires and his knowledge of reality. He comes into the world in an imperfect state and his life's task is to perfect himself. To do so he must develop his intellect and seek the truth according to his ability. He must also master his instinctual forces and train himself to act in accordance with justice and wisdom.

Judaism believes that man, alone, is responsible for his actions. The doctrine of spiritual self reliance is central to Judaism. Our fate is completely in our own hands and we do not put our faith in any person or object. It is because of this belief that so much emphasis is placed on Teshuva. Through it we affirm that while man is a sinner by nature he is not evil by nature. There is no such thing as a human being who is automatically righteous. The greatest people sin. However, the key is how they react to sin. Judaism maintains that overcoming sin is the gateway to spiritual

greatness. If sin generates a genuine process of introspection leading to a fundamental change in behavior then the person does not just remove the sin he achieves a higher spiritual level because of it. The perfectibility of man through the overcoming of sin is the fundamental pillar of Judaism.

We can now understand the great importance of the Holy Temple and the Sacrificial Service. The sacrifice was an instrument of atonement. When a person commits a serious sin he should not fall into despair. He must, however, summon the courage to confront his action with total honesty and resolve to change. The mitzvah of Sacrifice reassures him that G-d desires him to return. The sacrifice of the animal has a profound emotional impact on the sinner. It brings home to him in dramatic fashion that he must detach himself from the animalistic side of his nature. Have we become too steeped in lustful desires and materialistic drives? The sacrifice teaches us that a purely instinctual lifestyle will lead to destruction. Let us take a look at society today to see how relevant this teaching has become. The high divorce rate, breakdown of families, skyrocketing increase of unwanted pregnancies are only some of the symptoms of a society which has lost the discipline to control instinct and postpone gratification of carnal desires. The problem is rooted in the view that man is just a very sophisticated animal, not a unique being endowed with a Divine soul. This attitude expresses a denial of G-d. The institution of sacrifice affirms Judaism's teaching that G-d created the world and fashioned man "in His Image." The essence of man is not his animalistic nature but his spiritual capacity for goodness. Judaism proclaims the teaching that "sin lies crouching at the door and seeks to consume us but we can overcome it."

Shabbat Shalom ■



Leaving Subjectivity Behind

RABBI DR. DARRELL GINSBERG

The Sefer Chinuch is a sefer of tremendous depth and wisdom, revealing to us the myriad components of the system of mitzvos, ranging from sources, to reasons, to applications. His brilliance is constantly on display. There are times, though, where he diverts from his “normal routine”, dedicating time to a topic of extreme importance. In one such instance, he introduces an extremely innovative and thought provoking way of looking at the institution of mitzvos.

In discussing the prohibition of breaking any of the bones of the korban pesach (Passover sacrifice), the Chinuch offers a rationale in line with his overall explanation for the entire area concerning this commandment (see the various commandments in Parshas Bo). He explains that it is a more refined way of eating. Meaning that someone of wealth and power eats in a more careful manner. And, more importantly for this article, it serves as a reminder of the great miracles we experienced in Egypt.

Usually, this would be the final word regarding the explanation of this commandment. Yet he launches into a

lengthy discourse regarding how the commandments work to help us. He starts off lambasting a potential question:

“Now, do not think, my son, to seize upon my words and ask ‘But why should the Eternal Lord command us to do all these things in order to commemorate this miracle? Would the matter not have entered our consciousness through one commemoration, and thus not be forgotten out of the mouths of our descendants?’”

Essentially, the question is why the need to repeat this practice year after year. One time should have been sufficient. The Chinuch considers such a question not as the result of “wisdom”, but emergent from “childish thinking”. With this introduction out of the way, he proceeds to offer to teach the questioner the Torah and its commandments.

He begins with a seemingly simple premise – “know that a man is influenced in accordance with his actions. His heart and his thoughts are

always [drawn] after his deeds in which he is occupied, whether [they are] good or bad”. This means that the most evil person, through performance of the commandments, will “veer at once toward the good”. It is important to note here that the Chinuch is focusing on the performance, regardless of one’s understanding of the commandment. If I am bad, but I put on tefillin every day, I will become good. Why? “For after one’s acts is the heart drawn”.

He continues, positing the flip side of the coin. If a person is righteous, but engages in inappropriate actions, he will become evil. Yet the analogy he provides makes this more difficult to understand: “as we might say by way of example, if the king forcefully appointed him to an evil vocation...at some point in time he will turn from the righteousness of his heart to become completely wicked”. This is astonishing; how are we to understand the logic of someone becoming evil when performing inappropriate acts against his own will??? This is not a matter of someone choosing the path of evil. He may be fighting with every ounce of his being these actions, and yet he still becomes evil?

The Chinuch, following this line of reasoning, explains that this is the reason why God gave us an abundance of commandments – “in order to fasten all our thoughts onto them, that all our preoccupation should be with them”. He also brings in a proof, where the Talmud says that one who has a mezuzah on his doorpost, and is wearing tzitzis and tefillin, will not sin; “for these are uninterrupted commandments [to be observed constantly] and one is constantly affected by them”.

This argument has some merit when put solely in the context of the “constant” commandments, such as tzitzis. But we must ask how this makes sense when discussing a once-a-year commandment, such as the korban pesach.

After warning that one must approach this concept with humility, he brings us full circle, returning to the question of the commandments regarding the korban pesach:

(continued on next page)

"And now that you are aware of this, you should not find it hard to understand, henceforth, the multiplication of precepts in connection with remembering the miracles of Egypt, as they are a major pillar in our Torah"

How exactly does this answer the original question?

The approach may lie in a basic understanding of the composition of every mitzvah. On one level, each commandment given to us by God operates as a vehicle to a specific idea, perfecting us and assisting us in understanding more about God. Mazta conveys a specific idea, as does a lulav, tefillin, or any other mitzvah. However, there is another component that exists within each mitzvah, a more "generic" concept that is as equally important as the first. There is an idea of being involved in the system of commandments, a choice to adhere to the rules laid out by God. This adherence is rooted in the willingness to subordinate oneself to God's dictums. Our nature is to do as we please. We are subjective creatures, allowing our egos to dictate what is best (or worst) for us. To reject the world of the subjective in favor of subservience to the objective laws and ethics as taught to us by God is a clear demonstration of pushing the ego to the side. Every performance of a commandment contains this idea.

This could be the main idea that drives the Chinuch throughout this piece. The idea of being "influenced by one's actions" is being discussed in the context of the system the actions belong to. If he acts in accordance with what he personally sees as right or wrong, he will be under the constant direction of subjective reality. If he chooses to abide by God's systems, every action he does is now a reflection of this reality. We can now see how this answers the question of the evil person's "miraculous" change. A person who is evil is almost always someone who suffers from a distorted sense of self-importance. The moment he abandons this role and engages in the performance of a commandment, he has decided to subordinate himself to something external to the self. Even if he is performing the specific commandment

with complete ignorance as to the idea it conveys – he picks up a lulav without comprehending the concepts it reflects – the subordination alone to God's system represents a level of perfection. And what of the righteous person? Why does he eventually break down? The example of the king best expresses the rationale of the Chinuch. Once he is under the influence of someone else, abiding by the king's system rather than God's, he eventually loses the reality of being subordinate to an objective system.

Moving through the piece, we can also see why the Chinuch brings in the idea of the abundance of commandments into the conversation. One or two commandments do not make a system. But a large quantity of commandments, where it is clear the actions of our lives are always dictated by objective reality, has the power to create the true sense of subordination. We see this emerge as well in the example of the person who wears tefillin and tzitzis and has a

mezuzah on his doorpost. He is in a state of constant involvement with the commandments, always reminded of his subservience to God.

This leads us to the final issue, the answer to the specific question pilloried by the Chinuch. We see a large amount of commandments attached to the performance of the korban pesach, ostensibly to help remind us of the miracles that took place. Indeed, each specific mitzvah carries with it some unique idea about the relationship God has with the Jewish people. What about the second part of mitzvah? One could argue that the charge of the korban pesach is critical in that it represents the first commandment that the entire nation partook of. With the performance of the korban pesach, the Jewish people demonstrated their subservience to this system. Thus, many commandments were attached to this commandment, reminding us of that first moment where we shed the world of the subjective. ■

Subscribe to the Jewishtimes... it's FREE.



Subscribe by emailing
Subscribe@Mesora.org

You will receive our magazine each Friday morning and special issues throughout the year with original, thought provoking articles on Torah, Israel, politics and readers' letters.

Enjoy all 441 back issues free: www.Mesora.org/Jewishtimes

Intermediaries

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Parshas Yisro concludes with the Ten Commandments, but then adds a few more laws, including the prohibition of making "with" God (intermediaries), any gods of silver, or gods of gold for ourselves. Why is this law of intermediaries separated from the Ten Commandments, the second command being a perfect place for its inclusion, that being not to accept idolatry? Couldn't the Torah economize and group both laws together? And what's the difference between these two laws, of rejecting other gods and not resorting to intermediaries?

Why is this new law of gods of silver and gold placed together with the Jews' request not to hear God "Himself", but that Moses should relay the law to the Jews? (The people thought they would die from hearing God directly)

It appears that this new law is unique, and not similar that God should group it with classic idolatry in the Ten Commandments. In the Ten Commandments, God prohibits the acceptance of "other" gods. However, this new law is not about other gods, but rather, not using silver or gold gods as a means of worshipping God Himself. This is a unique violation of intermediaries (see Ibn Ezra on Exod. 20:20), unlike the Ten Commandments that prohibits worshipping imagined deities; not God.

This explains why this new law is placed where it is. There, the people asked Moses to be the go-between between them and God. God told



Mount Sinai

Moses the conditions of this relationship where Moses would relay God's words. God emphasized that He spoke "from the heavens." Meaning, there is no other deity except for God; the Jews heard (witnessed) Him directly, without an intermediary. God prohibits intermediaries precisely at this

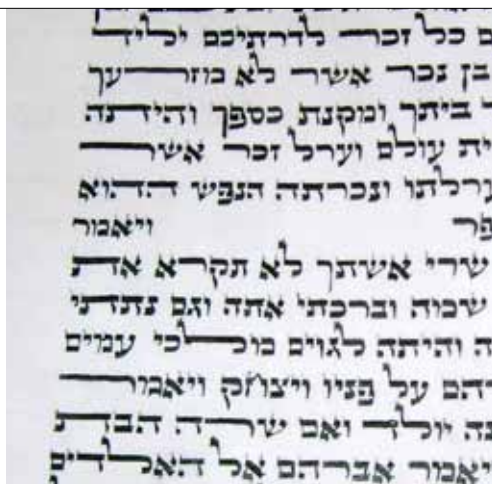
point, since the Jews now want Moses to be a go-between. This relationship carries with it the danger that they might gravitate too much towards the go-between, an intermediary. Therefore God tells Moses to convey to the Jews this new prohibition not to make gods of silver or gold "with Him." This phrase refers not to idolatry, but to intermediaries, precisely when the Jews sought an intermediary in Moses.

The Jews dreaded to continue hearing the voice God created, assuming they would die (Exod. 20:16). The asked Moses to be an intermediary (Deut. 5:24). Moses responds, saying that Revelation at Sinai was [not to kill them, but] to offer the nation the ability to wax greater, obtaining evidence of God and His laws so they would not sin in life (ibid 20:17). This dreadful sound, intended to be translated into a dread of sin.

"And the people, stood from a distance, and Moses drew close to the darkness where God was (ibid 20:18)." God then instructs Moses to highlight the fact that they have seen that God spoke to them from the heavens. Through Moses, God warns the Jews not to create silver gods "with Him", nor gold gods for themselves. It seems that God preferred to teach the prohibition of intermediaries when that impulse presented itself. And this is a wise method of instruction, for now the people would fully appreciate the necessity of this prohibition, amidst their request of Moses to be an intermediary. ■

Authentic Learning

RABBI BERNIE FOX



A column from a Torah. Each parasha is separated from the preceding and following parasha by a break in the text.

And Hashem called to Moshe. And Hashem spoke to him from the Ohel Moed saying "Speak to Bnai Yisrael and say to them: When a person from among you offers a sacrifice to Hashem, you should offer your sacrifice from cattle and from the flock." (Sefer VaYikra 1:1-2)

1. Hashem's regard for Moshe

The above two passages introduce Sefer VaYikra. The midrash is concerned with an obvious problem. The language of the first passage seems to be redundant. First, it states that Hashem called to Moshe. Then, it states that He spoke to Moshe from the Tabernacle – the Ohel Moed. The passage could have omitted the initial phrase and began, "And Hashem spoke to Moshe from the Ohel Moed". What is the purpose of the preamble of "And Hashem called to Moshe"?

The midrash responds that before imparting to Moshe the substance of His message, Hashem summoned Moshe. In other words, He called to him "Moshe, Moshe" inviting His prophet to receive His message. The midrash explains that Hashem's employ of an invitation was an expression of endearment. Furthermore, every prophetic episode that Moshe experienced was preceded by this invitation.

2. The Torah's sections – parshiyot – and their significance

The midrash continues with a further comment. In order to understand this comment an introduction is required. The Torah is divided into parshiyot – sections. The term parasha (singular of parshiyot) is often used to refer to the weekly Torah portion. However, the term more accurately refers to any section within the Torah. The weekly portion is actually composed of multiple smaller sections. Each of these sections is separated from the preceding and following section by a break or space in the text.

The midrash explains that Moshe received an invitation from Hashem at the initiation of each prophecy. However, he did not receive a separate invitation after each interruption. The commentators explain the meaning of this statement. Each of the separations in the Torah between parshiyot represents an actual interruption that Moshe experienced as Hashem revealed to him the Torah. In other words, the space between parshiyot communicates that when Moshe received the prophecy recorded in the Torah, Hashem paused and then, after an interlude, the prophecy resumed. This resumption of the prophecy was not preceded by a new invitation.

In summary, the position of the midrash is that every time the Torah indicates the initiation of a prophecy experienced by Moshe, it is assumed that the episode began with a summons or invitation. In the course of the prophecy, Moshe may have experienced interruptions – indicated by breaks in the Torah's text. However, the resumption of the prophecy after each interruption was not preceded by a new invitation.

Before considering the next comment of the midrash, the implications of the above material must be considered. Korban Aharon explains that it is clear from the midrash that the interruptions that Moshe experienced in the course of the prophetic experience should not be regarded as actual interruptions within the prophetic process. These interruptions were not followed by a new invitation. The absence of a new invitation indicates that the resumption of the prophetic experience was not the initiation of a new prophecy. It was the resumption of the prophecy Moshe was experiencing prior to the interruption. In other words, the interruptions were only pauses in the prophetic experience and not terminations of the experience followed by initiation of a new experience after the interruption.

(continued on next page)

3. The function of the pauses in Moshe's prophetic experience

Now, the midrash's next comment can be considered. The midrash asks, "What was the function of the interruptions?" As explained, these interruptions were actually only pauses within an ongoing prophetic experience. What was the purpose of these pauses? The midrash explains that these pauses provided Moshe the opportunity to consider the prophetic material that had been revealed to him before proceeding to the next element of the prophecy.

The implication of the midrash's comments is significant. The pauses that Moshe experienced in his prophetic episodes were not initiated by Moshe. They were not a consequence of Moshe asking Hashem to pause on his behalf. The midrash is positing that the pauses were an integral element of the prophetic experience. Through the pauses, the contemplative element was integrated into the prophetic experience. Moshe did not experience revelation as a passive recipient. The very structure of the prophetic experience included opportunity and the imperative that Moshe consider and ponder each element of the prophecy.

The midrash closes with an application of its conclusions. It explains that Moshe was taught by Hashem. Certainly, Hashem was the perfect pedagogue. He combined absolute mastery of the material He imparted with flawless presentation. Nonetheless, Hashem included in His presentation to Moshe pauses for contemplation. A human being cannot expect to achieve or even approach the perfection of Hashem's instruction to Moshe. It follows that a mortal teacher must provide his students with adequate opportunity to consider and contemplate the material he is imparting.

4. The midrash's model of effective learning

The midrash is communicating an important lesson in pedagogy. Effective learning requires that the student absorb and consider the material transmitted by the instructor. The midrash suggests that this outcome is best achieved by constructing each lesson as a series of smaller more easily mastered components. Each component should be presented. Students should be given the opportunity to master the component and then the next component should be added. In other words, the midrash is proposing a method that is very different from the traditional college or university lecture.

The outlook underlying the midrash's lesson is reflected in an important halachah. Maimonides includes in his code – Mishne Torah – a chapter that outlines halachot – laws – related to pedagogy. He

explains that the instructor should expect his student to be attentive. However, even attentive students cannot be expected to immediately master all material presented. The instructor must patiently answer the students' questions. Furthermore, the students are required to seek understanding and unabashedly demand of the instructor explanation of any point requiring clarification.

Maimonides' underlying message is that the learning experience requires mastery. Mere transmittal of information not accompanied by the students' consideration and basic understanding is not adequate and does not satisfy the requirement of Torah study. This does not mean that the teacher and students should plumb the depths of each issue considered. It means that understanding of the basic meaning and significance of the material is the sine qua non of authentic learning.

5. The Gaon's view on weekly review of the Torah portion

The midrash has another interesting implication. Each week we are required to study the complete weekly Torah portion. The portion must be read twice in its original Hebrew and then reviewed a third time by studying a commentary. Preferably, this final review should be executed through reading the Aramaic translation and commentary of Unkelus. There is a dispute among the authorities regarding the specific process one is to employ. According to many authorities, the portion should be studied passage by passage. Each passage is read twice in Hebrew, then, reviewed a third time by reading the Unkelus rendering. This process is repeated passage by passage in succession until the entire portion for the week is completed.

Rabbaynu Eliyahu (The Gaon) of Vilna objected to this method. He suggested that each parasha or section should be treated as an integrated entity. The section is read twice in Hebrew, then, reviewed a third time by reading Unkelus' rendering. The process is repeated parasha by parasha until the entire weekly portion is completed.

The above midrash provides a possible basis for The Gaon's position. According to the midrash, each parasha was revealed to Moshe accompanied by a pause during which he was required to contemplate its contents. This implies that each parasha constitutes an integrated lesson and Moshe was required to contemplate it as such. The Gaon's method of reviewing the weekly portion preserves the integrity of each component parasha – section – as an integrated component of study. ■



Need home improvements, but not the high costs?

BBG Services provides affordable, quality home improvements.

Powerwashing of all concrete and brick pavers / pavers sealing & concrete staining (algae mildew and mold treatment)

Stucco – patching & crack repairs

Tile work (ceramic, marble, vinyl) bathrooms, backsplashes, foyers

Painting & Staining – interior rooms, wood, cabinets, texture painting

Minor Plumbing – faucets, sinks, toilets, new shower heads

Minor Electrical – new light fixtures, ceiling fans, new switches, light timers, dimmers

Drywall Repairs – holes repaired, spackled, and painted

Shelving – for closets, bedrooms, laundry rooms, playrooms

Molding – door trim, window trim, base/cove molding, chair rail molding

Recaulking/Regrouting – tubs, showers, tiles, windows, doors

Serving the NY/NJ Metro Area

(845)262-9518

BBG Services
All your home improvement needs

Licensed & Insured – LIC# 2010-03250