

## Notice:

Last week, we published what we thought were fully corrected mezuzah images. Unfortunately, we allowed two names of God to be printed as is. Therefore we urge you to treat last week's JewishTimes accordingly, burying it as is the law with all instances of God's fully written name.



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**Weekly Parsha**

# Shemot

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“And these are the names of the Bnai Yisrael that came to Egypt. Each man with his household came with Yaakov.” (Shemot 1:1)

The passage above is the opening of Sefer Shemot. Sefer Shemot deals with the bondage of Bnai Yisrael in Egypt and their eventual redemption. The commentaries on

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# B to my Brothers & sisters

*King Solomon – one of the wisest men – taught that satisfaction comes not from possessions, but from wisdom. We must heed his counsel...but when? We are getting older.*

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

What is Judaism? Is it something we do, “aside” from life? Unfortunately, this is the response you will hear from many Jews: religious and not. This thinking, or lack thereof, is a byproduct of a culture, which focuses and praises wealth, fame, lusts, and entertainment. Since the lifestyle of Judaism paints a picture bereft of these fantasies portrayed in magazines, and acclaimed by celebrities (part of the problem) many leave the fold, or never experiment with Judaism. Many observant Jews are also at fault for promoting animosity towards gentiles and irreligious Jews which drives away other Jews from Jewish life, and claiming superiority...something God never said. If one is religious, he gains. But in no way is he or she permitted or

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(Shemot cont. from pg. 1)

## Weekly Parsha

# JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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the Torah have various views regarding the reasons for Bnai Yisrael's bondage. Many share the view that it was a punishment for some wrongdoing. However, they differ widely regarding the specific failing that engendered the bondage a persecution in Egypt.

Nachmanides maintains they crucial incident that led to the exile and persecution of Bnai Yisrael in Egypt occurred early in Sefer Beresheit. Avraham was confronted with a famine in the land of Canaan. In response to this famine, Avraham abandoned the land of Canaan and descended to Egypt. Nachmanides maintains that Avraham sinned in his decision to leave the land of Israel and seek refuge in Egypt. Nachmanides asserts that Avraham also committed a second sin. While in Egypt, Avraham denied that Sara was his wife. He claimed that she was his sister. Avraham engaged in this deception, in order to protect himself from the Egyptians. He feared that in order to seize Sara, the Egyptians might murder her husband, but as her brother he would be safe from harassment. According to Nachmanides, Avraham should have relied upon G-d's providence and assumed that he would be protected.[1]

The Talmud teaches us in Tractate Taanit that it is prohibited to rely upon miracles. Each individual is required to exercise common sense. We may not endanger ourselves needlessly with the hope of being saved by a miracle.[2] Why, then, did Avraham sin by traveling to Egypt and claiming that Sara was his sister? Both of these decisions reflect Avraham's determination to provide for his own safety, without relying on Divine intervention.

It seems that Hashem intended to demonstrate, through Avraham, a fundamental concept of the Torah. The Almighty is the Creator of the Universe. He is aware of all the intricate details of His creation. Furthermore, He will intervene with nature on behalf of His devoted children. Towards this end, G-d endeavored to demonstrate, through Avraham, the effects of His Providence. He made Avraham wealthy and mighty; He protected him from all harm. Because of this relationship, Avraham should have stayed in the land of Israel. He would have been protected, and unharmed by the famine. Similarly, upon entering Egypt, Avraham should have acknowledged Sara as his wife. His frank honesty in the face of danger would have been rewarded. G-d would have protected Avraham from the aggression of the Egyptians. Remaining in the land of Israel and declaring Sara as his wife would have served as a demonstration G-d's Providence, in the most dangerous of situations, over his beloved.

In short, it is prohibited for a person to rely upon a miracle. However, Avraham had a unique mission. The Almighty wished to demonstrate His Providence through Avraham. Because Avraham abandoned the land of Israel and protected Sara though deceit, he denied Hashem the opportunity to demonstrate His influence over nature on behalf of Avraham.

Nachmanides then demonstrates a remarkable set of parallels between Avraham's experiences in Egypt and those of his descendants.

Avraham was confronted with a famine. He descended to Egypt to survive. Bnai Yisrael was confronted with famine and descended to Egypt to survive.

The Egyptians took Avraham's wife – Sara. The Egyptians attempted to kill all the male children Of Bnai Yisrael but wanted to take the women of Bnai Yisrael for themselves.

Hashem intervened to save Avraham. He punished the Egyptians. Hashem intervened to save Bnai Yisrael and punished the Egyptians.

Finally, the Egyptians send Avraham away and he left with great wealth. The Egyptians send Bnai Yisrael away and they left with great wealth.

Nachmanides explains that this parallel occurred through design. Avraham sinned in descending to Egypt and in claiming that Sara was his sister. Instead, he should have relied on Hashem to save him from famine and danger. Nachmanides asserts that Avraham must have been guilty of wrongdoing – albeit accidental. Otherwise, he would not have experienced this misfortune. Finally, Nachmanides adds that Bnai Yisrael's exile to Egypt was also caused by Avraham's error.

Abravanel agrees that Nachmanides' basic reasoning is valid. The experience in Egypt seems to be a punishment. This implies the commitment of a sin. However, he objects to ascribing this sin to Avraham. He insists that we do not have the right to ascribe a wrongdoing to Avraham that is not explicitly indicated by the Torah. Instead, he maintains that the sin was committed by the Shevatim. The brothers sinned in selling their brother Yosef into bondage. The Torah does identify their behavior as a sin.

Like Nachmanides, Abravanel offers proof to his thesis by outlining the various parallels between the sin of the Shevatim and the punishment experienced by Bnai Yisrael.

The Shevatim sold Yosef into bondage in Egypt. Their descendants experienced bondage in Egypt.

They threw Yosef into a pit. Their male descendants were thrown into the river.

The Shevatim caused Yosef to enter bondage.

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(Shemot continued from page 2)

## Weekly Parsha

Yosef caused them to descend to Egypt and eventually, their descendants entered bondage.

They were caring for flocks and Yosef came to assess their work with these flocks. They descended to Egypt in order to provide their flocks with pasture.

It is interesting that although Nachmanides and Abravanel both assume that some sin led to the exile and bondage in Egypt, they differ on the specific sin. Abravanel rejects Nachmanides' thesis because it requires that we attribute wrongdoing to Avraham by inference. He argues that although we have the authority to explain and interpret the Torah, we must work within strict perimeters. We cannot ascribe a sin to the Avot – the forefathers – that is not explicitly stated in the text of the Torah.

This is an interesting dispute. It seems that Abravanel's criticism of Nachmanides is reasonable. Nachmanides is making remarkable and drastic inferences at the expense of Avraham! Why was Nachmanides not sensitive to Abravanel's concerns?

Perhaps, the basis of this dispute lies in under-

standing these two Sages' perspectives on the purpose and theme of the Torah's narrative. It seems reasonable to assume that even Abravanel would agree that the Torah is not a set of biographies. There is no attempt in the Torah to provide a comprehensive biographical sketch of Avraham or any of the Avot. However, Abravanel does maintain that the Torah wishes to provide us with a characterization of Avraham and the Avot that is fundamentally complete. Our identity as Bnai Yisrael is linked and built upon the foundation of our understanding of the Avot. The image and understanding presented in the Torah of Avraham and the other Avot contains the basic information that we are to integrate into our fundamental understanding and image of these individual. Based on this understanding of the Torah, Abravanel argues that the Torah would not exclude information that is needed to understand these individuals. We cannot assume that the Torah's characterization of Avraham is misleading or incomplete in a fundamental manner.

In contrast, Nachmanides is willing to assume

that the Torah's explicit treatment of the Avot is incomplete. This suggests that Nachmanides has a somewhat different understanding of the intent of the Torah's narrative. It seems that according to Nachmanides, the Torah is primarily concerned with outlining the unfolding of Hashem's providence over Bnai Yisrael. In this narrative the Avot are key characters. But they are characters in a narrative that is not primarily about them. It is about Hashem's providence. From this perspective it possible to assume that the explicit picture that is communicated regarding the Avot may not be comprehensive. The Torah describes Avraham's actions and decisions. It outlines the impact of these actions on the future of his descendents. This is relevant to the narrative of Hashem's providence. However, it is not essential to this objective for the Torah to explicitly evaluate Avraham's behavior. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 12:10.

[2] Mesechet Taanit 20b.

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## B to my Brothers & sisters

correct in degrading another soul, Jewish or gentile. The Rabbis criticize this as "Lomade l'Kantare", "Learning to degrade". Yeshivas too promote this religious, superiority complex, which is nothing more than ego, and not part of God's Torah in any measure. Many religious Jews rush through prayers in minyan each morning...their own abilities are their barometer for what creates success, and God is second: further grounds for them not to degrade irreligious Jews. Of course, we must work, but rushing through our blessings of, and prayers to God is foolish. It displays just how minor is its role, and that we require immediate correction.

For a person to view God as a reality, when one does not see him, hear Him, or witness miracles, this definitely requires a reorientation of how we estimate what is "real". We are ingrained in sensual lives, "When I see it I'll believe it". Well, this is actually true, but what you need to see is evidence of a Creator, and this universe is exactly that. We must team our seeing, with intelligent reason. No miracle will be better proof that the Earth was created, or that you were created. "Mind" must begin to lead the emotions, a role-

reversal battle that must ensue.

If an irreligious Jew would be given the opportunity, he too would realize the truth: he is a "created being". There is a Creator...the universe didn't simply appear of its own, as nothing can create itself. He may finally come to the astounding realization: "God created me". (Can you actually say this with a thrilled conviction? You should.) Realizing this through the assistance of properly educated Jews, currently irreligious Jews will certainly desire to know further proofs of God's existence, and why and how the Torah is not merely an activity "aside" from others, but a way of life that addresses each aspect of our days, weeks, and years.

If I could speak to my irreligious brothers and sisters I would tell them this: Do you realize that there must be a Creator? Are you aware that He is cognizant of each of us, of you, of me, and all our thoughts and actions? This must be the case, as he created everything alone. He knows His creations. Do you feel any other source can better advise us all as to which path in life will be most fulfilling, and what choices we must make to completely meet all of our physical, intellectual and psychological needs? Of course my brother, you agree that the Creator of man and Earth is the exclusive authority, and should be listened to. Surely, making a change to include daily study is the easier choice, but charting a new lifestyle, abandoning all previously cherished feelings, thoughts and actions, will take courage, and time. But don't cower, and don't be weak. Slowly, you can strip from yourself the false view of Judaism, which has kept you distant from it, feeling it is just

"another" activity, replacing it with the accurate view.

The correct view is that as created entities; we are bound to our Creator with a mission. We were not created to simply follow the leaders of Western civilization. We were created – each man and woman – with the capacity for great satisfaction, but this satisfaction only comes from our involvement in wisdom. Only when we engage this highest element of our being – our souls – are we to ever realize true happiness. But everyone has been geared from youth to seek happiness as depicted in commercials and society at large. This is one of the major curses of our exile: we are absorbing the values of all those cultures around us, and via the media we are expose us to distant idolatrous cultures, and we assume that the majority cannot be wrong. Hence, many Jews feel "other religions too must offer some good"...and sadly, some of our Rabbis voice this error too. But Abraham did not. He opposed falsehood in any form. We too must get back on Abraham's path, for God chose him, and He did not choose not today's false leaders. Reason supports Abraham's position.

Another point I would tell you my brother, is to review all the examples of people who God assisted. From the Patriarchs through the Sages, God is not shorthanded. And although we cannot predict when God steps into our lives, our Torah indisputably teaches that this is how He works: He supports those who follow Him. This must be real to you. If it is not, stop and review the many Torah stories. Once you are convinced of this, your

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problems will follow with an assurance that He can answer you too.

You will also view your problems in perspective, realizing that your life has more meaning than simply working, eating, and sleeping. With no involvement in wisdom and the marvels that we may uncover each day, we tend to overly focus on insignificant areas in life that are bound to get us down. Yes, we can get depressed when work does not come in as fast as we like, or need. But work cannot be, and is not, all of life. If we do view work in that light, then yes: we will be depressed when our work diminishes. But a person, who has Torah study in his life, where he is delighted at new concepts, will not view work or any other area that is lacking as a reason for depression.

Another example is a person who gets self-absorbed, to the point that she undergoes a dozen plastic surgeries to correct a problem that only she viewed as a "problem". Since all she had in life was an exaggerated value of beauty, she ends up with irreversible deformities, all because her values were corrupted by society. Had this same person – prior to her first surgery – focused more on a life of wisdom, charity, and kindness, this small imperfection would not have been that significant, as her studies would have taught her that she is so miniscule in comparison to all that exists, and all who have existed, and her energies would be directed outwards towards greater satisfaction in understanding this immense universe, and its Creator. She would have accepted her deformity as we all have them, and her interests in intellectual pursuits would have placed her values in check. She would not be deformed now.

Time after time, more irreligious Jews are making the return path towards a life where wisdom becomes central, and all other matters by definition, become less intense, and cause fewer problems when they don't work out. Just as winning the lottery obscures our pain of losing our wallet, our smaller problems, which we now view as catastrophes, will become nothing in our eyes when we realize what else is awaiting us in this life of Torah.

It is difficult for you to imagine, as you have yet to immerse yourself in study, but if you can only find the trust in the thousands of years and thousands of sages who devoted their lives to study for its satisfaction alone, then you will be pleasantly surprised with the knowledge and happiness you will gain in study, and the sense of satisfaction you now miss.

What is Judaism? Is it something we do, "aside" from life? No...it is all of life. And since we do not live forever, and have but one chance, consider the passing time, and trust me. I made the return too. ■



## Miracles & Movements

**Reader:** Nice article on Amulets two weeks ago. I also had 2 more examples from the Torah:

1) When the Jews are fighting Amalek, it says when Moshe's hands were raised, they were successful, and when they were lowered from weariness, the Jews began to lose. Rashi asks on the spot: "Can Moshe's hands affect the battle?" Rashi didn't even entertain that Moshe's hands played any role. He then goes on to explain the effect that his hands had on Israel: they gave them psychological strength.

2) Regarding the Copper Serpent, after the Torah describes how to get healed by it, Rashi on the spot asks, "Can a metal snake heal the sick?" Again Rashi never considers the possibility that the snake healed of its own. He then goes on to explain how the snake reminds one of the snake in Gan Eden that spoke lashon harah and then causes one to reflect on his own sin, do teshuva, raise his level, and merit a cure.

Thanks,

Ari Fischbein

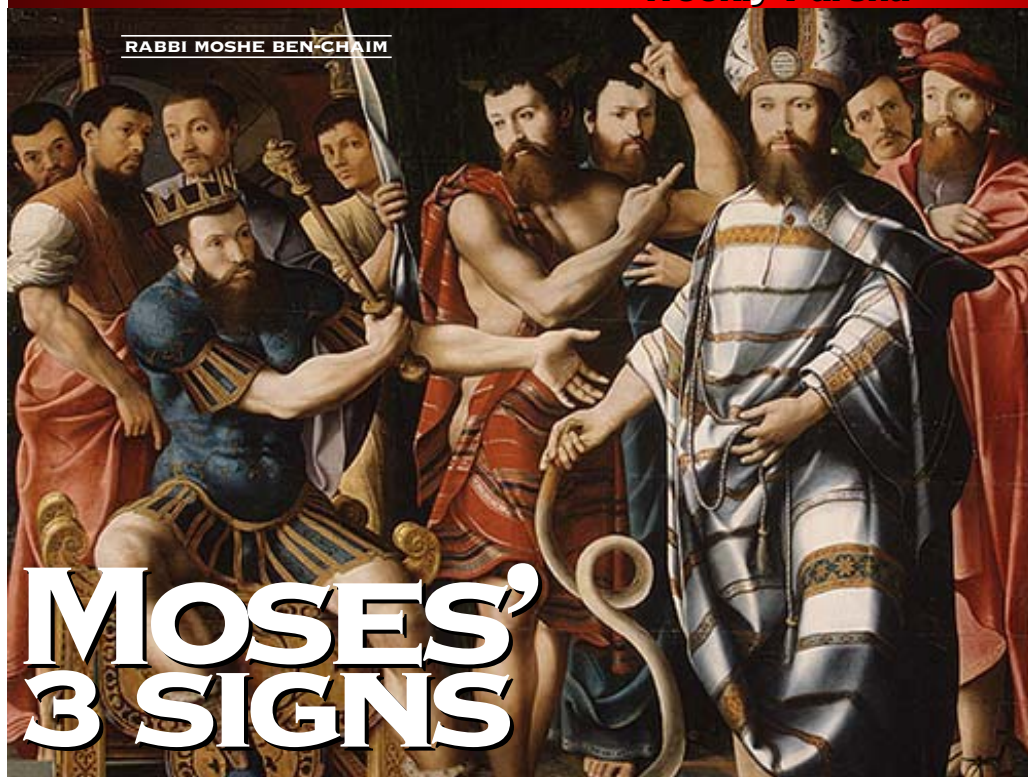
**Reader:** Is Chassidus completely a no go in terms of authentic knowledge and should not studied at any cost? Is the Chasidic route an incorrect approach to Judaism? Is Mussar, Kabbalah, Zohar excepted in your view as authentic and okay to study? With all respect

why are Chabad and Chassidus so widely accepted and only you and a handful at present condemn certain practices and approaches? Is Chassidus used in most Yeshiva's. Finally in your view would you recommend or disapprove of someone wanting to follow Chabad philosophy? Please forgive me if certain answers might have been embedded in your previous material on the site! Thanking you most kindly.

**Mesora:** The correct question to be posed is which "ideas" are true. For this is all that God desires: that you follow truth: not people, and not movements.

The bottom line to all your questions is this: follow what the Torah (Tanach), Talmud, and the Rabbis teach. If something violates Torah, you must not observe it. Therefore, you must carefully study the Rishonim, the Tanaim and the words of the Neveim and learn their thoughts, endorsed by God and reality. Once you have done this for many years, you will understand what is in accord with them, and what violates the undeniable truths they teach.

As you master Talmud, your ability to reason will increase, affording you the independence to arrive at your conclusions, which is why you too were granted intelligence. I urge you to study Rambam's works: the Yad Hachazaka, the Moreh Nevuchim, Saadia Gaon's Beliefs and Opinions, and Chovas HaLavavos, including his very vital introduction. These great sages will open your eyes to the difference between reason, and "faith". Follow reason. ■



Exodus, 4:1-9: 1) "And Moses answered and said, 'They (the Jews) will not believe in me and they will not listen to my voice, for they will say, 'God did not appear to you.' 2) And God said to him, 'What is in your hand?'" and he said, 'A staff.' 3) And He said, 'Throw it to the ground', and he threw it to the ground, and it became a serpent. And Moses fled from before it. 4) And God said to Moses, 'Send forth your hand and grasp it by its tail'. And he sent forth his and he seized it, and it was a staff in his palm. 5) 'In order that they believe you, that God appeared to you, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' 6) And God said to him, 'Further, bring now your hand into your chest', and he brought his hand into his chest, and he took it out, and behold his hand was leprous as snow. 7) And He said, 'Return your hand to your chest', and he returned his hand to his chest, and he took it out, and behold, it returned to its flesh. 8) 'And it will be if they do not believe you, and they do not listen to the voice of the first sign, then they will listen to the voice of the second sign. 9) And it will be if they do not listen to also these two signs, and they do not listen to your voice, and you will take from the waters of the Nile, and you will spill it onto the dry land, and it will be that the water that you take from the Nile, and it will be blood on the dry land.'"

God instructs Moses on his mission to free the Jews. God then responds to Moses' doubt of the Jews' conviction in his divine appointment, by giving him three signs. These signs will prove

God's appearance to him. A number of questions arise. Before reading further, take time to review the verses above, and discuss them with others. Simply reading on will remove your opportunity to engage in the process of learning and the use of your own thought. This process is how we become better Torah students, thereby refining our own thinking for future study. It is also an enjoyable activity. The Torah was purposefully written in a cryptic style so as to engage the mind in this most prized activity of analysis, induction, deduction and thought - our true purpose whose rewards are unmatched, both here, and in the next world. Once you have spent due time reviewing the issues, feel free to read the questions enumerated below, and our possible answers.

#### Questions:

1. The sign of blood is said to be the ultimate proof of God's directive. How does this sign surpass the others? 2. If blood is more convincing than a staff turning into a serpent, or leprosy, why not instruct Moses to perform the blood sign first? Three signs would then not be necessary! 3. What are the ideas conveyed through each specific sign? Why were these three selected? 4. Why does God give Moses signs easily "duplicated" by the magicians? 5. What is meant by the "voice" of each sign? 6. In both cases, the transformation of a staff into a serpent, and Nile water into blood, does not take place until both objects reach the ground, as it says, "and he threw it to the ground, and it became a serpent", and "it will be blood on the dry land." What is the reason

for this "miracle at a distance"? 7. Why do the first two signs "return" to their original objects? What need does this serve? 8. Why is Moses requested to "conceal" his hand in order for it to become leprous? God could certainly make him leprous without him concealing it. 9. In contrast to the sign of blood where God tells Moses what will happen to the Nile's waters before the sign's performance, why does God not tell Moses what will happen to the staff or his hand before those miracles? 10. What will the Jews learn when they hear Moses referring to God as "the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"?

We must say the following: The reason for three signs is twofold; 1) God wished the viewer to be convinced of His appointment of Moses with minimal, emotional amazement; and 2) God wished this from everyone, as additional signs of less deniability accompany the first. God knows what the most convincing sign is, i.e., blood, but He desired it come last in the sequence. A Rabbi Mann teaches in this week's JewishTimes issue, God desires we use our minds.

#### Action at a Distance

It is for this very reason that additional features are found in these signs. I refer here to the fact that both the staff, and the Nile's waters transformed only once on the ground. It is not the ground that is essential here, but the "distance" between Moses' hand and the transformation. All magicians require tactile control of their manipulated objects. Without physical contact, they cannot create illusions through sleight of hand. However, Moses' objects did not transform, while in his hand, but only once distanced from his control. "Distance" teaches that this was not sleight of hand - his hand was nowhere near the transformation! These signs could only be explained as true miracles, as God's actions.

#### Magic Does Not Exist

Sforno on Exod. 4:3 cites Talmud Sanhedrin 67b: (Responding to the plague of lice, and their inability to mimic it) "Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, 'this is the finger of God.' This proves that a magician cannot produce a creature less than a barley corn in size. [Strengthening this first position] Rav Pappa said, 'By God, he cannot produce something even as large as a camel! [So what does it mean that a magician cannot produce a creature less than a barley corn?] [It means] these that are larger than a barley corn, he can collect, and produce the illusion that he has magically created them.'" This Talmudic portion teaches that the human hand cannot control that which is too small.

Sleight of hand was known in the times of the

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Talmud, and in Egypt's times. All magic is illusory. What these Egyptians performed by hand was quicker than the eye, but only when the object was large enough to manipulate. Our Rabbis did not accept that any powers exist outside natural laws. God is the only One capable of altering natural law – only He created it, only He controls it. Saadia Gaon too stated that the Egyptian's blood trick was performed by the use of colored dyes, and the frogs leaped out of the Nile by their use of chemicals that frogs repel. Sforno also states that the Egyptian's snakes had no movement, i.e., they were not real. Moses' staff transformed into a "nachash", not the lifeless "tanin" of the Egyptians. The difference in terms indicates to Sforno, a difference in the two performances.

### Blood

Blood is the source of life. When one sees water transformed into blood, one realizes that life itself is in God's hands. This strikes at the core of any person's greatest fear - death. Additionally, its creation from the Nile disputed the Nile's position of grandeur. But as God wishes we come to know Him by the use of our higher nature - our intellect - He did not order the blood sign first in sequence. God offers a person the chance to rise to a higher level by following his mind. With a minimalist performance, man has the opportunity to exercise his thinking, and derive truths concerning God's will (His appointment of Moses) and His very existence.

### Creation: Arrived at Through Reason

I digress to focus your attention on a related and essential idea: God's position as the Creator is the most important concept of human comprehension. Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed", Book II, end of Chap XXV: "...Owing to the absence of all proof, we reject the theory of the Eternity of the Universe: and it is for this very reason that the noblest minds spent, and will spend their days in research. For if the Creation had been demonstrated by proof, even if only according to the Platonic hypothesis, all arguments of the philosophers against us would be of no avail. If, on the other hand, Aristotle had a proof for his theory, the whole teaching of Scripture would be rejected, and we should be forced to other opinions. I have thus shown that all depends on this question. Note it."

Maimonides teaches, "all depends on this question". What does he mean? I believe him to mean that by design, God wished that our conviction of this most central idea - God as Creator - must be arrived at through thought, and understanding, not through amazement at marvelous feats. In other words, our recognition of God as

the Creator 'must' be apprehended through our reasoning. This is the highest form of recognition of God, and the preferred method to knowing Him, and His works. "All depends on this question," means that proof of Creation was purposefully left to the realm of the "philosophical", and not to "emotional" via astonishing, miraculous displays. It is easy to witness a miracle, and be convinced, but in such a case, our mind forfeits the exercise of reasoning - THE mark of man's perfection. It is fitting that man use his crowned capacity in the pursuit of this question, of God as the Creator. I now return to our topic.

### The Serpent and Leprosy

Before resorting to blood, why did the staff transform into a serpent? On the surface, both the staff and a serpent have similar appearances, they are narrow, elongated shapes. Once transformed into a serpent, the viewer might second-guess what he saw, "Was it in fact a staff before hand, or was it a serpent in some stiffened state?" Control of one's emotions and clear thinking are required so as not to dismiss a miracle. Moses was given these signs for the very reason that the Jews were bent on disbelief in God's appointment of Moses. Hence, subsequent to a sign, the Jews might seek to explain away the miracle. To say the very minimum about this specific sign, we may suggest that it teaches that God controls life. He can turn a lifeless staff into a living organism. God's control of life would appear to offer the most impact on the Jews. Therefore God's signs were indications of His control of life. But this was yet animal life. More impressive, was Moses' hand becoming leprous. Here, God sought to teach that He controls human life. He does so in the negative (becoming leprous) as well as the positive (healing of Moses' leprosy). The fact that Moses own hand was smitten, may serve to teach again that it was not Moses who created such a feat, as one would not risk self injury. Similarly, one would not create a dangerous serpent.

Another observation of the serpent and leprosy is that the transformation into a serpent displays God's control over the "matter" of creation, while leprosy displays His control of His "laws" of creation. Transforming a staff into a serpent displays God's control over matter itself. Disease has a natural process. Moses' leprous hand displays that God controls "how" things behave. These two, initial signs bear witness to God control of both aspects of Creation - of matter, and laws governing that matter.

Perhaps, in order to minimize the affect of "astonishment", God instructed Moses to first

conceal his hand before it became leprous. For if a hand became leprous in plain sight, it would overwhelm the viewer, prohibiting his mind from fully functioning. This feat would startle him. Therefore, God told Moses to hide his hand. God also gave Moses signs easily "duplicated" by the Egyptians. And as Rabbi Mann taught, this was for our reason that the viewer use intelligence to discern true miracles of God, from man's sleight of hand. We may also suggest that the "voice" of each sign refers to the underlying "concept" derived by the mind, as opposed to the feat per se. God wished the viewer to understand each sign's message - its "voice".

Why did the first two signs return to their original forms? This may also be a practical issue, that Moses may once again perform these signs.

Why does God not tell Moses what will happen to the staff or his hand before those miracles? Mindful that God enabled these signs as a "response" to Moses' concern that he be validated, perhaps God did not inform Moses of the sign until it happened for good reason: God wished that Moses sense the effects of a these signs, just as would the Jews. By experiencing the sign without advance warning, Moses could identify with the perception and emotional impact afforded the Jews through these signs. Thereby, Moses' "first hand" knowledge gave him the security in these signs. God answered his concern in a primary fashion. He now knew how the Jews would react to these signs - that they were impressive. Had God told Moses what was about to happen, his expectation would lessen the emotional impact of these signs.

### The Fulfillment of God's Promise

Our final question was, "What will the Jews learn when they hear Moses referring to God as "the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"? I believe this may serve to illustrate God's consistent kindness. As Moses was God's emissary for the Redemption, the Jews would be more inclined to accept this news and Moses' role, by recalling how God favored their ancestors, and not just on one occasion, but the lifetimes of many individuals. The Redemption was not a deviation, disbelieved by the Jews, but it was consistent with the manner in which God relates to His people - to His prophets' descendants. We learn from this that God saw it necessary even prior to the act of redemption, the Jews required a psychological conviction in God's forthcoming salvation. This state of mind was necessary, and God reassured the Jews of His unchanging kindness through this statement. ■

# LOVE OF GOD



## REWARD

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by student

**“Ontignos, the man from Socho... said: Don’t be like servants who serve their master to receive ‘pras’. Rather, be like servants who serve their master not to receive ‘pras’ and let Fear of Heaven be on you.”**

We last learned how Rashi and Rambam explain that our Mishna is teaching that one should serve God out of love for Him, since there is no reward for serving Him in this world. We then left off with the following question: if there is no reward in this world, what are the implications about Divine Providence and the blessings in the Torah? If we receive them when fulfilling commandments, as stated in the Torah, then what is meant that there is no reward for serving God?

Clearly, the Torah tells us that there is the reward of Divine Providence in this world for one who serves God. However, this is a very specific type of reward: for one who lives correctly, God provides a situation where he can perfect himself to the greatest degree. The issue in our Mishna pertains to pleasures of the world, which have no effect on the soul, neither positively nor negatively. In such a case, does God reward a person with such pleasures in this world? Ontignos, in our Mishna, rejects this notion. Sensual pleasures that one receives are not part of a reward, as they are only accidental. It is for this reason that one cannot look to the physical for reward: God creates the best possible situation, but only He knows what that is. The real ‘good’ to be received cannot be translated into “this” world’s terminology. People lose their Fear of God because of this mistake: they expect that their good deeds will result in some physical enjoyment.

This idea is similar to what Rambam says concerning the story of Job. Job was a traditional Jew who enjoyed the commandments but he mistook the enjoyment for the real good. He thought the enjoyments would be secured for him because of his good deeds, and that was his mistake. People wish to translate their service of God into physical enjoyments. However, this cannot be done. As Rambam says elsewhere (in his introduction to his commentary on “Perek Chelek” in Tractate Sanhedrin) there is no spiritual enjoyment in this world.

The challenge that our Mishna presents is that most of us value that which is good to our senses and it is difficult to remove ourselves from this state. The only way we can do this by perceiving a different type of good: that which is non-physical and abstract, namely knowledge.

Rambam in his commentary on our Mishna explains that the import of the Mishna is to teach that we should serve God out of love, but at the same time still remain in fear of God, for fear of God is also a commandment, and our Sages say “serve with love, serve with fear” as well as “He who loves will not stay away from fulfilling a commandment and he who is fearful won’t transgress on a prohibition”. Fear plays great part in the prohibitive commandments. This commentary on Rambam leads us to the relationship between the two commandments, fearing God and loving God. From this statement of Rambam it sounds like they are two distinct commandments that must be upheld at all times.

However, Rambam in his Laws of Repentance 10:1 seems to contradict this, saying that one who serves God in order to avoid punishment either in this world or in the world to come is considered one who serves God out of fear and “it is not appropriate to serve God in this manner except by the ignoramuses, women, and children, that we teach them to serve with fear until they increase their knowledge so that they may serve with love”. From this statement, it seems that fear of God is only valuable as a means to loving God, as fear is just a training tool to be used for a person to reach the level of love. How are we to understand these two conflicting statements of Rambam?

In order to understand the relationship between fear and love of God, we need to also examine what is meant by love of God. Here too, Rambam seems to contradict himself: In Laws of Repentance 10:2, Rambam says that one who serves God out of love involves himself in Torah and its commandments only because he recognizes them as true and as the ultimate good. Rambam states further that this is a level of greatness that not even every wise man can reach. However, further in the same chapter, in law 5, he says that we train ignoramuses, women, and children to serve God out of fear and then increase their knowledge so that eventually they will have knowledge of God and serve Him with love. From this statement, it would seem that anyone can reach a level of love of God: even an ignoramus, after gaining a level of knowledge. How can we reconcile these two statements of Rambam: on the one hand, love of God is a level that not everyone can reach; on the other hand, with the correct education, anyone can reach the love of God! To be continued. ■





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