

Why did idolatry progressively deteriorate, then cease from further deviation?

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ESTD 1997

Dedicated to Scriptural and Rabbinic Verification of Authentic Jewish Beliefs and Practices

# JewishTimes

Volume III, No. 35...July 9, 2004

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**Weekly Parsha**

## Pinchas

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"Because he was zealous for his G-d and he atoned for Bnai Yisrael, he and his descendants after him will have a permanent covenant of priesthood." (BeMidbar 25:13)

Parshat Balak ends with an account  
(continued on page 4)

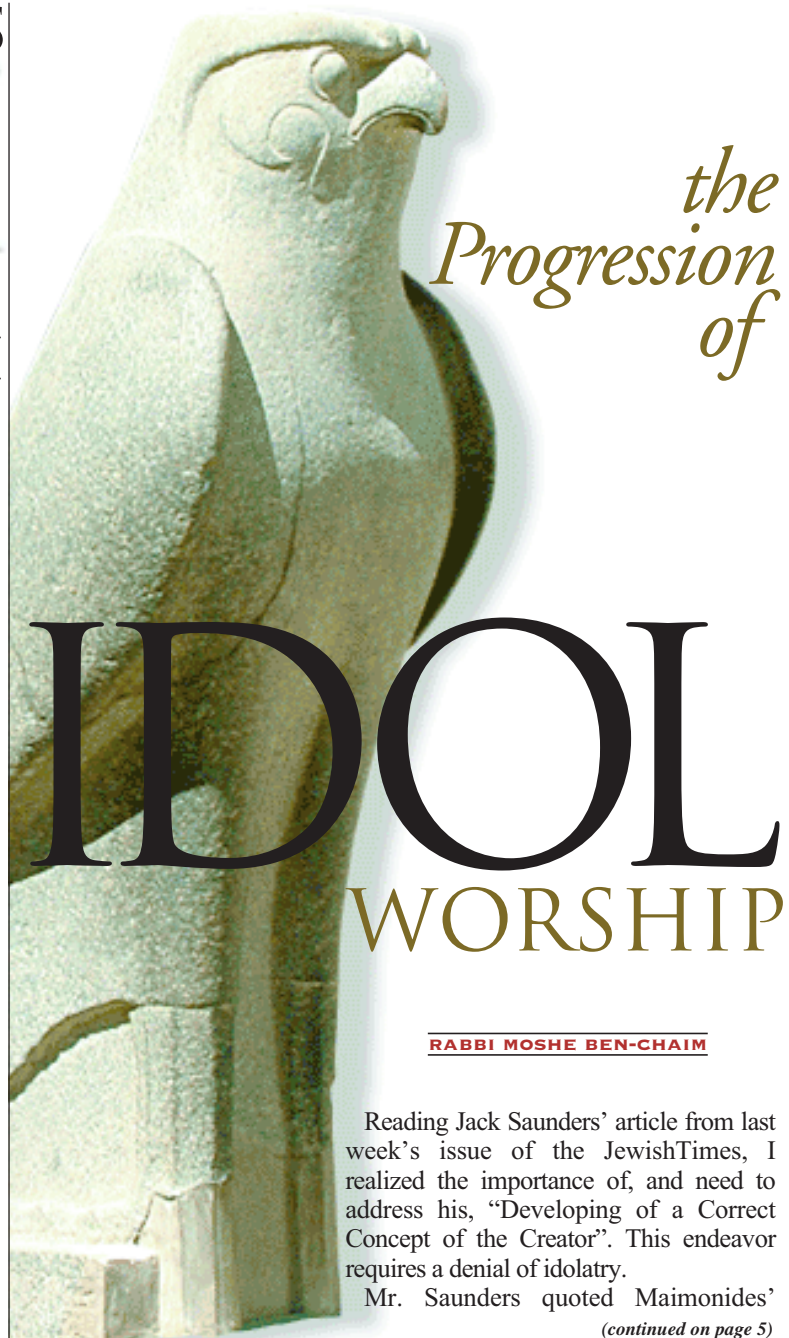
## MAIMONIDES XIII PRINCIPLES

INTRO BY RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM  
TRANSLATED BY MARC MERMELSTEIN

Due to the level of importance of these principles, I felt it necessary to make them available for the widest possible audience, and thank Marc Mermelstein for his efforts in this translation. These 13 Principles compiled by Maimonides formulate the essentials of Judaism. (The original Hebrew is located at the end of Talmud Sanhedrin, in Maimonides' commentary on the Mishna.)

I decided to reprint these principles in light of our recent articles dealing with various, false religions and their beliefs. It is crucial that one realize the sea of difference between Judaism and other religions: Judaism is not based on unfounded beliefs. Judaism complies with the design of our universe, and with what reason tells us is true. We see the Rabbis arriving at their conclusions - Judaism's tenets - through intense, rational argumentation and reasoning. This teaches that Judaism is in complete harmony with the design of our minds. It presents no contradictions. Thus, He who formed our minds, formed

(continued on next page)



*the Progression of*

# IDOL WORSHIP

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reading Jack Saunders' article from last week's issue of the JewishTimes, I realized the importance of, and need to address his, "Developing of a Correct Concept of the Creator". This endeavor requires a denial of idolatry.

Mr. Saunders quoted Maimonides'

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Judaism. Such a claim is absent in all other religions.

Over these past few weeks, we have read about many readers who were once Christian, but due to the lack of reasonable answers to their intelligent questions, and their joy in the answers contained in Judaism, they converted to Judaism.

Those seeking truth must not cower from any question. You must seek that which reason dictates. Just as there is one science of math and one science of physics, there is also one science of human happiness. All sciences were created by the same Creator. Just as math, natural science, and physics make sense, human psychology and philosophy will also follow the same degree of rational precision. Just as the sciences do not demand blind faith, the science of human happiness and perfection also asks no blind faith. Our minds will naturally follow reason - if we let them.

## MAIMONIDES' 13 FOUNDATIONS OF JUDAISM

### Principle I. To know the existence of the Creator

To believe in the existence of the Creator, and this creator is perfect in all manner of existence. He is the cause of all existence. He causes them to exist and they exist only because of Him. And if you could contemplate a case such that He were not to exist then all things would cease to exist and there would remain nothing. And if you were to contemplate a case such that all things would cease to exist aside from the creator, His existence would not cease. And He would lose nothing and oneness and kingship is His alone. Hashem of strength is His name because He is sufficient with His own existence and suffices just Him alone and needs no other. And the existences of the angels, and the celestial bodies, and all that is in them and that which is below them all need Him for their existence. And this is the first pillar and is attested to by the verse "I am Hashem your God."

### Principle II: The Unity of G-d

Meaning to say to accept that this is the quintessential idea of Oneness. It is not like the oneness of a pair (i.e. pair of shoes - one group) or and not one like a species. And not like man that has many individuals nor like a body that divides into many different parts until no end (everything keeps on being divisible). Rather God is one and there is no other oneness like His. This is the second principle and is taught in what it says "Hear Israel, Hashem your God, Hashem is one."

### Principle III: The Denial of Physicality in Connection with G-d

This is to accept that this Oneness that we have mentioned above (2) is not a body and has no strength in the body, and has no shape or image or relationship to a body or parts thereof. This is why the Sages of blessed memory said with regards to heaven there is no sitting, nor standing, no awakens, nor tiredness. This is all to say that He does not partake of any physical actions or qualities. And if He were to be a body then He would be like any other body and would not be God. And all that is written in the holy books regarding descriptions of God, they are all anthropomorphic. Thus said our great Rabbis of blessed memory The Torah spoke in man's language (i.e. using our terms so that we'd have some understanding). And the Rabbis have already spoken at length on this issue. This is the third pillar and is attested to by the verse "For you saw no image" meaning that you did not see an image or any form when you stood at Sinai because as we have just said He has no body nor power of the body.

### Principle IV: G-d's Antiquity

This is that God existed prior to everything and exists after everything. This is proved many times throughout scripture and is attested to by the verse "meuna Elokei kedem"

### Principle V: That G-d, blessed be He is worthy that we serve Him, to glorify Him, to make known His greatness, to do His commands

But not to do this to those that are below Him in the creation. Not to the angels or to the stars or the planets or anything else for they are all created things in nature and in their work there is no choice or judgment except by God Himself. Also it is not fitting to serve them as intermediaries to God. Only to God should you incline your thoughts and your actions. This is the fifth principle and it warns against idolatry and most of the Torah speaks out against this.

### Principle VI: Prophecy

And this is that it is known to man that this is a type of man who are created beings of high of great stature and perfection of the character traits. Who have tremendous knowledge until a different intelligence attaches to them when the intelligence of the person clings to the intelligence of God and it rests upon him. And these are the prophets and this is prophecy and the idea of it. The explanation of it is very long and the intention is not to bring a sign for every fundamental and to explain it all is encompassing of all knowledge (i.e. God's knowledge) but it is mentioned to us in a story form and all of the Torah attests to this.

### Principle VII: The Prophetic Capacity of Moses our Teacher, peace be upon him

And this is that we accept that he was the father of all prophets that were before him and that will be after him. He was on a qualitatively different level than any other and he is chosen from all other people before and after him of any that have any knowledge of God for his was the greatest. And he, peace be upon him, rose to the levels of the angels. He was granted all areas of knowledge and prophecy and his physical attributes did not diminish. His knowledge was different and it is through this difference that it is ascribed to him that he spoke to God without any intermediary or angel. My intention was to explain this puzzling concept and to open up the sealed areas in the Torah regarding the verses of "face to face" and other similar references but it's length would be tremendous and it would require numerous proofs from the Torah and other sources and encompass many areas. Even to write it the briefest of briefest it would require 100 pages so I will save it and write it in another book. I will now return to the intent of this seventh fundamental that the prophecy of Moshe our teacher, peace be upon him, was different from all others in 4 ways:

1) All other prophets God spoke to them through intermediaries. By Moshe it was without one, as it says "face to face I spoke to him".

2) Regarding all other prophets, prophecy came to them at night while they were asleep in a dream as it says "in a dream of the night" and other such references; or in the day but only after a deep sleep-like state came over them, and all their senses were shut off except their thoughts. Not so by Moshe. Moshe would receive a prophecy any time when he would stand between the two figures on the ark as God attests to it, "and I will make it known to you there" and "not so my servant Moshe. Face to face I speak to him."

3) When a prophet would receive prophecy he would not be able to stand the intense effect and he would shake and not be able to stand. As it relates regarding Daniel in his encounter with the angel Gabriel. Regarding Moshe, he did not suffer from this. As it says "Face to face do I speak to him as a person speaks to his friend". And even though this is the greatest connection to God, still he did not suffer.

4) All other prophets could not receive prophecy at their will. Only when God wanted to tell them. Some would go days or months without prophecy. Even if they wanted or needed something sometimes it would be days or months or years or even never that they would be told. Some would have people play music to put them in a good mood such as Elisha. But Moshe peace be upon him received prophecy whenever he wanted as it says, "Stand here and listen to what God will tell you what to do" and "God said to

Moshe tell Aaron your brother that he can't come to the holy of holies at any time [he wants]". Our rabbis said "Aaron was prohibited to come whenever he wanted, but not Moshe.

**Principle VIII: That the Torah is from heaven (i.e. God given)**

And this is that you believe that all of this Torah that was given by Moshe Rabbeinu, peace be upon him, that it is all from the mouth of God. Meaning that it was received by him entirely from God. And it is not known how Moshe received it except by Moshe himself, peace be upon him, that it came to him. That he was like a stenographer that you read to him and he writes all that is told to him: all the events and dates, the stories, and all the commandments. There is no difference between "And the sons of Cham were Kush, and Mizraim, and his wife was Mehatbe'el" and "Timnah was his concubine" and "I am Hashem your God" and "Hear Israel [Hashem your God, Hashem is one]" for it was all given by God. And it is all Hashem's perfect Torah, pure, holy, and true. And he who says that these verses or stories, Moshe made them up he is a denier of our sages and prophets worse than all other types of deniers [form of heretic] for he thinks that what is in the Torah is from man's flawed heart and the questions and statements and the dates and stories are of no value for they are from Moshe Rabbeinu, peace be upon him. And this area is that he believes the Torah is not from heaven. And on this our sages of blessed memory said, "he who believes that the Torah is from heaven except this verse that God did not say it but rather Moshe himself did [he is a denier of all the Torah]." And this that God spoke this and that each and every statement in the Torah is from God and it is full of wisdom (each statement) and benefit to those who understand them. And it's depth of knowledge is greater than all of the land and wider than all the seas and a person can only go in the path of David, the anointed of the God of Jacob who prayed and said "Open my eyes so that I may glance upon the wonders of Your Torah (Psalms 119)." And similarly the explanation of the Torah was also received from God and this is what we use today to know the appearance and structure of the sukka and the lulav and the shofar, tzitzis, tefillin and their usage. And all this God said to Moshe And Moshe told to us. And he is trustworthy in his role as the messenger and the verse that teaches of this fundamental is what is written (Numbers 16) "And Moshe said, with this shall you know that Hashem

sent me to do all these actions (wonders) for they are not from my heart."

**Principle IX: The Completeness of the Torah**

And this is that the Torah is from God and is not lacking. That to it you can't add or take away from. Not from the written Torah or from the oral Torah. As it says "Do not add to it and do not take away from it." (Deut 3). And we already explained what needs to be explained about this fundamental at the beginning of this essay (He had a whole long essay [I'll call it essay for lack of a better word] before he began the fundamental principles.)

**Principle X: That G-d knows man's actions and does not remove His eye from them**

His knowledge is not like someone who says God abandoned the land but rather like it says (Jer. 32) "Great in council and mighty in deed, Your eyes are cognizant to all the ways of mankind." "And God saw for the evil of man on the land had grown greatly (Gen. 6)." And it says "The disgust of Sodom and Amorrhah is great" and this demonstrates the 10th principle.

**Principle XI: That God gives reward to he who does the commandments of the Torah and punishes those that transgress its admonishes 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 we already said regarding this topic what these are. 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 give out reward to one and punishment to the other.

**Principle XI: The Era of the Messiah**

And this is to believe that in truth that he will come and that you should be waiting for him even though he delays in coming. And you should not come up with times for him to come, or to look in the verses of Tanach to see when he should come. The sages say: The wisdom of those who calculate times [of his coming] is small and that you should believe that he will be greater and more honored than all of the kings of Israel since the beginning of time as it is prophesied by all the prophets

from Moshe Rabbeinu, peace be upon him, until Malachi, peace be upon him. And he who doubts or diminishes the greatness of the moshiach is a denier in all the Torah for it testifies to the moshiach explicitly in the portion of Bilam and the portion of "You are gathered (towards the end of Deut)". And part of this principle that there is no king of Israel except from the house of David and from the seed of Solomon alone. And anyone who disputes this regarding this family is a denier of the name of God and in all the words of the prophets.

**Principle XIII: Resurrection of the dead**

And we have already explained it 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've understood them God knows that you are just involved in falsehood. Therefore don't read them quickly because I have not written them as it popped into my head. 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]. □

(Pinchas continued from page 1)

of Moav's attempt to corrupt Bnai Yisrael. The nation of Moav recruits the young women of the nation. They are sent into the camp of Bnai Yisrael with orders to seduce the men. Once the seduction is accomplished, the women entice the men to participate in idolatry.

This plan almost succeeds. The young women are successful in seducing some of the men. A princess of Midyan – Kazbi, the daughter of Tzur – actually succeeds in seducing one of the leaders of the shevet of Shimon – Zimri, the son of Salu.

Pinchas, the grandson of Ahron, intervenes. He executes Zimri and Kazbi while they are in the act of fomication.

Our parasha begins with an account of the rewards received by Pinchas. Among these rewards, Hashem promises Pinchas a permanent covenant of priesthood. What is the meaning of this blessing?

Superficially, it seems that this covenant endowed Pinchas and his descendants with the priesthood. They were made Kohanim. However, Pinchas was that grandson of Ahron. The descendants of Ahron were already chosen to serve as the Kohanim! What is Hashem giving to Pinchas that he does not already possess?

In fact, it is not at all clear that Pinchas and his descendants were already appointed as Kohanim. How is this possible? The Talmud in Tractate Zevachim discusses this issue. The Talmud explains that there are two opinions regarding the identity of the original Kohanim. The opinions differ on a simple question. Who were the original Kohanim? Were the only first Kohanim the sons of Ahron? Alternatively, did this group include all of Ahron's descendants alive at that time? What is the difference between these two possibilities? Pinchas was a grandson of Ahron. He was Ahron's descendant. However, he was not Ahron's son. According to the first opinion, only the sons of Ahron were the original Kohanim. Their descendants who were born subsequently also became Kohanim. However, descendants already born were not included in the Kehunah – the Priesthood. This means that Pinchas was not one of the original Kohanim. Neither could his descendants serve as Kohanim. He was not a son of Ahron. His descendants could not claim descent from a Kohen.

According to the second opinion, all the descendants of Ahron were included in the original group of Kohanim. Pinchas was a grandson of Ahron. He was a descendant. Therefore, he and his children were already included in the Kehunah.[1]

Rashi adopts the first opinion. He indicates that Pinchas was not one of the original Kohanim.[2] Maimonides sides with the second opinion. He maintains that Pinchas was included among the



original Kohanim.[3]

Our pasuk must be interpreted according to each of these opinions. According to the first opinion, our passage is easily understood. Pinchas and his children were not originally included in the Kehunah. At this point, he and his descendants are granted Kehunah. This was part of his reward for acting zealously on behalf of Hashem. In our pasuk, the Almighty creates a permanent change in the status of Pinchas and his descendants. They will now be Kohanim and have the same status as Ahron's sons and their progeny.[4]

However, according to the second opinion, our pasuk is not as easily understood. According to this opinion, Pinchas and his descendants already possessed the status of Kehunah. What new office is given to Pinchas in our passage?

Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra proposes an answer to this question. He explains that the passage does not represent a promise of Kehunah. Pinchas and his descendants already had this status. Instead, in our pasuk, Hashem awards Pinchas the office Kohen Gadol. Pinchas and his descendants will hold this office.[5]

Gershonides observes that most of those who held the office of Kohen Gadol were descendants of Pinchas. However, there were exceptions. Some of those who served as Kohen Gadol were descendants of Itamar. How can these exceptions be reconciled with Ibn Ezra's interpretation of the pasuk?

Gershonides responds that Hashem did not tell

Pinchas that every Kohen Gadol would be one of his descendants. Instead, Hashem promised that this office would always be associated with the descendants of Pinchas. The office would never be transferred to a different family. At times, there would not be a fitting descendant of Pinchas to hold the office. Under such circumstances, the Kohen Gadol would come from the family of Itamar. Nonetheless, this interruption will only be temporary. The office will always return to the descendants of Pinchas.

Geshonides maintains that this is an example of a general principle. Hashem's blessings often involve some element of permanency. For example, kingship is awarded to the shevet of Yehudah. This does not mean that there will never be a king who is not from the shevet of Yehudah. Geshonides points out that such an interpretation is untenable. At times, there may not be an appropriate candidate for kingship from the shevet. Alternatively, sometimes the shevet will deserve to be punished. Under these circumstances, the kingship must temporarily be transferred to another shevet. This is not an abrogation of the blessing. This kingship always returns to Yehudah. Any interruption is temporary. The blessing does not promise that there will never be an interruption. It promises that the kingship will never be permanently removed from the shevet.[6]

**“Be an enemy unto the people of Midyan and strike them. For they acted as enemies towards you through their plotting. They plotted against you in the matter of Peor and in the matter of Kazbi the daughter of Tzur their sister who was killed on the day of the plague for the matter of Peor.”** (BeMidbar 25:17-18)

Hashem commands Moshe to treat the people of Midyan as enemies. Bnai Yisrael are commanded to make war with them. This is because Midyan allied with Moav. They joined in the plot to corrupt Bnai Yisrael.

The pasuk explains that Midyan shared responsibility for the “matter of Peor.” This phrase is not difficult to interpret. The women of Midyan and Moav attempted to induce the men of Bnai Yisrael to engage in idolatry. The idolatrous entity they introduced to Bnai Yisrael was Peor. The pasuk admonishes the people to strike Midyan in response to this nation's efforts to introduce the worship of Peor among Bnai Yisrael. However, the pasuk adds that the people of Midyan should also be treated as enemies because of the “matter of Kazbi the daughter of Tzur.”

This phrase is difficult to understand. Kazbi was one of the women recruited to participate in the seduction of the men of Bnai Yisrael. She was one of the specific women who were involved in the matter of Peor. It seems that the “matter of Peor”

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and the “matter of Kazbi” are two references to the same incident and evil. Why does the pasuk refer to the incident with both of these descriptions? Why is the incident described as the matter of Peor and as the matter of Kazbi?

The commentaries offer various answers to this question. According to Rashi, the pasuk is not only an admonishment to strike against Midyan. The pasuk is also a warning. Hashem commands Bnai Yisrael to wage war with Midyan and explains the urgency of this mission. Midyan is a dangerous adversary. This nation is completely committed to the destruction of Bnai Yisrael. What is the indication of this commitment? The nation sent Kazbi, the daughter of Tzur, into the camp of Bnai Yisrael. They assigned her the role of seductress and harlot. This is remarkable! Kazbi was the daughter of Tzur. Tzur was one of the kings of Midyan. The people of Midyan were willing to defile a princess in order to destroy Bnai Yisrael. This is indicative of extreme, self-destructive hatred.[7] Bnai Yisrael must protect itself from this desperate enemy.

Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra offers a different explanation of the passage. He explains that the pasuk is providing an enumeration of reasons for the war Bnai Yisrael is to wage. The first reason is that Bnai Yisrael must respond to the actions already taken by Midyan. Midyan plotted against Bnai Yisrael. Midyan attempted to corrupt Bnai Yisrael. Second, Bnai Yisrael should be mindful of the future. Pinchas had killed Kazbi, the daughter of Tzur. Tzur was a king. His daughter was a princess. Surely, the people of Midyan would wish to avenge the death of their princess! In short, Midyan had attempted to destroy Bnai Yisrael without provocation. Now, Midyan had an additional motivation – the death of their princess.[8] Bnai Yisrael must protect themselves from Midyan. They must strike their enemy before Midyan can again plot against them. ■

[1] Mesechet Zevachim 101b.

[2] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 25:13.

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Bi'at HaMikdash 5:12.

[4] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 25:13.

[5] Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 25:13.

[6] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1998), p 141.

[7] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 25:18.

[8] Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 25:18.

# the Progression of IDOL WORSHIP

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

introductory remarks to his “Laws of Star Worship” (“Avodah Zara”, “strange worship”), or idolatry. (Idolatry commenced with star worship, as Maimonides teaches.)

Maimonides states, the error of that generation was the assumption that G-d’s will was that man glorify those stars and planets that minister before G-d. Those people - Adam’s grandson Enosh included - assumed erroneously, that the stars occupy some special proximity with G-d. Error number one: G-d does not exist in space. G-d created the universe, and does not exist ‘within it’. The proof: G-d existed prior to the universe. King Solomon said this too, “the heavens cannot hold You.” (Kings I, 8:27) Maimonides underlines their error as “assuming star worship is G-d’s will.” Herein is their essential sin: “assuming G-d’s will”. To suggest something is G-d’s will is the haughtiest of all thoughts. How can man know what the Creator of the universe desires? Nonetheless, these foolish people did so.

We learn that idolatry is the act of “approaching G-d through worship that is different, or strange from what G-d declares we do.” Therefore, if one attempts to reach G-d through star worship, he commits idolatry. However, if one does not attempt to reach G-d, and bows to the stars for other reasons, then we cannot define this as idolatry. Such an act, when not trying to fulfill G-d’s will, is simply stupid. However, it is not defined as idolatry. In this case, one is not trying to approach G-d. This is an important theoretical and philosophical

distinction.

Maimonides continues to describe the downward spiral of civilization in its progressively, deviant idolatry. First, man accepted that G-d exists, but suggested that His worship demanded star worship. Next, false prophets arose, lied to the people, claiming that G-d spoke to them, and instructed them in the construction of statues. They made up these forms in their fantasies, instructing them in G-d’s name that all people should worship them. The incentive offered by the false prophets to the people was that they would meet with success if they heeded his words, or failure if they didn’t.

Eventually, other, lying false prophets said the stars themselves appeared to them with instructions to do such and such worship. Soon, G-d was completely forgotten, and the worship of these statues remained as the only worship. Their priests assumed there was no such thing as G-d...only these idols. It appears from Maimonides’ words, that this final state remained unchanged. I say unchanged, as we see there was a progression, until this final stage.

Why did idolatry progressively deteriorate, until it reached the final state of worshipping stone and metal gods? We must understand why there was this phenomenon of “progressive deterioration”, and also, why idolatry finds itself not progressing, after this final practice was reached.

To gain some insight into idolatry, let us look to the famous case of the Golden Calf. Moses told the people he would ascend Sinai, and return

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forty days later. The people miscounted, including his ascension date as day one. Therefore, when they thought it was day 40, it was really only day 39. Moses' absence caused some great concern. Why? These were their words: "And the people saw that Moses delayed to descend from the mountain, and the nation assembled on Aaron and they said to him, 'get up and make for us gods that will go before us, for this man Moses that took us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.'" (Exod. 32:1)

We immediately notice the use of the extra word "man", in "the man Moses." Of course Moses is a man! What is this extra word indicating? It teaches us the precise cause of idolatry: man's need for tangible leaders. But not just tangible, the "man" Moses means that mankind is predisposed to needing an authority figure, which is "man".

From youth, we view parents as incomparable. They lift us, feed us, care for us, and direct us. They become a force not to be reckoned with. Psychologically, many adults do not ever mature past the need for the parent. G-d created the institution of parents by design. He could have made mankind as He made Adam, with no parent. But G-d's wisdom demanded that mankind endure the stages of childhood and adolescent development for good reason: G-d wishes man to acquire a respect for authority, to be ultimately transferred onto Him. With no parent, we cannot obtain any semblance of respecting authority. We will never arrive at viewing G-d as an "authority".

Now, when one matures, he can choose one of two paths; acceptance of his parents as mere mortals where he abandons his previous infantile "awe" of them, or he can succumb to his infantile emotions. In this latter scenario, he cannot abandon the need for parents, but simultaneously he realizes his parents are no better than he is. He is stuck. He seeks parental direction, as he remains an infant in his mind, so his only recourse is the invention of gods. This is where idolatry finds its roots: in man's infantile psyche. This is why the Jews said to Aaron, the "man" Moses is gone. The Jews returned to the infantile, at the moment this "physical" leader was gone. They could not tolerate Moses' absence, and demanded that Aaron create something physical to relate to. As Ramban says, no fool thinks the gold in his ear took him out of Egypt. They desired the Gold Calf as something physical. They were as children who lost their parents.

We may now answer our first two questions. The reason idolatry finds no further progression once it reached the practice of statue worship, is



because this is the raw, infantile expression of relying on the parent. Once these idolaters mentioned by Maimonides had deteriorated to pure statue worship, with no realization of G-d, there was no further to go. This is the infantile state of a child who finds his total comfort when his parents are in the room – as long as a form of a person is around, the infantile mind feels secure; he has his "parent". He feels protected, and his fears are gone. There is nothing more the child needs. So too, there is nothing more an adult needs in idolatry, for idolatry is the complete reversion to this infantile state of seeking the parent. For this reason, many idols are formed after the likeness of man. And for this reason, G-d warns against making the forms of man, "And guard your souls greatly, for you did not see any form on the day that G-d spoke to you in Horeb from amidst flames. Lest you act destructively, and make for yourself a statue, the form of any design, the form of male or female." (Deut., 4:15,16)

Why was there a progression of varying states of deteriorating idolatry? Because until the primary emotion was satisfied (i.e., statues) man was not yet completely satisfied with his current state of star worship. One may ask, "Why didn't

the first idolaters go straight to statue worship, and ignore G-d right off the bat?" The answer is that the emotions of man cannot make large steps. This would be a shock to the system. In general, man finds it difficult to make any sudden changes. Idolatry is the same.

We now understand why idolatry had a progression, and why it then came to a halt: it was seeking to completely mimic the infantile attachment to the parent, and when it found it, it was satisfied, so no further deviation was needed.

Parenthetically, the reason why false prophets became part of the progression, is not to be found in idolatry's dynamics, but in a very commonly found human expression: ego. Man's ego, if not tempered by the realization of the true G-d, and His authority, will always seek to express itself. So, many false prophets lied, claiming they were selected by G-d for communication. It is not surprising that in the drive towards denying G-d with idolatry, the "self" steals the spotlight, and many liars claimed to have been contacted by G-d.

We see that times have not changed at all since Adam's grandson. This week, Sun Myung Moon just proclaimed himself the messiah. ■

# Alien ALLEGIANCES

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

**Reader:** Dear Rabbi Ben-Chaim: I am frankly appalled by the series of articles attacking Christianity in the last few issues of Jewish Times. I have shared these with other members of my Shul and my Rabbi and everyone has reacted negatively and even felt offended by them. I don't have any problem with articles or websites encouraging Jews to be educated about Christianity if anything to ward off attempts to convert us or to attract us to the so-called Messianic movements. But your articles have used defamatory and derogatory terms such as "evil" and others. As an educated person, I am aware of the violent past and injustices committed by Christianity towards us, and we should not forget that. However, in these times, when both they and us face a relentless and deadly enemy in radical Islam it so happens that fundamental Christians and Orthodox Jews are the only allies that can block the Islamists. I would hope that these articles attacking Christianity would be either tempered and elevated to a dignified level of honest discussion of the theological differences or altogether stopped if you are not able to do so. I would appreciate your thoughts on this issue.

**Mesora:** Other considerations must not mitigate the teaching of what is true. Christianity is an evil, as are all other false ideas, and this word "evil" should not be mitigated because another enemy exists. Do you take issue with Ramban for his strong words during his Disputation at Barcelona? Do you take issue with Maimonides' words in his ridicule of Christianity in the Laws of Kings below?

Laws of Kings, Laws 11:10-12 (Capach Edition): [10] "Can there be a greater stumbling block than this (Christianity)? That all the prophets spoke that the Messiah will redeem Israel and save them, and gather their dispersed and strengthen their Mitzvot, and this (one, i.e., Jesus) caused the Jews to be destroyed by the sword, and scattered their remnants and humbled them, and exchanged the Torah, and caused the majority of the world to err to serve a god other than the Lord."

I have not even touched on the Crusades or other Christian atrocities, as did Maimonides above. He said Christianity caused the Jews to be "destroyed by the sword." Is that not an "evil"? Isn't missionary work an "evil"? I guess you have greater complaints about Maimonides' writings, than mine.

Maimonides did not say, "conceal my words in the future". Both Ramban, and Maimonides, our greatest teachers, did not play politics, holding their tongues when it came to identifying and condemning Christianity, even to the face of their Christian counterparts, as seen in Ramban's Disputation at Barcelona. Of course, Ramban was summoned, and did not initiate this debate. I too do not initiate a debate, but write to my audience of Jews who visit Mesora. If Christians visit, they must be objective enough to

appreciate that just as they teach against Judaism, we also teach against Christianity and all other man-made religions. We will not and cannot squelch Torah principles. It is wrong to soften one's speech, if in the process of doing so he dilutes his point. The truth of a lesson far outweighs the ruffled feathers of those who cannot stomach the truth.

I wonder also why you seek us to hold our tongue; for fear that Christians will visit Mesora, those very individuals who openly condemn you to burn in hell for rejecting their man-god Jesus. You accept their ridicule, but simultaneously attempt to protect them from our "harsh words", should they visit us. Your allegiance should be to what our Rabbis were allegiant to, not to maintaining your politics, if it risks hiding our Rabbi's words from other Jews. Such politics is what is killing more and more Jews in Israel. If Israel would adhere to Torah, with no concern for world approval, far fewer Jews would be dead right now. We don't need approval, when it costs lives. That is the greatest evil.

As a matter of fact, what you wish to silence - our words - is the cause of so many Jews becoming more secure in their Judaism, now clearly understanding the fallacies of Christianity. You should also know, that were it not for the many other Jews and Rabbis who openly discuss the false and evil doctrines of Christianity, many Christians would not have come to follow the Noachide laws, which is G-d's will. But due to the honesty of those teachers of Noachide law, fearless of Christian ridicule, more Gentiles have not lost their souls. You should stand and applaud them, not ask them to quiet down.

I don't know if you share my concern, that other human beings - both Jew and Gentile - should have the chance to realize what is true, and not lose their soul by following idolatry. Yes, idolatry, those are Maimonides' words: "Jesus exchanged the Torah, and caused the majority of the world to err to serve a god other than the Lord." You should be more concerned with your fellow Jews who need to learn Torah, and also with your Gentile friends who are lost, following what Maimonides describes as idolatry. Don't you wish they become exposed to truth, or do your subjective goals outweigh G-d's creation - for mankind in general to learn G-d's words?

I strongly urge you and the others in your shul that you mentioned, to rethink your views. And do not argue that since many others in your shul agree with you, that your position is tenable. This line of reason, which you opened with above, is not rational. Judge an idea or a position based solely on its reason, not its numbers of followers.

Review Maimonides as quoted above again, and read through the Disputation at Barcelona. These two great Rabbis should be followed, not ridiculed. ■

## Oxymorons:

# Plural Positions

**RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM**

**Reader:** Your site is quite odd. You seem to negate any idea of any arguments throughout Jewish History and presume yourself as the sole source on what is considered "correct" and "truth", whether it be in areas of Philosophy or Halacha. To presume either is quite laughable even for the greatest talmid chacham, which I'm sorry to say from reading through your website, you do not seem to be.

You quote the Rambam a great deal despite many views (especially in areas of philosophy) that clearly argue with his views. To presume any of these views as the "correct one" or "truth" is; a) quote presumptuous, or b) a dangerous foolish move. There are many philosophical and spiritual views in Judaism, yet you claim your opinions are correct.

In my experience the beauty of Orthodox Judaism, from both a halachic and philosophical perspective is the wealth of views we have in people trying to better find how G-d fits their lives. To make a statement that your view is correct or "better" than someone else's is wrong and can lead that person astray.

You should really consider placing on your site a greater variety of views and quote sources from many different philosophical backgrounds. You should also get an education... many of your claims are clearly stated from a lack of one.

**Mesora:** Answer a few questions to yourself:

1) Why did all the Rabbis and Sages argue on each other, stating their views with absolute conviction, equally convinced their opponent was wrong? According to you, they should have accepted other views equally, but they didn't.

2) You write, "the beauty of Orthodox Judaism, from both a halachic and philosophical perspective is the wealth of views..." According to you, my view should be equally acceptable as yours, which places you in an unanswerable contradiction.

3) You claim that by many people arguing on Rambam, this validates their positions as equally tenable. I fail to see the logic in your argument. Perhaps today, I will argue on Einstein. I doubt my position will ever be viewed as entering the arena with that "heavyweight". The validity of a position does not emerge from either, numbers of supporters, or from the simple act of opening one's mouth in opposition. Credence for one's argument emerges though a single criterion: rationality.

4) Your most obvious problem is your statement, "people trying to better find how G-d fits their lives". You thereby suggest that what is absolute, is one's predefined life. From that 'starting point', according to you, only then do we seek how G-d "fits" into our predefined philosophy. You miss the entire point of Torah: that G-d's knowledge is absolute, and the purpose in life is for man to "fit" himself into G-d's philosophy. Not the opposite as you state.

G-d's Torah contains no problems. All is true and harmonious. The Torah has only one position on each concept, i.e., "absolute truth" reflecting G-d's knowledge. The Rabbis taught, (paraphrased) "originally, there were no arguments in Torah. It was only due to man's ignorance that arguments arose." It is for this reason that we find the Rabbis so vehement in their positions, not accepting what their minds saw as incorrect. They did not accept a "wealth of views" as you do. They understood the concept that truth is 'singular' by definition. There cannot be two true views on a single point.

Maimonides and every Rabbi taught his own view, to the exclusion of others. This needs no explanation. What else would they teach?! Maimonides taught what he saw as truth, although others taught differently. Do you feel Maimonides should teach other opinions, with which he disagreed? This makes no sense. Similarly, I will not teach what I see is fallacy. ■

