

Be mindful of the concept of God's mercy...discussed throughout this issue.

ESTD 1997

JewishTimes

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

Volume V, No. 2...Nov. 4, 2005

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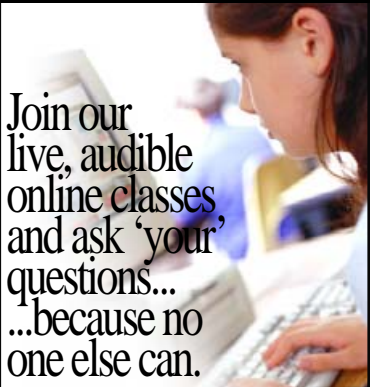
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Weekly Parsha

Noach

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"And the world was corrupt before Hashem and the land was filled with violent crime." (Beresheit 6:11)

Hashem decides to cause the Deluge – the Mabul. Noach is commanded to build a ship. He and his family will take refuge on this

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Religions



Beyond Compare

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

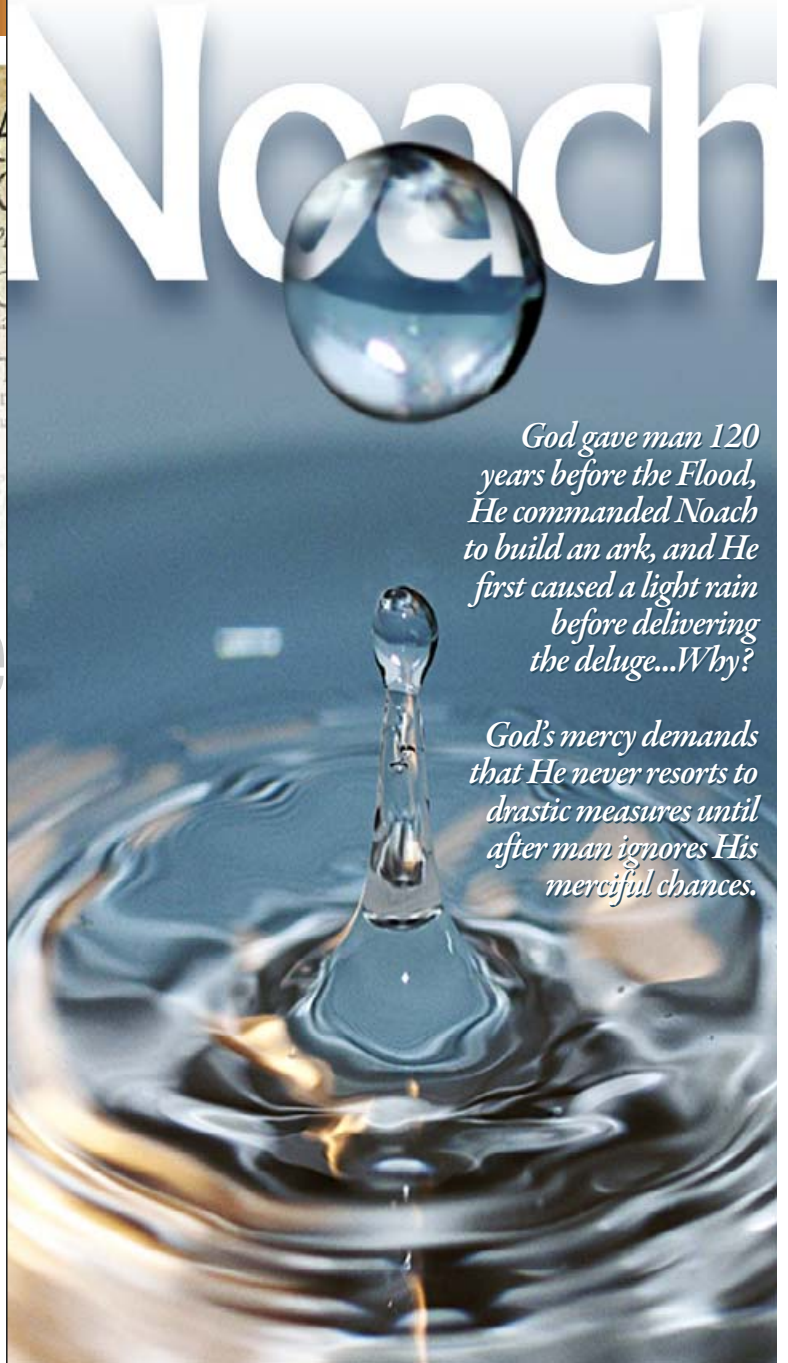
Reader: I have just read your article on turning the other cheek. My question is this: is everything in the Christian Bible wrong? Can we recognize certain teachings, even though we certainly do not accept their basic tenets? For example, the Torah says that G-d is slow to anger and merciful. Can turning the other cheek be a benchmark; to strive for only to moderate the need for revenge? Here is what I mean. Let us say that on a scale from one to ten, one being the absolute need for revenge. At the other end of the scale, ten, we take literally the Christian founders who desire

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Noach

God gave man 120 years before the Flood, He commanded Noach to build an ark, and He first caused a light rain before delivering the deluge...Why?

God's mercy demands that He never resorts to drastic measures until after man ignores His merciful chances.



JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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Religions

that we turn the other cheek fully. By striving for ten, yet knowing that this is unreasonable, maybe we can end up with six, which is less of a need for revenge than one. So then, the Christian ethic asks for ten knowing that it is too much to expect but will materialize in more than one. If a student strives for an "A" but ends up with a "B-" he did better than if he strives for a "B" and ends up with a "C".

Mesora: This type of "shooting for the stars, so just to reach the moon" is deceptive. One must not urge another person to do that which he does not feel is proper, even if he knows the other person could not possibly reach the objective. That closes one issue.

Secondly, some other religions and cultures possess ideas or laws, which only seem similar to Judaism. We tend to equate their objectives with God's Torah-based objective. But this is an error. The primary mistake is as follows: as long as one's view of God is inaccurate, all the "good" he does in the name of religion, is based on falsehood. All the knowledge he accrues is also false. As he thinks God to be something other than what He truly is, this person has no idea of what the Creator is, and therefore, all he assumes as truth, is false. Our earthly knowledge is targeted at our arrival at an ever-increasing knowledge of the Creator, to the best of human ability. And when this notion of God is wrong, thereby, all that we learned fails in its sole purpose. A Rabbi lectured 30 years ago as follows: "If one studied the human cell, but had no knowledge of God, he could not possibly understand the ultimate purpose of cells, because its purpose is to sustain a human being so he may function in full health...so as to study his Creator unimpeded. One, who is ignorant of God, may know the structure of the cell, but not its purpose, which is synonymous with its true reason for existing. Thus, a biologist has less knowledge of the human cell, than Moses. Moses possessed the most complete knowledge attainable concerning God and man. Thus, Moses possessed the most accurate knowledge of all created things."

"The fear of God is the beginning of knowledge." (Proverbs 1:7) All knowledge is accurate, provided one possesses a true knowledge of God. As long as one's notion of God is false or inaccurate, all his actions are not a reflection of God's will, and his knowledge is compromised, for he does not know what God is. With this argument alone, we may discount as forgeries, all alien religions and their values, which only appear similar to Judaism.

A third error is as follows: we cannot perform God's will, if God did not command a given act, or man did not study creation so as to derive God's will from it. Certainly, when the parameters and true considerations of mercy for example, do not reflect God's will, one only "appears" to be reflecting God's mercy. Forgiving a murderer, as some other religionists unbelievably do, allows this murderer to kill another innocent victim. Such religions preach a warped sense of mercy. Judaism demands murderers must be killed. Hence, the "apparent" mercy" of another religionist on the killer of his own son, is actually not a performance of God's mercy, but it is cruelty to others...maybe even cruelty to himself, if the killer so wishes to mark him as victim #2. Human emotions are the cause of this error. One explanation is that people wish saintly self-images, and by forgiving a murderer, one fantasizes himself as a saint. This is ego at its height. We must rely on God's supreme and ultimate knowledge to determine when and where mercy should be displayed, and who is a fitting recipient of our mercies.

Be mindful of God's command to not alter the Torah. Once altered, it is no longer "God's system". Certainly this is the case when false religions retain only a few of God's Torah verses or laws, and couch them in new, fabricated codes, calling them "God's words". In such a code, these verses, even if intact, no longer reflect God's intent, and therefore such ideas appearing to mirror Judaism and Torah, are in fact corrupt. □



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Letters

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Weekly Parsha

Religion of Proof

—Response to The JewishWeek—

“If Judaism is misrepresented as faith-based like Christianity, it no longer maintains its true, unparalleled rational nature. It thereby forfeits its unique claim for our adherence over other religions. In such a case, why should any Jew follow Judaism? For if faith is more valued than proof, one might rightfully say, “I have greater faith in Jesus than in Moses”: a position faithful Jews may no longer ‘reason’ against. However, Moses taught a different Judaism, one based on proof: “You have been shown to know that God is God” (Deut. 4:35), and “And you shall know it today” (Deut. 4:39). Moses taught that God orchestrated Revelation at Sinai so we might possess “evidence”, basing our beliefs on proven truths – not insufficient faith.

Faith-based Judaism ignores Moses’ words, and misleads Jews to succumb to missionaries. To steer Jews from this fatal error, I disputed Rabbi Schertz’s claim that, “religious views should be based on faith.” (“Pa. Jews” The Jewish Week 9/30) Subsequently, (“Intelligent Design” The Jewish Week 10/28) Rabbi Schertz defended his views on curriculum, and discussed methods of acceptance...topics I did not address. To be clear, I addressed one point: Rabbi Schertz’s claim of a faith-based Judaism. I argued: “Judaism offers and demands reason and proof for God’s existence”. However, I could have proven Judaism’s position with Moses’ words, without an insulting term. I apologize for that, as my intent was not to target anyone, but to clarify Moses’ denial of a faith-based Judaism. Our Sages unanimously transmitted rational proofs for both God, and Judaism. Judaism alone is worthy of man’s adherence, precisely because it is the only Divine religion, built on proofs, which outweigh faith.

A faith-based Judaism is no longer “Judaism”, for Moses demanded intellectual adherence to evidence, reason, and proofs.”

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

ship. He will also collect representatives of all the species of fowl and animal life. These birds and animals will join Noach and his family upon the ark. All other life, on the face of the earth, will be drowned by the Mabul.

The Torah reveals the reasons for this severe punishment. Humanity was corrupt. Violent crime was pervasive. Rashi explains that this violent crime was of a specific type. The members of the Dor HaMabul – the generation destroyed by the Deluge – stole from one another.[1] Apparently, these thefts were committed in the open. They were performed with force and the threat of violence. Rashi adds that theft was not the sole crime of this generation. However, this crime played a decisive role. The Almighty decided to destroy the Dor HaMabul because of this crime.[2]

The Torah begins its discussion of this wicked generation at the end of Parshat Beresheit. In that discussion, the Torah describes the wickedness of the Dor HaMabul. The Torah does not describe these people as thieves. Instead, the Torah offers a quite different description of their corruption. The Torah explains that the members of the Dor HaMabul were sexually promiscuous. A man would take, as a wife, any woman he desired. Marriage was not respected. A man would not hesitate to take a married woman as his wife.[3] Rashi adds that the depravity of these people extended beyond adultery. He explains that these people also practiced homosexuality and bestiality.[4]

A comparison of these descriptions of the Dor HaMabul presents an obvious problem. These two descriptions seem to contradict one another. The description at the end of Parshat Beresheit describes a society that is absorbed in promiscuity and sexual perversions. In Parshat Noach, the Torah characterizes the Dor HaMabul as a people willing to resort to violence in the pursuit of material ambitions.

Gershonides explains that these two descriptions are not contradictory. They describe a progression. The initial crime of the Dor HaMabul was sexual promiscuity. This crime led to violence and theft.[5] Gershonides does not explain the mechanics of this progression. How does promiscuity lead to violence and theft?

It seems that the early humanity understood and appreciated the institutions of personal property and marriage. However, during the period of the Dor HaMabul, the boundaries that protected these institutions were destroyed. How did these boundaries break down? The Torah tells us that the disintegration of these institutions occurred through a sequential process. Initially, the concept of personal property was not challenged. The initial sin was adultery. This sin was motivated by an overpowering sexual urge. This instinctual

drive drove the men of this generation to ignore the institution of marriage. Eventually, adultery became common and acceptable. This had a far-reaching impact. Adultery subtly undermined the concept of personal property. Taking another person’s wife expresses a disregard for the exclusive relationship between husband and wife. Once this relationship is denied, only a small additional step was required to deny the relationship of the individual to one’s personal property. In other words, once adultery became pervasive the institution of personal property was more easily assailed.

Gershonides’ insight provides an interesting perspective on an important Mishne in Tractate Avot. The Mishne asserts that a sin drags another sin in its wake.[6] This means that the performance of a sin lead to the performance of another sin. Tosefot Yom Tov explains that this is a natural, psychological phenomenon.

Gershonides is explaining one of the ways that one sin engenders another. Humans are faced with the challenge of resisting instinctual urges. Sometimes, we are overcome by a particularly great urge. We commit a sin. Perhaps, the sinful behavior becomes habitual and commonplace. The damage caused by this behavior extends beyond the commission of the specific sin. We become desensitized. Boundaries then begin to weaken. With the deterioration of these boundaries, other sinful behaviors – which were earlier resisted – become acceptable.

The Dor HaMabul illustrates this concept. Initially, the desire for material riches was not a threat to the concept of personal property. There was strong respect for personal property. The desire for material possessions existed. However, this urge was did not overcome this respect. The sexual desire was not as successfully managed. This desire did overpower society’s regard for marriage. This institution was destroyed. With its destruction came desensitization to the concept of personal property. Once respect for personal property was compromised, the desire for material wealth became overwhelming. Theft became rampant.

“And I will keep my covenant through you. And you will come into the ark – you and your children and your wife and the wives of your sons.” (Beresheit 6:18)

Hashem decides that He will bring a deluge upon the world. This flood will destroy humanity. However, Noach and his family will be saved. Hashem tells Noach that, through sparing Noach and his family, He will uphold His covenant. What was this covenant?

First, we must identify the nature of this covenant. Apparently, Hashem had made a

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Weekly Parsha

covenant that He would not completely destroy the world. Hashem saved Noach, his family and the species in the ark. This remnant served as the basis for a new world that was established after the Deluge. Through the rescue of this seed, the Almighty upheld the covenant not to destroy the world.

Still the question remains. At what point was this covenant made? Gershonides addresses this issue. He explains that this covenant was made on the seventh day of creation. This is the day commemorated by Shabbat.

Through better understanding Shabbat we can uncover the nature of the seventh day of creation. We can also understand the covenant created on that day. What is the meaning of Shabbat? The Torah explains that the Almighty created the universe in six days. On the seventh day, the Almighty rested from creating. Gershonides explains that this rest does not merely mean that creation ended. Instead, the will of Hashem was directed to sustaining the cosmos already created during the previous days. Shabbat recalls the emergence of the Creator's will that sustains the universe every moment of its existence. Gershonides explains that this will is the covenant referred to in our pasuk.[7]

Why is the will to sustain the universe a covenant to not destroy the world? The will of the Almighty does not change. He does not rescind His decrees. Neither does the Almighty abandon His plans. Apparently, Gershonides maintains that the Almighty's plan for the cosmos includes a role for humankind. This will does not change. Therefore, this will implies a covenant that the world will never be completely destroyed.

“And from all living creatures, two from each, you should bring to the ark to live with you. They should be male and female.” (Bereishit 6:19)

Noach is responsible to reestablish the earth's various species of creatures. He is commanded in this pasuk to bring onto the tevah a breeding pair of each species. These will repopulate the earth after the Deluge.

The commentaries are troubled with an apparent contradiction. A short introduction is needed to understand the problem. Halacha divides creatures into two categories. One category is composed of “pure” creatures. These are the animals and fowl which are permitted to be eaten by Bnai Yisrael and used for sacrifices. All other creatures fall into the second category of impure creatures. In our pasuk Noach is required to bring into the tevah one breeding pair for each species. No distinction is made between pure and impure creatures.

In the very next perek – chapter – Noach is



commanded to save seven pairs of each species of pure animals and fowl. Now the problem confronting the commentaries can be seen. Initially, Hashem makes no distinction between pure and impure creatures. Each species is to be represented by a single breeding pair. Then Hashem seemingly contradicts this command by differentiating between pure and impure creatures. A single breeding pair suffices for impure creatures. Seven pairs are gathered to represent each pure species.

Nachmanides and Rabbaynu Nissim offer similar answers to these questions. They explain that there were two objectives in saving the species. The first was that the Almighty wished to repopulate the world, after the Deluge, with all of the various creatures. In order to achieve this objective a single breeding pair of each species was required. The initial command given to Noach reflects this objective. Therefore, this command includes only a single pair from each species.

There was a second objective in the saving of the creatures. Humans require many of the species. Animals will be used by Noach and his descendants for food. They will also serve as sacrifices. This consideration is not relevant to all animals. It applies primarily to pure creatures. The direct consequence of this second objective is that a larger population of pure animals is must be rescued. This second issue is addressed in the second command. Noach is commanded to bring, into the tevah seven pairs of all pure animals.

The two commands do not involve a contradiction. Each command reflects a separate objective. In other words, Noach is required to save one pair of each species to reestablish the population. He is also required to save an additional six pair of each pure species in order to serve humanity's needs.

“From the various species of birds and the various species of animals and the various species of creatures which crawl upon the earth, two from each will come to you to live.” (Bereishit 6:20)

The commentaries are troubled by a subtle problem. How did the animals arrive at the tevah? The Chumash at some points indicates that it was Noach's responsibility to bring the creatures onto

the tevah. At other points, the Chumash states that the animals came, apparently spontaneously, to the tevah.

This is not too difficult to explain. The Chumash is explaining that the animals came, of their own accord, to the tevah. Noach then had to bring the creatures into the vessel and provide each with its proper place. However, a problem remains. Oddly all mention of the animals approaching the tevah spontaneously refers to the first breeding pair. Six additional pairs were required of each pure species. These pairs apparently did not approach the tevah. Noach was required to capture these additional pairs. The commentaries ask the obvious question. Why did the first pair approach spontaneously and not the additional six pairs?

Nachmanides and Rabbaynu Nissim suggest that their analysis will also resolve this issue. One pair of each species was saved in order to reestablish diverse creature life. This objective was not related to humanity. Appropriately, less of Noach's involvement was required in fulfilling this objective. These creatures appeared spontaneously.

The other pairs were saved for the benefit of humanity. This objective was relevant to Noach and his descendants. Appropriately his greater involvement was needed. These animals did not approach spontaneously. Noach was required to capture each of these pairs and bring them to the tevah. □

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 6:11.

[2] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 6:13.

[3] Sefer Beresheit 6:2, See Rashi.

[4] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 6:2.

[5] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1994), p 83.

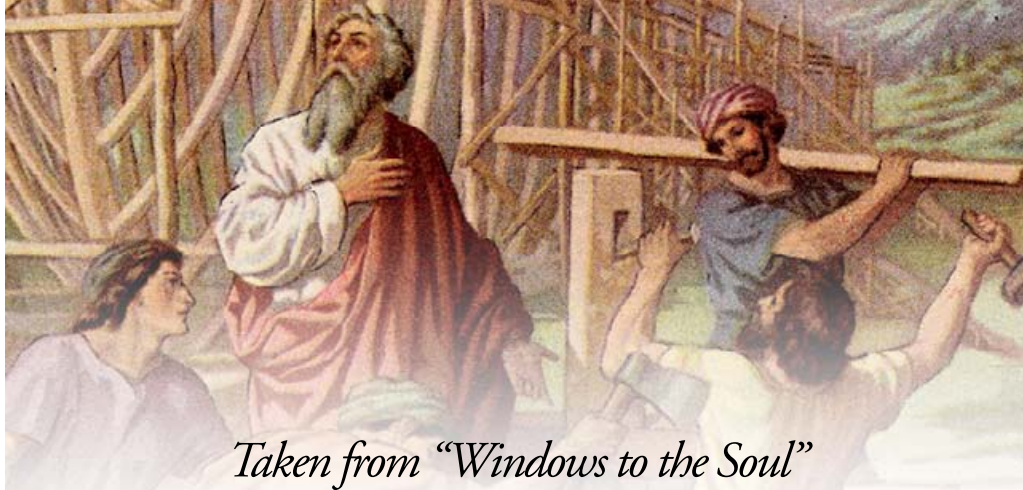
[6] Tractate Avot 4:2.

[7] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1994), p 85.

Books: Weekly Parsha

Noach

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Taken from "Windows to the Soul"

Why Are We Here?

Why did Noah find favor in God's eyes so that he and his family were saved from the Great Flood? The Torah informs us (6:9) that "he was a completely righteous man in his generation." The Torah does not simply pronounce him completely righteous; it adds the qualification "in his generation."

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 109a) records an argument between Rav and Shmuel regarding these words. One view infers that by the standards of Abraham's generation Noah would not have appeared as righteous. The other view is that the shortcomings of Noah generation adversely affected him; he would have been even greater had he lived in Abraham's generation.

Both of these views seem to agree that Noah was in some way lacking. Their point of disagreement is with regard to his potential. Did he have the potential for greater righteousness under more favorable circumstances?

This question has significant implications for us today.

According to the view that Noah's merit was only relative to his generation, it would appear that the world was saved only because it was God's will that His creation not be totally destroyed. Noah's righteousness itself would not have been enough to merit his salvation and that of his family. God saved him, because He wanted mankind to continue. He selected Noah as the best of an inferior lot. If so, society today only exists because of the Midas Harachamim, the

Attribute of Mercy.

According to the other view, mankind survived, because Noah was genuinely righteous and deserved to be saved. If not for his merit, the world would have been destroyed; the great human experiment would have ceased. If so, society today has a right to exist even by the standards of the Midas Hadin, the Attribute of Strict Justice. Noah earned it for us.

Noah's State of Mind

Noah spent a full year in the relatively pristine, hermetically sealed world of the ark. He adjusted to it and fulfilled his duties as God had instructed him. But then the year came to an end, and it was time to return to the outside world. What went through Noah's mind during those final days? Did he feel a sense of excitement at the prospect of rebuilding the flood-wrecked earth or did he feel daunted by the enormity of what lay ahead? And when he finally did emerge from the ark, why did he plant a vineyard (9:20) when he should have planted staple crops?

A close reading of the verses that describe Noah's sending of the birds from the ark give us some clues regarding his state of mind.

The Torah records four instances of Noah sending birds from the ark. The first time it was a raven, the next three a dove. The four verses are as follows:

—And [Noah] sent out the raven, and it went to

and fro until the waters dried upon the land. (8:7)

—And he sent out the dove from alongside him to see if the waters had receded from the face of the earth. (8:8)

—And another seven days passed, and again he sent out the dove from the ark. (8:10)

—Another seven days passed, and he sent out the dove, and it no longer returned to him. (8:11)

As we analyze these verses, we find subtle indications of Noah's progressive detachment from the animals around which his world had revolved for an entire year.

The Torah tells us why Noah sent out the dove, but it gives us no reason for his sending out the raven even earlier. It has been suggested that he sent out the raven because it is a scavenger that feeds on human carrion. Perhaps Noah wanted to ascertain what had become of the people who had remained outside the ark. He was making his first tentative steps toward his new life.

This would be in keeping with Noah's apparent strong emotional involvement with his antediluvian society. Incredulous at what is about to happen, he is reluctant to separate from his compatriots and enter the ark until the rising waters forced him to (7:7). After the Flood, even when he sees the land is dry, he remains inside the ark, unwilling to witness the devastation, until God commands him to leave (8:16). The sending of the raven may have reflected Noah's continued morbid interest in those he hesitantly left behind.

Noah then sends out the dove to determine if "the waters had receded from the face of the earth." The first time the dove is sent out "from alongside him," the second time "from the ark." The third time, we are told only "the dove was sent." The dispatch of the dove is becoming more and more impersonal. Noah is detaching himself from his wards.

We see this same progressive detachment in the description of the dove's return. The first time (8:9), Noah "reached out his arm to take it and bring it to himself to the ark." The second time (8:10), however, we are told rather impersonally that "the dove returned to him." His level of attachment is progressively diminishing.

When Noah finally leaves the ark and gives thanks to God for his salvation, he is disoriented. He has fulfilled his obligations to the animals, but his emotional attachment to them has not endured. He is still distraught over the demise of the society he once knew. Clearly not invigorated by the prospect of building a new world, he plants what he hopes will be a remedial vineyard before he does anything else. Unable to redirect his focus from his sense of loss, he turns to wine as a type of balm to soothe his hurt and his loneliness. Mankind would have to wait for Abraham to appear and restart the process of vigorously restoring the world.

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(Noach continued from page 5)

Weekly Parsha

To Drive Away the Raven

For what purpose did Noah send the raven out of the ark? The Torah only informs us (8:7) that Noah “sent out the raven, and it went to and fro until the waters dried upon the land.” Later on, the dove is sent out to determine if the waters had receded, but the Torah never tells us why the raven was sent out.

According to the Talmud (Sanhedrin 108b), the raven hovered over the ark and hurled two accusations at Noah. It alleged that Noah had sent him away in order to seduce the female raven. It also accused Noah of attempting to destroy his species. Otherwise, the raven contended, why hadn't Noah chosen one of the kosher birds, of which there were seven pairs in the ark? Why risk the raven of which there was only one pair?

According to the Talmud, Noah proved he had no designs on the raven's mate by saying, “If I am forbidden to have relations with my own wife as long the world is beset by the Flood, certainly I can have none with your mate.”

This argument effectively refuted the raven's first charge. But what about the second charge? There is no mention in the Talmud of any refutation, which suggests that it was valid. Apparently, the raven was right. Noah had indeed sent it out in order to prevent the propagation of its species. But why? What reason might Noah have had for wanting to rid the world of ravens?

In order to discover Noah's motivation, let us examine the raven. God forbade intimate relations during the year that all living creatures were confined to the ark .[1] Only three creatures violated this command, the dog, the raven and Ham, Noah's third son.

The raven was guilty of the sin of illicit relations in the ark, a grave infraction indicative of a fundamental indifference to God's will. Moreover, his irrepressible sexual drive was reminiscent of the world's first sin, which according to the Midrash included illicit relations between Eve and the serpent. The Midrash here anticipates modern psychology in identifying the sexual drive as among the most powerful, if not the most powerful, force of the animalistic side of human nature, which accounts for the capacity for sin and the consequent ability to exercise free will.[2]

What are the singular or distinguishing features of the raven? It is a scavenger that feeds on the carcasses of dead animals. This again connects the raven to the original sin of Adam, whose byproduct was human mortality. It also connects the raven to the greatest source of impurity (tumah), which is death.

The Talmud (Shabbos 155b) finds a second aspect of the raven's nature in the verse



(Psalms 147:9) “[God] feeds the young ravens when they call out.” The raven, explains the Talmud, has no compassion for its offspring and neglects to feed them. Mercifully, God sets the laws of nature so that worms are attracted to the raven's droppings and its young feed on them.

The raven emerges before us as a prototypal instinctual creature driven by lust, without mercy for its young, feasting on the spoils of death, unpredictable and unreliable.[3] The dove, on the other hand, is the opposite of the raven. It is so inordinately attached to its nest that it cannot survive the death of its mate. As such, in contrast to the instinctually driven raven, the dove could be trusted to fulfill its mission on the outside and then return to the ark to its mate.

Noah understood that in the aftermath of the Flood he would be called upon to rebuild civilization. He would become the second Adam, the father of humankind. With this mission in mind, he saw in the raven an evil vestige of the corruption and the disregard of God's will that characterized the defunct world obliterated by the Flood. In order to ensure the purity of his brave new world, Noah believed he had to eliminate the raven.[4]

There is actually an allusion to the negative characteristics of the raven in its Hebrew name, orev, which is etymologically related to the Hebrew word for mixing, arev. According to the Sages, the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge resulted in the displacement of truth and clarity by doubt and confusion; truth and falsehood became intermixed. The Talmud (Gittin 54a) reinforces this association by telling us that the raven, the orev, is an inveterate liar.[5] The raven is driven by his instinctual desires and will do anything necessary to satisfy them.

We find support for the characterization of the raven as a malignant presence in the world in the Talmud (Moed Katan 9a) in the context of a discussion of the importance of celebrating mitzvos one at a time. The Gemara points out that King Solomon celebrated the First Temple's inauguration a week before Sukkos, even though it would have been more convenient to delay the finishing touch of the construction until just before the festival so that the two celebrations could be combined. The Gemara concludes, mitzvos must be celebrated one at a time.

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(Noach continued from page 6)

Weekly Parsha

What was this “finishing touch of the Temple construction”?

The Gemara identifies it as the installation of the ama kalia orev, the arm-like spikes which “destroyed the ravens.” These sharpened spikes were placed on the Temple roof to keep away ravens that might otherwise have been attracted by the smell of the roasting flesh of the sacrifices.

The role of these spikes as the finishing touch of the construction of the Temple, the final blow of the hammer (makeh bepatish) so to speak, suggests an importance of function. It would seem, however, that the spikes were essentially superfluous, for even without them, no raven would have perched on the Temple, just as miraculously no flies were attracted to the sacrificial meat in the Temple; the spikes were placed there only because “we do not rely on miracles.” Since miracles were commonplace in the First Temple, the spikes were placed on the roof only for form’s sake and served no practical function. This reinforces the thought that the spikes as the “finishing touch” implied a more profound symbolism in their presence.

In the light of Noah’s rejection of the raven, we begin to discern this symbolism. The Torah states that the purpose of the Temple was to affect a relationship between God and the Jewish people and thereby create a dwelling place for God among them. The Temple is a vehicle designed to elevate the Jewish people, and by extension all of mankind, to a plane of existence that replicates the sinless state of mankind clinging to God in the Garden of Eden. The instinctual raven, the paradigm of primitive urges and disregard of God’s will, is the antithesis of this exalted state, and therefore, the ama kalia orev, “the spikes that destroy the ravens,” are a fitting capstone to the Temple. Symbolically, the Temple is meant to drive away the corrupt forces associated with ravens.

This theme is echoed in the following parashah, Lech Lecha. God informs Abraham that he and his descendants will inherit the land of Israel, and Abraham asks (15:8), “Whereby shall I know that I am to inherit it?” God instructs Abraham to take eleven animals, nine of which he severs in half, thereby sealing the Covenant of the Parts (bris bein habesarim). The Midrash comments that the animal parts were the symbolic answer to Abraham’s question. He would merit the land by virtue of the future sacrificial service in the Temple. In the midst of Abraham’s prophetic (15:11), “birds of prey descended upon the carcasses and Abraham drove them away.” Abraham’s act of chasing away generic birds of prey from the sacrifices foreshadowed the symbolic ama kalia orev, the crown of the Temple structure that “drove away the ravens.” □

[1] Bereishis Rabbah 31:12, 34:8. The Midrash finds an allusion to this oral tradition in that God commanded the men and women of Noah’s family to enter the ark separately. Furthermore, He only commanded them and the rest of the creatures to “be fruitful and multiply” after they left the ark. By inference, relations were forbidden as long as the world was being destroyed.

[2] Following the destruction of the First Temple, the Sages prayed for the destruction of the yetzer hara of idolatry to which they attributed the great national calamity. At the same time, they also attempted to destroy the yetzer hara of illicit relations, but they had to withdraw their request when all procreation came to a halt.

[3] It is interesting to note that the black raven in literature and other art forms throughout history conjures up images of dark, even demonic forces.

[4] Like Adam, Noah was prohibited from killing creatures, thus he had to wait to release the orev until a time when it could survive outside of the Ark, long before the rest of the creatures’ departure so that it would not find its mate.

[5] Interestingly, in the story, the dove (yonah) is present and tells the truth.



Why was God’s oath to never again annihilate man signified by a rainbow in particular? I believe the Radak alludes to the answer. He recalls that during the flood itself there were no rainbows, as there was complete cloud cover. No sun shone through. Perhaps what the Radak teaches is when we see a rainbow today, we realize that this is only possible if the cloud cover is ‘incomplete,’ and allows the sun to shine through on the clouds; the moisture thereby refracts the peeking sunlight into its seven component hues - forming the rainbow. We are thereby reassured that although based on our level, complete cloud cover and destruction might be warranted, God in His mercy avoids complete cloudcover and torrential downpours, proved by the rainbow’s evidence of sunlight.

We are given a sign of God’s mercy, that complete cloud cover and ultimate flooding will never again occur. □

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Punishment

DOUG TAYLOR & RABBI MORTON MOSKOWITZ

"If you don't stop that, I'll paddle you so hard you won't be able to sit down for a week!"

The kids didn't obey, but their mother's angry voice certainly got the attention of everyone on our ferry's forward upper deck. Seated several rows over, I turned back to my friend, the King of Rational Thought, while an afternoon deluge pounded out a reminder of western Washington's rainy reputation.

"Hmm," I said, half to myself. "Reminds me of dealing with my own kids."

"Really?" he replied with a disarming smiling. "Do you handle your children that way?"

I glanced at the mother, still struggling to corral her herd of wild ponies, and replied, "Well, I try not to get angry. But sometimes it seems like threats are the only way to get compliance."

Now it was his turn to say, "Hmm." I suddenly felt uncomfortable.

"Why is it so important for you to get compliance?" he asked.

"Well, to make them behave, of course. To teach them the right way to do things."

"Do you think that threatening them teaches them the right way to do things?" he asked gently.

That didn't seem fair. Or maybe I just didn't like looking in a mirror. I didn't answer.

He took a different tack.

"What's the purpose of punishment?" he asked.

I hesitated, then finally said, "Well, it's to punish people when they do bad things. When someone does something bad, you can't just let them get away with it." I found myself exasperated. Why was he questioning such an obvious concept? "Besides," I said defiantly, "some-

times people, and children, deserve it."

"I see," he said. "Tell me, do you think seeking revenge is a positive character quality?"

"No."

"What's the emotional difference between seeking revenge and saying that someone deserves to be punished?"

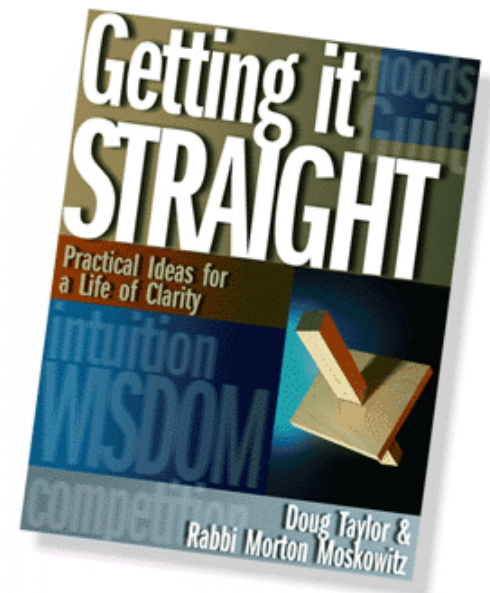
Checkmate.

"You see," he said, graciously not pushing the point, "there are really only two rational reasons to punish someone. The first reason is correction. This is as true for teaching a child not to run out in the street as it is for teaching an adult not to steal. We need to teach the child or adult to modify his or her behavior. But to achieve true, long-lasting correction, the punishment must be designed to bring about a real behavior change, not just compliance out of fear. If compliance comes only from fear, then compliance ceases as soon as the threat is removed. How many times have you told your children to do something under threat of punishment, only to have them do it when you're not around?"

"In crafting punishments," he continued, "emotions cloud the picture. The common parental approach of 'if you don't stop that, I'll spank you' is often more an expression of the parent's anger than a well-thought-out punishment designed to achieve real behavior change. That's why many of our societal responses to discipline problems and crime are ineffective. They're based more on vengeance motivation than on a carefully considered correction process."

I pondered that idea for a minute, then asked, "What's the second reason for punishment?"

"To protect society," he said. "Even if correc-




tion is impossible, society must protect itself from certain types of people, such as serial killers. However, even in these cases, the punishment should be designed solely with the objective of protecting society, not exacting vengeance."

I was quiet for a long time, thinking about how I sometimes discipline my children. The thoughts did not cheer me. What would happen, I wondered, if I disciplined my children only for their benefit and not mine? What if I disciplined my children based on my intellect rather than my emotions? What if I carefully designed punishments solely to achieve real understanding and behavior change on their part, instead of the short-term quick-fix compliance that so easily masquerades as the real thing?

I decided to find out. □

Education



J., a top graduate of a prominent modern Orthodox woman's high school, remembers her first day at Queens College. The students were in Sociology class. One of the members of the class confronted her about kashrut observance, espousing the oft repeated canard that kashrut really has its origins in primitive health regulations, and is thus superfluous for sophisticated moderns. The professor gave J. an opportunity to respond, and asked her to explain the reasons for kashrut to the rest of the class from her perspective as an observant Jew. She froze. She knew that her beliefs were under attack, and that she had been publicly put on the spot. She desperately wanted to explain the Torah position in a cogent way and yet she found that despite 15 years of day school education, she was unable to do so.

J.'s unfortunate experience is not unique. Faced with a university experience which is at best indifferent to Jewish sensibilities, and which is often actively hostile to observant Jewish values, many students find themselves questioning their belief systems.

What is the etiology of this problem? Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, zt'l, presciently discussed just this issue in a letter to Dr. Samuel Belkin in spring of 1955 (Community, Covenant and Commitment: selected letters and communications of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, KTAV 2005). Rabbi Soloveitchik felt that the yeshiva world is operating from an outmoded educational model in Judaic Studies. The real revolutions in Jewish education are over a century old, beginning with Rabbi Hirsch's "Torah im Derech Eretz" which led to his prototypical day school in Frankfurt, and continuing with the Rav's 20th century concept of Torah U'Mada. In both cases, the innovations centered on the inclusion of General Studies in a Yeshiva setting, and that basic trend continues today. There is tremendous energy put into updating curricula in General Studies in order to prepare our students for higher secular education and the world of work. In contrast, the format of the Judaic Studies curriculum in most yeshivas and day schools has remained virtually unchanged since the shtetl. And although many of us have warm feelings about shtetl life, the realities were often less attractive. Underneath the "Fiddler on the Roof" exterior, the shtetl was essentially a medieval society, cloistered from contact with the outside world, and suspicious of "modern ideas". Jewish learning needed only to prepare the average shtetl inhabitant for social intercourse with others of like belief. The Torah curriculum was predicated on a world in which biology teachers or sociology teachers did not exist. There was virtually no opportunity for the cognitive dissonance brought on by intellectual challenges from outside ideas.

Is it any wonder that some of our students feel challenged by the university experience? We are sending our children to do ideological battle against 21st century opponents armed only with 17th century weapons.

The inadequacy of this outmoded approach manifests itself in many ways before students enter

college. We are all familiar with the ramifications of this problem – young people who are otherwise motivated, but are apathetic about their Judaic Studies; uninspired, mechanical davening; lack of interest in mitzvah observance; fascination with the entertainments and fads of the non-Jewish world; and a general lack of pride in Jewish identity. Being Jewish is just "not cool." Our magnificent Mesorah has been reduced to competing with pop culture, and has been found wanting.

At the Torah Academy of Long Island, we believe that we have the outline of a solution to this problem. Following the Mesorah of Rabbi Soloveitchik and Rabbi Israel Chait of Yeshiva B'nei Torah, we have developed a curricular approach to Judaic Studies that emphasizes relevance, logic and intellectual rigor of the Rambam. We have designed a curriculum that enables our graduates to successfully and proudly compete in the marketplace of ideas regardless of their post high school experiences. We have achieved a tremendous level of success in truly impacting on the lives of our students. But we know that this is just a beginning. What is really needed is a totally new vision of Jewish education specifically designed for the modern student. This educational reform must permeate every aspect of the school experience, of which formal Judaic Studies curriculum is just a part.

We envision a school in which every subject, whether Biology or Talmud, is understood as a manifestation of Hashem's Chochmah, God's Wisdom. We envision a school in which curriculum is not just a matter of covering a certain quantity of text, but a program of powerfully answering the most pressing issues of Jewish life. We envision a school in which trips and extracurricular activities are not just entertainment, but opportunities for expanding the borders of the classroom, while building the strong personal relationships between faculty and students that are so valuable for meaningful academic success. At TALI, we are continually reassessing our Judaic Studies curriculum to address these issues – we are constantly working towards greater precision and meaningful integration with all facets of school life.

We feel that we have taken some valuable first steps. Although we do not have all the answers, we have at least honestly framed the problem. We know that we cannot afford business as usual. We already see the depredations to our community that have resulted from following this path. The potential for failure is too great – the costs are too high. We invite all interested community members to begin this dialog. As Pirkei Avos Says, "You are not required to complete the task, yet you are not free to withdraw from it."

By the way, what happened to J.? Thankfully, her story had a happy ending. Her response was to seek answers in Torah study with Rabbi Reuven Mann of the Masoret Institute for Women. She is now married, the mother of two daughters, a published author, and a teacher at TALI. ■

Crisis in Sociology Class

*An Open Dialogue
with the
Modern Orthodox
Community*

A TRUE STORY

Rabbi Pinchas Rosenthal, Dean
Torah Academy of Long Island

JewishTimes Profile

Education



Torah Abounds on L.I.

*Education Thrives in
Plainview Long Island*

CONG.

RINAT YISRAEL

JewishTimes Profile

Another notable institution in the Plainview, NY area is Congregation Rinat Yisrael. Rabbi Reuven Mann has been the spiritual leader of this congregation for the past five years. Rinat offers Shabbos services, along with many classes. Rabbi Mann gives an insightful, 20-minute Parsha drasha each Shabbos after Musaf, followed by a shul-wide Kiddush. On Shabbos afternoons following Mincha, Rabbi Mann gives a class on various topics including Israel, Jewish philosophy and portions of Torah, Talmud and Prophets. The class is interactive and lively, and attracts many community members. Other classes include the Sunday morning Rambam class, now covering Rambam's Laws of Blessings. In addition to leading the Rinat Yisrael congregation, Rabbi Mann has also been the menahel of Yeshiva B'nei Torah in Far Rockaway for 30 years. His local and visiting students spend a Torah-filled Shabbos at his home regularly, where they rise early to enjoy his 7:00-8:30am discussion in Rambam's Mishneh Torah before heading to shul at 9:00. Over ten years ago, Rabbi Mann founded Masoret Advanced Institute of Women's Torah Studies in Inwood, NY. Masoret offers year-round women's Torah and Talmud classes on location, and via telephone hookup. Rabbi Mann now adds to his schedule his lecture series at the Adult Institute in Plainview.

As a leader of the Plainview community, Rabbi Mann generously offers his time to residents, students and congregants, drawing on decades of experience, counseling others in religious, social and personal matters. His honest and intelligent approach, teamed with a sustained busy teaching schedule has made an impact on hundreds of Jews in the Metropolitan, NY area. Mesora and the JewishTimes recognizes his outstanding efforts and much needed work, wishes him continued success in proliferating true Torah fundamentals, and thanks him for his continued contributions to our publication. Chazak V'Yeematz.

To learn more about Rinat Yisrael, or to arrange a Shabbos visit to the shul and the Plainview community, please contact Rinat at: 516-822-6636

Shabbos at Rinat Yisrael

Jessie Fischbein

We visited Plainview for Shabbos. We came because Rabbi Mann, who knows us for many years, thought that the program Rinat was having that Shabbos would be meaningful to us. That's the kind of Rabbi that Rabbi Mann is. His special brand of chessed is very Abrahamic in that he loves Torah so much he has devoted his life to helping people appreciate its wisdom. There is a void in the community that Rabbi and Rebbetzin Mann left for Plainview, and I thought that I would feel ambivalent seeing them in their new community and feeling our loss. But after experiencing the atmosphere of a Shabbos at Rinat, I can see that he and the congregation have created something special.

Plainview itself is lovely. There are trees and beauti-

fully manicured lawns and it seems like there is a playground on every other corner. As we strolled around in the afternoon, we enjoyed the relaxed pace of a long Shabbos in suburban sunshine.

There is a welcoming warmth and intellectual energy bustling in the shul. The davening is quiet; people daven, not talk. During the kiddush afterwards (there is a kiddush every week), my children delighted in the fruit, salad, bagels, and cake. Every body was friendly. There is a real sense of community that beckons a person to join and be part of it. Rebbetzin Mann is her caring and gracious self, and people respond to her warmth.

We attended the class between mincha and ma'ariv. Rabbi Mann has a unique lecture style. Actually, he doesn't lecture. Part stand-up comic and part Socrates, the congregation alternately laughs and debates with him, ultimately coming away enlightened. We discussed the relevant topic of Lifnei Iver, giving advice to someone that is not in his or her best interest. Never before have I seen a congregation that was so involved in a shiur. The congregants are true participants, taking responsibility for acquiring Torah for themselves, under the expert guidance of their Rav.

Instead of giving a drasha in the middle of davening on Shabbos morning, Rabbi Mann speaks after davening. The congregation has an aura of anticipation after davening, as though something exciting is about to happen. Which it does. Rabbi Mann speaks about topics that are both fundamental and fascinating. This is also the time when Rinat has speakers for their special programs.

When we were there, Tzvi Binn spoke about the program EFRAT, an organization devoted to preventing abortions in Israel. My husband and I were startled to learn that there are 50,000 abortions a year. And the organization estimates that half of them are due to economic and social pressures that can be avoided with their support program. I was astonished to hear of something that claims more Israelis than terrorism. In fact, R' Binn read us a heartrending letter of a couple whose 11-month-old baby was a victim of terror, and how this couple is determined to bring 1000 babies into the world in his stead. He also read us another letter from a mother who wrote to EFRAT on her daughter's fifth birthday, thanking them. She talks about how much joy this daughter brings the family, and how she shudders every time she thinks that she could have actually aborted her. I was struck by the idea that, in preventing these abortions, EFRAT is really giving women "choice." They specifically deal with women and families who are in conflict about abortion, who don't want to abort their babies but are under financial pressure or emotional pressure. They help them make the decision that they really want to make. R' Binn also made the point this is also many families' first close contact with observant Jews, and it has a powerful kiruv effect that those who care so much are observant.

I thank Congregation Rinat Yisroel for bringing such a crucial issue to our attention. It was a pleasure to see a community so devoted to both learning and chessed.

the PLACE of the ALTAR

YAAKOV TRACHTMAN



Rambam, Hilchos Beis Habechira 2:2, “It is a well known tradition that the place that David and Solomon built the altar in Goren Arnona, was the same place that Abraham built the altar upon which he sacrificed Isaac, and it was the same place which Noach built an altar when he left the ark, and that was the altar which Cain and Abel sacrificed upon, and Adam brought a sacrifice there when he was created...and he was created there. The Rabbis say man was created from the place of his ‘kapara’, atonement.”

This Rambam raises numerous questions:

1. Most of the sacrifices he lists were not done for forgiveness (The Akeida of Isaac was a trial, and Cain and Abel were showing gratitude.). So what does Rambam mean that, “man was created from the place of his ‘kapara’, atonement”?
2. Why was man created from this place, the place of his “kapara”? What does this teach?
3. What is the significance of these individuals building their altars in the “same place”?
4. What is the significance of these specific, historical examples?
5. What is ‘history’ doing in a law book?

To begin, let us define “kapara”. Kapara – or atonement – means to say that a person can relate to God, even though he is inherently a lowly being. This is an astonishing thing, as King David states (Psalms 8:5) “Ma Enosh Ki Tizkerenu?”, “What is man that You shall be mindful of him?” Man should be trapped in his mundane activities, unable to reach the metaphysical.[1] When a person offers a sacrifice, he is recognizing his state, and the ability to bring himself to closeness with God. This explains the Rabbis’ statement: “Mimikom kaparato Nivra”, “From the pace of his atonement was man created.” It was essential to man’s creation, that there was the capacity to relate to God. If the means of attaining closeness to God was not specifically set up in his creation, man would be unable to create such a relationship; man’s existence would be worthless.

This is why all of these individuals built their altar in the same place. They all desired their sacrifice to reflect the idea that a person’s ability to relate to God is only due to God’s kindness in endowing man with that capability.

The events the Rambam lists were not merely personal sacrifices. Rather, each one of these sacrifices marked the beginning of a new period in human existence. At the beginning of each period, the person brought a sacrifice to express the fact that the nature of this existence is one of “kapara”. [2]

Adam brought a sacrifice at the first moment of human existence (even before man ever sinned). Cain and Abel (Adam’s sons) brought a sacrifice from the fruit of their labor, which was the new state of man’s existence due to Adam’s punishment. Noach brought a sacrifice at the beginning of a new period of man. God recreated the world through Noach (albeit with lesser lifespans) after man was worthy of destruction. At the Akeida, Abraham was initializing a new framework for man to operate in. Since most of man had turned to idol worship, God selected Abraham to be the progenitor of a nation whose role is to perfect the world: in contrast to the original plan, which was for the whole world to reach perfection on their own.

Each of these individuals brought a sacrifice to demonstrate that even though man is at a lower level of existence, the foundation of man’s existence must be a relationship with God (through whichever framework is currently at his disposal). This relationship is demonstrated via sacrifice.

King David knew this idea and therefore he chose this place for the altar for all generations. He desired every person who brought a sacrifice to recognize the idea of “kapara”, which is the essence of sacrifice.

What about Rambam’s insertion of history, into a law book? The Rambam placed history in a book of law in order to show that there is an entity of altar outside of the framework of Temple. The place of the altar does not stem from its identity as a vessel of the Temple, and has no designated place in the Temple’s Courtyard (like the Menora in the Heichal). Rather, that the idea of altar – sacrifice – exists in its own right, as the place of man’s “kapara”. The Rambam teaches this by including the entire history of the “Makom kapara” (place of atonement) in his definition of the “Makom kapara”, “place of the altar”. □

[1] “Kapara” in the forgiveness sense means the same thing; namely that even though the person sinned and should be permanently distant due to his low level. When he does teshuva God allows the relationship to be reestablished.

[2] In other words, as mankind began a new epoch in his existence, (viz, Adam upon his Creation, Noach after the Flood, etc) this new era demarcating man’s ‘renewed existence’ demanded the characterization of man’s inherent need for atonement. Man, without the notion of atonement, is a flawed view of man.

Pirkei Avos – Ethics

the
MESORA

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by Rabbi Ruben Gober

“Moses accepted Torah from Sinai and passed it over (masrah) to Joshua”
(Ethics 1:1)

Rashi explains that Moses had taught all of the Torah to Bnei Yisrael. However, the Mishna mentions Joshua exclusively, and not Elazar, Pinchas and the Seventy Elders. This was because Moses wanted to pass it over only to he who “to he who ‘killed’ himself from his days of youth in the tents of wisdom, and acquired a good name in the world...” Joshua was the only such person. There are a few questions that may be asked on Rashi’s explanation: First, it is not clear from Rashi what actually transpired: did Moses pass over the Torah to Elazar, Pinchas and the Seventy Elders but the Mishna only mentioned Joshua; or was it truly only passed over to Joshua? Rashi says that for the specific reasons mentioned, Moses only wanted to pass it over to Joshua, but if that is the case, then what was bothering Rashi that he asked why the Mishna only mentions Joshua?

Second, what are these two qualifications of 1) “he who ‘killed’ himself from his days of youth in the tents of wisdom, and 2) acquired a good name in the world”? Why are they so valuable?

Let us begin with the idea of ‘masrah’, the root of which is ‘masar’, to transmit or pass over. What exactly does this connote? When Moses transmitted the Torah specifically to Joshua, how was it different from how Moses taught the rest of the nation?

To address this issue, let us take up a similar problem in the Rambam: In his introduction to the Yad Hachazaka, the Rambam says that “although it wasn’t written down, Moses-taught the Oral Law in his court to the 70 elders...and to Joshua his student, Moses gave the Oral Law and appointed him on it.” What does the Rambam mean by “appointed him on it”? He already said that Moses taught it to Joshua, so what does this “appointment” add?

Rav Soloveitchik zt”l, known as the Rav, explained that there is a unique process of ‘Mesora’, continuing the chain of transmission of Torah, which demands its own context of learning. When Moses taught it to Joshua, it was not enough to receive the knowledge, but rather, it was in the specific context of the chain of the Mesora. With this idea, the Rav explained why the Rambam says that although Achiya HaShiloni learned Torah from Moses in his youth, he received it from King David and his court...why? Originally, Achiya did not learn in the context of Mesora, so in order to be charged with transmission of

the Torah, he had to ‘re-learn’ it in that specific method, from King David.

We are now in position to understand the answer to our original question on Rashi. While it is true that all others received the Torah and learned from Moses, only Joshua learned it in the context of Mesora, so that he specifically was charged with transmission of the Torah.

The Rambam, in his introduction to the Yad Hachazaka, makes an interesting statement regarding our Mesora. After listing 40 generations of the Mesora from the time of Rav Ashi back to Moses, who heard it from God, he concludes that the entire transmission was from God. The question presents itself: what does the Rambam mean? He just told us that only Moses heard it from God!

Clearly, the Rambam is trying to teach us an idea about our Mesora. When we learn that Moses set up a chain of transmission, he wasn’t just acting on his own; it was because this was God’s Will. God authorized Moses to pass over the Torah to Joshua which means that God setup the system of Mesora. Therefore, anyone who is a ‘baal Mesora’, charged with the transmission, must be viewed as partaking of a system having been setup by God and thus having been appointed by God. This is the idea of the Rambam: they all received it from God insofar as they all partook of the system of Mesora, which God set in place.

Now let us take up our next question on Rashi. What does he mean that Joshua “killed himself in his youth in the tents of wisdom”? We can begin to understand this when we understand the metaphor of “killing oneself”- what is the idea being conveyed? Death, we know, is the cessation of our physical existence. Here, death is used as a metaphor (we know Joshua was certainly alive when appointed by Moses!) to convey a removal from the physical pleasures and desires. An example of this is seen in the statement of Chazal that expounds that Torah is acquired only by those who ‘kill’ themselves for it: again death is used as a means of expressing a removal from the sensual and physical enjoyments; to be redirected towards the non-physical, conceptual world of wisdom. Joshua was one who was able to remove himself from the world of the physical and harness those energies to be engaged in God’s wisdom. Interestingly, Rashi points out that Joshua had done this from his youth. Why is this important to notice? Why is one who starts at this perfection from his youth better off?

...To be continued

