

A Rabbi once said,
 “You can measure a person’s
 true values, by how he
 spends his free time”.

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IGNORED

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

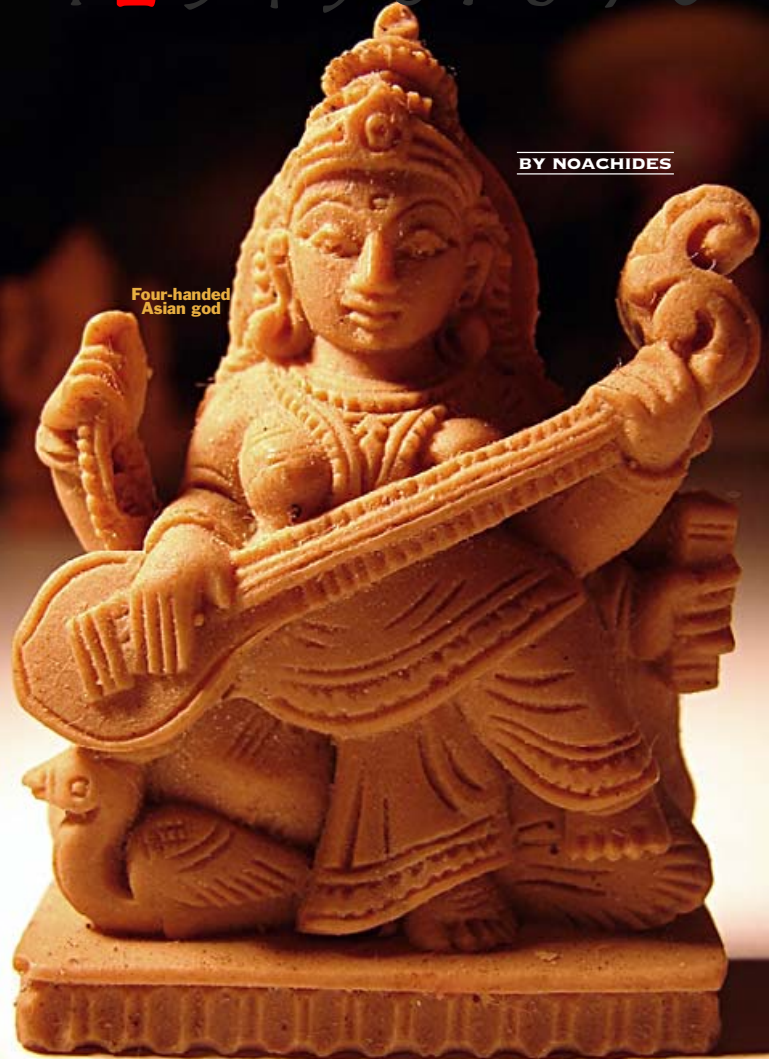
Once taught that Abraham and Sarah agreed to claim their status as siblings, a redundant lesson is not an acceptable interpretation in God’s perfect Torah. This case (Gen. 20) must teach of another personality: Avimelech. After seizing Sarah, God threatens Avimelech “in dreams of the night” to return Sarah or die, but he does not do so until the morning, and only after a long rebuke of Abraham, Sarah is returned. Why the two delays? In the dream, he claims to God his “innocence of heart”, and “purity of action” unaware of Sarah’s role as ‘wife’, not sister. However, God agrees only with the former claim. (Or Hachaim) Sifsay Chachamim note God’s reason to return Sarah is Abraham’s status as a prophet. Meaning, without Abraham’s status, Avimelech would have retained Sarah in forced custody, despite God’s threat. Startling. Further on, when repeating his dream, Avimelech’s people were “very frightened”. But why should they be, unless his people who “do not fear God” (20:11) believe dreams, deeming this just another, idolatrous manifestation.

Are we being taught of a personality, who although confronted by God, nonetheless, habitually lumps God into his preconceived categories of false deities? Although acquiescing, did Avimelech go so far as to ignore recognition of the true God, even having heard Him? I do not know, but the verses do point to Avimelech and his city as a flawed civilization. ■

POLYTHEISM

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

BY NOACHIDES



Four-handed
 Asian god

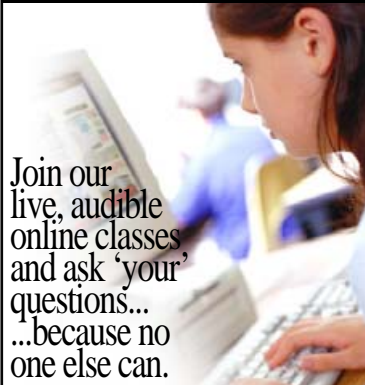
“Dear Mesora, After listening to your explanation on today’s class, and reading again the article “One God” in this week’s Jewish Times I have come to the conclusion that those who say shittuf allows a gentile to swear by two deities (independent of each other and existing at the same time),

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Weekly Parsha

Chayay Sarah

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“And the girl, to whom I shall say, “Tip your jug and I will drink,” and she will say, “Drink and I will also water your camels,” she is the one you have designated for your servant Yitzchak. And through her I will know that you have done kindness with my master.” (Bereshit 24:13)

(continued on page 3)

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Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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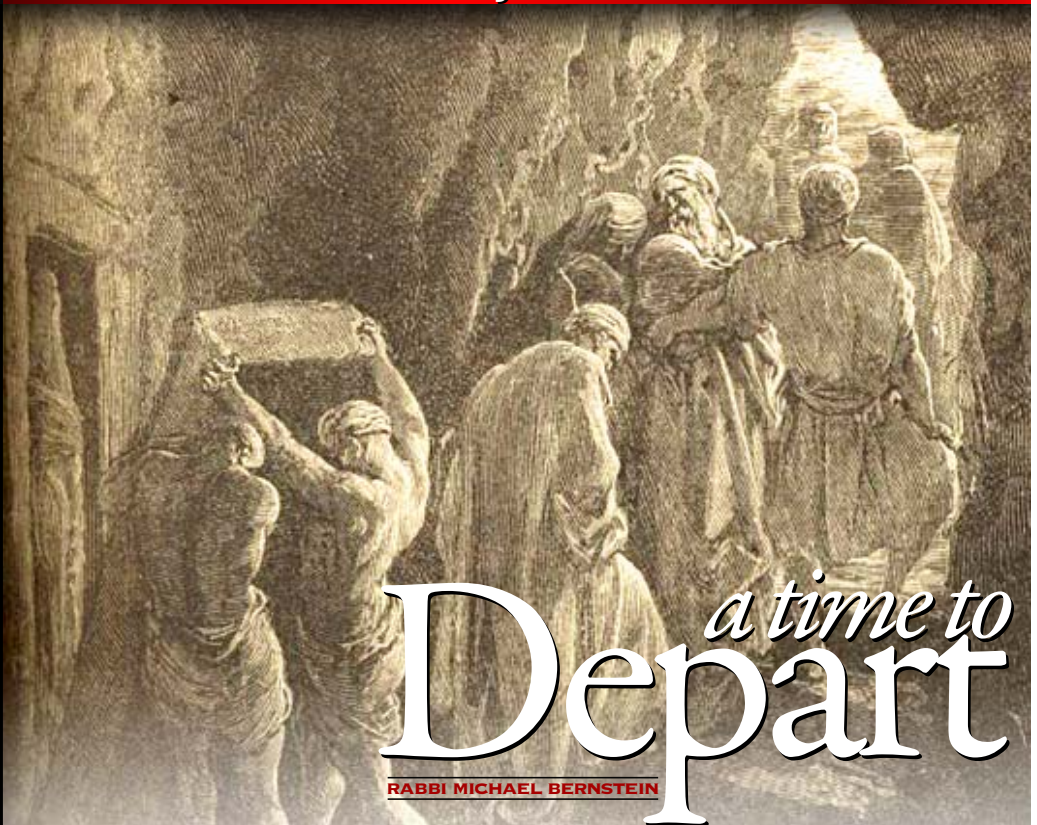
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Weekly Parsha



RABBI MICHAEL BERNSTEIN

Immediately after we read about the Akeidah, we learn of Sarah's death (23:2). Why? Rashi tells us, in the name of Midrash Tanchuma, that when Sarah heard that Isaac had nearly been slaughtered "her soul burst from her and she died."

What exactly does this mean? According to some commentators this means very simply that her shock at the frightening news of what had almost happened to her son was so great that her heart gave out and she died. Others commentators take the exact opposite view. Taking note of the idiomatic expression used for "nearly slaughtered," *kim'at shelo nish'chat*, which translates literally as "he almost wasn't slaughtered," they suggest that Sarah's profound disappointment that Isaac wasn't taken as a sacrifice to God caused her death.

Perhaps we can also suggest a slightly different interpretation. Sarah's overriding purpose in her life was to raise Isaac, the patriarch who would form the central link in the Avos between Abraham who was the initiator and Jacob from whom the nation of Israel commences. When God showed that he considered Isaac worthy of being a perfect sacrifice (*olah temimah*), and when Isaac showed he was ready to offer himself up with a perfect heart, Sarah realized she had accomplished her purpose in life. She experienced such a spiritual expansion that "her soul burst from her and she died."

Thus, Sarah did not die from mental anguish. She had fulfilled her life's duties. There was

nothing more she needed to give to Isaac. Abraham's work, however, was not complete. He still had to arrange the marriage of Isaac and teach the concepts of the Torah to his grandson Jacob. This work would take many more years.

The language of the Midrash lends some credence to this approach. It would appear that she did not die from any physical complication but rather that "her soul burst from her and she died." Apparently, her soul was no longer able to maintain its tenuous connection to her physical body. Her life was not terminated. It was completed.

We also find support for this approach in the first verse of the parashah (23:1), "And Sarah's life was one hundred years and twenty years and seven years, the years of Sarah's life." Rashi, in the name of Bereishis Rabbah, notes that the use of this unusual expanded language rather than a concise "one hundred and twenty-seven years" is instructive. It teaches that into her hundreds she was as free of sin as a twenty-year-old (who has just reached the age of responsibility), and she had the pristine beauty of a seven-year-old.

In the view of our Sages, a person's death has an element of atonement for the sins of his life. But Sarah, according to the Midrash, was free of sin. Why then did Sarah die? She is not listed among those who died only for the sin of Adam. Perhaps it was because she did not die from sin or physical fatigue. She had fulfilled her life's work, and her exalted soul sought to return to its Creator. ■

Students

Yosef's
ColumnEulogy
Before Tears

YOSEF ROTH

In this week's Parsha the second verse says "Sarah died in Kiryas Arbah, which is Hebron, in the land of Canaan. Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to cry for her". Usually, a person would cry and then eulogize the person. Why in this case did Avraham eulogize her first, and then cry for her?

The reason the average person cries upon hearing of the death of a loved one is because of their emotional loss. They're upset that the person who was so close to them is now gone. Avraham, who was beyond the average person, was not only crying for his emotional loss. Avraham recognized that Sarah's death was a loss to mankind. As such Avraham realized that it was important for all the people to understand just how great an effect Sarah's death would have on them by explaining to how important she was while alive. The intellectual recognition of Sarah's loss to mankind was far more significant and painful to Avraham than his own personal loss. He eulogized her first so that he could comprehend and explain intellectually what her loss would mean. It was after this recognition that Avraham began to cry. ■

(Chayay Sarah continued from page 1) Weekly Parsha

Our parasha discusses the selection of Rivka to become the wife of Yitzchak. This parasha also introduces Lavan – Rivka's bother. The Torah describes Rivka as a person of tremendous sensitivity and kindness. Lavan is generally regarded as the classical villain. However, it does not seem from our parasha that this characterization of Lavan is completely justified. As the Torah explains, Lavan and Rivka were products of the same household and it is clear from the parasha that Lavan was not completely bereft of positive qualities. Let us summarize the Torah's introduction of these two characters and compare the manner in which they are portrayed.

Avraham sends his servant Eliezer to Aram Naharayim. There, he is to find a wife for Yitzchak. Eliezer arrives at Aram Naharayim and prepares to fulfill his mission. He devises a test. He will stand by the town's well. The girls of the town will come to draw water for their families. Eliezer will approach each. He will ask each to share some water with him. The girl that offers him water and also offers to water his camels will be destined to be Yitzchak's wife. The objective of Eliezer's test is clear. He is seeking a wife for Yitzchak who exemplifies the characteristics of kindness and sensitivity. He has created a test designed to identify a candidate with these qualities.

Eliezer has barely completed formulating his test when Rivka appears. She fulfills all of the requirements of the test. Eliezer immediately rewards her with jewelry. He does not yet identify himself or explain his mission. Instead, he asks Rivka to identify her family and he asks if there is available lodging with her family. Rivka responds by telling Eliezer that she is the daughter of Betuel and that there is lodging available at her home as well as provisions for Eliezer's camels. Eliezer thanks Hashem for His assistance and Rivka rushes home and relates her experiences to her family.

Lavan observes the gifts that Rivka has received from Eliezer and rushes to greet him. Lavan finds Eliezer and immediately insists that he lodge with the family.

It is clear that Rivka was a person of tremendous compassion. But it is also evident that Rivka's home was a place where guests were welcome. As Rivka explained, their home included room for guests and provisions were kept on hand for their needs. Lavan was eager to invite Eliezer into their home. He was very insistent that Eliezer accept the invitation. So, it is true that Rivka demonstrated remarkable sensitivity to Eliezer's needs. But Lavan was also eager to accommodate this guest. What precisely was the difference between Rivka and her brother?

"And it was when he saw the nose-ring and the bracelets on the hands of his sister and he heard the words of Rivka – saying this is what the man said – that he came to the man and he was standing by his camels near the spring." (Beresheit 24:30)

The above pasuk plays a significant role in the traditional understanding of Lavan. The pasuk tells us that Lavan saw the jewelry that Rivka had received from Eliezer and he rushed to greet Eliezer. Rashi comments that the Torah is implying a connection between Lavan's observation of the jewelry and his eagerness to entertain Eliezer. According to Rashi, Lavan was not interested in practicing kindness. He was determined to develop a relationship with Eliezer and through this relationship devise some means of securing some of Eliezer's wealth.[1]

However, there is a problem with Rashi's interpretation of our pasuk. In the previous pasuk, the Torah tells us that Lavan heard Rivka's account and rushed out of the house to greet Eliezer. Only upon leaving, did Lavan notice Rivka's jewelry. It seems the Lavan had decided to greet Eliezer before he even noticed the gifts that Rivka had received!

However, this does raise an interesting problem. Why does the Torah note that Lavan observed Rivka's jewelry? In other words, the Torah implies that this observation had some impact on him. But the Torah does not describe the nature of this impact. How was Lavan influenced by his observation of the jewelry that Rivka had received from Eliezer?

Sforno answers these questions. He explains that although after hearing Rivka's story Lavan rushed to greet Eliezer, he did not initially intend to invite him to his home. He was merely wished to take advantage of the opportunity to meet a wealthy traveler. However, when Lavan saw the jewelry his intentions changed. He recognized the generosity that this stranger had shown towards his sister and he wished to respond with an invitation of lodging. Lavan felt that Eliezer's kindness towards his sister should be rewarded.[2]

In short, Sforno's characterization of Lavan is very different from Rashi's. According to Rashi, Lavan was only interested in taking advantage of Eliezer. But according to Sforno, Lavan felt obligated to repay Eliezer for his generosity to his sister.

Now, according to Rashi, we can see that there is a clear difference between Lavan and Rivka. Rivka was a sincere and sensitive person. She observed a traveler; ascertained his needs and immediately acted to address these needs. In contrast, Lavan saw Eliezer's needs as an opportunity to take advantage him. He was not sincerely interested in extending hospitality to Eliezer. He was interested in bringing Eliezer into his home in

(continued on next page)

(Chayay Sarah continued from page 3)

Weekly Parsha

the hope that he could devise a plan to take advantage of him.

However, according to Sforno, the difference between Eliezer and Rivka is not as clear. Rivka demonstrated kindness by assessing and responding to Eliezer's needs. Lavan extended his hospitality to Eliezer as an expression of gratitude for the generosity that Eliezer had shown Rivka. Why is Lavan morally inferior to Rivka?

“And he said,” Blessed is Hashem, the G-d of my master Avraham, who has not withdrawn His kindness and His truth from my master. Here I am, still on the road, and Hashem has led me to the house of my master's close relatives.” (Beresheit 24:27)

Eliezer recognizes that his success is a result of the Almighty's providence. He offers thanksgiving and praise to Hashem. In his words of thanks, Eliezer says that Hashem has treated Avraham with kindness and truth. What is the meaning of these terms? What is the kindness and truth to which Eliezer is referring?

Radak explains that Hashem acted with truth towards Avraham by guiding Eliezer to a wife that was fitting for Yitzchak. However, Hashem acted with kindness – chesed – in guiding him to a wife from Avraham's own family.[3]

Radak explains himself more fully in Sefer Yehoshua. Yehoshua sent spies to scout the land of Canaan. The spies came to the house of Rachav. They were observed entering the house. But Rachav hid the spies and saved their lives. Rachav asked these spies to treat her and her family with kindness and truth. She asked that Bnai Yisrael spare them in their conquest of the land. Radak is concerned with Rachav's characterization of her own request as an appeal for kindness and truth. Rachav asked for kindness – she asked to be spared. But in what manner was she requesting truth?

Radak responds that Rachav's request that she be spared was not an appeal for kindness. She saved the lives of the spies and she deserved to be repaid and spared. This not an appeal for kindness; it is an appeal for truth. The spies were indebted to her. Their dedication to the truth required that they recognize their debt. But Rachav asked that her family be spared. Her family had not done anything for these spies. They did not owe anything to Rachav's family. Her request that her family be spared was an appeal for kindness.[4]

According to Radak, Eliezer applied a similar analysis to Hashem's providence over Avraham. Avraham was dedicated to the service of Hashem. Yitzchak was committed to continue in Avraham's path. In order to succeed, he needed an appropriate wife. Hashem helped Eliezer identify this wife. This, Eliezer regarded as an act of truth. It is



appropriate for one who sincerely seeks to serve Hashem to be assisted in this mission. But Rivka was more than just a fitting wife. She was also a member of Avraham's own family. This element of Hashem's providence – Rivka's relationship to Avraham – Eliezer regarded as an expression of Hashem's chesed.

In summary, according to Radak some acts of charity are acts of truth. They are an acknowledgment and repayment of a debt. Other acts of charity are true acts of chesed. An act of chesed occurs when we demonstrate kindness to a person who has no claim on us and right or reason to expect our kindness.

We can now return to our comparative analysis of Rivka and Lavan. Rav Yehuda Copperman explains that according to Sforno, Lavan and Rivka had very different values. Both showed generosity towards Eliezer. However, their generosity expressed two different principles. Lavan was capable or recognizing truth. He recognized that Eliezer had been generous towards Rivka and he deserved to be repaid for his generosity. He was eager to repay this debt through providing Eliezer with lodging and provisions for his camels. However, at no juncture did Lavan demonstrate a commitment to chesed – unearned, spontaneous kindness. Rivka acted out of chesed. She observed a stranger in need of assistance and immediately threw herself into helping this stranger. She did not owe him her assistance; she did not even know him. He act was an expression of pure chesed.[5]

It is essential to consider the reason that repayment of a kindness is referred to as truth. When we repay a kindness, we are repaying a debt; we are executing an obligation that we have towards the

person that has acted towards us with chesed. It is not enough that we act with kindness in return. More is required. We must recognize that we have incurred a debt. We are required to accept that we are morally obligated to repay the chesed. If we believe that by demonstrating kindness in return we are performing chesed, our entire outlook is tragically flawed. We are denying our obligation and indebtedness.

Too often we confuse chesed with truth. When one who has helped us asks for our assistance in return, we imagine that we are being asked for chesed. We do not like to be in debt – not financially or morally. So, rather than recognizing that we are required to act with truth to those that have demonstrated chesed towards us, we deceive ourselves into believing that we have no debt. This attitude is tragic. It undermines the value of our response. We may respond to the call for assistance. But we depreciated the quality, significance, and meaning of our response if we believe that we are performing a chesed and deny that we are repaying a debt! ■

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 24:29.

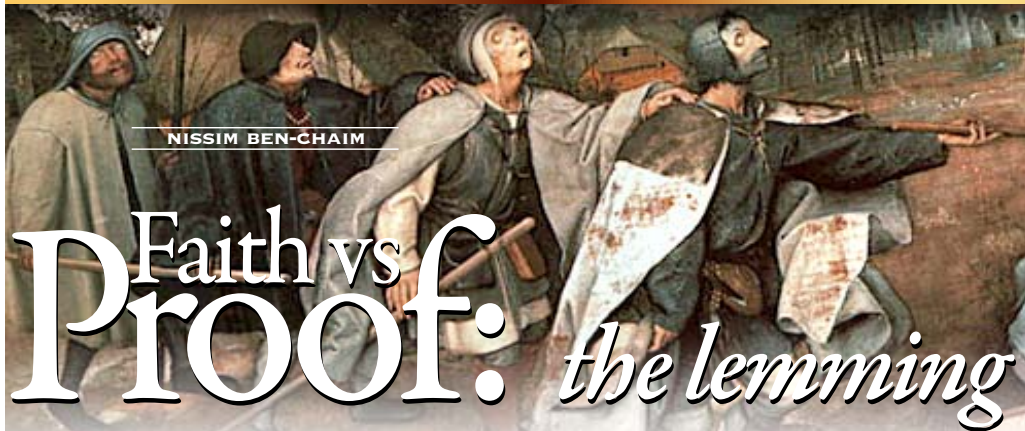
[2] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 24:29-30.

[3] Rabbaynu David Kimchi (Radak), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 24:27.

[4] Rabbaynu David Kimchi (Radak), Commentary on Sefer Yehoshua 2:12.

[5] Rav Yehuda Copperman, Notes to Commentary of Sforno on Sefer Beresheit 24:29, note 58.

Perfection



Faith vs Proof: *the lemming*

The Lemming is a perplexing creature. In packs, they seem to follow one after the other into the sea in an apparent mass suicide. In truth, they are merely creatures without intellect that instinctively emigrate en masse to find broader resources when their populations become overcrowded and exceed their local resources. Well, they are considerate at least.

Living life on faith alone is desirable as it asks little of its adherents. It is an inferior lifestyle to be certain, as it is rooted in the emotions, not the intellect G-d granted to us to understand, learn and for some of us, to teach. One who investigates and even questions the universe and G-d's wisdom with the intent to find proof of the truth of His Torah, will find irrefutable evidence of such truth, and will be motivated by his intellect to follow the Taryag (613) Mitzvos conscientiously. Perfecting oneself is to follow the intellect, not the base emotions and following the Taryag will indeed refine the individual to the extent of how those truths revealed through such study are integrated into one's lifestyle.

Today, it seems some Orthodox sects have taken a turn toward conformity over individualism, to operate on spoon fed faith over personal growth, frequently mimicking the same dynamics endemic to the consumerist secular population. Most adherents to popular culture do so from an emotional, hedonistic orientation. The mediocrity prescient in today's society is the result of following the cults of acquisition, celebrity and personality with the exception of those who have "seen behind the curtain" and rise above as individuals regardless of the social consequences they may experience. Every Jew, indeed every human has access to Torah knowledge to actualize his potential as a perfected individual.

Pirkei Avos is a wonderful resource for the individual who wishes to better himself. There are many people who can recite its tenets yet are arrogant in their ignorance, acting boorishly and rude, with little consideration for how these behaviors sully one's character and make a mockery of Judaism in the eyes of the gentiles and unaffiliated Jews. Children are taught to fear and despise the aforementioned on the basis that they are inferior, undeserving of any consideration or esteem. This attitude, rooted in the irrational emotions of fear and trumped up

superiority, are carried into adulthood with little examination of its origins. By operating on faith rather than logic we are handicapping ourselves, and those who will follow. Insular attitudes then effectively prevent us from exercising the knowledge and ethics of the Torah to maintain our spiritual purity. Instead we are throwing in the towel and admitting that we lack the conviction to keep the Mitzvos in the face of any temptation, which may arise. Avoidance of our problems today can only go so far and is beginning to have broader impact on many other important aspects of our lives.

Some 15 years or so ago, while driving along a busy state highway approaching a green traffic light, another vehicle made a left turn directly in front of my car with barely enough time to get through unscathed had evasive action not been taken. Directly behind that daredevil was yet another vehicle following the first one. There would be no missing this one and was headed for a near head on collision. Fortunately I had the presence of mind to yank the wheel sharply to the left, getting my car into a sideways skid such that the unoccupied passenger side of my car would take the brunt of the collision and spare myself and possibly the other driver of the serious, if not fatal injuries resultant of a head on collision.

Our cars did indeed collide rendering the other driver's car totaled; however I found that my quick reaction had actually allowed my car to be driven away with only superficial damage. Composing myself, I approached the other driver who happened to be a religious Jew in her fifties. I inquired why she almost killed the both of us. Did she not see me approaching? Did she think she had the right of way? Was she yet another inconsiderate driver in this area following the norm of routinely cutting another driver off? Was she having a debilitating seizure that caused her to lose control? No - her reasoning was, I kid you not, "I was following the other car in front of me". That sounded an awful lot like trying to blame the driver of the first vehicle for leading her astray or that she simply put her faith in the first vehicle. Either way, it did not seem that she was taking responsibility for her poor judgment if she was using any at all. If she had only looked before she leaped, applying a bit

of logic or common sense, we would all have been en route to our respective destinations. I reminded her that her actions almost killed us but she really didn't seem to get it- perhaps she was in a state of shock, but it seemed more like denial.

As I mentally reviewed her reasoning with disbelief, I realized that I was dealing with something far deeper and endemic to a certain modus operandi prevalent in some religious, and to a degree, the lower functioning individuals of secular cultures. This person was playing follow the leader in a deadly weapon in this situation, as she and so many others are doing in various aspects of life. Her inconsiderate and reckless actions were symptoms of a broader cause and were not defensible under any circumstance. Yet, she maintained her defensive stand.

Well, I received no justification but did learn an important lesson about the arrogance and ignorance of such people.

There are myriad practical ramifications of applying faith over logic in the material and spiritual realms. In the aforementioned instance, it is perplexing that this offender subscribes to the only authentic religion; one based on logical proofs and yet, has apparently been conditioned to operate on faith alone. I still live in the very same area, and as segments of our population have run roughshod over limited space and natural resources with overbuilding and without consideration to aesthetics or the infrastructure, such near misses can happen several times on a routine local trip. More and more sidewalks are being installed and roads are improved yet pedestrians and drivers seem to fight and even ignore the other motor vehicles in the same limited space. If epithets are hurled at us they may have some credibility. We may want to consider being more conscientious behind the wheel and remind ourselves that with courtesy, comes safety, not to mention the higher esteem we would earn as drivers. We must do more to ensure that we are sending new drivers out who are fully apprised on the rules of the road and that our streets, as overburdened as they are, is no "free for all" where the most aggressive driver wins. Good citizenship is a requirement we are actually commanded to employ Chutz L'Oretz (in exile) - an issue beyond the scope of today's piece which we hope to treat separately in the future.

Recently, an unsupervised toddler no more than 2 was observed on the edge of the street about to wander into traffic. It was inquired of a man standing twenty feet away whether the child was his - he shrugged his shoulders and went back to what he was doing. The mother was eventually located even farther down this street leaving one to wonder how the toddler escaped her attention long enough to get so far out of her control. Not too far away a 5 year old is pushing a baby in a carriage in the street without any adult supervision or concern on the part of others on this street. Irresponsibility? Fatalism? No matter,

(continued on next page)

(The Lemming continued from page 5)

Perfection

the cause may be the same and change is required.

I digress but have only scratched the surface regarding the material problems faith driven behavior creates. We have become more of a "Blight" rather than a "Light Unto the Nations". This is no Kiddush Hashem.

What is our Mesora's position on Faith vs. Proof?

R. Bachaya ben Josef ibn Paquda states in the following excerpts from his book on ethics "Duties of the Heart":

"Whoever has the intellectual capacity to verify what he receives from tradition, and yet is prevented from doing so by his own laziness, or because he takes lightly G-d's commandments and Torah, he will be punished for this and held accountable for negligence."

"If, however, you possess intelligence and insight, and through these faculties you are capable of verifying the fundamentals of the religion and the foundations of the commandments which you have received from the sages in the name of the prophets, then it is your duty to use these faculties until you understand the subject, so that you are certain of it - both by tradition and by force of reason. If you disregard and neglect this duty, you fall short in the fulfillment of what you owe your Creator."

What are some the spiritual origins and ramifications of such behaviors? There are many indeed and worse, such a modus operandi finds its way into the material aspects of everyday life. Let's begin to address some of them from the spiritual perspective.

Faith seems far more alluring than proving to oneself the objective truth found only in Torah. It is far easier and more attractive, than the work involved in individualism as we see in most of western culture to operate on an emotional basis than that rooted in logic. This sort of materialism and lust for instant gratification, predominantly feeding our emotional needs is alive and well in the Jewish communities too. In reality we are not really setting ourselves apart but rather simply feeding our infantile needs in a slightly different manner. Maturity requires one to operate on a basis of reason, not hiding behind Torah and just going through the motions to appear pious.

Why is this so hard and lost on so many of us? After all, it takes years of study to appreciate the relevance of Taryag Mitzvos so that one may observe them with understanding as we are commanded whether we are in the spiritual or material realm at any given moment. Following traditions on faith alone falls short of our responsibility as Jews. Further, some traditions that are followed by masses are not necessarily correct simply because they have endured for a few centuries. Others are based solidly upon our Mesora. Others yet are a result of a few leaders who would prefer to reign in absolute power by keeping its "followers" in the dark rather than have them

employ their G-d given intellects to verify for themselves the proper course in life. To these sheep and their shepherds, I say there's no danger of abandoning their insular ways and to reap more of the wisdom the world at large has to offer, provided that they are taught to think critically and to apply our Torah to their lives practically and spiritually. Further what of the Jews' responsibility of improving the world G-d gave us to "create"? To what benefit is insularity in this responsibility?

Abraham logically deduced the concept of monotheism by observing and applying critical reasoning. King Solomon took his wisdom into the world at large, participating in hedonistic endeavors, and wrote Ecclesiastes for our benefit. Are their examples no longer relevant? There is only one truth and we cannot arrive at and practice such truth by relying on others to tell us what to do. We need to do our own work and build upon our appreciation of such truth. We should participate in the world at large, as we have much to offer. Ultimately, we will see far more antisocial behaviors and may even attract a few more of the unaffiliated back to observance of Taryag Mitzvos. Frequently I cannot address the questions and criticisms leveled at our endemic antisocial behaviors as they truly defy logic and indeed the many mitzvos concerning the treatment of our fellow Jews and humans in general.

Let me posit then that faith in tradition, while it has its place, is an inferior position to logic by itself and stems from infantile emotional needs. True, when children are first introduced to the Torah it is done so with stories and other methods attuned specifically to their nature at that stage in life. Later, they are taught the commentaries, Mishnayos and around Bar Mitzvah they are already delving into the Gemara. Many teenaged Jewish boys have memorized page upon page and chapter upon chapter and can recite them with great fluency. Whether they have integrated such lessons into their lives are completely different stories. Sterling middos seem to be the exception rather than the rule today.

Around this time properly matured individuals begin to integrate their lessons into their realities, let go of their infantile needs to view their parents and rabbis as their "invincible protectors and providers" and take responsibility for their actions, livelihoods, and beliefs. The stories they were reared on should be replaced with understanding, and taught that those stories meant to hide advanced knowledge until their minds could adequately apprehend those truths. Are they following Judaism as cult members or as active participants? Instead, many trade in their parents for "Rebbs" whom they follow without question and remain in Kollal without any practical consideration to learning ability, and therefore whether they are suited to lead in the community or if their future responsibilities will be more mundane. Pretty soon though, they're married and raising, or worse, leading another generation of "lemmings" who will

inevitably carry out the very same antisocial behavior ad infinitum. Only now, with each succeeding generation we get a little worse, a little less conscientious, bring unnecessary blight and arrogance upon our neighbors and provide more fuel for the anti-Semites. To be clear, I do not advocate appeasement and assimilation, however, courtesy and consideration for your fellow human is indeed a worthy Judaic ideal.

We are raising children who are followers and lack decision making skills. How are they to make a livelihood or be of any benefit to our world? Are they to be a help or hindrance to the cause of bringing the Light of Torah wisdom into the world at large? What furtherance of Tikkun Olam will they offer? Today social chaos and divisiveness is running rampant through our insular suburban and metropolitan shtetls. Those of us who know of or remember Orthodoxy as it was a brief half century ago would tell you quite a different story. So where is the disconnect? How do learned people who know Pirkei Avos and other mussar then go out into the world and violate such ethical tenets a few moments later? Avos clearly teaches that Torah without livelihood is just as perilous as pursuing a livelihood bereft of Torah. This of course would negate today's practice of full time study for the masses over those select few with the aptitude for true chochma (wisdom) and who have toiled to be culled as the next generation's leaders.

Fifty years ago, under the tutelage of such great leaders as Rabbi Moshe Feinstein and Rabbi Soloveitchik, Orthodox parents stressed the importance of secular knowledge and higher education while imparting the lessons that would keep their children on the proper derech regardless of the outside influences they would encounter. Today, University is "off limits" for many Yeshiva graduates.

By employing faith over proof, an individual sacrifices the opportunity to take the responsibility of making the Torah "His Torah". He sacrifices the opportunity to appreciate G-d's wisdom in the formulation of the Mitzvos specifically attuned to the psychology of His creations. This individual externalizes a manufactured "Judaism" in his appearance but - will he be able to refute those who wish to "go off the derech" or address the Conservative, Reform Jews or the gentile missionaries on any logical basis, or just fall back on tradition as his modus operandi?

Is he meeting his responsibility to G-d or just going through ignorant motions?

There is only one true way to have faith, and that is to study to the extent of your capacity to prove to yourself the truths evident in our Torah: the basis for such faith is rooted in reason. Trust in G-d's system as the best path for man is superior to blind faith, as light is to darkness. We are not commanded in faith. Your intellect should be insulted by this ignorant position and be motivated to find logical reasons to trust in the truth. To say "I believe" is meaningless, instant gratification. We will discuss the effects of the faith driven lifestyle in further detail in the next installment. ■

Halacha - Jewish Law



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

RABBI DANIEL MYERS

Q. Halachically, what role does Vidui (confession) play in the Mitzva of Teshuva?

A. The Minchat Chinch (Mitzvah 364) maintains that the Biblical Mitzvah is actually the Vidui, confession, and not Teshuva, as seen from the Rambam's formulation in Hilchot Teshuva (1:1), where he writes that when one does Teshuva, he is obligated to do Vidui; he does not write that one is obligated in Teshuva itself. The Rav (On Repentance p.80) argues that the Teshuva itself is a Mitzvah, since the Rambam in the Koteret (heading) to Hilchot Teshuva writes: "The Laws of Repentance, consisting of one positive precept, namely, that the sinner shall repent of his sin before the Lord and confess." The Rambam (ibid. 7:5) also writes that all the Prophets commanded the nation to do Teshuva, which is essential for redemption. The Rav offers another reason why we must maintain that Teshuva itself is a Mitzvah; he writes: "But do we really need evidence of this sort? Can one really contemplate the possibility that confession be considered a precept while repentance is not? What would be the significance of confession without repentance?"

Q. Mr. Marc Abraham: If one spoke Lashon Hara about another individual, must he ask for Mechila, forgiveness, from the victim?

A. The Shulchan Aruch (606:1) writes that Yom Kippur atones for sins that are Bain Adam L'chavairo, between man and fellow man, only after the perpetrator asks for Mechila from the victim. The Mishna Berura (606:1) writes that this limitation also applies to one who violated Onaat Devarim, verbal abuse and insult. Regarding Lashon Hara, the Chafaiz Chaim (5:12) writes that one who spoke Lashon Hara and damaged the victim, i.e. the listeners accepted his Lashon Hara as truth, and the perpetrator must ask the victim for Mechila. However, the Moadim Uzmanin (1:54) quotes Rav Dessler in the name of Rav Yisrael Salanter who maintains that if the victim is not aware of the Lashon Hara, and will be hurt when he finds out that he was spoken about, then the sinner has no right to cause the victim pain by asking for Mechila. (See Az Nidbaru (7:66) for an analysis of the Shitot of the Chafaiz Chaim and Rav Yisrael Salanter.) Therefore, it would be best to ask for Mechila in a general way, as many do before Yom Kippur, without specifying the violation.

Q. Mr. Leonard Katz: Can a woman wear a ring with a Pasuk inscribed on it?

A. The Shulchan Aruch (Y"D 282:30) writes that one cannot walk into a bathroom with a Kamiah (jewelry containing Pesukim) unless it is covered with leather or the like. If the jewelry has Shaim Hashem (God's name) on it, then one cannot be undressed in front of it. (Rambam Yesodai Hatorah

6:6) The Ziz Eliezer (16:30) raises the possibility that it may even be Assur to engrave a Passuk on jewelry, as the Ramah (Y"D 276:13) writes that one should not write Hashem's name except in a Saifer, lest it be discarded. However, he writes that jewelry may be different since there is not a realistic fear that it will be discarded.

Q. Mr. Katz: How many coverings are needed on a ring with a Pasuk, or on a Saifer, before bringing it into the bathroom?

A. The Shulchan Aruch (O"C 40:2) writes that one must have a Kli Btoch Kli (a double covering) over Tefilin if they are in the room when one has Tashmish Hamita, marital relations. The Mishna Berura (40:4) writes that this restriction applies to Sefarim as well; the Sefarim must be in a Kli Btoch Kli if they are in a room during Tashmish Hamita. The Mishna Berura (40:5, Biur Halacha 40:2 "Assur") brings down a Machloket Poskim whether one needs a Kli Btoch Kli or simply one covering when bringing a Saifer into the bathroom. (See Ginza Hakodesh 14 note 16.) It is best to be Machmir, but one can rely on the lenient opinion if he or she needs to. Therefore, regarding a ring, one could put it into her pocket or simply cover it with a tissue. With a Saifer, the pocket of the pants may be considered a Kli Btoch Kli, since there are often two layers of material. If needed, simply putting it in a bag would suffice.

Q. Yaakov Myers: May one use an Etrog from the previous year if it is still fresh?

A. The Ramah (648:1) writes that one cannot use an Etrog from the previous year since we assume that it is Yavaish, dried out. The Shaar Hazon (648:8) quotes the Bechorai Yaakov who writes that he saw an old Etrog that was preserved well over the year and permitted the owner to use it. Rav Moshe (O"C 1:185) is hesitant about an Etrog that was frozen since some fruits do not freeze well and may look fine on the outside but be rotten on the inside. The Az Nidbaru (13:38:5) writes that one can be Yotzai with an Etrog that was frozen, while the B'air Moshe (7:52) Paskins that theoretically it would be fine, but considers it unrealistic for the Etrog to stay fresh for a year, even if it was frozen.

Q. Mr. Dov Frohlich: Many shirts, especially "Land's End" type tee-shirts, have four corners. Why are they exempt from Zizith?

A. The Shulchan Aruch (10:7) writes that a garment with four corners whose sides are sown up more than Rov (more than fifty percent of the side) is exempt from Zizith. Therefore, a shirt where the two slits (which form the four corners) only go up a few centimeters is exempt from Zizith. ■

Taken from "Getting It Straight—
Practical Ideas for a Life of Clarity"

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PURCHASE ONLINE

Motivation

DOUG TAYLOR & RABBI MORTON MOSKOWITZ

"So who cares about grades?" he asked.

I stared at him, unbelieving. My friend, the King of Rational Thought, not caring about quality education?

"You can't mean that," I said.

"Oh, but I do," he said, not backing off an inch as our discussion of schools and education progressed. "Look, what's the purpose of a grade?"

"Well, it's to measure someone's level of expertise in an area."

"Ok. Would you also agree that grades can motivate children to learn?"

"Sure," I said.

"Now which do you think is more important, the learning or the grade?"

"Well, the learning of course." What was he driving at?

"Now comes the critical question," he said. "Which do you think is more important to the children, the learning or the grades?"

"Hmm," I said, beginning to get it. "Probably the grades."

"Right. Grades should be just a means to an end; a motivator to get children to learn. But somewhere along the way, we got things reversed. Now the grades are the most important thing. Learning is only a means to the grades. How many kids do you know who study just because they love to learn?"

I had to admit I didn't know any.

"You see?" he continued. "Now, if children cheat, they may get a good grade, but they lose the knowledge they would otherwise have gained. Yet they view that as secondary. The important thing to them is the grade. Unfortunately, they're losing the real value - the learning. The grade, in and of itself, has no value at all."

"But what about getting into college and

getting a good job?" I asked.

"Why do kids want to get a good job?" he countered.

"So they can make a good living," I said.

"Same issue," he said. "You're focusing on the end result, not the process. Years ago, people used to feel good when they made something. They took pride in their work. Some craftspeople still do. But would you say most people enjoy their work today?"

"No," I replied. "I'd say most people just tolerate, if not outright dislike, what they do for a living."

"I agree. Lacking a sense of purpose in their work, they focus instead on what they can get out of it. The end result. The paycheck. The bonus. The three-week vacation. What should be important to them is that there is value in doing good work and doing the right thing as you go along. But once people decide there's only value in the result—"

"They cheat, and they're not bothered by it," I finished, seeing his point.

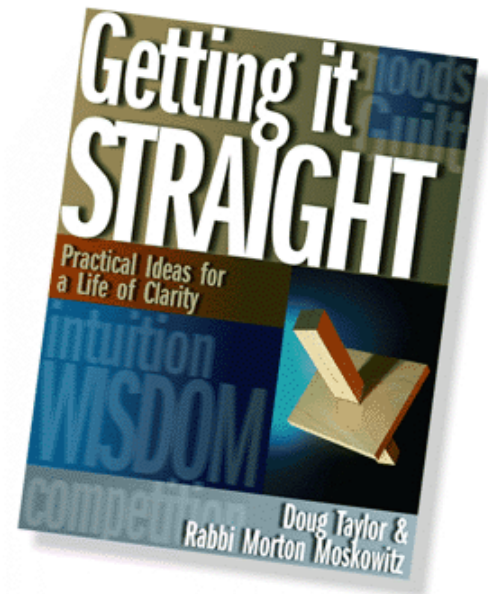
"Exactly. Like the student who sees only value in the grade, many adults only see value in the end result, not the process. You see, when you cheat to get a grade or money, it means you don't see the value of the learning or the work. Because if you recognized the value of those things, how could you cheat? You wouldn't, because you'd realize you were missing the most important thing: the activity itself."

"So back to grades," he went on. "Would you agree that most people - parents and teachers alike - push kids to get good grades?"

"Yes."

"And what result do you think that produces?"

I shuddered, realizing the implications of



what he was saying. "The students focus on the grades rather than the learning," I said.

"Yes," he said. "The way out of this is to de-emphasize grades and show students the value - and the joy - of learning itself. The really happy person is the one who loves what he's doing, whether it's learning or working. For him, the true motivator is the activity itself, not the grade or the paycheck."

I thought about my own children, not quite school-age. Could I motivate them to study for more than just a grade?

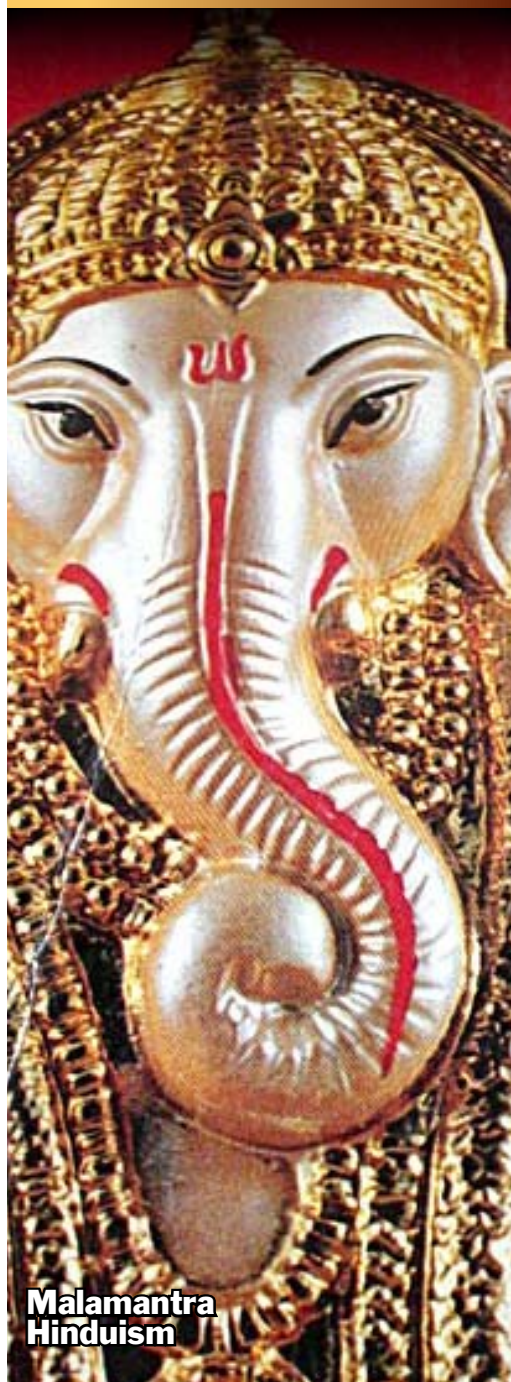
"How can I pass along a love of learning to my children?" I asked.

"That's easy," he replied.

"You model it." ■

(continued from page 1)

Letters: Religion



**Malamantra
Hinduism**

POLYTHEISM
1234567890

BY NOACHIDES

one being the G-d of Israel, are wrong!!

My introduction to shittuf or partnership was from "The Path of the Righteous Gentile" by Clorfene and Rogalsky. The following paragraph and its footnotes are in the chapter on idolatry:

"5. According to many authorities, a Noahide is not warned about the concept of "partnership with God." [5] The concept of partnership is the acknowledgment of the existence of the God of Israel in combination with the belief in the possibility and existence of a deity (independent will) other than God. So long as ascribing power to a deity other than the Creator remains conceptual, it is permissible to the Children of Noah according to many authorities [6]. But worship of this independent being is clearly idolatry. The danger of the concept of partnership is that it frees people to act in accord with nonexistent gods and opens a doorway to actual idolatry. Most recent authorities agree that Children of Noah are forbidden to believe in a partnership. But even according to these, the Children of Noah are permitted to swear by the name of an idol in combination with God (to swear by the Lord of Hosts and a Hindu deity, for example).

Unfortunately I don't have access to either source to see what exactly they say, but by the explanation above then it would seem permissible for a gentile to swear by the G-d of Israel AND another deity, let's say, Zeus, making that two deities independent of each other and existing at the same time.

But, by my understanding after listening to several explanations including yours today and some serious thinking, I think the correct scenario would be something like this: A person who was raised in an environment where the geek gods are worshipped comes to the realization, as Abraham did, that there is only one G-d. He still calls him Zeus, but rejects Apollo, Nike, etc, as gods. Later on, this person learns about the G-d of Israel and that the Jews call Him Hashem, the One True G-d. This person then would swear "By the One True God, whom the Jews call Hashem, and the Greeks call Zeus" that way recognizing that there is not a multitude of gods but just one: except He is called by different names in different places and, sadly, not given His proper place in other religions outside Judaism.

So, shittuf equals different deities and wrong. But we might understand Shittuf as One G-d, but with different names, even those of the chief gods in idolatrous religions, used to refer to the G-d of Israel. This latter interpretation of Shittuf would be allowed by the gentile, but not by the Jew. Do I understand this correctly?"

Hector Fernandez, Little Rock, AR

Mesora: Your explanation is actually in accord with both the Talmud (Bechoros 2b), and with Tosfos there, which cite the verse that a Jew may not mention other gods' names, nor cause them to be mentioned by others: "Lo yishama al picha", "False gods' names shall not be mentioned via your doings (lit. "your words)". (Exodus 23:13) But this prohibition is reserved for the Jew. However, although a gentile is prohibited from idolatry, he is not mandated with this high caliber of perfection, where he must refrain his speech. The gentile's system is one of minimum requirements to deserve life, and this far, a gentile is not required. However, he is certainly more perfected if he does adhere. ■

POLYTHEISM
1234567890

"Dear Mesora, I want to thank you for the article that was published in the latest issue of Jewish Times on the modern error of misunderstanding the Tosafist teaching of shittuf. As a Ben Noach, it angers and hurts me whenever I come across writings and proclamations by other Torah-observant Jews, especially by rabbis, that state that the avodah zarah is permitted to Gentiles. We are following in the steps of the brave and G-d-fearing Avraham, the progenitor of the nation that would serve as a light to the Nations, who fulfilled the mitzvah of abstaining from idol worship when he came to the true knowledge of G-d.

To be told the kinds of insane things, such as what your correspondent complained about, feels like a slap in the face. Surely, these rabbis do no mean us harm, and they wish only to establish peaceful relations with the non-Jewish world, but the lack of scholarship in this area is appalling. I am thankful to Hashem that this rebuke has been made public. The nation of Israel is entrusted with the mission of teaching the Sheva Mitzvot to the entire world. The laws of Avodah Zarah (idolatry) are among the most fundamental, and it is in this area where much education is needed, it seems.

I would also like to add another halachic source, which is indisputable and unequivocal concerning the obligations of Gentiles in regards to Avodah Zarah: Hilkhoth Melakhim u'Milchamotheihem 9:2 states that all the laws of Avodah Zarah that apply to a Jew, apply equally to a Gentile, whether he is executed for it or not. It is interesting to note that this is the only law of the Seven, in which the Rambam does not state any caveats or differences between how it applies to Jews and Gentiles. In the detailing of the other six mitzvot, differences are stated. You may want to add this halachic source to the article, or as a follow up for the next issue. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. Keep up the good work." ■

Shalom, Andy

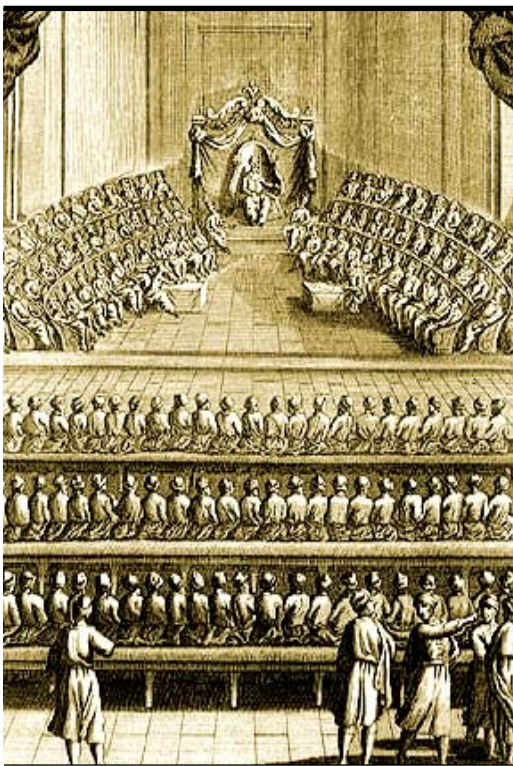
Pirkei Avos – Ethics

the
MESORA
PART IV

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by student

We last left off with questions on the Gemara that describes how the Men of the Great Assembly received that title. The Gemara relates that Moshe had praised God with the terms 'Gibor', meaning Strong, and 'Nora', meaning Awesome but Yirmiyahu and Daniel, living in times where these qualities were not manifest (being enslaved by enemies who controlled the Temple), did not recite them. Later, the Assembly reinstated these terms, explaining, that these qualities were seen in how God was tolerable of, and patient with wicked people, and in the astounding fact that His nation survived amidst all the other nations. The Gemara concludes that Yirmiyahu and Daniel were justified in their omission of these



terms because 'God is truthful' so they did not want to be deceitful. Our basic goal is to understand the apparent disagreement between these prophets and the men of the Assembly; what was the reasoning for each position?

To appreciate the core issue of this argument, we must review a fundamental idea about the use of adjectives in reference to God. When we describe God, none of the terms we use are truly accurate. For example, when we use the term Gibor (strong), we generally refer to one who performs heroic acts to force another party to surrender. In connection with God however, such an idea is impossible: there is no contest between God and anything or anyone else. Therefore, when we use the term Gibor to refer to God, we are using it metaphorically, bringing to mind the idea that God's actions reflect the perfection, which in our terms can only be described as strong, as Gibor. The Rambam expresses this idea when he says that "God is 'called' Merciful". Meaning, God does not actually possess mercy, this is limited to animated creations. Rather, Gibor is 'our' term applied to God, for His acts that – to our minds – reflect the same quality of "strength" which we witness in mortals.

With this framework, the disagreement between the Prophets and the Assembly can be understood – since the praise given to God is solely an idea that is perceived by us from His Actions, the question arises as to what exact idea or perception we are expressing. According to Yirmiyahu, the term 'Nora' was no longer applicable because it was not seen in a clear and manifest manner. At the time the non-Jews had control of the Temple, we did not receive an impression of an Awesome God, since God's enemies were in control of the place designated to His Name. The Assembly, however, argued that although it was not manifest, the quality of 'Awesome' was still extant and perceivable in the fact that the Jewish nation still existed amongst all the other nations. So too by 'Gibor': the issue was of a similar nature. Whereas the prophet Daniel said that the term reflects a manifest strength over the enemy, the Assembly held that the term may refer to the internal quality of strength as well, and although the Jews were subdued to their external enemy, the term could still be accurately used to refer to an idea of internal strength reflected in God's tolerance for the wicked. Thus, the debate centers on which idea is referenced in our praise of God: God's manifestation through these actions, or that He demonstrates these qualities, though they not need be manifest.

After this analysis of the Gemara, we may yet ask what greatness this debate reveals regarding both parties, warranting the appellation "Men of

the Great Assembly"? What did the Gemara consider "returning the crown to its place"? The praise that we give God is essential to our relationship to Him, for it is through these ideas that we may relate to Him and have some concept of Him. As such, when the Prophets removed those terms from our prayer, though they were justified in doing so because, as the Gemara says, 'God is Truthful', our prayer still lacked this element. When these men found a reason for bringing it back they removed this problem.

The Mishna continues with ethics taught by the Men of the Great Assembly, the first of which is "Be patient in issuing a verdict". Rabbeinu Yonah gives a lengthy commentary on this statement, saying that anyone who is in a position to issue a decision, whether in a court verdict or a halachic question, must be sure to have patience in coming to a conclusion, for everyone is subject to error so that very step must be thought through carefully and discussed until the truth is reached. He describes how when one thinks over an issue, initially, he may not be able to see things that he can, when he thinks it through a second time. He goes so far as to say that one who decides to quickly may even be called a Rasha, a wicked person.

At this point, clarification is needed: what does Rabbeinu Yonah mean that one who does not wait is considered a wicked person? Why should this hasty decision render someone wicked? And what is the meaning of 'be patient'? Is there a certain amount of time that one needs to wait?

Let us begin by understanding why a person would hurry to issue a verdict in general. When one rushes to a decision, they have a sense of self-assurance as to the outcome they have reached. This sense, though, stems from a certain belief that the knowledge comes from within himself, residing somewhere in his personality, so that he can be sure that whatever comes to mind will be correct. It is this 'haste' that the Mishna describes: one must appreciate that in the pursuit of knowledge; he must be tied only to the process of thought. It is this process that is responsible for gains made in the realm of knowledge and therefore everyone must go through it to the full extent in order to perceive the correct idea. Thus, 'be patient' isn't a question of time – it refers to a characteristic and an attitude in man that he must strive to perfect.

With this idea in mind we may ask another question on the Mishna: if the idea concerns how one relates to the process of knowledge and the pursuit of wisdom in general, why does the Mishna specifically refer to patience in the process of 'din', issuing a court verdict? Why not make this remark with regards to all knowledge? To be continued. ■