



We must not merely listen to the Rabbis, but we must also confirm their words are rooted in Torah texts. If you wish to know for certain what is God's truth, always ask for a Torah source.

1997
2008
11
YEARS

JewishTimes

Dedicated to Scriptural and Rabbinic Verification of Authentic Jewish Beliefs and Practices

Volume VIII, No. 1...Oct. 24, 2008

WWW.MESORA.ORG/JEWISHTIMES

Download and Print Free

IN THIS ISSUE

| | |
|----------------------|-------|
| PARSHA: BERESHIT | I-5 |
| LETTERS | I,6,7 |
| CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM | 8,9 |

THE JEWISHTIMES
EDUCATING 10,000S
WORLDWIDE



JOIN IN THE MITZVAH
WWW.MESORA.ORG/DONATE

CANDLE LIGHTING 10/24

| | | | |
|--------------|------|---------------|------|
| Boston | 5:31 | Moscow | 4:50 |
| Chicago | 5:38 | New York | 5:45 |
| Cleveland | 6:15 | Paris | 6:25 |
| Detroit | 6:19 | Philadelphia | 5:50 |
| Houston | 6:24 | Phoenix | 5:26 |
| Jerusalem | 5:39 | Pittsburgh | 6:09 |
| Johannesburg | 6:01 | Seattle | 5:48 |
| Los Angeles | 5:50 | Sydney | 5:57 |
| London | 5:30 | Tokyo | 4:37 |
| Miami | 6:27 | Toronto | 6:03 |
| Montreal | 5:36 | Washington DC | 5:59 |

Weekly Parsha

Bereshit

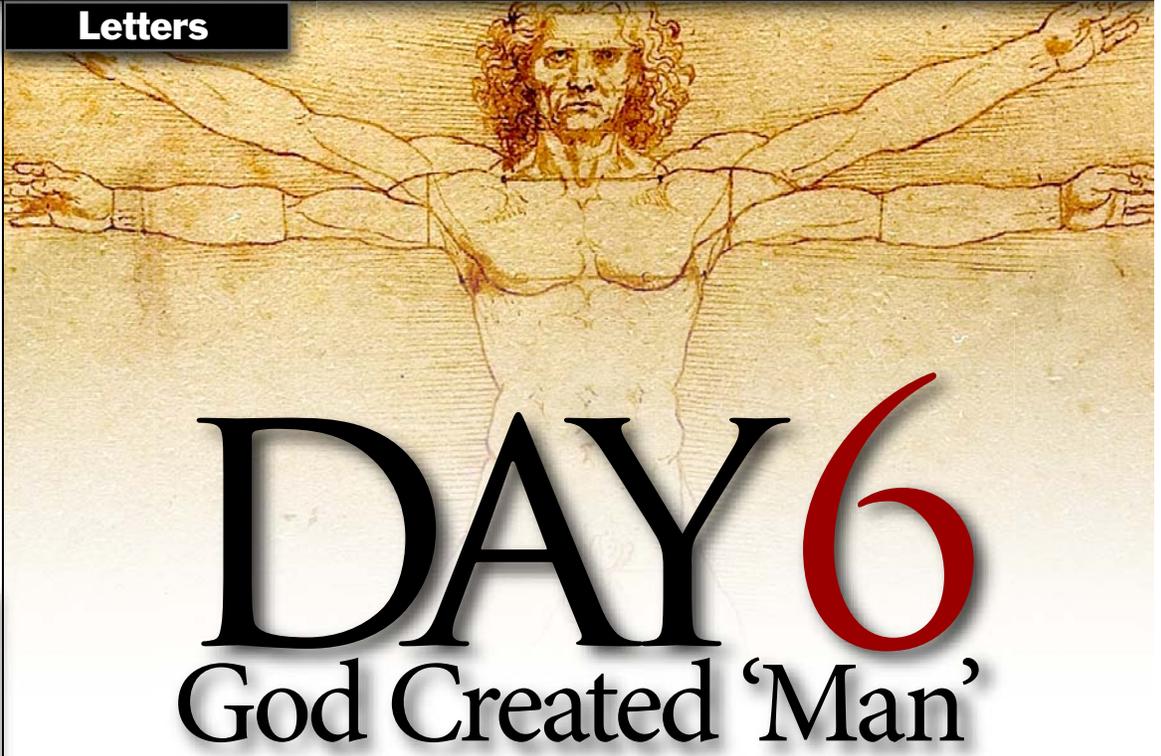
RABBI BERNIE FOX

Hashem Consulted the Torah in Creating the Universe

"In the beginning, the Lord created the heavens and the earth."
(Bereshit 1:1)

(continued on next page)

Letters



DAY 6

God Created 'Man'

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: Shalom R' Moshe,

Your sincerity and humility in reaching out to us Noachides is very rare and I deeply appreciate it. I am especially moved when you mentioned that "your duty is to make Torah accessible to non-Jews, and if the tables were turned and you were born a non-Jew, you would expect the same to be done for you". I must say that I have not heard anything like this from any rabbi before.

My experience with Chabad is a sharp contrast! After I came to know Torah truth and repented of my idolatrous religion, I have been searching high and low for rabbis, in fact, any rabbi who is willing to teach Torah truths to Noachides like me. I live in Malaysia and there's no rabbi here. So I approached rabbis in neighbouring countries (Thailand and Singapore), but none of them were willing to teach Torah to a non-Jew. And these are people who boast their good works! Can you imagine that one of these Chabad rabbis even told me that it's a sin to convert people?! He said that converting people is like telling God "You made a mistake in having made them Noachides". It's insane, it's like saying, God forbid, that the revelation at Sinai was a mistake, and that God should have let the to-be-Jewish people remain as Noachides. To me, you are a seldom-found voice crying in the wilderness – one that is much needed.

Yasher koach in your good works.

Kol tov,
Yosh

(response on page 6)

(Bereshit cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



The JewishTimes is published every Friday and delivered by email. Subscriptions are FREE. To subscribe, send any email message to: subscribe@mesora.org

Subscribers will also receive our advertisers' emails and our regular email announcements.

Contacts:

We invite feedback or any questions at this address: office@mesora.org
Ph(516)569-8888 Fx(516)569-0404

Advertising:

<https://www.Mesora.org/Advertising>

Donations:

<https://www.Mesora.org/Donate>

Content at Mesora.org:**JewishTimes Archives:**

<http://www.Mesora.org/JewishTimes>

Philosophy Archives:

<http://www.Mesora.org/Philosophy>

Weekly Parsha Archives:

<http://www.Mesora.org/WeeklyParsha>

Audio Archives:

<http://www.Mesora.org/Audio>

Interactive, Live, Audible Sessions:

<http://www.Mesora.org/TalkLive>

Database Search:

<http://www.Mesora.org/Search>

Articles may be reprinted without consent of the JewishTimes or the authors, provided the content is not altered, and credits are given.

The term used in the pasuk for “the beginning” is resheit. The Midrash Rabbah explains that this term is an allusion to the Torah. The Midrash continues and comments that Hashem looked into the Torah in order to construct the universe.[1]

This teaching of the Sages must be carefully considered. The simple meaning of the Midrash defies understanding. Hashem is the source of all truth and wisdom. He does not need to consult any other source to determine His actions. Furthermore, the Torah is His creation. It contains His wisdom. There is no purpose in the Creator’s seeking a blueprint within His own Torah.

The Midrash contains an important lesson in life. Many people are profoundly unhappy. The reasons for their unhappiness vary. Some complain that they are unable to balance their various responsibilities and needs. Others feel that they cannot discover any meaning to existence. Without meaning, their lives seem empty and depressing. It would appear that, for many, the pursuit of happiness presents insurmountable challenges. Why is there so much unhappiness?

Our Sages are responding to this issue. They are telling us that the world has a specific purpose, and it is designed to serve this purpose. Because of its design, we cannot expect to use the resources of our world in any manner that we choose. Let us consider an analogy. Imagine a ball of clay. This is a very flexible medium. The artisan has freedom to mold the clay as he or she pleases. The clay will assume the shape chosen by the artisan. By contrast, a hammer is not nearly as flexible. It is a tool with a specific design. In order for an artisan to use the hammer successfully, he must consider its design. The hammer can be used with positive results to drive nails into wood. Now, imagine a foolish person using a hammer as a toothbrush. We would not be surprised if this individual were unhappy with the outcome.

If the universe lacked specific design, it would be reasonable to assume its resources, and elements could be adapted to any purpose we would imagine. Each person could choose to mold his or her environment to correspond with individual goals and endeavors. Many different lifestyles would offer similar potential for happiness. Our Sages, however, are positing that a design does exist. In this sense, the universe resembles the hammer. It was created as an environment to support the way of life and the values outlined in the Torah. Like the hammer, it

works well, if used within the parameters of its purpose. However, if one attempts to use the world that Hashem created towards some other end that is not consistent with its design, frustration is inevitable. This is the meaning of our Sages in their comment that Hashem looked into the Torah in creating the world. He designed our universe as an environment to support the life of Torah. It is this life that is destined to bring us the greatest happiness.

This does not imply that a non-Jew cannot find happiness. The Torah includes a set of laws. These were given to the Jewish people. However, the Torah also includes universal values and a unique outlook. These aspects of Torah are appropriate for all of humanity. They serve as a key, available to all, for finding happiness and fulfillment.



Human Beings are Created in Hashem’s Likeness

“And the L-rd said: Let us make humankind, in Our image and in Our likeness, and they will rule over the fish of the ocean, the fowl of the skies, the beasts and all of the earth, and over all that crawls upon the earth.” (Bereshit 1:26)

Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno offers an interesting interpretation of the phrase “in our likeness.” He explains that humans partake of the “likeness of G-d” through the unique characteristic of freewill. Beasts respond to stimulus without the ability to choose. Only the human being has the capacity to make choices. In this sense, the human being is like G-d. Sforno goes on to explain that although the human being chooses between good and evil, sometimes choosing the latter, Hashem always chooses the good.[2] The comments of Sforno seem difficult to understand. How can he say that G-d actually has free choice, but at the same time, argue that G-d can only choose the good?

Sforno’s comments contain a deep insight into the concept of freewill. Sforno maintains that freewill does not mean the ability to select a course of action from among alternatives. This definition does not apply to Hashem. Hashem is perfect and His actions must be consistent with His perfection. Instead, freewill means to be the cause of one’s own actions. In other words, freewill is to be able to act free of any outside the influence or external causes.

(continued on next page)

The human being is unique in this ability. We have the volition to raise ourselves above negative surroundings and choose to follow the path of righteousness. Similarly, we bear responsibility for freely choosing evil. We are responsible for this choice because we have the ability to be the cause of our own actions. Although Hashem only chooses the good, He is uninfluenced by and free of any influence outside of Himself. He alone, is the source of all His actions.

Why isn't the Universe More Perfect

"And the land brought forth vegetation, plants bearing their own kinds of seeds, and trees producing fruits containing their own kinds of seeds. And G-d saw that it was good." (Bereshit 1:12)

This passage describes the emergence of vegetation on the third day of creation. The passage tells us that one element of this vegetation was fruit bearing trees. Rashi comments that the earth was not obedient to Hashem. Hashem had commanded the earth to bring forth fruit trees with flavored wood or bark. According to Hashem's design, the wood was to share the taste of the fruit. The earth did not obey. It produced trees with flavorful fruit. However, this taste was not characteristic of the wood.

Rashi further comments that the earth was subsequently punished for its disobedience. When G-d punished humanity and exiled Adam and Chava from Gan Eden – the Garden of Eden, He also cursed the earth. This curse was in response to the disobedience alluded to by our passage.[3]

Rashi's comments present obvious difficulties. How can the commands of Hashem be defied by the earth? Only humanity is endowed with freewill. All other elements of creation must respond to the commands of Hashem! It is also difficult to explain Hashem's reaction to this disobedience. Why punish the earth? The earth is not responsible for this deviation from the command. Furthermore, it is devoid of intellectual understanding. What is achieved through punishing the earth? It is clear that Rashi is presenting an allegorical lesson. What is the message?

Hashem wished to create a perfect universe. However, His will also dictated that this universe should be governed by natural law. Therefore, Hashem did not instantaneously create the present-day universe. Instead, He designed the building blocks of the universe and developed the universe from these building blocks. In other words, Nature was His tool in the process of creation. He worked through the laws of nature



to produce the universe that exists today. This was a step-by-step process. The Torah's account of creation is a synopsis of the basic developmental steps.

This scenario results in a conflict. Every tool has its limitations. Nature sets limits. Working with the laws of nature as a tool imposes restrictions on the design of the universe. Therefore, Hashem's will to work within natural law resulted in a universe consistent with these laws. It also produced a universe that was somewhat compromised in its perfection. An example will illustrate this point. Assume I want to draw a square. The perfection of my drawing will be determined by the tools used. A sharp pencil will create a more defined image. A straight-edge will allow for more precision. A decision to restrict myself to a dull pencil and to not use a ruler will impose limitations on the perfection of the final product. Hashem chose to impose a restriction upon Himself. He would design the universe using natural law. This limited the perfection that could be achieved.

We can now understand Rashi's comments. In the abstract, a tree with flavored wood would be more perfect than the trees that actually vegetates the earth. Rashi explains that the earth could not produce this more perfect tree. This was a result of Hashem's decision to work within nature. The tree that nature produced was less perfect than the ideal.

Rashi's comments regarding Hashem's punishment of the earth are more difficult to interpret. It seems that Rashi feels that Hashem would not have cursed the earth had its perfection been more complete. In other words, Hashem would not have cursed a creation that reflected the ideal perfection. However, the earth did not meet the ideal of perfection. Its trees reflected limited perfection. Therefore, Hashem was willing to curse the earth.

The Purpose of Creation and the Purpose of Prayer

"And all the trees of the field were not yet on the earth and all the plants of the field had not yet sprouted, for Hashem had not caused it to rain on the earth and there was no humanity to work the land." (Bereshit 2:5)

Why do we pray? Probably, most people would respond that we pray because we have needs and we turn to Hashem in order to secure these needs. Unfortunately, this motivation often ends in disaster. At first, the motivation leads the petitioner to pray with intensity and sincerity. The assumption of the petitioner is that if one prays properly, Hashem will respond. True, everyone knows that many prayers seem to go unanswered. But the hopeful petitioner initially assumes that this is because these unanswered prayers were not appropriate or that they were not offered properly or with adequate sincerity. This leads to the conclusion that if one is sure that the request is worthy of a response and the prayer is offered properly and sincerely, Hashem will answer.

But this is where the problem arises. Often, the petitioner feels that he or she has fulfilled these requirements. The prayers the supplicant offers are sincere, proper, and appropriate. Yet, the petitioner can detect no response from Hashem. At this point, frustration sets in and the person who recently prayed with fervor and sincerity becomes disillusioned. Prayer becomes much more difficult or even impossible. Prayer is replaced with resentment. Where did things go wrong? How can Hashem expect us to pray with sincerity if so many of our most sincere prayers seem to go unanswered? Why does Hashem command us to pray and then seemingly disregard our supplications? The answer is not simple and requires extensive discussion. But some simple observations may be helpful.

We know that prayer is an act of service to Hashem. Maimonides, in defining the mitzvah of prayer, formulates it as "to serve Hashem daily through prayer." [4] This formulation suggests that we must revisit the common motivation for prayer. If we pray in order to secure our needs, we are focused primarily upon ourselves. It is impossible to reconcile this essentially self-centered motivation with the concept of service to Hashem. Consider an analogy. You ask a friend to do you a favor and pick up a sandwich for you at the deli. Is it possible to describe the act of making this request as an act of devotion to your friend? Of course not! You are asking your friend to show devotion to you. So, if the purpose of prayer is to

(continued on next page)

(Bereshit cont. from previous page)

Weekly Parsha

secure Hashem's assistance in satisfying our own needs, prayer is self-serving and not an act of selfless worship. The implication of this analysis is that although it is appropriate to petition Hashem for our personal needs in our prayers, this is not the primary purpose of prayer. Prayer is a form of worship. The central figure in the act of prayer must be Hashem – not us.

Based on Maimonides' characterization of prayer, we can certainly understand the elements of praise and the expressions of thanks that are included in the prayers formulated by our Sages. But despite these elements of praise and thanks that are included in the daily prayer services, it is difficult to reconcile the characterization of prayer as worship with the overall format for prayer established by our Sages. The central component of our daily prayer is the Amidah. Most of the blessings of the weekday Amidah consist of requests. We ask for knowledge, health, redemption, restoration of the Temple, and many other needs. We are urged by our Sages to personalize these requests and insert into the proper blessing personal needs. For example, in the blessing for health, we are to add a special prayer for specific individuals that are ill.[5] How can we reconcile for this emphasis on requests with the characterization of prayer as a selfless act of worship?

In order to answer this question, we must begin with an analysis of human nature. If we are honest with ourselves, we will realize that human nature is fundamentally self-centered. We work towards being sensitive to others and being empathic, but we cannot easily overcome our fixation with ourselves. Each of us must deal with the challenge of self-centeredness. We see ourselves as the central figure of our own universe and must struggle to make room for the needs, wishes, and desires of others. This phenomenon of human nature makes it difficult to be aware of G-d. We take for granted His kindness and benevolence. We feel entitled and must struggle to appreciate Hashem. An even greater battle is required to recognize Hashem – and not oneself – as the true center of all reality.

Yet, the Torah regards this struggle as an essential element of human perfection. We are expected to break out of our self-centeredness. We are required to respect the rights of others as being on par with our own rights. More fundamentally, we are required to recognize Hashem as the pivotal element of all existence and the true center of the universe. To our Sages, one of the basic measures of human perfection is the degree



to which a person breaks out of the personal, self-centered, subjective reality, and grasps the objective, G-d centered reality of the universe. How can we make this transition from the self-centered to the G-d centered view of reality?

Part of the solution is outlined by our Sages in their comments on our parasha. These comments are quoted by Rashi in his commentary. The Torah explains that although Hashem created vegetation on third day of creation, the vegetation remained dormant until the sixth day. On the sixth day Hashem caused it to rain and the dormant vegetation sprung to life and covered our world. Our Sages asked: Why did Hashem wait until the sixth day to fully develop the lush covering of the Earth? The Sages respond that before the sixth day, humanity did not exist. No human being had yet been created who could appreciate the wonderful blessing of rain. On the sixth day, humanity was created. Adam realized that the trees and plants needed rain, and he prayed for rain. In response to Adam's prayer, Hashem brought forth rain and the vegetation sprang to life.[6]

Why did Hashem wait for Adam's prayers? Why did Hashem not create humanity in a world that was already fully developed? The message of our Sages is that Hashem wanted to help humanity gain an appreciation of Hashem's kindness, benevolence, and our dependence upon Him. In order to accomplish this, Hashem granted rain in response to Adam's request. Adam was required to first ask – to recognize his dependence upon Hashem. Only then did Hashem respond with the rain that Adam had realized he needed to exist.

These comments provide a moving insight into the purpose of prayer. When we turn to Hashem to make our requests, we recognize our dependence. We cannot know whether we will be answered, or even what form an answer might take. But we submit to Hashem and acknowledge His central role in providing all that we have. We are forced – if we pray with sincerity – to recognize that His gracious kindness is not an entitlement. We are required to – at least for a few moments – see the universe as it really exists and not through the lens of our innate self-centeredness.

There is another astounding comment of our Sages on this week's parasha that further develops their remarkable perspective on human nature and the fundamental definition of human perfection.

(continued on next page)



“And the heavens and earth were completed and all of their components.” (Bereshit 2:1)

This passage describes the moment at the advent of the first Shabbat. The passage is the first verse in a set of passages we recite each Friday night before reciting the Shabbat kiddush. Our Sages comment that when a person recites this set of passages, one becomes Hashem’s partner in the work of creation.[7] How does the recitation of a few passages from the Torah make a person Hashem’s partner?

First, let us consider the content of the passages. Essentially, the passages acknowledge that Hashem created the universe in six days and rested on the seventh. This seventh day, He blessed and sanctified the Shabbat. In reciting these passages, we acknowledge Hashem as creator. We affirm the sanctity of the Shabbat as a memorial to creation.

If through making this acknowledgment we become Hashem’s partners in creation, then we can deduce an amazing insight into the purpose of creation. Of course, we cannot fully understand Hashem’s motives for creation. His motives are an expression of His unfathomable divine nature. But we can derive from the comments of our Sages some limited insight into their understanding of the purpose of creation. If our acknowledgement of creation elevates us into a partnership with the Creator, apparently an element of Hashem’s design was to create a universe in which human beings would perceive Him. Our Sages are telling us that when we recognize Hashem as the Creator and center of all existence, we realize an element of the divine plan in creation.

This outlook once again indicates the fundamental importance of prayer. Just as when we recite this paragraph, so too in prayer we acknowledge our dependant relationship upon Hashem and recognize His centrality in our universe. ■

[1] Midrash Rabbah, Sefer Bereshit 1:1.

[2] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Bereshit 1:26.

[3] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Bereshit 1:11.

[4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam/Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Tefillah, Introduction.

[5] Mesechet Avodah Zarah 8a.

[6] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Bereshit 2:5.

[7] Mesechet Shabbat 119b.

DAY 6

God Created Man

(continued from page 1)

Mesora: Yosh, thank you for your kind words. Torah study demands proof, and sources. Yet, Chabad makes claims that are in opposition to Torah ideals. I wonder what their gentile donors would say, had they told them this view of "inferior gentiles". Chabad takes millions from gentile supporters during their telethons: their money is good enough to take, but their souls are second rate. I also often hear in Chabad's defense, "But look at all the good they do". I disagree: if this is what they teach, I fail to see how falsehood becomes a "good" if it's spread wide enough. They do not represent Torah values. Let's learn what the Torah does in fact say...

The Torah says that God didn't create "Jew and Gentile". God created "man and woman". No one was created with a different soul, more perfect than any other person. Thus, Abraham was no different than any other human. Yet, God spoke to him. So I ask any "superior" Jew today, "Did God ever speak to YOU?" Hence, Abraham – a non Jew – was on a far greater level than any Jew today. Abraham – the Noachide – far surpassed any Chabad member.

We also just read (Deut. 32:8) that God "delineated the nations according to the number of Israelites". Rashi teaches this as referring to the 70 languages with which God dispersed the generation of Babel. 70 was also the number of Jews who entered Egypt. God equates the former Bable generation, to the Jews. What's the equation? I believe God is teaching that He desired the former Noachides to possess the same goodness He eventually bestowed on Israel, namely, the Torah. Talmud Avoda Zara 2b says this openly: God offered Torah to the other nations.

God created mankind, once. He never reinvented man. Thus, all nations possess the identical soul. ■

Man of Torah

Reader: I am a Catholic writer who is married to a Reform Jew. As you may know, Pope John Paul II often referred to the Jewish people as our "elder brothers in faith." My goal in registering here is to grow in my understanding of the Jewish faith that Catholicism claims as its roots. OK... now to my question...

Regarding the following quote from Torah from Sinai: "The religionist believes first in God and then in his mind and senses, while the man of Torah, who bases himself on evidence, accepts his mind and his senses and then proceeds to recognize God and His Torah by means of these tools. Only the man of Torah perceives God as a reality as his ideas concerning God register on the same part of his mind that all ideas concerning reality do."

According to Rabbi Chait's description above, would Abraham be considered more akin to the "religionist," or to the "man of Torah?"

Mesora: Abraham is akin to the "man of Torah". He discovered God using his mind, similar to a scientist who discovers God through the universe. In contrast, the religionist first accepts any notion of God – not based on a rational approach. As Rabbi Chait says, he does not approach God using his sense of reality. Such an individual operates on a purely emotional, religious path, not based on anything he has witnessed in the universe. This latter religionist is not following reason, but religious emotion. He therefore construes an idea of God that is not based in reality. A critique.

The "man of Torah" has "ideas concerning God that register on the same part of his mind that all ideas concerning reality do". The "man of Torah" lives in reality. That was Abraham, and that is why God selected him to teach all who followed him. (Gen. 18:19) ■



Letters

from our

READERS



Letters



Letters

from our

READERS



Afterlife: w/o God?

I was recently asked if one could receive the Afterlife, if he did not accept that God exists. The same question was answered in the affirmative by a Conservative Rabbi, although no Torah source was quoted by that Rabbi in his response. I could not disagree more. As always, when claiming some view is, or is not part of Torah, one must base his or her answer on reason, and Torah sources. I will do so...

Reason

First of all, in the Shema prayer (Deut. 6:4,5) God Himself requires that we not only affirm that He exists, that He governs Israel, and that He is One, but that we must also love Him with "all our hearts, all our soul and all our might". Now, as Love of God is one of the 613 commands, which even the Conservatives accept, how could this Rabbi claim that man is commanded to "love God, and with all his abilities", yet, man need not affirm God exists to receive the Afterlife? Loving a God that one feels does not exist, is impossible.

Additionally, Shema demands that we must also accept that God is "Elohaynu", "our God". "Our God" means that He created and governs mankind. That is the undeniable, Torah definition of "God". If a person denies this fundamental of fundamentals, there is no greater crime, and certainly, he cannot be gifted the greatest reward of the Afterlife. Moreover, since the Afterlife is a state of being where we gain our most knowledge of God, if one denies God's existence, his being is antithetical to the Afterlife. He cannot exist in that world.

Furthermore, King Solomon stated, "The fear of God is the prerequisite of knowledge..." (Proverbs 1:7) Now, if a man or woman does not accept God, this wisest man next to Moses thereby states that such a person has no knowledge, since, "The fear of God is the prerequisite of knowledge..." Now, if one has no knowledge, his or her view is wrong. And the Rabbis teach that if "one prepares for Sabbath, he will eat on Sabbath". This is a metaphor for life and death. That is, "If one prepares for the Afterlife, only then can he enjoy the Afterlife." And since the only feature of the Afterlife is knowledge of God, one who didn't study and rejects God, has not prepared. The Rabbis thereby teach that this person has no Afterlife. For knowledge is only

"Talmud Sanhedrin (90a) cites those who do not receive the Afterlife: one who denies Resurrection is in the Torah, and one who embarrasses a Torah scholar (99b).

If these lesser crimes cause one to forfeit his or her Afterlife, certainly, rejection of God forfeits one's Afterlife"

accurate, if a person sees God as the Creator of all he studies. But if one's knowledge does not eventuate in an appreciation of God, such knowledge is useless, for he feels there is no Creator, or that something else created all that exists.

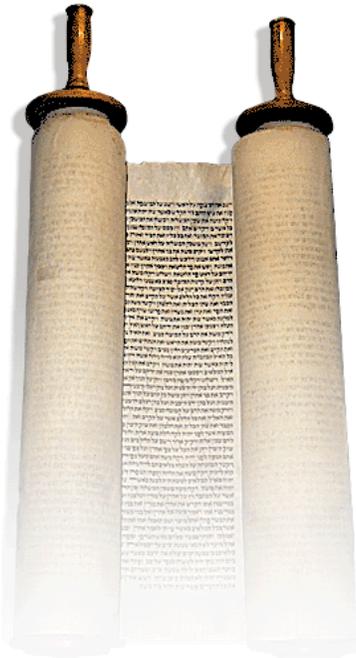
Torah Sources

Leviticus 17:7 warns against the idolatrous practice of sacrificing to demons, imaginary beings. In verse 17:9 God states that He will cut off the soul (remove the Afterlife) from one who does not bring his sacrifice to God in the Temple, but brings them in the other places, as demon sacrifices. Such an individual abandons God, and loses his soul, his Afterlife. Ibn Ezra (17:7) explains this severe punishment is because one feels something exists – aside from God – that can "do good or punish man". We thereby learn that if we feel anything else caused our existences (doing good) we thereby go astray from following God, as 17:7 warns against. Abandoning God meets with the death of our souls.

Talmudic Sources

Talmud Sanhedrin (90a) cites those who do not receive the Afterlife: one who denies Resurrection is in the Torah, and one who embarrasses a Torah scholar (99b). If these lesser crimes cause one to forfeit his or her Afterlife, certainly, rejection of God forfeits one's Afterlife, and need not be mentioned, as this is obvious.

Unfortunately, many people – even Rabbis – spread false positions in the name of Torah, but are in fact in opposition to the Torah. The rule: always ask for a source. ■



Conservative vs. Orthodox Judaism

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Is it correct to suggest that any Jew has the right to choose a Judaism that ‘best suits him or her’? This we answer quite easily, as God instructs man not to add or subtract from the Torah: “This entire matter which I command to you, guard yourselves to observe it: do not add upon it, and do not subtract from it.” (Deut. 13:1) God further states that He will not forgive one who justifies their deviation from the Torah. (Deut. 29:18,19) It is quite clear from God Himself that alteration of Torah violates His will, and such an altered form can no longer be considered “Judaism”.

Today, “Judaism” has many forms. How do we determine which form is authentic

Judaism, and which ones are imposters? Certainly, as God prohibited alteration of Torah, many forms of Judaism cannot all lay claim as the “true Judaism”. All must be wrong except for one. By what means might we evaluate these many forms, so as to arrive at God’s true Torah system?

God teaches (above; Deut. 29:18,19) that subjective feelings are no grounds for observing a different Judaism than your fellow man. And this makes sense. For if two people have identical ailments, no doctor will change his prescription or surgery methods for the one of these people, who has a different outlook on life. One’s personal feelings do not affect the nature of one’s ailments. So identical treatments are warranted.

Similarly, all mankind share not only identical physical characteristics, but also, we share identical psychological, intellectual and emotional designs. We all have feelings of love, hate, revenge, sorrow, loneliness, etc. We all feel greater self-pride when we resolve advanced thought questions, as opposed to building sand castles: we know our intellect is the higher feature within us. We all love family naturally, and can love others conditionally. We all miss those with whom we share good times and common values, and we all want answers to questions that intrigue us. And above all, we all want happiness.

For this reason, it makes sense that just as the doctor prescribes the identical drug for the identical ailment, God too prescribes only one religion for all mankind. God never gave a second religion to the world. Such religions are without proof, and are always based on belief, since proof is not found. But reason alone dictates that there cannot be more than one religion, for a single mankind.

When we refer to “Judaism”, we refer to the Written Torah (Five Books of Moses) and the Oral Law (the Mishna). Judaism is then synonymous with the Written and Oral Laws. We call this system “Torah”. On this point, there is no confusion or doubt.

The Torah was given about 3320 years ago. This too is not debated. Just as mass witnesses concerning any event prove Alexander the Great, for example; the masses at Sinai (2.5 million) prove that event too, as well as the Egyptian Plagues, the Red Sea parting, the Manna, and the pillars of fire and cloud. No intelligent person disputes the unanimous transmission of “events” witnessed by masses.

But this must not be confused with the transmission of “beliefs” that all other religions hang on to as their defense. However, “belief” is not “proof”, and living without proof is unreasonable, when in fact, proof does exist for Israel’s history of God’s providence, and His one-time giving of a religion.

This original, Orthodox Judaism received by Moses and transmitted throughout the millennia went unchallenged, precisely because of those mass witnesses, and because literally all Rabbis understood Torah as that one, identical system. In fact, the Torah teaches that those who opposed what Moses received – namely Korach and his rebellion – were killed by God when the Earth opened its mouth and swallowed them. Moses was thereby validated as possessing true Judaism. This event also validates all Rabbis who uphold the stringencies of Sabbath observance transmitted by Moses. It is true that observance can be trying at times, but that is no reason for Frankel to have rejected a clear understanding of the lessons of Korach, or the man who carried wood on Sabbath (below). In time, those who earnestly study the Torah will find its observance becomes easier, as our appreciation for the deep ideas strikes us profoundly, and with a feeling of such fortune.

Conservative Judaism loosened the stringencies on Torah observance, as its founder Zechariah Frankel said, “Judaism must adapt to each cultural era”. The teachings of Zacharias Frankel (1801-75) form the foundation of Conservative Judaism. Frankel broke away from the Reform movement in Germany in the 1840s. He opined that Judaism had developed in response to the different conditions of Jewish life in various civilizations. But our quotes from God Himself insist that God created Judaism, and man must not alter this Torah.

The Torah cites a case (Numbers 15:35) where a man gathered wood on the Sabbath, and was killed by God’s command. If Conservative Judaism allows one to drive to Temple on Sabbath, this too violates God outlined Sabbath prohibitions. The Rabbis below unanimously understand this crime of carrying to equate with ignition, which occurs when driving an automobile. Each of these violations is considered 1 of the 39 forms of prohibited Sabbath labor. It is vital that we are clear on what God says, and how Conservative Judaism violates His word.

(continued on next page)

The Torah says that we judge Halachik matters by the majority, which Frankel clearly was not. Frankel himself should have agreed with this rule of determining Jewish Law, but he erred again here.

But the most powerful argument is that Judaism's original form was Orthodoxy. When something comes into existence, that is its true form.

It must strike an intelligent person, that for 3000 years; all Rabbis supported Judaism in its original form. These include Maimonides, Ramban, hundreds of Talmudic Rabbis, Rabbeinu Nissim, Ritvah, Rashbah, Rashi, Tosfos, Ibn Ezra, Sforno, Malbim, Samson Raphael Hirsch, Radak, Joseph Caro (author of the Shulchan Aruch) Rif, Taz, Shach, Maharsha, the Rash, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik and all other Rabbis. It was not until 200 years ago that one individual named Zacharias Frankel argued on thousands of brilliant Rabbis. We say "brilliant", as Frankel was not on par with any of the great Rabbis, as we see their voluminous, deep writings, and the absence of such in Frankel's case. No Rabbi ever suggested that Torah should be altered based on any cultural change. Frankel did say this, violating true Judaism.

Additionally, the Torah says that we judge Halachik matters by the majority, which Frankel clearly was not. Frankel himself should have agreed with this rule of determining Jewish Law, but he erred again here.

But the most powerful argument is that Judaism's original form was Orthodoxy. When something comes into existence, that is its true form. Similarly, actors who mimic great stars, cannot be better than the original. They cannot be the original.

At times, we are faced with an emotional dilemma: "Do I continue following someone for whom I have strong admiration, deep respect, and has done so much for me, but now I see he or she is wrong? Can I truly follow what my mind tells me, if it means admitting that my teacher was wrong? How can I disagree with my teacher, and to his face?" This is obviously difficult, but our adherence must be to what we now see has always been true Judaism. We must not favor smooth relationships with others – even beloved teachers – if it means we deny these truths.

I truly hope the objective reader will allow these arguments I have presented to resonate, and review them until they are clear. One's path in life must follow truth, not people. I feel the truth supports Orthodox Judaism, and rejects all other forms. ■

JewishTimes

The Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought

It's better to give and to receive!

Give: Email a FREE subscription of the JewishTimes to a friend or relative and they'll also receive 2 free gifts at right: our 60 pg book Retrospective and the 32 pg Passover Special edition with astonishing imagery.

Receive: As you help grow our readership, more advertisers place ads. We pass that on to you in the form of your continued, free JewishTimes subscription. Plus, we'll give you these 2 publications! *Invite others today!*

www.Mesora.org/Subscriptions

