



What elements of Egyptian culture and religion affect Jews today, still so evident in our current day and age?
What "devices" do you feel have protective qualities?
Leave Egypt permanently this Passover.
Abandon all except for God.

ESTD 1997

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

JewishTimes

Volume IV, No. 28...April 15, 2005

WWW.MESORA.ORG/JEWISHTIMES

Download and Print Free

IN THIS ISSUE:

PARSHA: METZORA	1,5-7
PURPOSE OF EMOTIONS	1-4
YOSEF'S COLUMN: EXODUS	4
PUNISHMENT OF LEPROSY	8
LOSHON HARA	9
TANYA'S HERESY V	10

FREE AT MESORA:

SEE THIS AND OTHER FEATURES AT OUR SITE



Receive the JewishTimes free each Friday morning

Send any email to:

subscribe@mesora.org

Weekly Parsha

Metzora

RABBI BERNARD FOX

This is the law of the metzora on the day of his purification. And he should be brought to the Kohen. (VaYikra 14:1)

Parshat Tazria discussed the laws of the metzora. This is a person stricken with tzara'at. The affliction is a result of spiritual failings. The metzora is ritually unclean. Our

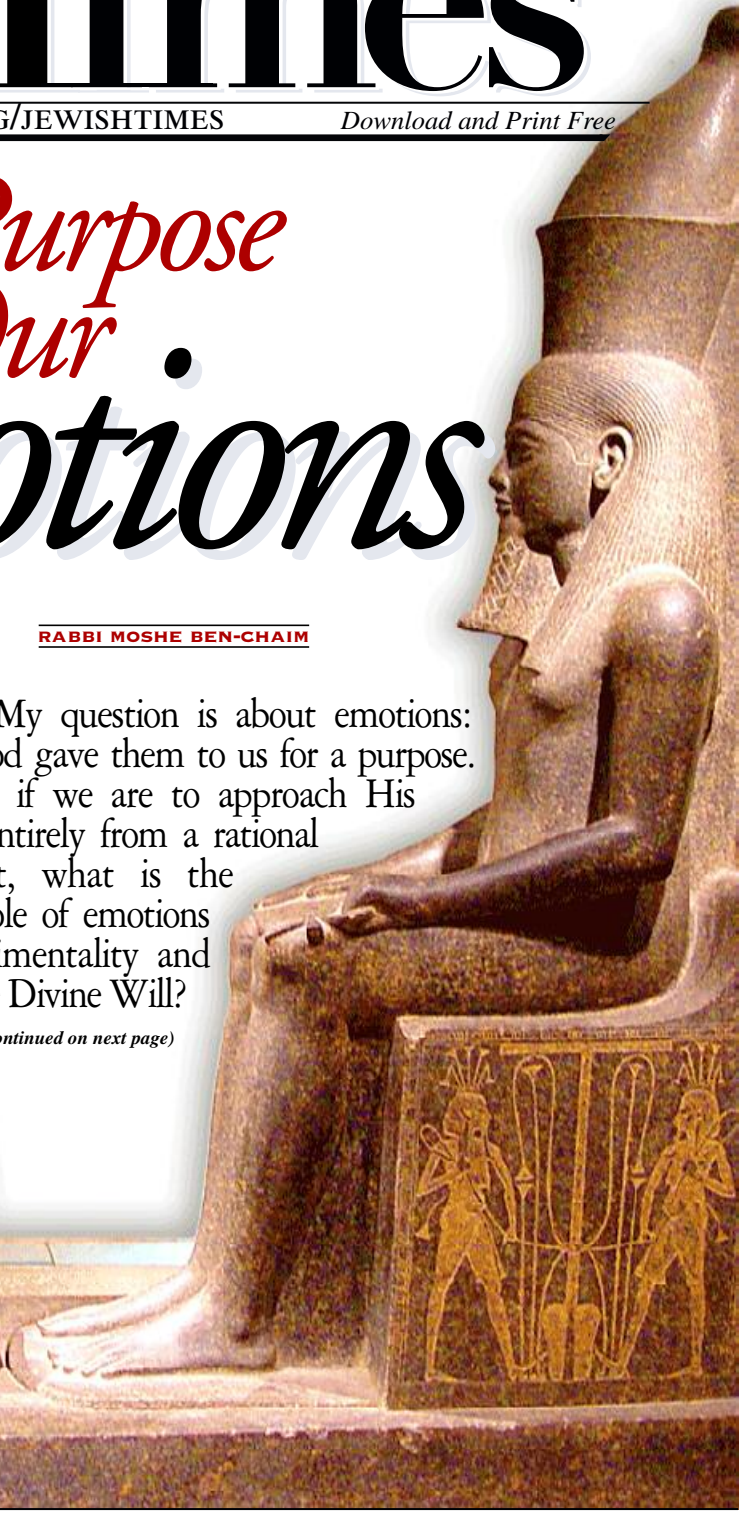
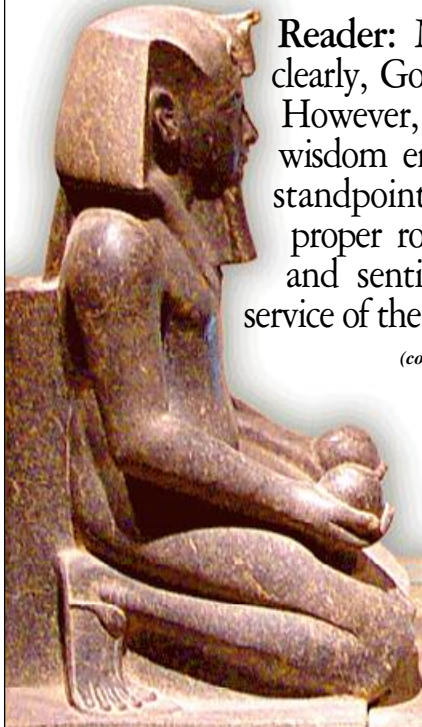
(continued on page 5)

the Purpose of Our Emotions

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

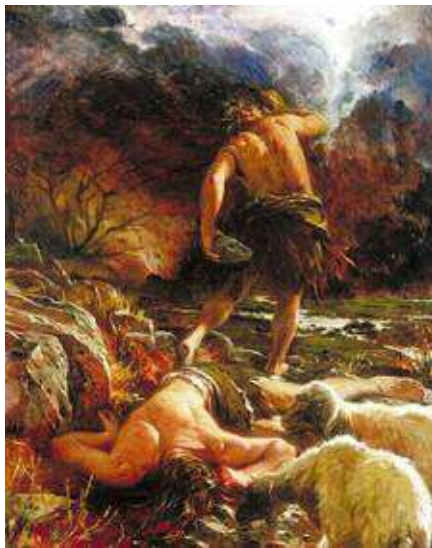
Reader: My question is about emotions: clearly, God gave them to us for a purpose. However, if we are to approach His wisdom entirely from a rational standpoint, what is the proper role of emotions and sentimentality and service of the Divine Will?

(continued on next page)



(continued from previous page)

Perfection



*Cain killed
his brother Abel
due to his emotions.*

*We still possess the
very same emotions*

Cain displayed.

*How may we
harness them
for the good?*

Mesora: I will answer your question, and will also address another, related question asked by Tamara just yesterday. Tamara asked why God made people so different from each other: “We all have the same emotions, but the degree of variation in each person, along with his personality and preferences, makes us so different. Why did God want this to be?”

First questions first: the Talmud states that they once tied up the instincts (Yetzer Hara) and this resulted in chickens not laying eggs, and man not moving to accomplish anything. Emotions are needed to drive man and beast; both require an “energy source” - which we call the libido. This libidinal/emotional energy drives man, motivates him, and is responsible in all its forms for man’s accomplishments. This energy fuels our many emotions. A Rabbi once explained Ecclesiastes 1:7 (the metaphor of a river flowing) as referring to this “energy source” in each person. This energy may be let loose, when we do not restrain ourselves from any desire, or they may be directed by our intellect as to when and where we express, indulge or restrain from emotional involvement or gratification. King Solomon opened his work Ecclesiastes with a description of how man operates psychologically, so we may appreciate his subsequent words describing man, his downfalls, and his correct lifestyle. I believe the Torah does the same, using water again.

I thank my Rav Muvhak of 26 years for once calling our attention to an Ibn Ezra on Ecclesiastes 7:3. There, Ibn Ezra describes the three major components of man, and how one may eventuate at the life of wisdom. He commences by describing man’s three major components of his mind; 1) the Nefesh (base drives), 2) the Neshama (intelligence) and 3) the Ruach (ego). Ibn Ezra then explains how man can become perfected and negotiate his varied natures towards success:

“It is known that when the base drives (nefesh) of man are strengthened, the intelligence (neshama) becomes weak and has no power to stand before it, for the body and all instincts strengthen that nefesh. Therefore, one who indulges in eating and drinking will never become wise. [But] when one joins the intelligence with one’s ego (ruach) one may succeed over the nefesh, the base drives. Then, the “eyes of the intelligence” are opened a small degree and eh is enables to understand physical science. However he cannot [yet] understand the higher areas of wisdom due to the power of the ego which strives for power; and it is that ego which creates anger....And after the

intelligence reigns over the base drives via the assistance of the ego, the intelligence requires it be immersed in wisdom, that it will strengthen it, until the intelligence succeeds over the ego, and the ego is now subjugated to the intelligence.”

This amazing Ibn Ezra means as follows: At first, man enters the world as a child, completely controlled by his instincts, as his mind is not yet available. As he grows, his mind begins to stir, but the instincts have a head start on the intelligence, and it is impossible to conquer them alone. Man requires teaming his intelligence with another new, developing part of his mind: his ego. One’s ego is a formidable adversary to the base instincts, as one will seek ego satisfaction over instinctual satisfaction at a stage in his development. However, this ego and drive for power and fame limits a person, and causes him to become angry when he does not get his way. This means his energies are not solely devoted to study, some of his concern still flows towards the ego. What he must do is to fully immerse himself in wisdom, and only then he will begin to attach himself to ideas, with no ulterior motive. This attachment possesses a greater hold on him, as it is his mind that is now engaged. The mind has the greatest magnetism of all man’s components, as God designed man to be attached to wisdom over all else. God gave man his greatest strengths in the realm of his intellect. But to arrive at this level of attachment to truth and wisdom, Ibn Ezra teaches that man must encounter these various stages, and address each stage as outlined: man must overcome the first set of drives he encounters, i.e., the base instincts, by teaming his ego with intelligence. Then man must immerse himself in wisdom, and this will loosen the hold, which his ego has on him. Man can arrive at a state where his mind is attached to the good, more powerfully than how strong his ego and base drives were attached to their objects of passion.

Once at this final level, and even before, God’s plan is that mankind harnesses his instincts and use them in service of the Torah lifestyle. Thus, King Solomon wrote in chapter three of Ecclesiastes that “there is a time to kill and a time to heal...a time a time to cry and a time to laugh...a time to love and a time to hate”. Meaning, no feeling or attitude is correct at all times, but must be guided. What guides it? Our intellect. War may be correct to remove killers, but killing innocent people is not correct. Love is good for creating societies, but wrong when used to pity a murderer. Harnessing emotions for Torah’s goals can be expressed positively as in loving your neighbor, lending money to the poor, and negatively by speaking

(continued on next page)

Perfection

loshon hora – evil speech. In some cases we must force ourselves to maintain more positive feelings, as in helping a friend. At the same time, we must subjugate our “natural” feeling of resistance to helping our enemy, and bear the yoke for sake of the Torah’s loftier goals, until we appreciate why we should help an enemy in certain cases.

Emotions, or the Yetzer Hara, are comprised of numerous feelings that may be categorized under larger headings. For example, man’s sense of self – his ego – generates many “sub-emotions”: ego may be the cause for his hating someone who wronged HIM, as in, “Who does he think he is to do that to ME?!” In this case, one’s self image caused him to get riled up, as stated by Ibn Ezra above. Had he cared little about another person’s words, or little about his popularity, he would have let those intended insults pass with no affect on his demeanor. But the fool who hears ridicule will seek to protect his fragile ego, subsequently taking revenge on the one who slandered him. He also feels rejection, (the emotion that started this process) another expression of his need to maintain his desired self-image. In all these cases, the primary faculty of “ego” is responsible for all the trouble this poor individual suffered. So from a single faculty – ego – many emotions are heightened and acted upon, or controlled. And although praiseworthy, mere control is only one level. There is yet a higher level of existence we may achieve, where we are removed from the stress of controlling our emotions. That level is when the emotion is minimized as far as possible. How does this work?

What is the Torah’s perspective on how to handle insult? The Torah lifestyle is where God always retains the focus. Man is most happy when his essence is satisfied: when his mind is engaged in perceiving new ideas and he arrives at a new truth about how the world operates, seeing new levels of wisdom in creation. As such, the self decreases in focus, and ultimately becomes of little concern: “The righteous eat to satisfy their souls”, “Bread with salt he eats”, “I am but dust and ashes.” These Torah sentiments display the true Torah perspective, where the self is maintained properly, but not excessively, and where one’s self-image is accurate: man is but “ashes” compared to God and creation. He does not live as a monk, he is not morbid, but he caters to his needs and desires guided by the Torah’s prescription. He strikes the balance where all of his emotions are in check, a middle ground as prescribed by Maimonides. This middle ground is where man is equidistant from both poles of a given emotional spectrum: he is not greedy, and not overly charitable; he is not callous, but not overly empathetic. Being equidistant was explained by my same Rav

Muvhak as the means by which the intelligence is the least pulled by the emotions. Imagine two magnets at either side of a table. In order to maintain the least pull they may exert over a steel ball bearing, we place that ball bearing exactly in the table’s center. Neither magnet has any more of a pull than the other, and the ball bearing remains at the center; never overpowered by either magnet. The emotions work in an identical fashion.

When man attains a correct perspective of himself, and his emotions fall in line after having studied reality and Torah, he does not have to control himself from lashing out when ridiculed, as the ridicule has no affect at all on his demeanor. He realizes too, that words do not alter reality! If he possesses good values before the insult, the insult cannot change that truth. God and His world humble him, enough, not to be bothered by the insult. Nor did the insult change reality. God created our psyches, and knows best how we should manage them so as to achieve happiness and fulfillment. In this example, man followed God’s Torah, and found that what is prescribed by God, works perfectly, that he lives a far better, undisturbed life. Less matters stress him, and thereby, he is even afforded greater energy to pursue God’s wisdom.

Now what about Tamara’s question? Why is each person designed so differently from the next? Not only do we all possess these various feelings, but also, every person varies in his “degree” of emotional strength (passion) and personality traits. One man may be passionate about money, while another is passionate about ideas and wisdom, caring little for money. The difference in these two people is explained by the latter having developed his mind, and discovering a new truth: wisdom offers a real happiness, which far exceeds the joy, imagined by the first man to result from wealth. Both individuals have a large quantity of energy (we all do) but they differ in what they “value” and therefore place their energies in different pursuits. I recall asking my Rabbi, the day I became a rabbi – why there are so few Jews entering the Rabbinate today. “Have people changed?” I asked. He responded, “No at all. But our society has placed higher value on wealth than on wisdom. The same numbers of great minds exist, but they gravitate towards lesser pursuits.” He continued, “The Ivan Boeskie’s of the world could have been great Rabbis, had they realized that a life of wisdom is far greater than a life of pursuing wealth.” I concluded that if all men and women would be shown the truth, they would all desire it equally. The difference in what people follow has less to do with God’s design, and more to do with man’s ignorance.

That explains the “choices” man makes about his occupations. But why did God make people

(continued from previous page)

*Our various traits
which distinguish us
all, are the very
causes which keep
societies functioning.*

Perfection

so different than one another? Why are some people delicate, others are hard or stubborn; some people like working with their hands, while others lack any such ability? Why are some people leaders and some people followers? I recall an explanation, but not the source. Peoples' differences enable the world's continued function. Had all men and women become doctors, but not one person became a baker, shoemaker, farmer, rabbi or a builder, we would perish physically and spiritually. God, in His wisdom, created each person with different inclinations and abilities. Some traits may even be learned, while others are innate. This enables all human needs to be addressed by those suited for the job. Our differences enabled the continued existence of mankind.

I hope this offers some glimpse into why we possess emotions, and why God made us all different.

Now, having gained this knowledge, it will benefit us all if we start to examine ourselves, make note of our individual natures, see where we are failing, admit our errors, and use the Torah as a guide to return ourselves to a life of real happiness and fulfillment. God created our psyches, and knows best how we should manage them so as to achieve happiness and fulfillment. We all possess the ability to examine life, just as King Solomon did. He realized that a life of wisdom far exceeds any other material pursuit, or lifestyle. He was one of the wisest men ever. Let us first study his work Ecclesiastes, understanding his teachings, and then be led by reason to alter our lifestyles to match what is true, what is our purpose, and what will offer real happiness. □

Spring Rates

New

Purchase a Mesora HTML email ad, and receive 2 more ads **FREE**: one here in the JewishTimes, and an ad on our homepage. Inquire here:

info@mesora.org



\$895

HTML Email Ads

Students

Yosef's Column

YOSEF ROTH



RECOUNTING THE Exodus

One of the mitzvos on the Seder night is to transmit to our children the story of our going out of Egypt, including all the miracles that God did for our ancestors. The best way to accomplish this is through questions and answers. We see that Halacha incorporates activities within the Seder in order to make questions. An example of this is Karpas. Dipping a food usually takes place within the meal, and not before the meal. The reason we dip before the meal is so the children will ask why we are doing it, and we will be able to answer them because "tonight is different than all other nights". When the kid asks, "why is tonight different than all other nights?" we will begin telling them the story of us getting freed from Egypt. The Rambam says "a person must make differences on this night so that the children will ask why is this night different from all other nights". We see according to the Rambam that a person should strive to make any difference in order to make the children inquisitive. If this provokes questions, he will fulfill the positive commandment of telling over the story to his children. □

The JewishTimes is happy to announce a new column, "Yosef's Column", delivered by our young friend Yosef Roth. He invites other young students to contribute your Divrei Torah. Email your Torah to Yosef here: yosef@mesora.org

pasuk introduces the discussion of the cleansing and purification process of the metzora. The Chumash explains that the afflicted individual must be brought to the Kohen. The Kohen is responsible for the execution of this process.

The commentaries are concerned with the wording of our passage. The metzora is brought to the Kohen. The implication is that the Kohen does not come to the metzora. The metzora must come to the Kohen.

What is the reason for this law? In order to answer this question, we must recall one of the special laws governing the conduct of the metzora. During the period of the affliction, the metzora must live outside of the city or camp. This means that the afflicted person cannot enter the camp to consult with the Kohen. The Kohen must leave the city and come to the metzora.

This practical consideration would seem to require that the Kohen come to the metzora! What is the meaning of our pasuk? How can the metzora come to the Kohen?

Sforno explains that there is another consideration that is relevant. The honor of the Kohen must be respected. Therefore, it is inappropriate for the Kohen to travel to the metzora. However, the metzora cannot enter the city! How are these conflicting considerations resolved? Sforno explains that this is the issue addressed by the pasuk. The metzora must approach the city. The Kohen meets the metzora directly outside the boundaries of the camp. This procedure respects the position of the Kohen without compromising the prohibition against the metzora entering the city. This is the meaning of the pasuk. To the extent possible, the metzora must be brought to the Kohen.[1]

Sforno's explanation is very interesting. The Chumash is stressing that the metzora must respect and honor the Kohen. This implies that the metzora has a special need for this lesson. Why is this message so relevant for the metzora?

Maimonides explains that tzara'at is a punishment for lashon hara – gossip and tale bearing. He adds that this behavior ultimately leads to the denigration, by the gossip, of the righteous.[2] What is the connection between these two activities?

Perhaps, the righteous are particularly susceptible to being targeted for lashon hara. What motivates us to speak lashon hara? Lashon hara is a means by which we can feel better about ourselves. We denigrate others that we feel are, in some way, better than ourselves. We are saying that our target is not really such a good person. We no longer need not feel that we compare poorly to this person.

We can now identify the reason that the tzadik is very susceptible to being targeted. The tzadik challenges our estimation of ourselves. The behavior of the righteous gives us cause to

recognize our own faults. This occurs through a process of comparison. This can be a painful realization. Some individuals will be tempted to speak lashon hara against the tzadik. This tactic helps alleviate the pain created by the comparison.

The Kohen is devoted to the service of Hashem. He represents commitment to Torah and righteous behavior. This status exposes the Kohen to lashon hara. It is fitting that, as part of the purification process, the metzora express respect for the Kohen. Perhaps, for this reason the entire process of identifying tzara'at and purification is the responsibility of the Kohen. This arrangement forces the metzora to demonstrate humility in the presence the Kohen.

The Kohen shall then order that for the person undergoing purification there be taken two live clean birds, a piece of cedar, some crimson thread and a hyssop branch. (VaYikra 14:4) This pasuk introduces the purification process for the metzora. The Chumash describes the purification process in some detail. The first portion of the process involves the items listed in our pasuk. One of the two birds is slaughtered. The blood of this bird is mixed with fresh water. The second bird, along with the cedar, crimson thread and hyssop are dipped into the mixture of blood and water. The mixture is sprinkled on the metzora. The live bird is then released.

It is difficult to determine the meaning of this process. The commentaries offer various explanations. One of the most interesting is provided by Rav Yosef Karo. In order to understand this interpretation, we need an introduction.

The human being is a combination of the spiritual and material. These two elements compete for dominance within the individual. How should a person resolve the conflict between these elements? There are various approaches to this issue. Some religions favor denial of the material element of our nature. If all of humanity would adopt this approach, humanity would cease to exist. The instincts provide the motivation for many human endeavors. The obvious example is procreation. Clearly, humanity cannot survive if the instinctual drives are completely suppressed.

An alternative is to adopt the opposite extreme. Some individuals forsake their spiritual element. These people choose to become completely absorbed in their material desires. This solution to the human conflict is also ineffectual. First, often these people feel unfulfilled. It seems we have a need for spiritual expression. A life bereft of any spiritual endeavor feels empty and meaningless.

Furthermore, the human being has the potential to achieve eternal existence. The spiritual element is not extinguished by death. However, this element must be developed during the period of one's existence in this world. If one does not

develop spiritually, the element becomes atrophied. It cannot survive material death.

We can now understand Rav Yosef Karo's comments. He explains that the two birds represent the two aspects of the human being – the spiritual and material. One bird is slaughtered. This bird represents the instinctual element. Complete dominance of this element results in the destruction of the individual. Happiness in this world is lost. Eternal existence is forsaken.

The other bird represents the spiritual element of the human being. This bird is dipped into the blood of the slaughtered bird. What is the message, here? One cannot completely ignore the instinctual element. Instead, the spiritual person must acknowledge the instinctual element and even indulge this element to a limited extent. This is essential for the existence of society and the stability of the personality. This acknowledgement is symbolized through the dipping of "spiritual" bird into the blood of the "material" bird.

The bird is then freed. This act symbolizes the freedom of the spiritual element to pursue spiritual endeavors. Acknowledging the instinctual element does not damage the individual's spiritual element. On the contrary, denial of the instincts is destructive. The healthy individual recognizes the importance of the instincts and through this recognition attains spiritual freedom.[3] Using this approach Rav Yosef Karo also explains other elements of the purification process.

Before one begins to search one recites the blessing, "that sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us on the removal of chametz"... (Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayim 432:1)

And there are those who observe the custom of placing pieces of chametz in a place that they will be found. This is in order that the blessing will not be recited needlessly. However, if these pieces are not distributed, it does not prevent the recital of the blessing. This is because a person's intention in reciting the blessing is to remove chametz if it is found. (Ibid, Rema 432:2)

On Pesach, leavened substances – chametz – are forbidden. A number of commandments regulate our interaction with these substances. These mitzvot prohibit consumption and possession of chametz. It is prohibited to even benefit from this forbidden substance. In addition to these prohibitions, there is a positive command regarding chametz. One must remove all chametz from one's possession prior to Pesach. Two processes are employed to fulfill this positive command. First, a thorough search is conducted on the night of the fourteenth of Nissan – the night prior to Pesach. Any chametz found during this search is subsequently destroyed. Second, we



nullify our ownership of all chametz. This is accomplished through the pronouncement of a specific legal formula. This formula is recited after the search for the chametz and repeated after the destruction of the chametz.

The search for the chametz fulfills a positive command to remove the chametz from our possession. Therefore, it is preceded by a blessing. This blessing is described in the above quotation from Shulchan Aruch. Rema – Rav Moshe Isserles – deals with an interesting problem. It is prohibited to recite a blessing needlessly. This blessing is recited prior to fulfilling the commandment to remove chametz from one's possession. It is possible that the person reciting the blessing will not find chametz. No chametz will be removed. If this should occur, the mitzvah of removing chametz has not been fulfilled. The blessing was recited needlessly.

Rema, suggests that this consideration led to the development of a popular custom. Pieces of chametz are placed in a specific place in the house. The search is conducted. At least these pre-placed pieces of chametz are found. This assures that some chametz is removed. The mitzvah is fulfilled. The blessing is not recited needlessly.

It is easy to appreciate the logic of this custom. It seems to respond to a valid consideration. However, Shulchan Aruch does not require the placement of these pieces of bread. Furthermore, Rema explains that there is a basis for Shulchan Aruch's dismissal of this issue. He points out that it is not absolutely necessary to find chametz in order for the blessing to be recited. He argues that the meaning of the blessing is determined by the intention of the person by whom it is recited. This person does refer to the commandment for the destruction of chametz. However, one's real intention is that we are commanded to destroy any chametz one may find. Therefore, this objective is fulfilled regardless of finding actual chametz. This explains the position of Shulchan Aruch. There is simply no need to validate the blessing though distributing pieces of bread.

Rema's argument is somewhat difficult to understand. The terms in the blessing are not an expression of personal thoughts. Our personal interpretation of the blessing is irrelevant. The blessing refers to a specific commandment. In order to determine the meaning of the blessing, we cannot consider a subjective interpretation of one reciting the blessing. We must analyze the actual commandment. This blessing acknowledges the mitzvah to remove chametz from one's possession. Rema seems to concede that the commandment requires the actual removal of chametz. If so, the personal interpretation of the individual reciting the blessing is unimportant! If the mitzvah is fulfilled, the blessing is valid. This requires the actual removal of chametz.

An alternative explanation of Shulchan Aruch's position can be derived from a discussion in the mishne. The mishne raises an interesting question. The search for chametz seems to ignore a practical problem. How can the search actually assure that one's domain is free of chametz? Assume a person checks one room of his or her home. This individual then moves on to another room. In the interim, prior to completing the inspection of the second room it cannot be regarded as free of chametz. Any chametz in that room could be dragged by a mouse to the already inspected room. As a result, it seems impossible to determine that the house is completely free of chametz. The mishne responds to this issue. It explains that we do not concern ourselves with this consideration! [4] This is a rather odd response. How can a valid consideration be

dismissed?

This mishne is conveying a basic concept underlying the process of searching for chametz. The search is not merely a practical means of determining that the domain is free of chametz. In an absolute sense, this is impossible. One cannot inspect the entire domain simultaneously. Even were this possible, the inspected domain could become contaminated by chametz. This chametz could be brought into the inspected domain from another home not yet inspected. [5] What then is the value of the search?

The mishne is telling us that the search is effective because it confers upon the domain a legal status. Once a room is inspected this legal status is created. The room is legally regarded as chametz-free. This legal status exists despite the possibility of contamination. Halacha can and does choose to disregard the possibility of contamination. Halacha has the right to determine the requirement for creating a legal state. In short, the search is effective because it creates a legal status of chametz-free. It is not effective because it creates an actual practical assurance.

We can now understand Shulchan Aruch's position regarding the blessing over the search. The search is not merely a means for finding and removing chametz. The search creates a chametz-free status in the domain. This suggests an alternative understanding of the mitzvah to remove chametz. We are not actually required to remove all chametz from our domain. The mishne explains that this is virtually impossible. Instead, we are required to create a legally chametz-free domain. The blessing prior to the search acknowledges that we are fulfilling this commandment. Therefore, it is valid whether or not chametz is found. It is valid because the mitzvah is not to remove chametz. The mitzvah is to render one's domain chametz-free.

This is the bread of affliction that our fathers ate in the land of Egypt. Let all that are hungry come and eat. Let all that so require come and join in the Pesach offering. Now, we are here. Next year, may we be in the land of Israel. Now, we are servants. Next year, may we be free people. (Haggadah of Pesach)

This short paragraph is recited prior to breaking the matzah at the opening of the Seder. The paragraph contains a number of elements. It describes the matzah as the bread eaten by our ancestors during the bondage. It includes an invitation to others to join in our meal. Finally, it closes with a confirmation of our conviction in the coming of the Messiah. The Messiah will come and we will be a free people in the land of Israel.

Rabbaynu Saadia does not include this paragraph in his Haggadah. He replaces it with a similar paragraph. Rabbaynu Saadia's version

(continued on next page)

(continued from previous page)

Weekly Parsha

contains two of the three elements. It begins with an invitation to join in the Seder. It concludes with the confirmation of our conviction in the coming of the Messiah.

In both versions we affirm our conviction in the Messianic era. This conviction is one of the fundamental principles of Judaism. However, why do we begin the Seder with this affirmation?

The Haggadah indicates that there is an close connection between the redemption from Egypt and the Messianic era. The end of the Magid – the portion of the Haggadah that retells the story of the exodus – we recite the blessing of Ga'al Yisrael. In this berachah we thank Hashem for redeeming us from Egypt. We acknowledge that we now celebrate the Seder as a result of this redemption. We then express our wish to soon be able to celebrate the festivals in the rebuilt holy Temple.

This blessing indicates that the celebration of Pesach is related to the Messianic era? What is the relationship?

There are two basic possibilities. The first is that the redemption from Egypt is incomplete. We are in exile. Our affirmation of the Messianic era is a request to the Almighty to hasten the Messiah's coming. This explanation is consistent with the formulation of the blessing of Ga'al Yisrael. We begin the blessing thanking Hashem for our redemption. We than acknowledge that this redemption is incomplete. We cannot serve the Almighty in the Bait HaMikdash. We pray that Hashem will rebuild the Temple so we can serve Him more fully.

However, this interpretation does not explain the affirmation of the Messianic era at the opening of the Seder. According to this first explanation, we mention the Messianic era only after recalling our redemption. We are asking Hashem to complete the redemption. It would not make sense to affirm our conviction in the Messianic era before we discuss the redemption from Egypt.

Therefore, an alternative explanation is needed. It seems that the through introducing the Seder with an acknowledgement of the Messianic era we are identifying one of the objectives of the Seder. The purpose of the Seder is not solely to recall our exodus from Egypt. Retelling the story of our redemption serves another purpose. We are obligated to fully accept that the Messiah will ultimately arrive. How do we know that there is a basis for this conviction? The redemption from Egypt provides the proof. The Almighty rescued our ancestors from slavery. He created a free nation from an oppressed people. If we accept the truth of these events, we have a firm basis for our conviction in a second redemption through the Messiah.

The order of the Seder expresses this theme. We begin with an affirmation of the Messianic era. We then discuss the basis for our conviction

– the redemption from Egypt. We close by articulating the connection. Hashem redeemed us from Egypt. Therefore, we can be sure that He will redeem us again.

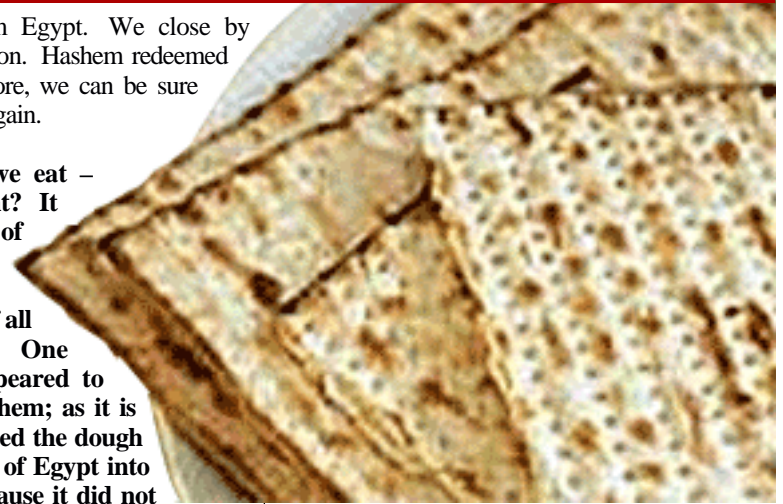
This matzah that we eat – what does it represent? It recalls that the dough of our fathers did not have sufficient time to rise before the King of all Kings – the Holy One Blessed be He – appeared to them and redeemed them; as it is stated, "And they baked the dough that they brought out of Egypt into cakes of matzah. Because it did not rise for the Egyptians chased them out. And they could not delay. And they also did not prepare provisions". (Pesach Haggadah)

The Haggadah explains the symbolism of matzah. The matzah recalls the haste of the exodus from Egypt. The Egyptians were eager for Bnai Yisrael to leave Egypt. They begged the Jews to leave as soon as possible. The Jews did not have time to allow their dough to rise properly. Therefore, the dough baked into unleavened cakes.

The Haggadah quotes a pasuk from the Torah that describes the haste of the departure from Egypt and the preparation of the matzah. The passage does not refer to the matzah brought out from Egypt as loaves – lechem. Instead, it calls the matzah "cakes" – ugot. Rashbam explains that the term lechem is not applicable to these matzot. The term lechem is only used to describe bread baked in an oven. These matzot were not placed in an oven. Instead, the dough was carried by Bnai Yisrael and baked by the heat of the sun. In order to indicate that these matzot were not baked in an oven the term ugot is used.[6]

This raises an interesting question. On Pesach, we are commanded to eat matzah. Can one fulfill the commandment of eating matzah with sun-baked dough? The Aruch HaShulchan maintains that this product is unfit for use as matzah. He explains that it is difficult to sun-bake the dough before it leavens. He adds that even were leavening avoided, the product would not be suitable for the mitzvah of matzah. This is because matzah is a type of lechem. Lechem is dough processed through the heat of an oven.[7]

Other authorities offer an alternative explanation of the term ugot. Their explanation is based on a comment of Rashi in Tractate Taanit. Rashi explains that the term uguh – the singular of ugot – means round.[8] These authorities conclude that it is appropriate to use round matzot for the mitzvah of matzah.[9]



This interpretation is difficult to understand. Why would the Chumash stress the shape of the matzot Bnai Yisrael baked when leaving Egypt? Furthermore, why should we be required to imitate this characteristic of Bnai Yisrael's matzah?

A solution to these questions is provided by the pasuk quoted in the Haggadah. The passage explains that the matzah symbolize the haste of the departure from Egypt. Bnai Yisrael did not have the time to allow the dough to rise. Therefore, it baked as unleavened cakes. This haste also explains the round shape. The dough was mixed, kneaded and flattened. The resultant cake was round. Any other form would have required shaping. There was no time to form shaped loaves. We can now understand the requirement to use round matzot for the mitzvah of matzah. Our matzah must reflect the haste of the departure from Egypt. The matzah is unleavened. This captures the image of haste. However, the round shape adds another reminder of the haste of the departure. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer VaYikra 14:2.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Tumat Tzara'at, 16:10.

[3] Rav Yosef Karo, Maggid Meysharim (Bar Lev, 1990), p 227.

[4] Mesechet Pesachim 9a.

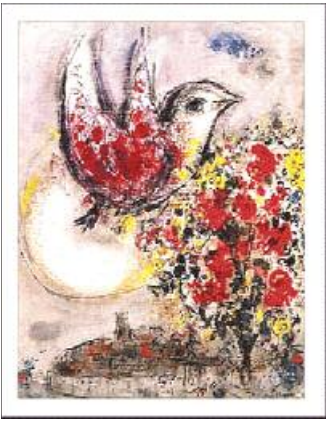
[5] Mesechet Pesachim 9a.

[6] Rabbaynu Shemuel ben Meir (Rashbam) Commentary on Sefer Shemot 12:39.

[7] Rav Yechezkel Michal HaLeyve Epstein, Aruch HaShulchan, Orech Chayim 461:5.

[8] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on the Talmud, Mesechet Taanit 23a.

[9] Rav Yitzchak Mirsky, Haggadat Hegyonai Halacha (Jerusalem, 5755), p 19, note 32.



Leprosy

the Punishment of

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The Torah teaches of the punishment of leprosy, or Tzaraas, which visits a person on account of his speaking “Lashon Hara”, derogatory remarks concerning another. Leprosy visits the person in stages. At first, leprosy attaches itself to the person’s home. If the person heeds the warning and repents, it is gone. If not, it excels towards the person’s garments. Again, if one repents, it is gone. If not, it finally attaches to the person’s body.

What is the purpose of this progression, and why these objects? Additionally, the Torah states that for one to be atoned, one must bring two birds, one is slaughtered, and its blood is caught in a bowl. The live bird is dipped therein along with a branch of hyssop and myrtle, and the live, bloodied bird is now set free over an open field.

On the surface, this seems barbaric, or at the least, unintelligible. However, as we know God is the Designer of the Torah, and “all its ways are pleasant”, there must be a rational explanation for these required practices, and for the objects used in attempting to correct the person who spoke viciously.

In order to understand how “mida k’neged mida” (measure for measure) works in this case, we must first understand the crime. Speaking derogatorily against another has at its source, the desire for self-affirmation of one’s greatness. An insecure person will usually be found degrading others. In his mind, he now feels higher in comparison to the ridiculed party. A secure individual however, will not concern himself with others, as this doesn’t affect his self-estimation. Being secure, another person’s level has no effect on his status. What then is the remedy for this egomaniacal type of personality? It is to diminish his imagined grandeur with a dose of real alienation. Part of the need to elevate oneself is the desire to be loved by others. When this cannot be, as a leper is banished outside the camp of the Israelites,

he is faced with the fact that he is not the great image he conjured, and he must eat his words of scorn.

However, God the merciful seeks to avoid the worst by hinting to the person that he has done wrong. God does not send leprosy to the body first. He initially uses other vehicles with which the person identifies, viz., his home, and his clothing. God commences with the home, as this is furthest removed from the person, but related enough to him so as to awaken him. There is something distasteful in him that he should delve into. If the person is obstinate, God sends the leprosy to a closer object, his garments. This is more closely tied to one’s identity, and is more effective. But if not heeded to, God finally delivers leprosy to his body, which is undeniably ‘him’. We see from here God’s mercy, and intelligence in using objects, with which we identify.

Parenthetically, these three objects, namely the house, clothes and body, correlate exactly to Mezuzah, Tzitzis, and Tefilin. These are also tied to the idea of identification, but from a different angle: since God desires that one place their trust in Him, and not in their own strength, God created these three commands to redirect where one places their trust. Mezuzah reminds one not to invest too much reliance in his home, as God should be recognized as the True Protector. The home is correctly viewed as a haven from the elements. But God desires that we act in line with reality, which means, above natural law: we must trust in His shelter, over structural shelters. So we place a reminder on the doorway, which is the best place for us to be reminded of God, as a doorway receives all of the traffic of a home. We are urged not to place too much importance on our dress, and therefore are commanded to wear tzitzis, fringes. Clothing again is an area where people express their identity. Lastly, but most closely tied to our self-images, are our bodies. One is

most affected when something happens to his body, even if no pain is suffered. We are also more tied to our appearances than to our clothes and homes. We define the body incorrectly as the “real me”. This is due to our false definition of what “man” is. Society tells us that man equals his body. The Torah tells us that man equals intellect, perfected values, and ideals. Hence, we are commanded to wear tefilin: a bodily reminder that we should not invest too much worth here either.

These three, the home, clothes, and body are the three main areas where one identifies, and thus, the three areas where God saw it fit to place reminders that God alone should be Who we depend on. And as these three are where we identify, God uses them again when attempting to focus us on our errors: He attacks those objects that we deem are “ours”, or “ourselves”.

Returning to the Parsha, what is the idea behind the two birds? I believe that besides correcting the person’s flaw of overestimation, he must also realize the irrevocable harm inflicted on another human being. Rashi states that birds in specific are brought, as they chirp, to make clear that the crime had to do with his “chirping” like a bird. The live bird (resembling the sinner) is dipped in the blood of the other, dead bird (resembling the one humiliated by the speech) and let free over a field. This is to demonstrate that just as this bloodied bird is irretrievable, so is his evil, “bloody speech” irretrievable. As you cannot catch the same bird twice, so also he cannot retract his words which were let loose on the world. The damage is done, the “bird is loose”. This will hopefully give recognition to the person who spoke destructively and make clear his crime.

The birds acting as atonement teaches that knowing one’s sin is the first step towards forgiveness. ■

Loshon Hora

Forbidden Speech

RIVKA OLENICK

“Shimon, the son of Rabban Gamliel said: All my days I grew up among the Sages and did not find anything better for one’s person than silence. Study is not the essential thing - deed is, and whoever engages in excessive talk brings on sin.” (Pirkei Avos)

How easy it is to engage in excessive talk. Do we stop and think about what is considered excessive? When we are alone we think, “I just wish I could talk to someone.” How e v f r o m the statement above by Shimon, “he did not find anything better for one’s person than silence.”

When we are part of a group/family, the need for continuous talk is satisfied. I can say whatever I want, with my group/family. And since everyone has something to say, then what I say won’t sound so negative, like gossip, and maybe won’t be repeated, and probably won’t even be remembered.

In Pirkei Avos, it says, “whoever engages in excessive talk brings on sin.” The Rambam says that when a person speaks excessively, he will surely sin because within his words, there will be at least one concept that was unnecessary to mention. It is clear; excessive talk always leads to sin. It leads to forbidden speech, loshon hora. What is considered excessive? The Rambam says most of what we say is superfluous, unnecessary. So if most of what we say is unnecessary, then it is also excessive. Excessive talk is an indication of foolishness, as it is written: “A fool’s voice is known by a multitude of words.”

What about the person/people who listen to loshon hora, forbidden speech? Have they sinned by listening? Our

Sages say that the person who receives the loshon hora, forbidden speech - is more severely affected than the one who speaks it. The Chofetz Chaim adds, that the punishment for accepting loshon hora is more severe than the punishment for speaking it! How can the person know before that what he is about to hear will be loshon hora? Why should he/she be punished more than the person who first thought it, found someone who would listen to it, and then said it? What is the difference between being affected by loshon hora and accepting loshon hora?

A person is affected by the forbidden speech - just by listening to it. It is still considered forbidden even if by listening to it your intention is not to accept it. Accepting loshon hora, forbidden speech is a more severe punishment because although you heard negative information about a person you still are not permitted to accept this information without further investigation. This ‘acceptance’ applies only to your business dealings or a match for marriage; it permissible to accept the information to protect oneself, but not to accept the information as fact. So, imagine the negative information you heard was about your sibling - naturally you would not want to accept this information and you might immediately think: this information could be false. That is exactly how we should feel about our fellow Jew as protective as we would be of our own sibling.

There are five categories of speech according to the Rambam. What I refer to above is the second category of speech that includes: false testimony, lies, gossip, curses, vile speech and slander. The Torah is specific in what is included

in this category.

The first category is what we are ‘commanded’ to speak: reading from the Torah, Torah study, and looking into its meanings. Category two I cited above.

The third category includes information spoken about by everyone, which is not positive or negative. This is called idle talk. Examples of this would be, “How so and so became wealthy (the most popular “idle” talk!); how a public figure acted a certain way; how a building was built, etc.

The fourth category - “derech eretz” the way of the world - describes acquiring desirable attributes and avoiding negative ones - speech about emulating others with positive traits. Traits that are ethical, intellectual, praise of the wise, their conduct and how important their virtues are and how we should strive to emulate them. Included is speech that discourages undesirable traits, how not to emulate their behavior and their ways.

The fifth category is left to us. This includes one’s personal agenda: one’s livelihood, food, clothing and other needs.

A person can speak about these needs as much as he/she wants. However, it is beneficial to minimize even this type of talk when possible.

“Loshon Hora kills three people: the one who speaks it, the one who listens to it, and the person about whom it is spoken.” Arachin 15b, Jerusalem Talmud (Pe’ah 1:1)

How encouraging it would be if people would invest more energy and effort into the first category and much less energy and effort into the second category! ■

Tanya's Heresy

Reader: I have and read what you have to write about the Tanya. The question in the column has already been answered - especially after so many people responded with sources etc. I will only add some additional sources:

1. Jerusalem Talmud (Bikurim 3:3) "G-d in His holy chamber" - and a name of a sage is quoted as a reference for this passage.

2. Medrash Rabbah (Bereishis chap. 99) "listen to your father Yaakov (E-I Yisroel avichem), the same way that G-d creates worlds, the same way your father Yaakov is creating worlds."

I really think that if you would really live to your word that you officially stand for "Mesora" - I am obligated according to the Mesora (tradition) of our Torah to tell you what you are really revealing about yourself. A sefer (the Tanya) that has been compiled and written for 20 years (!) by a Great Tzaddik and Gaon in the revealed part of the Torah (compiling a Shulchan Aruch) and a luminary in the hidden parts of the Torah, and amongst his books stands, first and foremost the "Holy Tanya". Parts of the Tanya are also found in Reb Chaim Volozin's books, and have in the course of seven generations had hundreds of books commenting and explaining the insights of the Tanya, including a lengthy commentary from the Rebbe the Tzemach Tzedek, a popular posek (judge) in his time. The (same) Tzemach Tzedek has once commented on the Baal Hatanya: "Our thoughts in comparison to his, is considered null in comparison to Kodshei kodoshim" (Responses Tzemach Tzedek - Yoreh Deah 63 chapt. 8) and yet, none of the G'dolei Yisroel in 7 generations has found any problem with the beginning of Perek 2 in Tanya.

In addition: Who in their clear mind would ever consider to label a "Sefer Kodosh" that has in 7 generations strengthened the belief and love and fear of Hashem in thousands of Jews with the label that you are referring to? I can only say and since the Talmud (Bava Metzia 83b) says it, so it is then lesson for all - "when one conducts himself in a very disrespectful way (chutzpa)... this clearly indicates that the person is an evil person.

The Rambam who is the tradition we follow writes Hilchos Teshuva 3:14: "One that puts shame on a Talmid Chachom (learned man) does not have a share in the world to come."

Umsayimin b'Tov, Rabbi Michoel

Mesora: Your first two quotes are incomprehensible; I have no idea what you are writing or trying to communicate.

Unfortunately, you follow the pattern of all others complaining about our critique of the Tanya, offering no rational explanation for your position:

1) You offer no explanation for "Umah Chelek Elokim M'maal", "...and what portion shall I have with God above [if I sin]?" Quoted from the book of Job, this refers to man's inheritance of God's ultimate good for mankind...not that God has "chalekim" (parts). Rambam states in his Yesodei HaTorah and in his Ikarim (13 Fundamentals), "God has no parts", thus, He cannot "partition" Himself into pieces and give every man a piece...what you think is man's soul.

2) You disagree with our "Elohay Nishama" prayer in our Siddur (prayer book) which states, "My God, the soul...that You created." It does not say as you falsely suggest, that God "partitioned pieces of Himself". It says God "created" the human soul. Just as creation in Genesis refers to matter from nothingness, God also created man's soul from nothingness, and not from Himself. To suggest God has parts is heretical.

3) God tells Moshe (Exod. 33:20) "Ki lo yirani h'adam v'Chai", "For man cannot know me while alive." You violate these words of God, as you feel you CAN know God - enough to make such a statement that he partitions Himself.

4) You do not explain Isaiah's statement, "To what shall your equate Me that I should be similar?" so says G-d." (Isaiah, 40:25) If God says we cannot equate anything to Him, this includes the phenomenon of division; we cannot say God may be subject to division of His essence, and give man a 'piece' of Himself.

We know nothing about God. God told this to Moses. Moses, the greatest prophet, knew nothing positive about God. Get this idea clear. Yet you claim you know how God created man, that He took a piece of Himself, and placed it into man?! You think God "breathed" life into man in a literal sense...you think that God breathes? Do you feel as others who critique our position - that of Rambam - that just as a breath is where one takes something in himself and transfers it externally, God too transferred "part" of himself into man?! Is this how we are to understand Genesis when God "breathed" into man a soul? Or, shall we follow Rambam's intelligent approach of applying metaphors when necessary? His son Abraham and the Rabbis all concur that God uses metaphor to teach man. Rambam writes in his introduction to the Guide: "My primary object in this work is to explain certain words occurring in the prophetic books. Of these some are homonyms, and of their

several meanings the ignorant choose the wrong ones; other terms which are employed in a figurative sense are erroneously taken by such persons in their primary signification." Rambam continues: "I have also spoken in similes by the Prophets" (Hosea xii. 10): and also the verse, "Put forth a riddle and speak a parable" (Ezek. xvii. 2). And because the Prophets continually employ figures, Ezekiel said, "Does He not speak parables?" (xxi. 5). Again, Solomon begins his book of Proverbs with the words, "To understand a proverb and figurative speech, the words of the wise and their dark sayings" (Prov. i. 6)

Now, as you quoted Rambam, why do you not quote his 13 Principles and his Fundamentals where he denounces that God has parts? You seem to pick and choose that which can aid your defense of Tanya, and ignore reason and other quotes from God, Rambam and Isaiah that expose your view as heretical.

Your greatest crime, and the crime of others that have written us sharing your opinion, is the collective absence of any intelligent argument. The reason for this absence is the same reason why in darkness, there cannot exist light: in both cases, one assumes the 'impossible'. Just as darkness means "the absence of light", by definition, so too, God means the absence of any physical phenomenon, by definition. God is not subject to "division". Get it clear: "For man cannot know Me while alive." Listen to God's words, not those written by man in a book if reason is thereby contradicted. God says you cannot know Him. So cease from making statements about God; about He who is unknowable.

We learn (Ethics, 5:17) that the arguments of Hillel and Shammai were "for the sake of heaven, and will be sustained." Meaning, arguments with the objective of arriving at truth are praiseworthy, and are proper to engage in. I am satisfied that I follow in their footsteps with my arguments on Tanya.

However, you call me evil, and claim I have no share in the world to come. Do you apply this critique to Rambam too? I ask you, "Who is defaming a Talmid Chocham today; you or I?" Real evil is spreading falsehood, and misleading others, especially when you have no reasoning at all behind your words. It matters none that these words are found in print.

The real 'good' is exposing falsehood, and showing through reason what must be true; what must be false, what God teaches, and what the Prophets taught.

God created the world with intelligence of the highest magnitude. It continues to function by intelligent laws. Your words are bereft of reason, and therefore, cannot be describing God's world, but your own imagination. ■