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Houston	8:08	Phoenix	7:24
Jerusalem	7:30	Pittsburgh	8:35
Johannesburg	5:11	Seattle	8:52
Los Angeles	7:49	Sydney	4:43
London	9:01	Tokyo	6:42
Miami	7:58	Toronto	8:44
Montreal	8:27	Washington DC	8:19

Weekly Parsha

Chukat

RABBI BERNIE FOX

"This is the law of the Torah that Hashem commanded saying: Speak to Bnai Yisrael. And they should take for you a perfectly red cow that has no blemish and has never had a yoke placed upon it." (BeMidbar 19:2)

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Creation

DAY 7

THE MESSIANIC FORECAST

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

In a recent shiur, a Rabbi quoted Nachmanides (Ramban) on Leviticus 25:2. This verse refers to the law concerning our rest from working the land; the Sabbatical Year. The Torah verse says this year must be a "Sabbath unto God"[1]. Nachmanides teaches that this term "Sabbath unto God" appears only twice in Torah: once here, and

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(Chukat cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

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Parshat Chukat discusses the laws of the Parah Adumah – the Red Cow. This cow is burned. Its ashes are used in the process of purifying a person that has become defiled through contact with a dead body.

The cow that is burned and used in this purification process must meet specific requirements. Our pasuk describes these three basic requirements. The cow must be completely red. It must be unblemished. The cow must never have had a yoke placed upon it.

The need for the cow to be unblemished is not surprising. This is a requirement of animals used for sacrifice. It is reasonable for this requirement to be applied to the Parah Adumah. However, the restriction against using a cow that has born a yoke is unusual. This restriction does not generally apply to sacrifices. What is the reason for this restriction?

There is one instance of a similar restriction. This is in regard to the Eglah Arufah. This calf is slaughtered in the process of atonement for an unsolved murder. The Torah requires the calf has not been used for labor and has not drawn a load with a yoke.[1]

These restrictions are similar. Both the Parah Adumah and the Eglah Arufah are disqualified through association with labor. However, the restrictions are not identical. A cow is disqualified from serving as Parah Adumah through placing a yoke upon it. It is not necessary for the cow to do any actual labor.[2] In contrast, the mere placement of the yoke on a calf does not disqualify it from serving as an Eglah Arufah. The calf is only disqualified if it has actually drawn a load.[3] This raises an additional question. Why is this unique restriction formulated differently in these two instances? Why does the mere placement of the yoke upon the Parah Adumah disqualify the animal? Why is the Eglah Arufah only disqualified through drawing a burden with the yoke?

Gershonides deals with our first question. Why is an animal associated with labor disqualified from use as a Parah Adumah and an Eglah Arufah? He explains the basic concept underlying this restriction. There is a fundamental distinction between animals used for sacrifice and the animals chosen for Parah Adumah and Eglah Arufah. An animal chosen for a sacrifice can have a previous identity or function. An animal that has been designated for work or used for labor can become a sacrifice. Only after the animal is chosen for sacrifice, does it receive a designation. After the animal is designated to be a sacrifice, it can no longer be used for labor. Using the animal for labor contradicts its designation as a sacrifice. In short, in the case of a sacrificial animal a previous

identity does not disqualify the animal from receiving a new designation. It can still be designated as a sacrifice.

The cow chosen for the Parah Adumah cannot have been previously associated with labor. The use of the cow as a Parah Adumah must be the first and only identity of the cow. The placement of a yoke upon the cow confers an identity. With the placement of the yoke upon the cow, it is associated with labor. This is an identity in the animal. This disqualifies the animal. The identity of Parah Adumah or Eglah Arufah must be the first and only identity in the animal. Gershonides expresses the concept in an interesting manner. It must be as if the animal was created to serve as a Parah Adumah or Eglah Arufah. [4]

We will now turn to our second question. Why is the restriction of the Eglah Arufah formulated differently than the restriction upon the Parah Adumah? Why does the mere placement of the yoke upon a cow disqualify it from use as a Parah Adumah? Why is a calf disqualified from serving as an Eglah Arufah only after it has pulled a load?

Gershonides contends that the restrictions upon the Parah Adumah and the Eglah Arufah share the same underlying concept.[5] The animal chosen for either of these functions must be free of a previous identity. He explains that the difference in the restrictions lies in the stringency with which this requirement is applied. In the case of the Eglah Arufah, the animal becomes

associated with labor through the performance of labor. Therefore, only through the actual performance of labor is the calf disqualified. In contrast, the Parah Adumah is associated with labor through designation. Placement of the yoke upon the cow designates it for use in labor. This designation alone creates an association. The cow can no longer be used as a Parah Adumah.

In short, the two formulations differ in the degree of association to labor that disqualifies the animal. The restriction in regard to Eglah Arufah requires a higher degree of association. Only the actual performance of labor produces this degree of association. The restriction in regard to the Parah Adumah requires a lower degree of association. Even designation of the cow for labor creates this lower degree of association and disqualifies the cow. ■

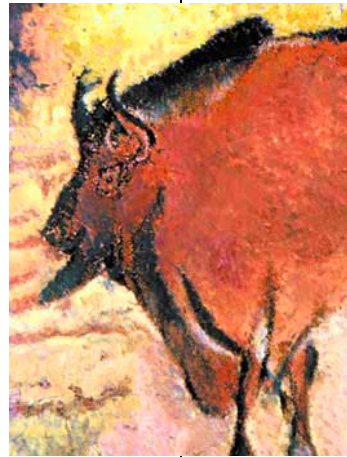
[1] Sefer Devarim 21:3.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Parah Adumah 1:7.

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Rotzeach U' Shmirat Nefesh 10:3.

[4] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1998), pp. 94-95.

[5] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1998), pp. 94-95.



once in Exodus 20:10 (in the Ten Commandments) addressing the seventh day. Both the Sabbath, and the seventh, Sabbatical Year share the same design, and by the words "Sabbath unto God", a similar objective. Why must years duplicate the first seven days?

Later in his commentary, Nachmanides says these words: "Behold, the days allude to that which was created in the act of Creation; and the years allude to that which will be in the creation of all the days of the world." He means to say that the days – working six days and resting on the seventh – remind us of God's act of Creation. The past. We require a weekly reminder of this fundamental, that all exists only due to God alone. But what does Nachmanides mean by "the years allude that which will be in the creation of all the days of the world"? I believe Nachmanides is teaching us an amazing idea.

When God created the world in six days, our focus tends to remain on those days, and not the seventh. This is because the universe is magnificent, replete with marvels at every turn. We focus on physical objects and laws that captivate our thoughts. But when reading Genesis 2:2, we wonder at the apparent duplication: "And God completed His work that He did on the seventh day; and He rested on the seventh day from all the work that He performed." The question is glaring: if it already states that God "completed" His work, how can he do another act of "resting"? He is already at rest! the answer is as follows.

Suppose I am drinking a soda, and then I place the cup down and stop drinking. There are one of two reasons why I stop drinking: 1) no soda remains; or 2) I commence a diet at that moment. In the latter case, my abstention from drinking is due to a "positive" act of dieting in which I now engage. My inactivity is not a passive act, but a positive commitment to some ideal.

When God "completed" Creation, it was due to the fact that all that He wished to exist, now existed. Nothing was left to create. But when God "rested", He gave rest a "positive" designation. God was designating Sabbath as the objective of creation, not merely a day with nothing to do since all was created. The Licha Dodi recited Friday night says, "The last in creation, but first in His thought". Although Sabbath came after all else was formed, it was first in God's thought. Meaning, it was the purpose of Creation. What is the purpose of Sabbath?

Sabbath is a day when man cannot engage in creative labor. He is freed from all physical preoccupation in Earthly establishment (issur melacha), he is commanded to partake in physical pleasures (oneg Shabbat), but mostly, he is to immerse himself in Torah and all thoughts about God's creation. This is what the refrain from the physical targets as its objective.

The universe is truly a laboratory for man to witness and experiment with God's creation, for the purpose of arriving at new observations and learning God's wisdom as far as humanly possible. Therefore, Sabbath is the choicest of days, since God desired man to engage a life of wisdom, over a life of physical toil.

Why then wasn't Adam commanded in the Sabbath? This is because Adam was not yet sentenced to work for his needs. (Gen. 3:17) Adam had all his needs prepared. He enjoyed that preferred state where he could devote all his energies to wisdom. He lived a truly "Sabbatical" existence. A command of Sabbath would have produced no change in his activities. But once sentenced to labor after the sin, Sabbath entered the picture when Torah was given. But the Sabbath is not to remain eternally as a "weekly" event...

Messianic Times: The Final Sabbatical Era

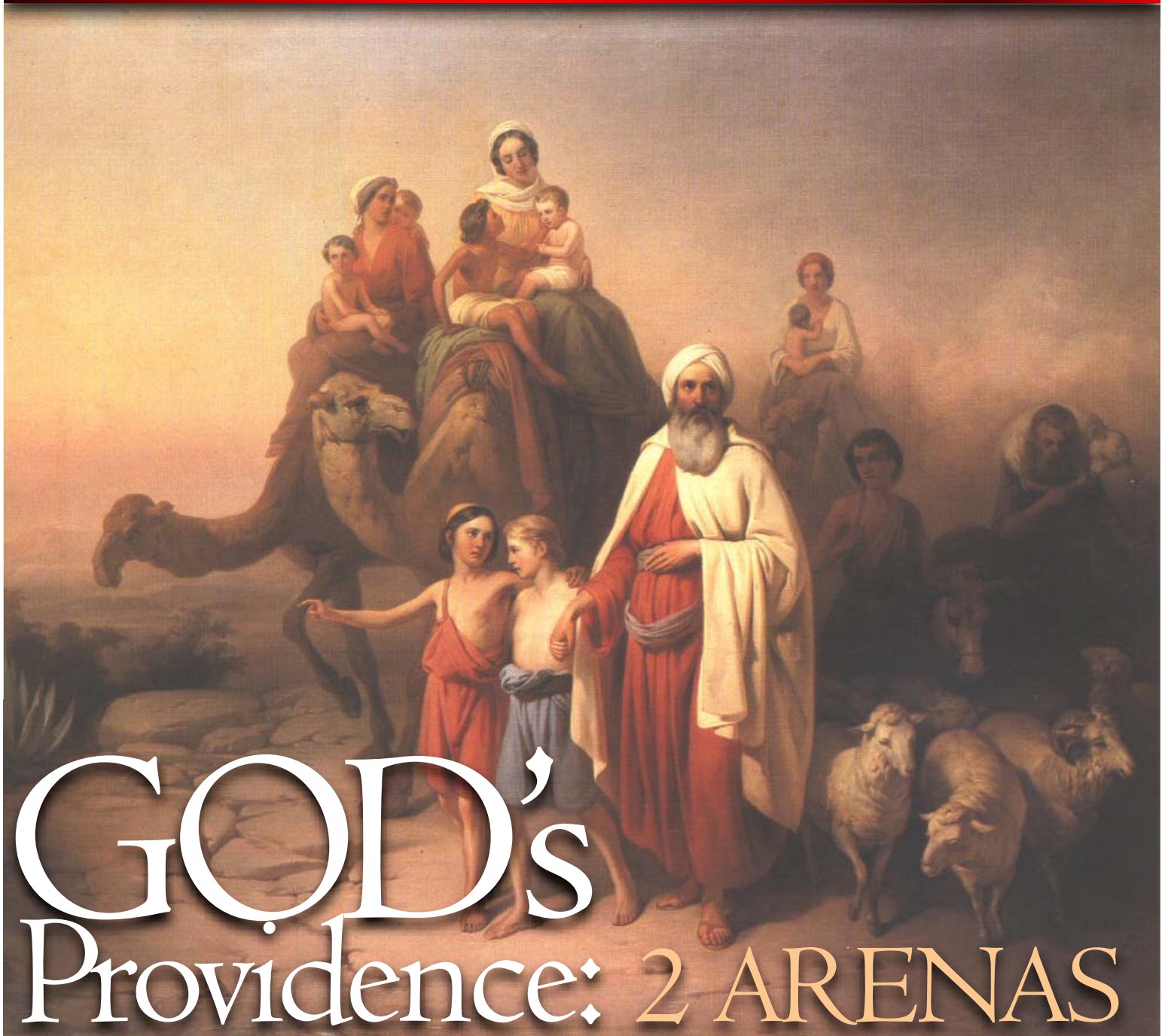
The Rabbis refer to the Messianic era as a time that is "entirely Sabbath". In the future, man will once again enjoy the state where he works minimally, and engages the pursuit of wisdom as his main focus. In other words, and here's Nachmanides' point: the original Sabbath was a model for man's ultimate state. Man was originally meant to be fully immersed in a life of wisdom and this is why man alone received the gift of intelligence. Although we are temporarily distracted by the need to work, God will finally create a state where mankind will recognize Him, "v'kol bnei bassar, yikru b'shimecha", "And all sons of flesh will call in Your name". Sabbath is the choicest of days, as it is the state where man lives as originally planned: immersed in studying God. And this state will soon be an enduring state, not simply a weekly event. (Of course, the law of Sabbath remains, as the Torah will never change.)

Perhaps this is what Nachmanides means when he says, "the years allude to that which will be in the creation of all the days of the world". The years refers to the Sabbatical Year. By receiving this command to rest for an entire year, God teaches that man's state can in fact tolerate an elongated state of preoccupation with Torah, without physical toil. We don't need to labor to be happy. Just the opposite is true. The Sabbatical year points to the ability in man to enjoy thought on a prolonged basis. And then we have the Jubilee, where after a period of seven cycles of seven years, we again must rest the land. This time, two consecutive years of rest: the 49th and the 50th. We see an even longer period that carries the original design of Sabbath. This continually protracted approach – 6 days + 1 rest day; 6 years + 1 rest year; 7 x 7 years + 2 rest years – all point to the next span of time in this continually increasing pattern: the Messianic Era, which will not end.

It is amazing that the first seven days serve the purpose of bringing creation into existence, but also allude to all the days of the world. We may rightfully say that the millennium from Adam until the Messiah are the "first six days" of mankind, and from the Messiah and onward is a "seventh day", a "day" of Sabbath, that lasts forever. The first seven days thereby foretell the entire history of mankind, based on the objective that man engage intelligence over all else. That is something.

Perhaps too this is one reason for Resurrection of the Dead; that all those who have passed will yet enjoy the preferred human state. ■

[1] "Sabbath unto God" means a timeframe where man is dedicated to knowledge of God, not a day that God needs. For God has no needs. All God's commands are for human benefit.



GOD'S Providence: 2 ARENAS

Rabbi Israel Chait
TRANSCRIBED BY STUDENT

Maimonides states in his Laws of Idolatry that Abraham was quite young (some suggest three years of age) when he started recognizing God, and pondering His existence. Having worshipped idols himself, but then realizing the contradictions in such practices, Abraham was yet a youth, considering these matters day and night. Over time, he realized the idolaters were gravely mistaken.

Then, Abraham wrote responses to the idolaters and debated with them, but not until he was 40. Although possessing far greater knowledge than they had possessed, for decades, Abraham abstained from entering into debates with others until he fully concluded his thinking process, and attained clarity on the issues he pondered. Maimonides teaches that a poor answer is worse than no answer at all. Influencing

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people thru truth requires the educator to give over an entire subject matter: a conclusive series of arguments. To effectively present a “system” of truths, an incomplete or poor presentation mars the appreciation intended for the student – the goal is forfeited, and even worse, the student assumes the teacher to possess a flawed system. This would greatly decrease or perhaps even remove the student’s ability to ever recognize this system at a later date. The student would thereby suffer the greatest loss: he would never come to an appreciation for the Creator, and His system of knowledge and providence over mankind. Therefore, Abraham patiently studied all matters until he attained crystallized concepts. Only then did he venture out into society, and take on the idolatrous cultures with well-formulated responses, only attained over decades of analysis driven by his yearning to know truth.

Two times in his life, did Abraham engage in debate: 1) in Ur Kasdim, and 2) in Charan. Charan was a major platform. He went from kingdom to kingdom, and called in God’s name in many cities. Abraham dealt with others on an individual basis, offering them arguments against their corrupt philosophies: each person according to his own, subjective level. He also wrote many books addressing the flawed views these cultures defended.

However, Abraham’s real success was not in Ur or even in Charan. He only succeeded in attracting his 10,000’s of followers once God’s providence stepped in. Abraham’s philosophy continued thru Isaac, until it was almost lost by the time the Jews left Egypt.

Each morning we recite the blessing of “Sanctifying God’s name”:

“You are the one (who existed) while the world was not yet created. You are the one from when the world was created. You are the one in this world, and You are the one in the world to come. Sanctify Your name by those who sanctify Your name, and sanctify Your name in Your world. And with Your salvation, raise up, and exalt our horn. Blessed are You, God, who sanctifies His name publicly.”

This blessing reiterates the truth, that the Jews are the people given the task to sanctify God’s great name. But it is only through His providence that we may do so. We learn this from the Torah’s omission of Abraham’s initial successes prior to God’s intervention, and we learn this from Revelation at Sinai. It was this Sinaiic event where God’s providence intervened in human affairs, directing the descendants of Abraham to study and observe His Torah, and educate the world on His existence, His Oneness, and His truths.

Maimonides: Only Certain Individuals Knew God

Noah’s son Shem recognized and taught about God. Shem established a house of study in B’aire L’chai Roh-ee. We learn when the twins (Jacob and Esau) violently wrestled within Rebecca, that Rebecca went

to the study hall of Shem to gain some insight as to why her pregnancy deviated from the norm. What was Rebecca intent on learning? Why did she go here specifically? Upon Eliezer’s successful return from locating a wife for Isaac, the Torah tells us that Isaac too was returning from B’aire L’chai Roh-ee. What Isaac was doing there?

Previously, when Hagar fled from before Sarah, she named the well where the angel appeared, “B’aire L’chai Roh-ee”. We now arrive at the initial event, from which we may derive the significance attributed to this place. What is this significance?

B’aire L’chai Roh-ee – God’s Providence over Individuals

Rashi states that Hagar had witnessed God’s providence while in Abraham’s house. But now exiled, she never expected to see providence outside of Abraham’s house. Hagar, as an individual, no longer comprised Abraham’s mission and was surprised to witness an angel of God, i.e., God’s providence. (Gen. 16:7) Hagar named that God who spoke to her at the well, “The God Who sees.” (Gen. 16:13) The Torah explains why she gave this name, “[13] ...for she said, ‘for also further I see, after I have seen’. [14] Therefore the well was named, ‘The Well of the Living One Who is Seen.’” Hagar states that she saw God’s providence “again”. After having seen it Abraham’s house, Hagar again witnessed God’s providence via His angels. What is the lesson?



Yonasan ben Uzziel explained the name of this place as, “One Who sees, but is not seen.” What does this name mean? Hagar’s naming of this place on account of a new providential event teach this: “You are the One who has true existence. Here was revealed the providence of God.” Hagar praised God. She admitted of the idea that no human knows when providence will take place. She assumed providence was limited to Abraham’s mission. But now, Hagar recognized that His providence provides for every “individual”. She experienced God’s intervention, His providence, even away from Abraham’s house. Providence for God’s mission for Abraham to establish the Jewish nation was not the only type of providence. Thus, Hagar identified two distinct roles in which God’s providence relates to man, 1) providence for mankind (Abraham establishing a nation, and 2) providence for individuals. The idea Hagar spoke of, “He sees but isn’t seen”, refers to providence outside Abraham’s mission, that is, “How God’s providence extends to every individual.”

Simultaneously, Hagar demonstrated through her very surprise at God’s intervention that man cannot know when and where God’s providence will step in. In contrast, most people incorrectly feel they “know” when God is in their lives. But as Yonasan ben Uzziel explained, the name means “One Who sees, but is not seen.” “Is not seen” means that man cannot predict God’s methods of providence.

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Providence

Isaac too came from B'aire L'chai Roh-ee, where Shem was. Shem's house of study was established precisely in this location, as this was the goal of Shem's study hall: to study God's providence for individuals. Shem's study hall embodied the truth uttered by Hagar. Therefore he established his study hall in the very place where Hagar had expressed this very truth.

Why did Rebecca go to Shem's study hall? As we stated, Shem taught about God's providence for individuals. Rebecca didn't think her pregnancy was anything more than a personal crisis, not on par with God's mission for Abraham and Isaac to establish the Jewish nation. Therefore she sought understanding about her "individual" case: she felt it was a personal and private problem. However, it was then revealed to her through prophecy that her pregnancy was not a personal matter. Her abnormal pregnancy was an act of God's providence over the nation, not the individual.

Both Isaac and Jacob learned at Shem's study hall. Why? To fulfill their roles as forefathers of the Jewish nation, they required knowledge of God's providence for the individual. To pass on to Israel the traditions and teachings of Abraham, this "individual providence" was required learning. Abraham's knowledge concerned providence for mankind, while Shem's knowledge centered on individual providence.

We learn that on his journey from his home to his uncle Laban, Jacob lodged at Shem's study hall for 14 years. This teaches that Jacob required 14 years of knowledge of God's providence over individuals, so as to become the establisher of the tribes. This level of knowledge was acquired at Shem. Only then, did the providence relate to Jacob to establish the tribes. Such a long duration of study teaches that God's methods of providence require long and deep study. The patriarchs all required a level of in-depth study, in order to accomplish their goals: this study was "God's Providence to individuals."

It was asked, "Why did Isaac have to spend so many years in blindness?" The answer was "to give the blessing to Jacob" So why could he not be temporarily blind? We must appreciate that God's providence is not a simple matter. For some reason, Isaac required this degree of blindness. If Isaac had a condition that led to his blindness, and God did not remove it, it was necessary for God's plan. It was not a punishment, as it says, "To give the blessing to Jacob". But we may investigate this matter further.

Moses did not lose his vision. (Deut. 34:7) He knew that beyond a certain point, he could not know. This is the meaning of "...and Moses hid his face" (Exod. 3:6) stated in connection with his encounter with the burning bush. Because of this, Moses merited to attain the highest level of prophecy ever experienced. Moses understood when a matter that was greater than his abilities. However, Isaac tried to understand that which was beyond his abilities. When Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac, Isaac pondered how God could first tell Abraham "For in Isaac will your seed be called", and then Abraham should be commanded to kill Isaac. Isaac sought an understanding for this contradiction in God's words.

The Medrash states that Isaac's blindness was due to the angel's tears falling into Isaac's eyes as he was bound on the altar. How do we understand this Medrash? The angels represent "ultimate knowledge". Their "tears falling into Isaac's eyes" metaphorically alludes to something greater than Isaac (angels) causing a negative (blindness) in Isaac. Thus, Isaac's very attempt to overextend his inquiry into areas greater than his abilities had a negative effect on him. He became blinded. God's initial promise of Isaac being a successor would not come to be. This knowledge affected Isaac, i.e., blindness. However, this very blindness helped direct Isaac to review his act, and repent from trying to gain knowledge, which surpassed his abilities. Another Medrash also teaches that Isaac lacked the knowledge concerning how the providence over Abraham works.

We learn that God designed two types of providence, 1) providence over mankind, and 2) providence over the individual. Hagar understood that God granted His providence over Abraham for the sake of mankind. But Hagar was then exiled from Abraham's house. She did not assume she would experience providence, unless connected somehow with God's influence over mankind. After experiencing God's intervention at the well, Hagar now learned of this second type of providence. ■



the Angel of Death

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

In Parshas Korach, (Numbers, 17:13) Rashi states an amazing story of how Aaron “seized the Angel of Death “against its will”. In order to understand this metaphor, we must first understand the events immediately prior.

God had wiped out Korach and his rebellion. On the morrow, the Jewish people said the following (Numbers, 17:6), “You (Moses and Aaron) have killed the people of God”, referring to Korach and his assembly. Evidently, the Jews could not make such a statement the same day as God’s destruction of the Korach assembly, perhaps because the Jews were too frightened at the moment. But as their terror waned, they mustered the courage to speak their true feelings,

on the next day.

What they said were actually two accusations, 1) You, Moses and Aaron, are murderers, and 2) those murdered are God’s people. The Jews made two errors, and God addressed both.

The method God used to correct their second error was to demonstrate through a miracle that Aaron in fact was following God and Korach’s people were not: detached wood – the staff – miraculously continued its growth, and blossomed almonds. By Aaron’s rod blossoming, this showed whom God favored, and to whom He related – even via a miracle. Now the Jew’s false opinion that Korach followed God was corrected, as it was Aaron’s staff, which God selected, and not Korach’s.

But how did Moses correct the people’s false opinion, that he and Aaron were murderers? How did the incense, which Moses instructed Aaron to bring, correct the problem, and stay off the plague, which God sent to kill the Jews? What Moses commanded Aaron to do was to take the incense, and stand between the living and the dead during the plague, which only temporarily stopped the plague. It was not until Aaron returned back to Moses that God completely halted the plague. So what does Aaron standing there accomplish, that it stopped the plague temporarily? Additionally, what does his return to Moses and God at the Tent of Meeting do? This is where the Rashi comes in.

Rashi reads as follows:

“Aaron seized the angel of death against its will. The angel said, ‘leave me to do my mission’. Aaron said, ‘Moses commanded me to prevent you’. The angel said, ‘I am the messenger of God, and you are (only) the messenger of Moses’. Aaron said, ‘Moses says nothing on his own accord, rather, (he says matters only) through God. If you do not believe me, behold Moses and God are at the Tent of Meeting, come with me and ask”.

What this means is the following: Moses knew that the people accused him and Aaron of being murderers. The Jews saw Moses and God as two opposing sides, i.e., Moses was not working in sync with God, as he apparently killed the “people of God”, i.e., Korach and his rebellious congregation. The statement, “you have killed the people of God” displays the people’s belief that God was correct to follow, but Moses opposed God’s will. Moses now attempted to correct the Jews, and show that in fact, he and Aaron were not murderers opposing God. Moses sent Aaron to make atonement for the Jews. What was this atonement, and how did it entitle the Jews to be saved from God’s current plague?

The Jews saw Aaron with this incense offering, standing at the place where the last Jew dropped

down in death; the plague progressed in a domino fashion. And the Jews now saw that no more Jews were dropping down dead, due to Aaron’s presence with the incense. They were now perplexed: they accused Aaron and Moses as murderers, but Aaron was now healing, and not killing as they previously assumed. This perplexity is what the Rashi described metaphorically as “Aaron seizing the Angel of Death”. Aaron was now correcting the “opinion” of the people, which made them deserving of death, as if he seized the cause of their death, i.e., the angel. The people’s opinion was in fact, their “Angel of Death”. This means that the angel is not a real, separate “being”, but the cause of death is man’s own distance from God. And these Jews were distant from God when they imputed murder to Moses and Aaron.

Now, as they were now questioning, but not completely abandoning this false view of Aaron and Moses, the plague stopped, but only temporarily, reflecting their temporal suspension of their accusation, while they pondered the truth. So we may interpret Aaron as “seizing the angel of death” as his correction the false notions the Jews maintained that Moses and Aaron were murderers of Korachian revolutionaries. “Seizing the Angel of Death” means Aaron retarded the cause of death in the remaining Jews; he corrected their false notions, for which, others perished at God’s hand in this plague.

The Jews were confused, and rightly so, when they saw Aaron standing between the living and the dead with incense, apparently causing a halt to the deaths: Aaron is Moses’ messenger, but the plague was clearly from God. So, how could Aaron and Moses overpower God? How could Aaron on Moses’ mission halt a plague from God? This is what Rashi means when metaphorically the Angel of Death tells Aaron, “I am the messenger of God, and you are (only) the messenger of Moses”. The Angel in this metaphor personifies the “false opinions of the people”, which caused death. But with a corrected opinion, God will not kill. So the Angel talking in this metaphor, really represents the Jewish people’s corrupt opinion - which in fact causes death. (Sometimes, false views can be so wrong that the follower of such a view deserves death.)

Returning to the Rashi, Aaron replies to the Angel one last time, “Moses says nothing on his own accord, rather, (he says matters only) through God. If you do not believe me, behold Moses and God are at the Tent of Meeting, come with me and ask”. At this point, the plague was temporarily stopped, as the Jews were entertaining the idea that Moses and Aaron were not murderers, as Aaron was atoning, trying to keep them alive. Their perplexity about whether Aaron and Moses were following God had to be removed if they

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were to live permanently. This is what is meant that when Aaron returned to the tent of meeting (Numbers , 17:15) the plague was terminated completely: as the Jews witnessed Aaron, Moses, and God “together”, they now understood that Moses and Aaron were in fact followers of God. The metaphor depicts Aaron as ‘seizing’ the corrupt views of the people which demanded their death, allegorized by seizing an “Angel of Death”.

This Rashi is yet another of literally thousands of examples where the Rabbis wrote in riddles, as King Solomon taught in Proverbs 1:6. When we learn from one as great as Solomon, to whom God gave knowledge miraculously (Kings I, 3:12) that riddles are a means of education, we must continue to look for the hidden meanings in the Rabbis’ words, which seem bizarre. We must not take amazing stories literally, as this practice is causing many Jews to become idolatrous. There are no demons running around earth, no angels of death, no powers of segulas that protect. God is the only power, and He created the Earth and heavens and all they behold, with distinct, limited physical properties and laws. Physical creation cannot exceed its design: a piece of twined wool with a scarlet pigmentation does not suddenly get transformed into a device, which wards off God’s punishments. It is unfortunate that we have become so backwards.

And what this leads to, is the children of such superstitious parents finding Christianity as proper to this new “magical, pop-Kabbalistic” Judaism. Jews fail to see the difference between a superstitious Judaism, and other religions, so they convert. And they are accurate in this equation: there is no difference between a Judaism that preaches segulas, and Christianity.

What parents, teachers, and leaders must do is teach that, which for some reason has left the Torah curriculum: I mean Judaism’s Fundamentals. If Jewish children were taught the “What’s” and “Whys” about God’s unity; that He is not physical since He created all physical things; that He created everything and nothing possesses powers but Him alone; that we cannot know what He is; that His Torah is correct; that He rewards and punishes...and if students were taught the proofs behind these ideas as Maimonides teaches in his Laws of Fundamentals...then there would be no room for students to err. However, these Fundamentals are not being taught. Although important, classes in Hebrew language, grammar and electives, are secondary to classes in Torah Fundamentals, and Comparative Religion.

Maimonides formulated his 13 Principles for a reason; they are essential. Make sure your children and students, and yourselves, know them inside out. ■

Angel of Death II

Jessie: In Parshas Chukas, (Numbers, 20:29) it says the entire congregation saw that Aaron had died. Rashi comments: “When they saw Moses and Elazar came down and Aaron didn’t come down they said, “Where is he?” He said, “He died.” The Jews said, “Is it possible that he who stood against the Angel of Death and stopped the plague (in Korach) can be defeated by the Angel of Death?” Immediately Moshe asked for mercy and the ministering angels showed them Aaron lying dead in a bed. They saw and they believed.”

Questions: What is this Medrash trying to teach us? Why would they not believe that Aaron had died? Why did this sort of vision demonstrate that he did die? Why did Moshe need mercy for this demonstration?

Mesora: As always, good questions, and succinct Jess. I believe the first thing we must posit is this: when Aaron stayed the plague, it was necessary to teach the Jews that Aaron and Moses were not murderers. However, this miracle of Aaron standing between the dead and the living during that plague was in part, incorrectly interpreted: that Aaron “the man” possessed some greater power over death. (The Jews saw Aaron standing between the living and dead, and no more people died) Nonetheless, God enacted this miraculous feat were Aaron stayed the plague, so as to correct the false notion harbored by the Jews that Aaron and Moses were murderers, as the Jews formerly accused. So God thereby corrected the false notion of the Jews, that Aaron and Moses killed the “just” congregation of Korach. In fact, Korach’s congregation was evil. So Aaron and Moses were not killers of “innocents”. Aaron demonstrated their innocence by saving the Jews with the incense. However, this act to which you refer, was perceived as Aaron being “above death”, since he stayed the plague of death.

Now, as Moses and Elazar descended the mountain, without Aaron, the Jews were confused and thought, “Aaron beat death in the previous plague, how can he possibly die?” Moses too realized the problem, and saw a solution: beseeching God to intervene, through prayer, but not as you may think. God agreed and responded. The only solution, as Moses anticipated, was that Moses help demonstrate that Aaron had no power over life and death. Perhaps, since Aaron himself was not the cause of the corrupted, immortal reputation maintained by the Jews, hence, he could not be the one who might correct this reputation. Meaning, in order that the Jews realize that Aaron was not immortal, the very Source of life – God – must step in to teach that man is not inherently immortal, and man (Aaron) possesses no power over life at all. When the Jews

realized that Moses was praying to God to correct their false, immortal view of Aaron, they now realized from where their wrong assumption of Aaron’s immortality originated: it was from “God’s” miracle of staying the plague, Aaron was a bystander simply following orders. The Jews either see Moses pray to God, or better, they see God somehow unveil Aaron’s true mortality, which results in the Jews’ realization that it was not Aaron who had any power whatsoever over the lives of the saved Jews, but it was God all along. Thus, this Midrash teaches that Moses’ prayed to God, conveying that Moses knew that God was the cause of the Jews’ salvation, and not Aaron. The Jews, by witnessing Moses’ prayer, or God’s intervention, were enabled to rid themselves of their false assumption and accept Aaron’s mortality, as if the “ministering angels showed them Aaron dead on a bed.”

Nonetheless, the Jews still required Divine assistance to return to the correct view. God intervened and somehow allowed this concept of Aaron’s mortality to penetrate these misled Jews. I don’t believe they actually “saw a bed with Aaron lying in it”. This means they were somehow relieved of their previous, erroneous notion of Aaron’s immortality. Somehow, God addressed this: God’s “ministering angels” conveys this. It means that something other than the actions of the Jews themselves was required to correct the false notion of Aaron’s immortality. In contrast to other cases where prayer is an act of ultimate desperation and beseeching God to intercede, perhaps here, Moses prayer may very well have been a demonstration that God is the source of life, not Aaron. The very “act” of Moses praying to God was what was required to dispel the false idea of Aaron’s immortality, and not so much performed for the need of a response from God.

A similar case is as follows. One angel is “punished” as he ascribed the miraculous phenomena of overturning Sodom to himself, and not to God. The Rabbis wrote that statement to teach a problem with ascribing miracles to anything but God. I would explain the two Rashis (Gen. 19:22) as teaching us exactly that:

(Gen. 19:22) “(The angel said to Lot) Hurry, escape there, for cannot do anything (destroy Sodom) until you come there.”

Rashi 1: “This is the punishment of the angels, on account that they said ‘for we are destroying (Sodom)’, and they ascribed the matter (destroying Sodom) to themselves. Therefore, they did not move from there until they righted, and they said the matter was not under their control.”

Rashi 2: “Two angles are not sent for one mission.”

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Letters

What does Rashi 1 teach? The angels didn't truly talk, ascribing phenomena to themselves. However, the Rabbis have license to write these Midrashim – stories – teaching us fundamentals. Perhaps here, the Rabbis desired to teach a new lesson; that God alone caused the destruction of Sodom. Somehow, there was room for misunderstanding the cause of Sodom's destruction. An angel – a "force of nature" like fire – will sometimes appear as a purely natural event. But as Rashi said, the punishment of that angel was that "it didn't move from that place until it admitted that it had no ability of its own to perform the destruction". The angel – the destructive force that overturned Sodom – didn't necessarily talk. When the angels said, "we are destroying Sodom", this means that the force of nature causing the destruction, seemed natural, and not due to God. But this idea would forfeit the entire lesson, that God punishes the wicked! Nature (angels) appeared to "claim sole responsibility" for Sodom's destruction, with no will of God. Therefore, its appearance required correction, in some manner. There was something about what took place in Sodom, that onlookers might ascribe a natural disaster to Sodom, thereby forfeiting the lesson that it was in reality, a Godly punishment. Hence, no deterrent for future generations would exist. Angels, or natural forces, can only function by the will of God, and not independently.

The "natural" appearance of Sodom's destruction had to somehow be corrected so a warning to others and subsequent generations would exist. The fact that the angels "remained until they corrected themselves", means that within this disaster ordained by God, there was some element which clearly indicated that it was of Divine origin. What that was, I do not know, but it was part of the disastrous process, as it was the angels – these forces – which also corrected the previous error.

Through these Midrashim, the Rabbis teach that although a false idea could be perceived in both – Sodom's destruction, and Aaron's salvation – God insured that both false ideas were corrected.

I would add that regarding Aaron, the people had to first see Moses praying to God, thereby priming their minds to accept a subsequent, metaphysical lesson (Aaron on the bed). Without the first step of the Jews entertaining the idea that Aaron was in fact mortal, perhaps the Jews would not have related to the subsequent, metaphysical lesson.

In turn this teaches that when God educates man, as effectuated via the vision of Aaron dead on the bed, God works within the confines of man's mind, and does not force upon man that which he is yet unready to accept. ■

Perfect Times

Reader: I have been praying and talking to G-d for over 30 years, and have come to the realization that I have not been enthusiastic nor joyous with my attitude and actions for the Redemption. I have not been inspired nor have been mildly inquisitive to find out what this Era of Moshiach is all about. Have I been lulled into complacency by the exile? Are there hundreds or even thousands of other Jews who are devoid, like me?

In my davening, I briefly ask for Hashem's Salvation, the coming of the new offspring of David, and then my words fly onto the next prayer. Maybe I should add another prayer, "To have Hashem help me seek out the knowledge and joy of the Redemption."

What would you recommend to counteract the negativity of the Exile? Where would I find, in-depth information about Moshiach, about the Era of Redemption?

*Thank you,
Chaim*

Mesora: In his Laws of Kings chapters 11 and 12, Maimonides addresses Messianic times. In 12:2, he quotes the Rabbis who teach: "There is no difference between now, and the Messianic Era except for the subservience to foreign governments alone". If so, what's all the hype about?

There may be a number of factors that have lulled you towards a complacent disposition. But perhaps the primary reason the Messianic Era is not on our radar is due to our lack of Torah study. Those who learn Torah regularly are quite taken back – on a daily basis – by the beauty of Torah thought and ideas. Nothing gives a person more fulfillment than apprehending God's will as seen through Torah, creation, or the sharp ideas realized after seemingly incongruous Talmudic portions reveal deep insights. King Solomon wrote Proverbs in this very fashion, so that ideas are hidden and only expose them elves after rigorous study. And when a Torah student uncovers the meaning, the enjoyment is intense.

This is what the Messianic times will offer: an age where study of God will be our main focus, with little exertion to procure our needs. Law 12:4 expresses why the wise sages and prophets longed for Messianic times: it would provide the setting for the highest level of Torah study.

What has lulled us into complacency? It is our ignorance of the highest satisfaction only obtained through a life of thought. But if we too attain an appreciation for what Torah is and the enjoyment it affords, we too will anticipate the Messianic times. It is then so crucial that we immediately immerse ourselves in study under a great teacher for hours every day. ■

Perfection I

Reader: You often talk about "perfection." However, you do not (as far as I know) define what IS perfection. It seems too abstract. Would you mind shedding some light on this idea?

*Thank You,
Aviva*

Mesora: Perfection refers to a person who is in full control of his/her emotions and does not violate a negative command. This person is also morally upright, seeks to help others, and does not give in to ego emotions, or other destructive urges. He or she fulfills all commands as they are to be fulfilled, as he or she recognizes God, what He is, and what he is not. This person is "perfect" in his thoughts and ideas, and in his emotional life. His intellect guides all his actions, and he or she seeks knowledge as their true joy and primary occupation.

Perfection Too

Reader: I was reading The Guide for the Perplexed and I had a question on Maimonides' opinion on wisdom and perfection. He states that metaphysical opinions of G-d is more important than having knowledge of the Law and moral principles, if I understand him correctly. I would think it would be the other way around. It is the very last chapter of the book. (Part 3 Ch 44) It would seem he's saying that an Albert Einstein is more perfected than say, a Rabbi. Or am I getting metaphysics and science confused? I understand metaphysics is how G-d relates to man, animals, the universe, science, etc.

*Thank you in advance,
Joshua*

Mesora: You have not misunderstood metaphysics. But I feel your misunderstanding is in what is known by the Rabbi and Einstein.

Metaphysics refers to "knowledge of God" which includes His justice. This area addresses God, as opposed to physics, which addresses nature. Therefore, metaphysical knowledge is more essential than moral knowledge, such as laws of stealing. Possessing a corrupt view of God – poor metaphysical knowledge – a person is further from the truth, than if his ideas of stealing are corrupt. Thus, one who steals but knows as best as humanly possible what God is, is more perfected than one who never steals, but thinks God is physical.

Now, your suggestion the Rabbi is involved in moral law and not metaphysics is not a true assessment. A Rabbi will – or should – be fully versed in metaphysics. This area is not reserved for scientists and metaphysicians, but as Maimonides teaches, it is primary in life for all mankind. The "fundamental of fundamentals". The Rabbi will certainly be on a higher level than an Einstein, since he possesses not only metaphysics, but knowledge of morality and its perfection too. ■