



*"Praise Him sun and moon
praise Him all bright stars
for He commanded
and they were created."*

King David: Psalm 148

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Repentance

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Maimonides in his Code gives us the specific formula for repentance: "I beseech Thee O' Lord, I have sinned, I have deviated, I have been negligent before you and I have done such and such, and behold I have repented and am ashamed of my deeds, and I will never again repeat this deed." "This is the essence of the verbal formula for repentance," says Maimonides, "but whoever wishes to add to it may do so and this is even considered praiseworthy."

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9/11 and The Jewish People

RABBI REUVEN MANN

It is difficult to believe that a year has passed since the numbers 9 and 11 became indelibly etched in the annals of infamy. We cannot come to grips with the sadistic character of the horror we witnessed with our own eyes. What evil movement would consign thousands of innocents who had no connection to its "grievance" to a sudden and horrible death?

We generally underestimate the full extent of human sadism. We naively imagine that all people, especially those, who profess to act in the name of G-d, have some element of "compassion." The primary cause of the horrible explosions was the religious zeal of the terrorists. On the surface, this is impossible to comprehend. Most people associate religion with peace, restraint and compassion. Moslem theologians continuously insist that the term Islam means submission to the will of their deity. How can people who hold that faith act with such complete cruelty and contempt for human life and the most cherished institutions of advanced civilization? In my opinion, we are very naive about the real nature of "religion."

Throughout history people have had intense "religious experiences." The danger of confusing one's personal "vision" with the will of the Creator is very great. Most of the wars of history were fought by competing religions seeking to impose their theological falsehoods. Man made religion can be very dangerous. You can tell that a religion is a human invention by the behavior of its adherents.

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PLANETARY NEBULAE

(Photo above) The Hubble telescope reveals a rainbow of colors in this dying star, called IC 4406. Like many other so-called planetary nebulae, IC 4406 exhibits a high degree of symmetry. The nebula's left and right halves are nearly mirror images of the other. If we could fly around IC 4406 in a spaceship, we would see that the gas and dust form a vast donut of material streaming outward from the dying star. We don't see the donut shape in this photograph because we are viewing IC 4406 from the Earth-orbiting Hubble telescope. From this vantage point, we are seeing the side of the donut. This side view allows us to see the intricate tendrils of material that have been compared to the eye's retina. In fact, IC 4406 is dubbed the "Retina Nebula."



(Right) Resembling a nightmarish beast rearing its head from a crimson sea, this monstrous object is actually an innocuous pillar of gas and dust. Called the Cone Nebula (NGC 2264) — so named because, in ground-based images, it has a conical shape — this giant pillar resides in a turbulent star-forming region.

This picture, taken by the newly installed Advanced Camera for Surveys (ACS) aboard NASA's Hubble Space Telescope, shows the upper 2.5 light-years of the nebula, a height that equals 23 million roundtrips to the Moon. The entire nebula is 7 light-years long. The Cone Nebula resides 2,500 light-years away in the constellation Monoceros. Radiation from hot, young stars [located beyond the top of the image] has slowly eroded the nebula over millions of years. Ultraviolet light heats the edges of the dark cloud, releasing gas into the relatively empty region of surrounding space. There, additional ultraviolet radiation causes the hydrogen gas to glow, which produces the red halo of light seen around the pillar. A similar process occurs on a much smaller scale to gas surrounding a single star, forming the bow-shaped arc seen near the upper left side of the Cone. This arc, seen previously with the Hubble telescope, is 65 times larger than the diameter of our solar system. The blue-white light from surrounding stars is reflected by dust. Background stars can be seen peeking through the evaporating tendrils of gas, while the turbulent base is pockmarked with stars reddened by dust. Over time, only the densest regions of the Cone will be left. Inside these regions, stars and planets may form.

The Cone Nebula is a cousin of the M16 pillars, which the Hubble telescope imaged in 1995. Monstrous pillars of cold gas, like the Cone and M16, are common in large regions of star birth. Astronomers believe that these pillars are incubators for developing stars.

Another Gift - The 10 Days of Repentance - Part I

RIVKA OLENICK

"Bring us back, our Father, to Your Torah, and bring us near our King, to Your service, and influence us to return in perfect repentance before You. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who desires repentance."

From the Shemoneh Esrie The purpose of the 10 days from Rosh Hashana until Yom Kippur is repentance, tshuvah. Engaging oneself in repentance requires introspection as we look into our actions and we have regret for our transgressions. At the sound of the first shofar blast, teruah it cries out to each of us for "self-examination", to reconcile our differences with each other, and to make amends and repent. The use of the emotion of guilt can act as a positive motivator; facing shame and regret pushes a person towards tshuvah.

How many of us are aware of the profound need for and the importance of the 7 days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, especially designated for repentance? Once again, God is giving us another gift of love. Love for His created beings through repentance, and the opportunity to relate to Him, when He is closer to us. During these 10 days God is more accessible to us individually and according to the Rambam when we call Him our call is answered immediately. The Rambam also says: "For in every situation a person has the choice of changing from good to bad and from bad to good. The choice is in one's hands." The choice

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Repentance

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

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It is important to note that while repentance is accepted by God even if it is not verbalized, that is, even if it is done in thought alone, it is not considered complete until one has verbally expressed these thoughts. The essence of repentance is in the heart and mind as it is stated in Deuteronomy, "And you shall know this day and return to your heart... (Deuteronomy 4:39)." Why then does the Torah call for verbalization? The answer lies in a principle of Halakah that verbalization is the most complete expression of human thought. The ideas of the mind, as profound as they may be, reach their full fruition only when they are translated into tangible statements. For this reason one may think in Torah without reciting a blessing before doing so, while verbalizing Torah or even writing Torah ideas demand a blessing. The Torah considers verbal expression to be the final stage of the thinking process, the crystallization of one's thoughts. Repentance is not complete until one can stand before the Creator and enunciate one's thoughts clearly concerning his or her misdeeds.

Why is it necessary for one to invoke the Creator in one's expression of repentance? Is not the essence of repentance the recognition of one's error and the conviction never to return to the misdeed, that is, never to perform it again? Why then is it necessary to begin the repentance formula with the expression "I beseech Thee O' Lord"?

Here we get an opportunity to see the great insight of Torah. The objective of the entire Torah is to give man the correct idea of God. This idea is the one idea that must never be distorted. Hence Torah rails constantly against idolatry or attaching any form to the Creator. Once the idea of God is distorted in any way whatever man is doomed.

Man is a creature that is guided by thoughts. This is true even in his most mundane actions. But aside from the activities that are vital for man's existence there exists a realm of behavior that involves man's higher nature, that part of him which is truly human. Here man's activities are determined by his value system or what he considers to be good or not good. The Torah teaches us the remarkable concept that this is all dependent on one's idea of God. If one sees God as a big daddy in the sky that metes out punishment for infractions and gives rewards for certain actions then one's entire life will be spent trying to gain reward and avoid punishment. If one thinks God has a physical form one will ascribe to him human traits and act towards him as he would towards a human being. He will also think that the physical reality is the underlying reality of all existence. If one knows that God is not physical, nor can He be compared to any of His creation as the prophet states, "And to whom can you compare me sayeth the Holy One (Isaiah 40:25)," that this God is the source of all existence, as is stated in the

first verse of Genesis, and that all that we perceive as physical stems from the underlying reality of God's infinite knowledge, then one will spend one's life in reaching God as He reveals Himself through His infinite knowledge and wisdom. All the actions of such a person will have just one objective, that is, to know God as the prophet states, "In all your ways you shall know Him... (Proverbs 3:6)." Such an individual will indulge in physical and psychological pleasures only insofar as is necessary in order to be able to pursue his relationship with the Creator via the divine element God has implanted in man's soul.

Whenever man sins he lacks, of necessity, knowledge either of the Creator or himself. Because of his error he sways from his course and engages in activities that take him away from God. He must therefore first and foremost approach God, reestablish his relationship with Him and turn to Him with the words "I beseech Thee O' Lord." With this one most powerful phrase one comes to realize that sin is not just a misdemeanor and repentance a childish resolution, but that sin involves a necessary turning away from the Creator, a deviation from one's program in life and repentance is a return to that way of life that involves an endless reaching out towards the Creator.

Maimonides in his ingenious formulation of the laws of repentance taught us an important truth. He stated that in order to repent one must have knowledge of certain principles of Torah. In his heading for the laws of repentance he states, "The explanation of this commandment and the principles that are drawn along with it and because of it are in these chapters." These principles include free will, the afterlife, how God judges man, what is apostasy, knowledge of God, the value of repentance, which things prevent repentance, and the correct way to serve God. Why is it necessary to know all these things in order to repent? The answer is plain: Since repentance is not a mere act of contrition but a qualitatively new relationship with the Creator one must have a sound knowledge of these principles which are the very basis of man's relationship with God. One must review these principles and seek in them new depths of understanding in order to establish one's relationship with God on a higher plane. The Torah and the prophets have made it clear that without knowledge one cannot serve God. David charged his son Solomon upon his taking leave from this earthly existence with the words "know the God of your fathers and serve Him (Chronicles I 28:9)." As the Rabbis say, "first one must know Him and then one may serve Him." All perfection involves a knowledge of the Creator and the more perfected one is the greater is that knowledge. As man strives for higher levels throughout his life his knowledge of God is forever changing, forever deepening.

The measure of a human being is in direct proportion to his knowledge of God. As such there are various degrees of human existence until one reaches the level of our great teacher Moses whose knowledge of God was the

very highest attainable by the human species.

Repentance as seen by the Torah is not a mere act but the quintessence of man's relationship with God. □

9/11 and The Jewish People

RABBI REUVEN MANN

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Their psychological insecurity about the truth of their system compels them to act ruthlessly against non-believers. Skeptics are a threat who must be forcefully converted or eliminated.

The freedom to inquire and live by reason is the greatest danger to religion because if the real origin of the doctrines were discovered, the claim of divinity would be seriously compromised. Make no mistake about it; the 9/11 criminals were not men of true religion. They were cruel people in pursuit of personal glory in an imaginary paradise whose souls were purged of any element of pity for human beings. Let us recognize the fact that false religion can lead to the worst horrors. Much crime has been committed by those who arrogantly claim to speak in G-d's name. 9/11 ranks with the most heinous abuses of religion in history! There is certainly much evil in the world. None is worse than that which rationalizes itself in the form of misbegotten "theologies."

Judaism stands apart from the religions of man. It is based on submission to the will of G-d as He has revealed it to us, not as we would like it to be. In Judaism, we strive to approach G-d through recognition and appreciation of His Infinite Wisdom, which is revealed in the world of nature, and in the ideas of His Torah. This produces a certain humility and a sense of compassion for all of His creatures. Judaism, unlike other religions, does not proselytize. We do not seek to impose our views on others. Yet, the question arises: If we regard the Torah as G-d's instruction to mankind, do we not have the obligation to disseminate this knowledge? I believe that there is no greater compassion than to educate people in the proper "way of life." However, we cannot assume the role of missionaries. Our national goal is expressed in the words, "And I shall be sanctified in the midst of the children of Israel." Our wisdom, behavior, kindness and commitment to justice in all situations, in our personal and national dealings serve to sanctify the name of G-d and draw mankind closer to His service.

Some have said that 9/11 gave religion a bad name. I say, it gave false religion a very bad name. We must, in every area, use our G-d given intelligence to differentiate between the true and the false, between darkness and light. Our task is to reflect the wisdom and beauty of our religion of truth. Let us at this time renew our appreciation of our eternal Torah heritage and rededicate ourselves to our national mission of Kiddush Hashem, the sanctification of G-d's name.

May you all be inscribed for a Happy and Health New Year. □

The Awesome Power of Teshuva

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Many people have the notion that Jews only "care about their own." An honest study of our history shows that this is not the case. We are concerned about the welfare of all people. On Yom Kippur we read the Book of Jonah which tells of G-d's compassion for the wicked people of Ninveh. This story illustrates the awesome power of Teshuva. The most surprising element in the narrative is that the sinful people actually listened to Jonah's rebuke and repented. This is one of the most inspiring stories in Tanach. How often in history do we encounter the moral transformation of a corrupt people? Human stubbornness and the propensity for rationalization block the path of return. It is hard to believe but histories greatest villains were righteous in their own minds. They were fighting for a cause. Distorted idealism can be the worst evil. It gives rise to fanaticism and allows people to commit the worst atrocities with a clear conscience.

We face the problem today. Anti-Semitism has taken the form of primitive religious zealotry which promises paradise to those who die while destroying innocent Jews. Israel finds itself in an Aise Tzaar (time of suffering) and we must identify with the pain of our brethren. There are many things we can and must do. In addition there needs to be a fundamental change of attitude. Let us admit that we have been shaken to our very core. We had a sense of total confidence in the military and technological prowess of the Jewish state. We never believed that Israel could become so vulnerable. Statistics tell the story. Tourism has virtually come to a standstill. Many summer camps for Diaspora children had to be closed down.

The situation in Israel has great significance and demands a response. We must admit that we were wrong to believe that the security of Israel could be achieved by physical means, alone. The Torah teaches that the Jewish people are a special creation of G-d whose welfare depends on adherence to His commandments. The "blessings and curses" are clearly set forth in the Torah, reiterated by the prophets and confirmed by thousands of years of Jewish history. In recent years some "visionaries" allowed themselves to believe that a new era of enlightenment had come to the Middle East. The current violence against Israel has shattered all illusions. The "matzav" (situation) demands that we give up illusions and return to HaKadosh Baruch Hu (Holy One Blessed be He). At this time of year we must respond to the spiritual alarm that is sounded by the crisis. Let us draw inspiration from the people of Ninveh who did not harden their hearts to the words of the prophet. Let us instead seize the moment and return to Hashem with renewed determination to study Torah, obey His mitzvot and be united with Eretz Yisrael and Klal Yisrael. Then we can be confident that as in the case of Bilaam, Hashem will take the curse and turn it into a blessing because "Hashem your G-d loves you." □

10 Days of Repentance

RIVKA OLENICK

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is yours, it is up to you, and it is for your own benefit. Even on one's deathbed, even an evil person can repent, and God hears that person's tshuvah. "Seek God when He is to be found." from Isaiah 55:6, which refers specifically to these 10 days. The Rambam states further that: "Calling out to God is desirable at all times, whether a person's judgment is sealed or not." God gives us the 10 days from Rosh Hashana until Yom Kippur to pour out our heart, to draw closer to Him through our tshuvah. We are reminded of this idea every single day, when in our tefila we ask God to: Bring us back, bring us near, and influence us to return. This is all daily preparation for repentance, and as the Rambam says: "we should be constantly calling out to God." The question is: do we take it seriously, as an obligation that does have beneficial results, or do we just mutter the words?

The Meiri (Rosh Hashana 16b) stresses the importance of using the unique nature of these 10 days and uses harsh language to describe those who fail to use this time and opportunity to repent. This is a time of keen awareness, for us to be more cognizant of our actions and behavior. With more awareness of the Creator during this time, and of God hearing our plea through our tshuvah. During these 7 intermittent days when we are eager to be closer to God, He gives us additional time when we are feeling positive about the Yom Tov but at the same time, we now draw closer to Him and return to Him. Chazal say that tshuvah performed during this week is on a higher level than the significant tshuvah we perform throughout the entire year. On Yom Kippur we culminate our tshuvah the entire day in fasting and repentance.

The 10 days of repentance is an amazing process to partake of because it is a qualitatively unique period of time for all Jews. A time when only Jews can come closer to God and God makes it possible for us to do so. Let these 10 days of repentance and devotion act as leverage for you personally and use it with hope and optimism to transform yourself, like "perfect repentance" before God. It is too awesome a time to ignore. These 10 days give us more awareness of a "truer reality" as Jews. And it is given to us as a valuable and precious gift, an investment we each can make in our soul. How could a

person pass this up? We usually think of tshuvah as repentance from our sins, but tshuvah also means to return, to return to God. This is the relationship we have with God, as His created beings and He set it up for us this way. There is a relationship to God and this relationship allows us to return to Him, "Who desires repentance."

It is up to each of us to take this seriously, since this is the most important relationship we have. And at the same time we realize how far away from God we really are. We have the heavy, burdened status of gulus, Klal Yisroel is disbursed mostly outside the land of Israel without the Temple. We must be more aware of the necessity of regaining our status as "the light" unto the nations and as one nation chosen to be God's "holy nation." In calling out to God we feel the pain knowing our distance from Him, and this is what awakens our heart. This is what should make us literally cry out to God, this is *teru'ah*, the cry of the first shofar blast. □

Following God Perfectly

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The Torah says in Deuteronomy 18:9, "When you come into the land which Hashem your God gives you, do not learn to do as the abominations of those (other) nations." The Torah lists idolatrous prohibitions; passing children in between pillars of fire (Molech), inquiring counsel from your staff (Kosame), fortune telling, witchcraft, consulting the dead and other practices. We understand that all these idolatrous practices are not based on knowledge and are completely false. But this section concludes with a statement not found at the end of other sections of commandments, (18:13) "Perfect (tamim) shall you be with Hashem your God." My question is: Why isn't this statement applied in other areas i.e. kosher and non kosher animals, laws of robbery, court systems, or any other section? Why is the statement of "Perfect shall you be..." mentioned here? And what does this statement mean?

We must say that only in the area of the idolatrous practices is one in violation. If one were to eat non kosher foods, he would not violate this command to be perfect. To what specific objective does "perfect" with God refer? Framing the question this way, we are forced to understand these "abominations".

What we find is that each of the mentioned practices is an attempt in some way, to procure information. In

each case, there is an inquiry, or an attempt to secure oneself. I will give a few examples. Molech was a practice where a parent would pass his son or daughter through two flames - not burning the infant according to at least one view. What was this objective? Fire is the one element which opposes all biological existence. In all elements, an organism may survive, except in fire. Passing the child through, and unharmed, the father imagines that just as the child is shielded from flames, so he is shielded from all other mishaps during his life. It makes sense that the parent/child relationship forms the prohibition, as the paternal or maternal instinct is focused primarily on survival. The parent has a distorted notion that such action is fortuitous and actually "protects" the remainder of his child's existence. Kosame and Nichush were two practices which foretold the success or failure of future events or actions. So too was the practice of consulting the dead. The goal is to obtain knowledge of the 'other side', or of future events. One would usually attempt to consult a dead friend or relative. As there was nothing to be learned about someone with whom you were already intimate with. The interest in consulting him was for another need; knowledge of the future, or more specific, the inquirer's future. Obsession with the dead is, in truth, an obsession with one's own immortality.

What common thread runs through all these practices? The answer is "knowledge". In each of these violations, the inquirer seeks security through some imagined source of knowledge, via a warlock, an enchanter, or the dead. He assumes there is a source of knowledge out there - besides God. This is precisely where one removes himself from following God perfectly, or rather, exclusively. To assume sources of knowledge other than God, is to not follow God "perfectly". It is a dilution of God's omniscience. Therefore, the command to "be perfect with God", means in other words, "do not assume other causes for the universe's existence and operation".

The followers of these practices assume there are in fact other means by which the universe operates. They feel some people have supernatural powers over events outside real laws of cause and effect. This of course is absurd. Their insecurities propel them to seek forecasts for their actions, so they need not think for themselves. Relying on another's advice removes their need to make decisions. This is the opposite of God's plan that man receive and engage the gift of intelligence. Similar to these idolatrous practitioners are present day

Jews who check a mezuzah when household members fall sick, or those who don red bendels, place keys in challas, use prayer books as protection, and those who ascribe powers to "rebbe's". I recently heard of a "Meir bal Hanase" practice where foolish individuals believe by giving charity, you can locate a lost object. How ridiculous and damaging are such notions?

All practices involving outside forces that assume to control cause and effect are idolatrous. It makes no difference if we see "religious" Jews practicing such foolishness, or if we even read about them under a Hebrew title, or authored by a Rabbi. What is the objective truth? That which God created and wrote in our Torah. He created and controls the universe, therefore, He alone determines reality. Not people, and not objects. The same mezuzah which will be consumed when touched by flames, people foolishly think it to have protective abilities. If it cannot protect itself, how can it protect anything else?

God created everything. There is no other source of knowledge. God's knowledge alone defines the operation of the entire universe. Therefore, there cannot be anything which can alter or explain our reality, other than God, the Sole Creator.

"Perfect shall you be with God" means we must not deviate from following Him alone. God, to the exclusion of anything else is the only Cause. This makes sense: How can That which has ultimate power, coexist with anything else laying claim to His power? God's ultimate Kingship and power negates anything else from having any power whatsoever. This is so clear, it boggles the mind that there are such idolatrous practices within our fold.

Having shown that the term "perfect" (tamim) refers to man's requirement not to create sources of knowledge outside God, we have a question: In Genesis 17:1, regarding circumcision, God instructs Abraham to "walk before Me and be perfect". God uses the term "perfect". How does this fit in with our theory? I believe it is perfect. The Ibn Ezra says on this command to Abraham to "be perfect" the following commentary, "You should not ask why perform circumcision." On the surface, Ibn Ezra defies all which he stands for, i.e. a life of understanding. How then can he verbalize such a statement? I don't believe Ibn Ezra is saying we should not use our minds. Rather, he is teaching us that Abraham should not make his performance of divine decrees dependent on his own intelligence.

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Following God Perfectly

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

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Ibn Ezra teaches that man can fall prey to an erroneous notion that "only when I know the reasons will I perform, but not before". To this, Ibn Ezra teaches, "do not inquire why the circumcision". Do not let your inquiry determine your acts. "Be perfect with God and don't render your intelligence superior to his" - this is what Ibn Ezra is teaching, and why the term "perfect" is also used here. In this case too, man can go so far as to think of himself as a source of knowledge outside of God...making his subjective knowledge truer than the knowledge contained in the divine commands. God says to Abraham, "be perfect" - follow me even when your mind does not grasp complete understanding.

We see Abraham does follow this concept, as he did not second guess God when he was commanded to kill his son Isaac. A rabbi once asked why Abraham inquired of God's decision to destroy Sodom, but not regarding Isaac. The rabbi suggested that Abraham realized he could learn about God's justice by asking. But regarding perfection via commands, Abraham felt he could not always understand how a command would perfect him, although it did. He therefore did not ask about the killing Isaac - a divine command - but he did inquire about God's justice. □

Messianic Judaism

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: My name is xxxx. I am 16 years old and have been born and raised "Jewish." I put that in quotes because even though I was told that I am Jewish I only went to Hebrew School for a year and was never able to learn much about my religion but was always proud to be able to be a part of such an amazing heritage.

I may not be extremely educated in Judaism but I am a strong believer in God. Recently my mother was lead in a different direction and found Jesus and had accepted him into her life. She still considers herself to be Jewish and has titled herself to be a Messianic Jew. It's been extremely hard on me to adjust to the drastic change. Within the last year and a half there were many changes that I was forced to accommodate to. I have

tried very hard to understand her beliefs and where she is coming from, but there are many things about her beliefs that just do not make sense to me.

She says that she is still Jewish yet, from what I understand about the religion, she is going against many things that Jewish people have been fighting for, for so many years. I was hoping that you could please help me better understand certain aspects of messianic beliefs and answer some questions that have been running through my head.

Thank you so much for taking your time to read my letter. It would mean so much to me if you could somehow help me to find my way out of my state of confusion. I will be looking forward to your reply.

Sincerely, xxxx.

Mesora: Thank you for writing me. I will respond after each of your questions below.

Reader: Question 1: I understand that the Tanach is the Torah, also known as the Jewish Bible. My mother, who reads the Bible religiously, says that the Bible can answer any question. Does the Tanach state anything about Messianic Judaism, and if so what does it say?

Mesora: Before I answer, please note something you just did: You accepted your mother's statement and based a question to me on this acceptance. You should always question your premises until you see an idea as clear as $2+2=4$. I am referring to when you accepted your mother's statement of "the Bible can answer any question". True, the Torah - not the Christian Bible - contains all the knowledge we need for our lives dedicated to understanding and following God. I felt it important to clarify your mother's words, and point out a lesson to you. Having said that, let me answer your first question. If by Messianic Judaism you mean a Judaism which recognizes Jesus as the messiah, Judaism does not recognize Jesus. He did not fulfill God's requirements which determine one as the messiah. Additionally, Jesus does not follow God's Torah principles. He violated God's Torah principles of not adding or subtracting to the Torah's words. This means he does not follow God. Jesus also wished to violate the Rabbis, who God said we must follow. The Rabbi attested to Jesus's breaking of the commands. So we see that those who God entrusted to interpret the Torah - the Rabbis - unanimously said Jesus did not follow this Torah.

Reader: Question 2: Is Messianic Judaism true to the "real" Jewish beliefs?

Mesora: As I stated above, Messianic Judaism is not Judaism. As soon as one law is not upheld, the entire system is no longer the original Torah which God said we must never alter at all. God knew the future, which would include Jesus and other false prophets. He therefore wished the Torah be intact throughout all generations. To achieve this goal, God included in the 613 commandments the laws of not adding to, or subtracting from the Torah.

Reader: Question 3: What, aside from believing in Yeshua, is the main difference between Messianic Judaism and Traditional Judaism?

Mesora: That difference alone renders Messianic Judaism as no longer Judaism. No other difference makes it any "worse", although there are many deviations from God's words. Once it is not Judaism, additional deviations cannot make it "further" from Judaism. If either one, or all commandments are changed, it is no longer Judaism. It is akin to saying "Once the animal is slaughtered, can I make it 'dead' any further?" Just as the slaughtered animal cannot be killed any further, so too, Messianic Judaism is not Judaism at all. Deviations in addition to primary corruptions are irrelevant.

Reader: Question 4: I have heard from many sources that Messianic Judaism's beliefs are far from Traditional Jewish beliefs. Many have even gone as far as saying that it is pure Christianity. What are your views on the topic; and what do you know about Messianic Judaism?

Mesora: If Messianic "Jews" believe Jesus to be God, they are practicing idolatry. There are no other forces but God alone.

Reader: Question 5: Messianics state that they study the Torah through the Bible. It is my understanding that the Bible does in fact have the Old Testament in there along with the New Testament. How is it possible to study the Torah through the Bible, aren't they just simply reading the Old Testament? And what is the difference between the New and Old Testaments? And why don't Jewish people read the New Testament? What is the difference between the Old Testament and the Tanach?

Mesora: What God gave to man has been proved via the event at Sinai. There, God gave the Torah, the Five Books of Moses, in a written form to about 3 million people. The event was witnessed, and passed down through the ages. This account reached us today, as it did the rest of the world. This is only possible if this event occurred. Masses witnessing Sinai created the undeniable truth about that portion of history. It is through this method, that all other

events in history are accepted today as 100% accurate. Judaism is the only religion to lay claim to such an event. All other religions are based on the word of one or a few people. Such stories require others to simply believe with blind faith. There is no way to disprove these stories, even though God disagrees with them, and would not contradict Himself. The followers of these other religions choose to believe in Jesus, Mohammed and others. Their attachment to emotionally appealing stories lures them away from realizing a rational proof available in the Torah. A proof, the method of which, they use in other areas of life.

Our Torah consists not only of the Written Law - the Five Books of Moses - but also in the Oral Law communicated to Moses by God, and all the words of the Prophets and Writings. We do not recognize that which was not through the Prophets. And it must be clear that only those Prophets recognized by authoritative Orthodox Jewish Rabbis have been unanimously recognized to the exclusion of all others. There is no dispute who is a prophet, and who is not. It is therefore audacious that another group called Christians should try to teach us what we unanimously know is false, that being their suggestion that Jesus was recognized by God. God's chosen nation has more accurate information than those who pop up centuries later. It is futile for the New Testament to borrow the Old Testament's fame by plagiarizing its name. In fact, their forgery is really proof to their acceptance of Judaism's authenticity. One only forges that which he feels is real.

Reader: Question 6: How is it possible for Messianic believers to call themselves Jewish when they seem to go against so many things that Jewish people believe in and have been fighting for for so many years?

Mesora: As I said in my very last statement, this is the method used by counterfeits: They borrow terms from the authentic source, as an attempt to cover up their fallacy, just to develop a facade of credibility. Without such a facade, their content will be easily refuted as false. But unfortunately, most people judge a book by its cover, and they believe the lies. "Tell the world a lie enough times, and they will swear it is truth." This is why the Palestinians gain sympathy from certain groups.

I strongly suggest that your mother examine her views from a rational standpoint. She will see the contradictions and inconsistencies. God created only one, complete, unchanging system. This is the best prescription for mankind. □

From Golus to Geula

NISSIM BEN-CHAIM

"When you beget children and grandchildren and will have been long in the land, you will grow corrupt and make a carved image, a likeness of anything, and you will do evil in the eyes of Hashem, your G-d, to anger him." Vaeschanan, 4:25. What corruption brought about the Destruction of the first Bayit? Can we effect and end to our Geulah? How? Was Moshe's statement in Devarim 4:25 a warning or a prophecy? If prophecy, does Hashem negate prophecy? Can we negate prophecy through our actions? Are Gematria found in Gemorra equivalent with "Bible Codes" on any level?

With reference to Klal Yisroel's reliance on Kohen Godols' Yom Kippur service for atonement rather than striving for perfection in Avodas Hashem, perhaps I'm not the first to posit this but I see this former reliance on the Bais Hamikdosh service as a crutch and obstacle as similar to today's observance of mitzvahs without responsibility, appreciation or understanding, observance by rote, amulets, red bendels, silver rings, mezzuzahs, etc., ad nauseum. Such are the conditions, which brought about little resistance to avoda zorah, the destruction of the first Bayit, and quite possibly what extends our Geula today.

A rabbi with whom I learn agreed and as I've been able to make arguments that refined our approach in other areas, we checked together for any Talmudic reference. You'll have interest in learning into the Gemorrah as well as the additional references my research has provided for us. We will address the dangers of complacency then and now and bring attention to the timely issue that since we have not yet brought on Geula it is apparent that Klal Yisroel needs to rise far above our current modes of observance (by extension of living in golus we are all tainted with Avodah Zorah- Kesubos 110b) in understanding what our true pursuits and goals should be, consequently wanting this perfection so much that we are toiling in it to achieve it. Sources and observations for consideration: -Toldos Aron on

Vaeschanan, 4:25; Vinishantem; trans: "will have been long" references Sanhedrin 38a -Artscroll, Sanhedrin 38a, Gittin 88a - Ramban on Moshe' Rabbainu's statement 4:25, (Chavel p.58) and on the question on negative prophecies going unfulfilled, codes, etc.

Moshe does open with Ki=when not Im=if and Ramban seems to hold that he was prophesizing about the warning going unheeded but not decreeing that Klal Yisroel would indeed commit Avoda Zora. Take note of footnotes regarding 850 yrs. in the land prior to exile vs. 852 prior to destruction. I do not see any problem with a prophecy actually being negated here by Hashem's intervention given the context of Moshe's statement as a warning against complacency according to Ramban. Further, in the notes to this section referencing Sefer Hageula, Ramban alludes that the time of redemption may also be found in this section but will not be apparent until the Geula just as the Gematria referred to here was only apparent after the fact and with much Chochma. Since we have the power to bring Geula within ourselves, this date cannot be a definite although Hashem "knows" when it will ultimately be. It's known that some hold that if we don't bring Geula ourselves by a certain preordained time, then Hashem will do so. That belief seems to be flawed since it would negate our abilities to use free will to create the conditions favorable to Geula. As far as the "Codes" go then, I believe that the Torah encompasses infinite possible outcomes given infinite possible actions on our part allowing us actual free will. Yes, algorithms may be employed to give a glimpse into a logical system, but for all we know those codes may have only been accurate at that moment in time and/or Hashem "willed" us to have the tools for such a glimpse so that many would observe for themselves the veracity and infinitely accurate "Living Torah" within a context more likely to resonate within our nature at present. The "Codes" did after all

come at time where we are more socially and culturally bereft and in need of Avodas Hashem than ever as a people. Whether or not this was "intended" by Hashem we cannot say, but many people gave the Torah a "second look" after the "Codes" was published.

It becomes clear here why Ramban posits in Moreh Nevuchim that Metaphysics are a "dessert for wisdom". What Men of Chochma have learned out for us in terms of proper lifestyles of "Shomrei Torah Umitzvos" and practical Wisdom and even perhaps science far outweighs what any scientific approach has divulged to date. There are many of us who search for Objective Truth. There are different approaches and provided that they are logical, they will lead to a glimpse of some of the same tenets of this Whole Truth-"Echad" regardless. We will however, err in our appraisal of what works best for the Human Being for a lack of truly investigating knowledge which has already been made available to the world and is there for the taking. So, we may continue in our Golus, "Living to Eat" crying out for and amassing unnecessary material wealth, engaging in empty, vain pursuits and perhaps fitting a little perfunctory and logically flawed Torah observance into lives overburdened and spiritually atrophied by such "idolatrous" endeavor. We follow the pack, maintain status quo in apparent observance because, as Moshe recognized, it is human nature to do so. Our ancestors were also very busy maintaining cultural or societal status quo, and one would postulate that in those times also, there were individuals too lazy or concerned with the wrong priorities to perfect themselves in their Avoda. Instead, they counted fully and exclusively upon atonement through their Kohen Godol only to lament their sins at the Waters of Babylon when Nebuchadnezzar was struck with a merciful spirit and lessened their hardship to some degree.

In two thousand years of scientific, cultural, and societal experimentation,

our priorities are still backward by a full 180 degrees. Perhaps we may do better to give our Neshamas the opportunity to consider the importance of, to recognize it for ourselves and to seek the truth of "Echad" wanting it so very, very much that our Neshamas cry out for it, to celebrate it, just as our less fortunate bretheren yearn for wealth, fame and good fortune without cognizance for its toll on the world's physical and spiritual resources.

Avodas Hashem, developed through mature investigation of Torah is the proper framework for life. We thereby internalize the wisdom of Truth, we desire only to learn and take pleasure in the many facets of this Truth. In order to fulfill our role as Hashem's "partners in creation" This concept of "Echad" reveals itself to those who yearn for and toil in its Chochma and effectively employing this wisdom practically in all of our endeavors. We are then "Eating to Live" in a world where we recognize that our most important resources are plentiful, learned minds bearing the fruits of the correct Torah lifestyle, which in turn bring the blessings promised to us so that we are free to spend our resources to create a better world for all humankind. As long as we justify the status quo with groupthink and our excuses for not doing more as critically thinking individuals, following the masses within our people and indeed the world, not to change our priorities and increase our learning and observance, qualitatively and correctly, we shall endure this Golus. Let us resolve to dispense with our conformity to the status quo, our childish approach to Judaism in our deification of men and the desire to experience "magic", segulahs, silver rings, red strings and other foolish notions and commit ourselves as individuals to the extent of our abilities to the singular goal of becoming individuals capable of achieving Echad. May we be zocheh to see our individual paths merge into one, to bring upon ourselves the advent of our Geula. ■