

Torah: a system as rational and scientific as math and science. God created all knowledge; each branch must reflect His wisdom equally. Why then do Hebrew teachers spread stories that teach children the opposite?

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Weekly Parsha

VaYerah

RABBI BERNIE FOX

“And Hashem appeared to him in the plains of Mamre and he was sitting at the entrance of the tent when the day was hot. And he lifted his eyes and he saw that three men were standing before him. And he saw and he ran from the

(continued on next page)

GOSSIP & SLANDER LASHON HARA

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

There's much to discuss regarding the prohibition and appeal of Lashon Hara. From the ease of violation, to the profound words of our Rabbis and Sages addressing our human nature. What is so wrong with Lashon Hara? What is the appeal? Why does Maimonides say it equates to sexual immorality, idolatry and murder: three sins causing punishment here, and the loss of Olam Haba?

As God structured all laws, there must be great insight; far surpassing our simple understanding of “degrading others”. Hopefully the sources quoted herein will sensitize us to the damage we cause others, and ourselves, acting as a deterrent.

The Torah Prohibition

A Rabbi once taught that the primary source for any Torah law is derived from the Five Books. Other quotes from Prophets or Writings will further embellish, explain and elaborate that primary message and additional facets.

Leviticus 19:16 says, “Do not go as a talebearer in your people, and do not stand by the blood of your friend, I am God”. In Hilchos Dayos 7:1 Maimonides explains why

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Evil speech has led to murder. Even lesser results can destroy lives.



(VaYerah cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

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opening of his tent to greet them. And he bowed towards the ground.” (Beresheit 18:1-2)

Hashem sends three messengers to Avraham. Avraham greets the messengers and prevails upon them to partake of his hospitality. The Torah describes Avraham's elaborate efforts on their behalf. The messengers reveal to Avraham and Sara that they will have a son. Sara is astounded by this news and expresses her disbelief.

Avraham accompanies the messengers as they resume their journey. Hashem speaks to Avraham and tells him that He will destroy Sedom. Avraham appeals to Hashem to spare Sedom for the sake of the righteous among its population. Hashem agrees to spare Sedom if ten righteous people can be found among its inhabitants.

The messengers continue on their journey to Sedom. There they encounter Lote, Avraham's nephew. Like his uncle, Avraham, Lote persuades the messengers to be his guests and brings them to his home. The people of Sedom surround Lote's home and demand that he turn over to them these visitors. They plan to mistreat them. Lote refuses. The people of Sedom threaten to take the visitors by force. The messengers bring blindness upon their assailants. They reveal to Lote that they have come to Sedom to destroy the city and to rescue him and his family. The messengers rescue Lote and destroy Sedom.

This incident is the focus of a major dispute between Maimonides and Nachmanides. Maimonides begins his analysis of the incident with a simple question. The narrative begins with Hashem appearing to Avraham. It seems that Avraham was receiving a prophecy from Hashem. However, the Torah does not seem to communicate the substance of this prophecy. Instead, the narrative continues with Avraham's encounter with the messengers. Maimonides question is obvious: What was the nature of the prophecy received by Avraham and why does the Torah not reveal the contents of this prophecy?

Maimonides responds that – in fact – the Torah does communicate the substance of the prophecy. The encounter with the messengers was not an actual event. It was a prophetic vision. Prophets generally receive prophecy in the form of a vision. The vision is constructed in a manner similar to a dream. The message of the prophecy is interwoven into the dream-vision. The Torah does not always reveal the dream-vision that communicates the message of the prophecy.

Often, the Torah reveals the substance of the message and does not indicate the details of the vision into which it is interwoven. Nonetheless, this dream-like vision is the vehicle through which the prophetic message is communicated.[1]

Nachmanides strongly opposes Maimonides' interpretation of the passages and the narrative. He insists that Avraham was not having a vision. He saw actual material forms. Nachmanides raises a number of objections to Maimonides' thesis. He argues that if these messengers were merely elements within a vision, then we must assume that these same messengers were also only a prophetic vision when they were beheld by Lote. This is difficult to accept. These messengers interacted with Lote and the people of Sedom. They struck the people of Sedom with blindness and destroyed their city. They rescued Lote and his family. How can figures in vision produce all of these effects?

Maimonides does not provide a response to this objection. There is little comment on this issue among commentators on his work.

Nachmanides raises a second objection. According to Maimonides, all of the details of the vision were merely a fabric into which the message of the prophecy was woven. Nachmanides argues that this means that most of the content of the prophecy was simply the product of Avraham's imagination. The description of Avraham greeting the messengers and his hospital-

ity were only meaningless details added to create the framework of a vision through which the actual message was communicated! Nachmanides rejects the suggestion that these details – most of the narrative – are meaningless. [2]

Rabbaynu Yom Tov ben Avraham Isbili – Ritva – responds to this issue. He explains that according to Maimonides, most prophecies are visions. Their form has much in common with dreams. The vehicle through which the prophecy is communicated uses the same imaginative processes through which more common dreams are constructed. The Sages refer to these facilities as the ko'ach ha medameh – the imaginative force. However, the prophetic dream is radically different from the common dream. The substance and message of the prophetic dream is divinely constructed and are a message from Hashem. The prophetic dream is not merely the product of the dreamer's imagination. The prophetic dream takes advantage of the imaginative force to construct the vehicle through which the message

(continued on next page)



is communicated. But unlike the common dream, the fundamental content and message is not the product of the imagination. It is provided by Hashem.[3]

Ritva offers an amazing proof of his understanding of prophetic visions. However, before we can consider this proof we must review another objection raised by Nachmanides. Nachmanides observes that this is not the only instance in which Maimonides treats a narrative in the Torah that seems to describe an actual event as a prophetic vision. Yaakov encounters a man who engages him in battle. Yaakov defeats his adversary. However, the opponent succeeds in delivering a blow that temporarily cripples Yaakov.[4] Maimonides contends that this narrative is communicating a prophetic vision granted to Yaakov. The battle in which Yaakov engaged took place in his mind.[5] This vision was designed to communicate to Yaakov that he and his descendants will struggle with Esav and his descendants. In this battle the forces confronting Bnai Yisrael will achieve temporary victories. But ultimately Bnai Yisrael will triumph.[6]

Nachmanides argues that if this narrative describes a vision, then Yaakov was not really struck. He only imagined his struggle. Why was he temporarily crippled by a blow that was merely an element of a vision? Nachmanides responds that obviously this was not just a vision. Yaakov engaged in an actual physical struggle and the blow he received was very real.[7]

Ritva responds to this objection. As explained above, Ritva asserts that the prophetic vision

utilizes the same imaginative forces that are used in the construction of a common dream. The narrative concerning Yaakov actually supports this thesis. Often a dreamer responds to the imagined events in a dream with physical activity. The dreamer may thrash in his dream or exhibit other physical manifestations of the experiences that are taking place within the confines of his mind. The imaginative forces are very strong and the dreamer's experience seems very real. A dreamer may awake from a dream feeling pain or other sensations. These sensations are the residue of an experience that took place in the dreamer's imagination. Yet, these sensations are very real! Yaakov's prophetic dream utilized these same imaginative faculties. The struggle took place in his mind but it felt very real. The limp that Yaakov acquired after the vision actually proves that the vision utilized the same powerful imaginative forces that create the common dream. Nachmanides' question actually supports Ritva's contention that the prophetic vision relies heavily upon the faculty of imagination![8]

This discussion only touches upon the many aspects of this dispute and these two opposing interpretations of Avraham's encounter. However, this discussion illustrates a fundamental difference between Maimonides' and Nachmanides' understanding of the mechanism of prophecy.

It does not seem likely that Nachmanides completely rejects the presence of imagery and allegory in prophetic vision. TaNaCh describes many prophecies and it is not uncommon for

these descriptions to include such elements. However, according to Nachmanides, these elements are designed to communicate the message of the prophecy. Through the use of allegory and figures, the prophecy communicates to the prophet a message from Hashem. But any figure or image included in the vision is designed to communicate a message. The prophecy is a compact message. Every element of the vision has prophetic meaning. This is the fundamental difference between the prophetic vision and the common dream. The common dream contains nonsensical elements. These nonsensical elements distinguish the dream from waking thought. The prophetic message does not contain any superfluous elements. Every aspect and element of the vision is designed to communicate the message of the prophecy.

Maimonides opposes this understanding of prophecy. The common dream and prophecy have much in common. Both utilize the same imaginative faculty. They differ in the function of this imaginative faculty. In the common dream the content is wholly the product of the imagination. A prophetic dream uses the imaginative faculty in the manner a thoughtful writer uses words. The writer composes a story designed to deliver a message. The novel must be cohesive and intelligible. But the author is using the story to communicate a message and lesson. Similarly, the prophetic vision uses the imaginative faculty to construct the story, or vision, through which the message is communicated. The prophecy is not the product of the prophet's imagination. It is the product of Hashem's communication. But the communication is delivered through the vehicle of the imaginative faculty. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Moreh Nevuchim, volume 2, chapter 2.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 18:1.

[3] Rabbaynu Yom Tov ben Avraham Isbili (Ritva), Sefer HaZikaron, Parshat VaYerah.

[4] Sefer Beresheit 32:25-33.

[5] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Moreh Nevuchim, volume 2, chapter 42.

[6] Rav Aharon HaLeyve, Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 3.

[7] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 18:1.

[8] Rabbaynu Yom Tov ben Avraham Isbili (Ritva), Sefer HaZikaron, Parshat VaYerah.

(Lashon Hara continued from page 1)

Perfection

the talebearer is placed in the same verse as a murderer: it is because from the tales we spread, we can cause many deaths. Maimonides cites the example of Doeg the Edomite whose words – although not negative in themselves – caused the murders of many innocents. We may also add that slander is an act of assassination; character assassination. When we slander, on some level we wish the demise of the personality we attack. King Solomon said one has thrown arrows at the other party.

Maimonides states that this case of Doeg is an example of the head category, “Richiluss”. Richiluss is the act transferring private information from one to another; that which is not yet public knowledge. The Rabbis argue whether this information must be negative, or as Maimonides teaches, even neutral information. But all agree that the violation is in spreading gossip. Maimonides already explained what is so negative about this: many can die. But is there something negative lurking inside the “one who spreads” gossip, inside this instigator? Let’s list the other three subcategories of Richiluss first. And they are subcategories, since they are only quantitatively different from Richiluss.

Richiluss is spreading information, but the “manner” in which we do so may come under one of the three other headings. Maimonides then formulates the second category, “There is yet another sin much greater than this, in this category, and it is called Lashon Hara. It is the act of speaking of the negative aspects of one’s friend, even though he speaks the truth.” Maimonides’ third category is Motzei Shame Ra, or character assassination. This refers to one who spreads lies about others. But quite interesting is Maimonides’ fourth and final category, “Bal Lashon Hara”, or the “Master of Lashon Hara”. Why is this its own category? Maimonides defines this infraction as, “One who sits and recites matters about another, that his forefathers were such and such people, and that he heard certain matters concerning him, and all he says are matters of derision. On this [case] does the Torah say, ‘God should cut off all those with smooth lips, tongues that speak grandiose matters.’ (Psalms 12:4).” Let’s start to understand Lashon Hara.

King David on Lashon Hara

This verse in Psalms commences with “God”. Why is this so? Many verses in the Torah that cite evildoers merely address the evil, and God is not mentioned in the verse. I



King Saul had numerous innocents killed due to Doeg’s Richiluss

believe the reason God is included here, is precisely to the point of the sin: man wishes self-aggrandizement. Our egos are very powerful, always seeking satisfaction. And when we sense someone whom we estimate (correctly or not) is superior to ourselves, our egos sense a threat and go into defense mode...unless we have come to learn that competition is against the goals of the Torah. Therefore, King David carefully wrote, “God should cut off all those with smooth lips, tongues that speak grandiose matters”. God is mentioned, as a purposeful ‘contrast’ to the sinful objective of the talebearer, whom King David says wishes to “speak grandiose matters”. The speaker is attempting to elevate himself. Therefore, King David pits God against man in this verse to highlight the issue. Man should not seek competitive advantage, but rather, God.

The next verse in Psalms continues this theme: “That they say, ‘With our tongues we shall become powerful; our lips are with us, who will rule over us!’.” (Maimonides states that these people deny God, as they say, “Who will rule over us!”) What are the additional aspects of the sin highlighted in this second verse of Psalms?

The ego senses that with the power of speech, we may project a grandiose image of

ourselves: we can manipulate how others see reality...how WE see reality, and we can cause much damage. That is the first lesson of “with our tongues we will become powerful.”

Then they say something strange, “Our lips are with us”. Who else would they be with? But this unveils a deep emotion. Man feels that what is in his control, is his right to do with as he pleases. Another aspect of the ego is thereby unveiled: total domination. Since “my lips are mine, I can do with them as I please”. The ego does not want to be opposed by another. The self wants complete reign. I once saw a Rabbi in his fifties go into an intolerant, screaming frenzy when someone much younger than himself corrected him during his class. Such types wish their words went unopposed. They do not seek truth, but rather, a platform for projecting their greatness. The last words embody their goal, “Who will rule over us!” That is not a question. They are saying, “no one will rule over us!” Lashon Hara seeks unrivaled expression, and pity the person who stands in opposition.

We must realize this unruly part of human nature. Sin has many titles; mistake, crookedness, and wantonness. This last one is called “peshah”, and what we address here: the unruly tendency.

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Why Bother – Why So Many Types?

Why must a person ridicule others? This stems from one's own insecurities. Had he realized that his life's goal is to study God and His creations, and not elevate his reputation among men, he would not need to reduce others to elevate the self. The insecurity he feels about himself originates in his state of mind where social status is more important than enjoying God's wisdom. Therefore, the gossip is an insecure person. The gossip also unloads his or her news on others due to this insecurity, and seeks out others who might side with their attraction to such news.

But we can violate gossip in four ways. Richiluss is when we contribute to defaming others, although we do not necessarily utter negative words, like the case of Doeg above. We are instigators. But our corruption is present. We are merely distributors of what we hear. Lashon Hara is when we actually talk negatively, originating the content, citing truths. And Motzei Sham Ra is when we lie.

But what is the difference between Lashon Hara, and Bal Lashon Hara? Maimonides tells us that the Bal Lashon Hara talks about the person's forefathers. That seems quite odd. What does this have to do with the slanderer's attempt to destroy another person?

It appears to me, that what the Bal Lashon Hara does is quite sharp. He seeks not to take a single jab, as does the Lashon Hara individual. No, the Bal Lashon Hara is not seeking to vent against another person, but desires to completely ruin the other party. He doesn't mean to tarnish one's reputation, but to throw a knockout blow. This is a totally different type of viciousness. The other party must be removed. And how does he do this? By saying that his very "inception" was evil, "Look at who his parents were!" With such a statement, he gives the listeners no chance to view him in a good light. "He came from bad blood" as they say. "He is essentially no good." The Bal Lashon Hara most closely approximates the act of murder, as he seeks to thoroughly destroy every aspect of another human being.

Viciousness

We briefly noted that viciousness is part of the sin. Talmud Archin 15b cites a metaphor: "In the future, all beasts will approach the snake and ask, 'The lion tramples and eats, the wolf tears and eats...of what benefit then is there to you snake, that you bite, and do not eat? The snake will reply, 'And of what benefit

is there to man who speaks evil?'" A Rabbi once lectured on this metaphor. He taught that the same as the snake has no motive in biting and does so by nature alone, so too, man is vicious by nature. There is no need for any benefit. Just as the snake bites not for eating purposes, but merely to afflict, man as well has in his nature to be vicious. In that Talmudic portion, God metaphorically says, "What more can I do to prevent Lashon Hara? I created the limbs upright, but the tongue lying down [to keep it dormant]. All limbs are external, but the tongue is inside (to restrain it). I created around the tongue, a wall of bones [teeth] and one of flesh [lips] [to halt Lashon Hara]." The Rabbi said this teaches that speaking Lashon Hara is practically unavoidable, as if God did all He can do, with no success. Of course, since we receive great punishment for Lashon Hara, we are to blame. But this portion has one message: Lashon Hara caters to strong impulses. Therefore, we must be stronger, and more knowledgeable so as to fight it.

Most Severe

Why does Maimonides say Lashon Hara equates to sexual immorality, idolatry and murder: three sins causing punishment here, and the loss of Olam Haba?

What is murder? It is the attempt to eliminate another from one's reality. Lashon Hara does the same; one reduces another with speech.

Sexual immorality is man's unbridled instinctual expression. Lashon Hara also is man as he fully expresses instinctual drives of aggression, ego, and others. But how is Lashon Hara akin to idolatry?

What is idolatry? It is not the mere prostration to stone or metal statues. Idolatry is an attempt to view reality as "we wish". It is where man seeks to validate his infantile fantasies, projecting them onto his daily activities, making them "objective" reality, and no longer subjective whims. The goal of satisfying my wishes is the focus. Man is seeking to circumvent reality, which "gets in his way".

For example, I may be a meek individual, and wish to be protected from others harming me. I will do all I can to assume this protection is in place. I don't care "how" this protection aids me, as long as it does. So I pray to Jesus to offer me his shelter. I actually feel he does. I have thereby violated idolatry. I am not seeking any reasonable lifestyle, but rather, I seek the "goal" of a certain good I want for myself. Since I don't seek reason, I am not

discouraged when people tell me that statues are inanimate. That does not register. When being idolatrous, I assume a reality, which is unsubstantiated by what is real and evident. Now let's apply this to Lashon Hara...

When I speak Lashon Hara, again, my starting point is that I feel a certain way towards others. This is the reality I live in, and I use speech to cater to that delusional world. In reality, Charlie is a great guy, and helps others genuinely. But in "my world", he has surpassed me, I feel threatened since I concern myself with competition, and now I need to "correct" this. I assume my speech has a reductive quality on Charlie's value. So I say things that are true about him, but to those who will similarly sense resentment. His "down-fall" is soon at hand. I now feel the "world" is good again. When we view human nature this way, we realize how nonsensical evil speech is.

Summary

We now appreciate how we are so corrupt when we cater to Lashon Hara. We live in a fantasy world; we desire to hurt others who do not deserve it; and we outlet base emotions like animals, without thinking. We reject God's plan that we abandon petty issues and strive towards human perfection, where abandon instinctual gratification. Lashon Hara also seems to go unnoticed; as we speak so much, and we deny we did anything wrong with those few words about Charlie. Because of its subtleties, we must be all the more sensitive to our motives when we talk.

We can correct our tongues, only after we correct our hearts. And the competitive emotion that drives us to seek fame and honor is at the root of this sin. If we study Torah properly, we will realize the repeated, underlying message, stated at least once openly, "And the man Moses was exceedingly humble from all men that are on face of the Earth". (Num. 12:3)

End Note

Interestingly, this assessment of Moses' humility is made in connection with his sister's Lashon Hara. Perhaps this is purposefully contrasting Moses' perfection, to his sister's flaw. ■

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



Torah: As rational as science

This week, a friend shared with me her disappointment with her children's orthodox, Yeshiva education, which I paraphrase:

"My sons come home from yeshiva, repeating stories about magical miracles that happened to some Rabbi. They're being taught that we are to be more impressed with supposed, miraculous occurrences, than with natural law".

I too recently witnessed this to some degree, when I asked a friend's 9-year-old daughter Rochelle, what she had learned in Hebrew studies. She recited ideas, which clearly violated reason. But since they formed part of her "Hebrew" studies, she did not apply reason, and blindly accepted and strongly defended them. She unconditionally accepted all that was taught in the name of Torah. But this same girl will question sciences until she is blue in the face. Why the distinction? Because she has been poorly educated that Torah is not subject to reason, as is science.

This happens to be a predominant occurrence. And to make matters worse, on two separate occasions, I witnessed firsthand orthodox shul Rabbis endorsing their belief in miraculous occurrences. I'm not talking about the Torah's miracles, but miracles purported about recent Torah personalities. Of course we

wonder why such miracles never make the news, and are never seen by masses. And the reporting party – in this case the two Rabbis – did not witness the miracles firsthand. As a matter of fact, in all cases where I heard such accounts, the party relating the event to me did not witness anything firsthand. So why did these people accept these stories? They were fed this when they attended yeshiva, and so, the disease spirals downward.

Think about it: these Rabbis would not undergo surgery by voodoo doctor. No, both Rabbis would insist on "knowing" he is a full-fledged doctor, with the proper education and numerous successful operations under his belt before risking their lives. But in matters more crucial – matters of the soul – these Rabbis are ready to spread lies without the concern that they mislead others...a great crime, as Maimonides teaches:

"Four matters are great sins, for which God does not allow one to repent, and they are: 1) causing the masses to sin..." (Laws of Teshuva, 4:1)

Misleading the masses is the first sin Maimonides lists. Misleading people to accept a faulty way of thinking that directly opposes Torah thought is a philosophical sin at the least. This path destroys Torah.

The Rabbis' messages were identically disturbing Torah violations, which I translate for you: "We must be impressed with those about whom we hear miraculous events. We must follow them unconditionally". These Rabbis did not claim to see the events, but they repeated them to their captive audience, certainly with the wish to "ooh and aah" them. Perhaps teaching Torah has lost its impact for their congregants, after years of miraculous stories. But had these Rabbis replaced the names of those they sainted in these fables, with "Jesus" or "Mohammed", they would be searching the Help Wanted.

Why do Jews buy stories about "Rabbis" flying on animals, or walking on water?

Shouldn't a Rabbi seek to impress his flock with God, not man?

The primary danger is that this practice endorses the Jesus phenomenon: where without evidence, we accept miracles, and deify a person, or raise him to some prophetic status. As proof to where this path leads, a vocal segment of Chabad deifies the Rebbe, calls him God, prays to him, and sends faxed letters to his grave...as proof that the Jesus phenomenon has been resurrected. Those in the Chabad camp who disagree, must repeatedly denounce such views. In contrast, Moses teaches the Jews to accept only "what your eyes saw". (Deut. 4:9) Belief in second hand reports of miracles without mass compliance was not Moses' way. Therefore, we must not deviate from Moses.

Now, what happens to children who are raised to blindly accept such stories? They do not learn to use their critical faculties...their Tzelem Elokim, which God gave us precisely to determine what makes sense, and what doesn't. God designed the world with scientific laws and math, so that man might learn these sciences and witness a sensible system. This is what God deems most central to the human race, and why He granted us alone a soul. This realization of precise laws, that are consistent, allows man to build upon previous knowledge, upon the laws he learned yesterday, and progress further and uncover more truths. This is God's system, that man follows a rational trend of thinking, and sees the consistent beauty in nature. It was this approach that Abraham used to discover God. And it is this same logical approach God desires we employ when approaching Him

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Education

through Judaism. The Talmud teaches that the purpose of study is "svara", definitions, an understanding of principles, not a blind faith in miracles, or in anything. But if we train our children to seek out miraculous stories, to be impressed with incomprehensible matters, they will become blind faith observers, where Judaism and Christianity share identical fundamentals. In essence – we will have made them into Christians. We will have taught them that using our minds is not preferred. But our greatest Rabbis toiled to explain the root of mitzvahs such as the Minchas Chinuch. They uncovered beautiful explanations for the philosophy of Judaism as seen in incomparable works authored by Maimonides, Saadia Gaon, Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Radak, Nachmanides, Sforno...the list is endless. These leaders opposed the blind faith approach, and practice of extolling people whom purportedly experienced miracles. That is why they rejected Jesus.

God is the source of all knowledge. And knowledge is the set of truths that by definition explain matters of creation and God's will, with "reason". This means, that the only path to knowledge, is a path where reason guides every step. If we do not engage reason, then what we fathom are mere fantasies that do not reflect what is true and real. Therefore, if a teacher continues to repeat stories that he or she did not witness, or where there were no masses present...they do not teach Torah. They in fact teach lies, and train students to be impressed with fantasy, and not with reality. They oppose all our great Rabbis, starting with Moses.

We must urge our teachers not to repeat stories without proof, just as Moses did not wish the Jews to accept anything without proof. For if we follow a life where any story goes, we cannot say Christianity is wrong.

The distinguishing characteristic of Torah that makes Judaism true and all other religions false is the path of reason, the unwavering demand for

proof. As concerned parents, you must be sensitive to the stories your children repeat, and not sit idly by, unless you do no care that your child may one day be more impressed with Jesus, than Rabbi so and so. Teachers must emulate the great Rabbis, and teach what they have toiled to preserve for us.

Torah is no less logical than the sciences. God created both, so they both must reflect wisdom, and a structure that is reasonable and based on proofs. So the next time you hear miraculous stories coming from your children's mouths, contact the teacher or Rabbi, and demand proof, or their retraction in front of the class. If you do not act, then you are to blame for the continued loss of Torah, and these teachers' students who eventually abandon Judaism because they found Christianity more emotionally appealing. Conversely, if the Torah's proofs are taught, starting with the Fundamentals, then your children will be armed with the arguments to defend Judaism 100%. They will only grow in their devotion to the true God, and His true Religion. ■

Drasha: Shabbat Bereishis

Conquering the World

RABBI DANIEL MYERS

In 1962, John F. Kennedy, the President of the United States of America declared that "We will reach the moon before this decade is out." His prediction was accurate, and on July 20, 1969, Neil Armstrong and the rest of the Apollo 11 crew reached the moon. It is now almost 40 years later and man has soared way beyond the moon. What is the Torah's attitude towards these cosmic developments?

The Pasuk in Braishit (1:28) says "V'chivshuha-Man shall conquer the earth." While Rashi writes that the Pasuk refers to Pru Urvu, the Mitzvah to propagate, Seforno, Ramban and Daat Mikra maintain that the Pasuk refers to man's dominance over animals, natural elements and agriculture. The Pasuk in Tehilim (Chapter 8) takes this concept even further: "When I behold Your heavens, the moon and the stars that You have set in place, I wonder what is the frail human that You should remember him? Yet you have made him only a little less than angels, and crowned him with a soul and splendor. You gave him dominion over the works of Your hand, You placed everything under his feet." Although Ibn Ezra (8:6) understands this to mean that man has dominance here on earth, Metsudath David (8:6) writes that God has placed everything under his domain. (See also The Lonely Man of Faith by Rav Soloveitchik.) According to this, man uncovering God's wisdom in the universe and harnessing it to further his interests, is a fulfillment of the verses regarding Kibbush, conquest, in Braishit and Tehilim.

Drasha



Desert to Dessert
Israelis grow orchards of date palms in barren areas

We would like to point out two other aspects of V'chivshua, a national and personal one. With the Divine creation of the State of Israel, the Jewish nation has been privileged to be involved in national Kibbush. Harnessing and developing the latest cutting-edge technology in areas such as agriculture, economy, military, etc., as we rebuild our homeland, is national Kibbush. Making the arid desert bloom with a dazzling array of colors, and jamming the most sophisticated radars in the world while destroying our enemy's nuclear capabilities are two stunning examples of this glorious national Kibbush.

The third Kibbush-the one that every Jew struggles with each day of his life...is the personal one, discussed in Pirkei Avos (4:1): "Who is the Gibor, the warrior? One who conquers his inclinations" One who develops the ability to analyze, understand and properly deal with and harness on's desires and inclinations is truly a Gibor, one who is involved in a most noble form of Kibbush.

In sum, we have noted three types of V'chivshua-Kibbush, "conquest": 1) universal, 2) national and 3) individualistic. May Hashem grant us success in all three endeavors! ■

Letters



Letters

from our

READERS



Letters

We invite your questions, and letters in response to articles

"The only poor question is the one not asked."

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World...to Come

Chaim: Chronicles 29:10-13 says: "And David blessed Hashem in the presence of the entire congregation; David said, "Blessed are You, Hashem, the G-d of Israel our forefather, from This World to the World to Come."

1. Why did he say "The G-d of Israel , only one of our Patriachs, and not The G-d of Abraham nor The G-d of Isaac?"

2. Is there a special connection between Israel (our Patriach), and The World to Come?

3. What did he mean, from This World to the World? Does "This World" mean the Physical world, the Planet Earth as compared to the metaphysical "World to Come"?

As I envision King David, standing in front of his congregation, as a King and as a religious leader, was he using himself as a model to teach his congregants how to bless Hashem, and what words to say? Was he saying to his congregation that they were obligated to Bless Hashem while they are all living, up until the day that they cross over? Was he also implying that man is obligated to Bless Hashem even after they cross over?

Rabbi, this command is very difficult for me to perceive, since I cannot envision the hidden appearance of the "World to Come." Right now, the "World to Come" are just words and are like a figure of speech. Did King David elaborate, anywhere in the Torah, on what the "World to Come" was all about? Do we have a written source to refer to, to enlarge our perception of the "World to Come," or must we rely on "Faith," like all

the other religions of our time?

You have written many articles that our Torah is based on "Facts," not "Faith." Are we to live a Torah Way of Life, with all its restrictions, and not have any clear idea of the "World to Come" save vague metaphors and vague descriptions like, "our souls will experience the unlimited enjoyment of discovering new ideas and concepts", or, "our souls will be closer and warmer, and one step higher to the source of eternal light"? Another saying is, "If we learn Torah and perform more mitzvas in the Reception Hall, then the rewards in the Main Ballroom will be magnified and awesome." These promises don't register since I have no idea about the World to Come.

In spite of all of the above vagueness, at Sinai, where we promised to obey the Lord OUR G-d, I will continue to try to learn more, and perform more mitzvahs. However it would be easier, and more motivational if I had a clearer picture of the "World to Come."

Mesora: The Rabbis agree that "G-d of Israel" is mentioned, for two reasons. The first is that since Israel (Jacob) was the first to make an oath of wealth dedicated to God, King David wished to embody that age-old perfection with all his wealth that he lists here. So he mentions Israel alone. The second answer given is that Israel was the first to decide upon making a location dedicated to God. So King David who wished to do the same (with Temple) referred to Israel's perfection.

Why did King David bless God "from this world to the next world"? Perhaps as he was king and quite wealthy, he wished the people to recognize that human existence only starts on earth. But our earthly existence is not our entire existence. God did not create man to experience a mere 70 years...and nothing more. Our souls can live forever.

But the great wealth and power possessed by King David could cause his nation to gravitate towards these entities, as ends in themselves. They would forfeit their true objective of pursuing a life of Torah. Therefore, King David properly taught the nation that human experience has a final stage, and Earth is not it. In one phrase, he redirected his nation towards God, and the larger picture of human existence.

Regarding the afterlife, there are no mitzvahs in that reality, so there is no obligation to bless God. The Rabbis teach regarding the World to Come, "No eye has seen it". This makes sense, for if we had seen it, how could our learning Torah here on Earth be motivated by the pure enjoyment of God's wisdom as is should? We would be learning just to get the "prize". And if we did learn for an ulterior motive, we would thereby forfeit that prize since the next world is a continued but heightened state of appreciating wisdom, but on higher plateaus. If we seek anything but wisdom here, we could not enjoy the next world which is wisdom to the nth degree.

The righteous anticipated the next world, as it must be devoid of physical toil, since we shed our bodies prior to our entrance. Without physical toil, those who enjoyed wisdom here, will have no distractions or impediments, their souls alone exist, and they will be euphoric in their newfound knowledge.

We do not know what that exact state is in the World to Come, but we do know what it cannot be, and that alone was exciting to the wisest of men, both Jews and gentiles. ■

(continued on next page)

(Letters continued from page 8)

Letters

Tehillim Penicillin

Reader: It is permitted to say Tehillim for a sick person. What is forbidden, is thinking as you are treating Tehillim as penicillin for a strep infection: say two/three times a day before meals and the sickness will go away. Tehillim is not magic. Appealing to G-d for help thru the word of King David is like prayer and is commendable. So is doing good deeds so that you will be more deserving of having your prayers answered (Shu"t Tzitz Eliezer XVII 30). Is this true?

Mesora: These words contain truths, but must be clarified. Reciting Tehillim so we perfect our thoughts is proper, but assuming that saying Tehillim is the only action required to seek God's help for the sick is not true. We must - after reciting Tehillim - use the medium of Tefilah to ask for God's help. Tehillim is not the medium to make requests - Shmoneh Esray is. This is what the rabbis formulated, and what we must follow. And yes, by performing mitzvos, we may correctly assume that we deserve God's protection all that more. ■

When to Say No

Reader: My son was offered an opportunity to work for a non-profit food-for-the-hungry organization. They need his help in designing brochures and the like. However, it's a Christian-based organization. That raises the question as to whether he should be working for them. Should one decline the work, or take it on? And if the answer is decline, then comes the further question of how far that would go. For example, what if it was a major tobacco

company that approached you? Or a Las Vegas casino? Or any of a number of enterprises which could be considered as somewhat hazardous to one's health? It seems like there are infinite degrees here. Suppose it was a fast food chain, whose food is known to be tasty, but poor nutrition in the long run? Or a candy manufacturer? You see the challenge.

Of course, this question goes beyond graphic design businesses and really applies to any business.

Mesora: If I were your son, I would reject such work outright. I would say this goes only so far as the inherent nature of the organization or business is detrimental, such as all other religions. But a tobacco or fast food company doesn't produce inherently unhealthy substance: the loss of health is from the consumers' abuse, not the substance per se. Fast food or cigarettes in small quantities do not harm us in a manner that the Torah would forbid it.

What I mean is that the Torah has no law limiting wine to just once a week...even though drinking it each hour may produce harmful effects. I believe Rav Feinstein once said that a single cigarette is not harmful, so the act of smoking - which means one at a time - cannot be prohibited. I would follow this rule. Therefore, creating cigarette package designs is not prohibited, since this is even further removed from smoking. But then there comes the philosophy of creating that which will lead people towards cancer. So I would decline this case as well if asked to design one, although it may not be prohibited. But I would accept creating packaging, websites, et al for a Taco Bell, since the dangers are much less frequent. ■

Homework help free online: Mesora plans new feature

Mesora is seeking feedback from parents and students regarding a planned "Homework Hour" on our TalkLIVE area.

Students of any age would be invited to join this live chat with audio. Questions will be typed in chat, and students will hear a live response to their Hebrew studies topics from the Rabbi.

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