

JewishTimes

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GOD'S *plan for* MAN

Tisha B'Av

Devarim

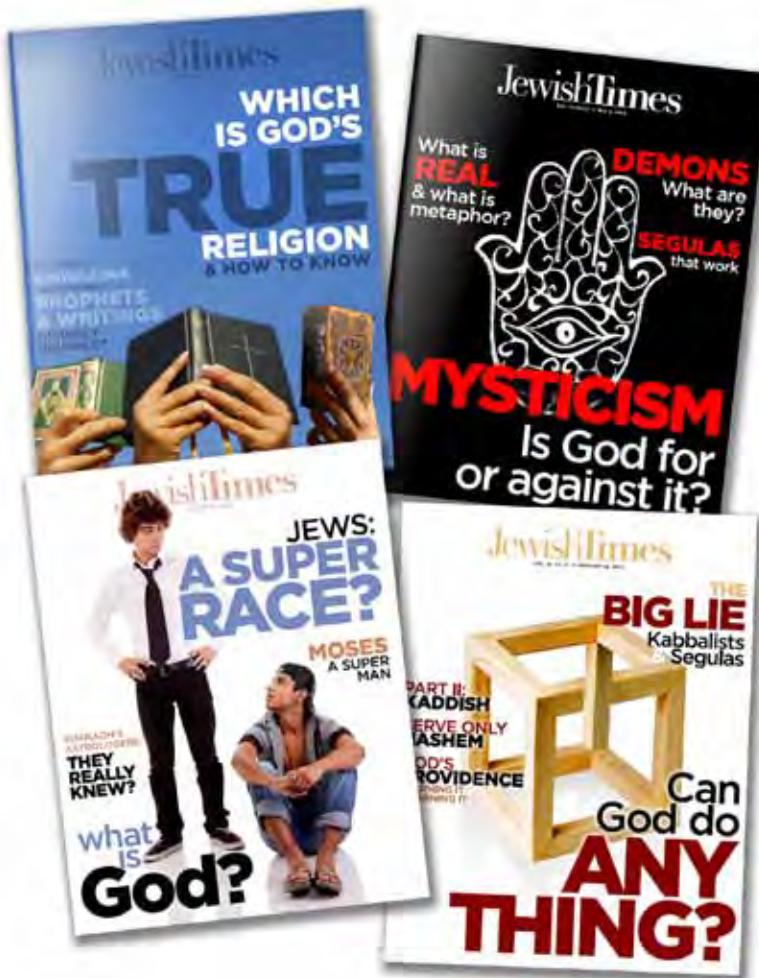
God vs. the
Multiverse
Parts VI–VIII

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LETTERS

Omens

I have had a bit of a disagreement with a local rabbi about various 'customs' surrounding the Havdalla wine at the Sabbath conclusion, which seem to me to be omens or amulets and therefore, according to you, forbidden. For instance, wine overflowing and dipping fingers in the wine afterwards and putting it on ones eyes and in ones pockets to ensure success for the upcoming week. I would like your comments please.

-Arieh

Rabbi: Yes, these are Nichush (omen) violations. See Mishne Torah, Avoda Zarah chapter 11. Any act that has no demonstrated effects, and people claim it causes certain results...is Nichush and a form of idolatry.

Arieh: I suppose the same applies to the the following, taken from a shiur sent out last week (davka on hilchot teshuva of the Rambam):

"As my own simple example, there were times in the past when I would leave morning synagogue services

(continued on page 11)

Is Torah mystical... or rational, just like God's natural laws? It's time a book unveiled the truth.

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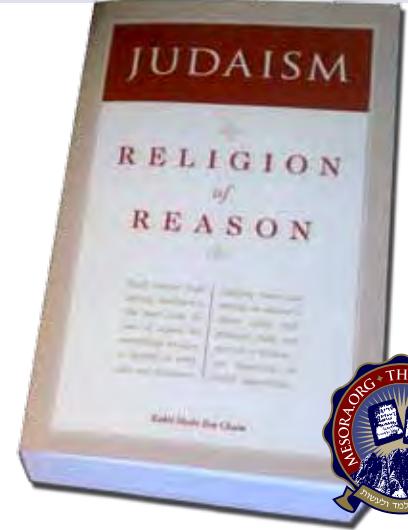
RABBI REUVEN MANN — *Rabbi, Y. Israel of Phoenix*

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim has written extensively on Jewish philosophy for many years. His ideas are rooted in a rational approach. He follows the great philosophers like Rambam and Saadia Gaon. He is opposed to all forms of "mysticism" and seeks to debunk all practices and beliefs which are rooted in superstition and contrary to reason. This work covers a wide variety of topics, of interest to contemporary; insightful analyses of Biblical narratives as well as the significance of many mitzvot. Rabbi Ben-Chaim demonstrates that Judaism can be harmonized with human reason. He is not afraid to ask the most penetrating and challenging questions as he is convinced that Torah is the Word of God and based on the highest form of wisdom. Jews who have a profound desire to make sense out of their religion will benefit greatly from reading this book.



RABBI STEVEN WEIL — *Executive Vice President, The Orthodox Union*

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim asks critical, crucial and defining questions that any thinking Jew needs to ask. His method enables the reader to explore and engage our theology in a meaningful and serious way. Following the Rishonim, he forces us to define, weigh and analyze each phrase of chazal, showing there is no contradiction between an investigation of Science and an investigation of Judaism. Rabbi Ben-Chaim has written a work that addresses the thinking person of all faiths. This work speaks to the scholar and lay person alike and will help you gain insight into how the great Rishonim define how we view the world. Rabbi Ben-Chaim's website, Mesora.org is a very serious tool and resource for thinking human beings who want to engage and explore the Almighty, the Almighty's universe and do so within the realm of wisdom, rationality and intellectual honesty.



RELIGION of REASON

by JewishTimes' publisher
Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim



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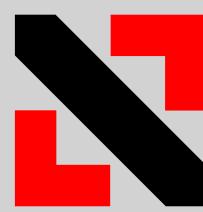
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Coming to Grips

RABBI DR. DARRELL GINSBERG



Shabbos Chazon, as it is commonly known, is the Shabbos preceding Tisha B'Av, taking its name from the well-known haftorah from the first chapter of Yishayahu. This chapter, whose custom is to be read to the tune of Eicha, is dominated by the tocha-cha, or rebuke, of the Jewish people. There is a general poetic grace to the words of the prophet; while for those of a literary background it speaks volumes, to the seeker of the ideas of God, it merely serves as the gateway into understanding the nature of the prophecy. When faced with these rebukes, we must look beyond the poetic value, and attempt to glean what God is telling us, as well as to learn how we can correct our defects, leading us back to God.

In this first full verse of prophecy, we are faced with a poetic statement that is quite cryptic (Yeshayahu 1:3):

"An ox knows his owner and a donkey his master's crib; Israel does not know, my people does not consider."

What now? We turn to Rashi for help. However, as we will soon see, we are only digging a deeper hole:

"his owner: (Heb. "kono") [is] like "misakno", the one who affixes him to the plowshare for plowing by day, and since he has accustomed him to this, he knows him. The dull donkey, however, does not recognize his master until he feeds him. Israel was not intelligent like the ox, to know, when I called him and said, "Israel will be your name" (Gen. 35:10), and I informed them of several of My statutes, yet they deserted Me, as is related in Ezekiel (20:39): "Let each one go and worship his idols." Even after I took them out of Egypt and fed them the manna and called them, "My people, the children of Israel," they did not consider even as a donkey.

Another explanation is: An ox knows its owner: An ox recognizes his owner so that his fear is upon him. He did not deviate from what I decreed upon him, by saying, I will not plow today. Neither did a donkey say to his owner, I will not bear burdens today. Now, these [creatures,] who were created to serve you, and are not destined to receive reward if they merit, or to be punished if they sin, did not change their manner, which I

decreed upon them. Israel, however, who, if they merit receive reward, and if they sin are punished.

does not know: i.e., did not want to know; they knew but trod with their heels, and my people did not take heart to consider."

Even understanding the words of Rashi on a literal basis is quite difficult, and not solely due to the translation. In his first explanation, Rashi seems to be separating the ox from the donkey. Whereas an ox becomes attached to his master through acclimation to work, the donkey develops this same type of relationship when fed (the zoological implications are unimportant to this author). The Jewish people, having been identified as Yisrael, received a handful of commandments (ostensibly referring to the time from Yaakov through their sojourn in Egypt), and demonstrate their "substandard" intelligence by turning to idolatry. God provides all sorts of wonderful things in the desert, and yet the Jewish people, again acting in a manner inferior to that of the animal, turn away from God.

In the second explanation, Rashi is

(continued on next page)

tying the two animals together. Here, he seems to be expressing an idea of knowledge or lack thereof, of the good provided by God. The Redak (based on this author's opinion) seems to expand on Rashi's explanation, giving us a better idea of what Rashi is talking about. Animals adhere to the commands of their master, "knowing" the master is the provider of good. The Jewish people received much good from God, such as the exodus from Egypt and entrance into Israel, and yet behaved in a manner indicating they did not "know" God. Furthermore, they failed to recognize that unlike an animal, they were subject to reward and punishment. If they followed God, they would be rewarded, but if they rejected God, they would be punished.

What is Rashi teaching us?

In his first explanation, we see a contrast between the behavior of the ox and the donkey. The ox, through working for his master, becomes accustomed to his role, directly leading to knowledge of his master. The donkey, on the other hand, requires food to reach this knowledge. What is the difference here? The analogy might be speaking of the two basic elements of man – the mind and the emotions. In this case, the ox reflects the mind. Within the ox lies a certain potential - to work for his master - and once it is actualized, he now knows him. The same can be said of the mind, the ability to comprehend knowledge and ultimately yediyas Hashem. Within every person lies the tzelem Elokim, the part of man created to perceive knowledge of God. For the Jewish people, it lay in its potential state until God identified the nation and gave some commandments. At that point, the Jews were now able to actualize this ability, to engage in yediyas Hashem through the understanding and performance of these various commandments. When a person involves himself in the commandments, understanding their benefits and ideas, he becomes "accustomed" to knowing God. His mind becomes naturally drawn to the ideas, much like the ox naturally knows its

owner. What the prophet is telling us is that the Jewish people acted in a manner below the ox; they had this knowledge, and yet they chose to turn away from it. They used this actualized potential to pursue idolatry and other falsehoods. The donkey reflects the other side of man, requiring the world of the instinctual to develop his relationship with his owner. In this instance, the prophet is explaining how God provided the Jewish people the complete spectrum of emotional satisfaction. He took them out of Egypt, destroying the slave psyche predominant in the nation. He provided them with the manna, ensuring their physical needs were taken care of. He created for them a complete sense of security, an environment where all their emotional needs were addressed. This type of state is ideal for a person to be able to worship God accordingly. And yet, the prophet points out, this was not enough. The Jews still rebelled, still turned away from God. This seems to be the first explanation of Rashi.

Rashi's second explanation offers a different understanding of the flaws exhibited by the Jewish people. As we mentioned before, Rashi does not distinguish between the two animals. Instead, he focuses on the distinction between the Jewish people's failure to "know" God as the Source of all good, as well as their inability to "recognize" that they were subject to both reward and punishment based on their behavior. This behavior by the Jews indicated they were on a level lower than that of animals that naturally recognize the good provided by their masters. Rashi is keying in on an important concept here. God bestowed much good onto the nation from the onset, yet the nation acted as if they did not know God was the source. How could they not "know"? In fact, as Rashi points out, they knew but dragged their heels. This means they knew, but there was some type of resistance to accepting this as being true. Why? Receiving the good from God no doubt brought much benefit to

the nation. However, it also clearly demonstrated a sense of dependency. Man detests this reality, the fact that he is dependent. It is a shock to the ego, a reality difficult to swallow. We want to believe we are independent creatures, free to rule as we please. The reality of our dependency on God was on full display in the exodus from Egypt through the entrance into the Land of Israel and beyond. The objective was to tie the security of the Jews with God. However, the Jews failed to appreciate this goal, and instead viewed the reality of their dependency as a weakness, and therefore chose not to "know" God as the source of the good. This always leads to the embracing of other ideologies. A similar concept is found in Rashi's notion of the Jewish people's failure to recognize their tie to the world of reward and punishment. All mankind is subject to God's justice, where his fate is tied to his actions. The Jewish people partake of this to a different degree, our adherence to the commandments the true arbiter of our fate. This notion is an affront as well to the ego. We want to believe we are masters of our destiny, where we control our fate. To "admit" we are subject to this world of schar v'onesh is to recognize that we, in fact, are subservient to a system beyond our control. Resistance to this reality leads to the apparent failure to "recognize" this fundamental truth. Sadly, the Jewish people failed to recognize this, to internalize this, and were subsequently driven into exile.

We are at the highpoint of the time of tochacha, culminating in the tragedy of the destruction of the Temple. The message of the tochacha is harsh, exposing our flaws to us, forcing us to recognize how we have strayed from God and exited the world of reality. We must turn to the prophecy of Yeshayahu, accept the truth of our flaws, whether they stem from our inflated egos or our subservience to the world of the instinctual. The words of the prophecy are our guides, and we should keep this in mind as the day of Tisha B'Av dawns. ■



The Torah & its **Mitzvot**

RABBI BERNIE FOX

These are the words that Moshe spoke to all of Israel on the east bank of the Jordan, in the wilderness, in the Aravah, opposite Suf, between Paran and Tofel, Lavan, Chatzerot and De Zahav. (Sefer Devarim 1:1)

1. Sefer Devrim and its content

This passage introduces Sefer Devarim. The sefer is composed of three basic elements. The first element consists of rebukes over the past failings of the nation coupled to warnings to not return to these behaviors. The second element is composed of a review of many of the commandments described earlier in the Torah. In some instances the review of a particular commandment includes additional detail not previously revealed. Sometimes the review does not provide additional detail and merely restates the mitzvah. The third element consists of the communication of mitzvot that were not previously revealed to the nation.

Nachmanides notes that the second element – composed of a review of previously communicated commandments – does not include those commandments that are assigned exclusively to the kohanim. This omission can be understood in the context of the overall objective of the sefer. Moshe's rebukes and warn-

ings are intended to prepare the people for entering and settling the Land of Israel. The success of their conquest of the land and their achievement of lasting settlement will directly depend upon their observance of the Torah. As the Torah explained earlier and as Moshe will reiterate in Sefer Devarim, providence will determine the fate of the nation. In turn, providence will be guided by Bnai Yisrael's obedience or abandonment of the Torah. Observance of the mitzvot will secure the nation's wellbeing in the land and neglect of the mitzvot will lead to suffering and exile. In this context Moshe reviews the commandments. This review is intended to compliment the rebukes and warnings. Moshe combines an explanation of the urgency of obedience to the Torah with a review of its commandments.

Nachmanides explains that the kohanim did not require a review of their commandments. They were fully committed to their observance. Although they too received his address, Moshe did not feel he needed to focus of the kohanim. They could be expected to be scrupulous in the observance of the commandments given specifically to them without a further review.

Nachmanides raises another issue. Why were some mitzvot not previously revealed? Why did Moshe wait until the final moments of his life to communicate to the nation mitzvot he had received thirty-eight years

(continued on next page)

earlier at Sinai? Nachmanides replies that the commandments that were only now revealed had little or no application in the wilderness. Some would only apply in the Land of Israel. Now that the nation was poised to enter the land, the appropriate time had arrived for the communication of these commandments. Other commandments first communicated at this point apply outside of the Land of Israel but are observed very infrequently.

Why did Moshe delay revealing those commandments that occur infrequently? Moshe could have communicated these commandments earlier with an explanation of the circumstances in and conditions under which each is observed. Moshe was apparently awaiting a practical context in which to teach these commandments. During the thirty-eight years in the wilderness the circumstances in which these commandments apply did not arise. Now, Moshe knew that his end was rapidly approaching. The ideal setting for the teaching of these commandments would not arise. He could wait no longer. Now, he revealed these commandments.

2. Moshe's review of previously communicated commandments

As Nachmanides observes, some commandments are repeated in Sefer Devarim without any additional detail. Moshe reviews the commandment as it has already been taught to the people. He may select words and employ phrasing in his review that was not used in the first iteration. However, in substance, nothing new is added to the commandment. Nachmanides explains that this review was required in order to impress upon the nation the importance of the observance of the commandments. Through repletion Moshe communicated urgency and import.

However, it seems that according to Nachmanides, there is a practical outcome from the repetition of a commandment. Understanding this outcome requires a brief introduction. The Torah commandments can be divided into two broad categories – positive commandments and negative commandments. In general, the positive commandments instruct us to perform an activity, profess a conviction, or engage in a behavior. We are commanded to eat matzah on Pesach. We are required to accept that Hashem is a unity. We must give various forms of charity. These are all positive commandments.

Negative commandments are prohibitions. The negative commandments also relate to convictions, actions, and behaviors.

In general, the courts are not empowered to enforce through punishments the observance of positive commandments. However, the active violation of a negative commandment, generally, is punished by the courts. The most common consequence for such a violation is lashes. A lengthy discussion is required to explain the means of administering lashes. This discussion is not necessary for this introduction.

3. Repeated admonitions and their judicial impact

Maimonides explains that a person receives only a single set of lashes for the violation of a single commandment. Regardless of the number of times the commandment is reviewed and the number of admonitions in the Torah regarding the commandment's observance, the violation of a single commandment will evoke a single set of lashes. Maimonides explains that repeated admonitions are intended to stress the importance of the commandment's observance and encourage scrupulous attention to its requirements. However, these repeated admonitions do not have to produce a practical judicial outcome.

Nachmanides seems to dispute this conclusion. Apparently, he maintains that for those mitzvot punished by lashes, the number of sets of lashes administered by the court varies. For the violation of some of these commandments a single set of lashes is administered. For others, multiple sets are administered. The number of sets is determined by the number of times the Torah admonishes us to not violate the commandment. One set of lashes is administered for each admonition.

Maimonides' position is more easily understood. Lashes are administered for violation of the commandment. Regardless of the number of times the Torah admonishes us to observe a commandment, a single violation should result in administration of a single set of lashes. Nachmanides' position is more difficult to grasp. Why does the number of sets of lashes correspond to the number of admonitions in the Torah?

4. The Torah, its mitzvot and lashes

It seems that Maimonides and Nachmanides disagree over the factor that engenders the lashes punishment. Maimonides maintains that lashes are administered for violation of a commandment. Therefore, regardless of the number of admonitions in the Torah to refrain from a behavior, a single commandment's violation produces a single set of lashes as its punishment. Nachmanides argues that lashes are not administered for violation of the commandment but for violation of the "word" of the Torah. For each disobedience to the Torah's word lashes are administered. When the Torah repeats its instruction to refrain from an action, it has one of two purposes. Either the intention is to reveal some new aspect of the mitzvah or the Torah is delivering an additional admonition regarding a previously stated commandment. If the Torah is expressing an additional admonition and we perform the prohibited action, we have ignored each of these separate admonitions. The sets of lashes will correspond with the number of admonitions – the number of violations of the words of the Torah. ■

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more promptly in order to make it to work sooner. I began to notice that whenever I would do that, I would somehow get on the entirely wrong traffic-light cycle, and find myself waiting 5+ minutes at red lights -- something which never seemed to occur to me when I stayed in the synagogue longer. I got the message. And there is nothing unique about my case. Any one of us will notice -- if we only pay attention -- that the little things which go wrong in life are often G-d's veiled way of nudging us in the proper direction. We need only notice it and hear G-d's message."

I wonder if he did a statistical analysis of his supposed phenomena. Where does G-d indicating something to him appear on the graph? 50%, 80%?

Rabbi: This would not be Nichush. Certainly, saying God did something is baseless, as we don't have that knowledge. But it's not Nichush, since he doesn't attribute a cause and effect to some inanimate object, like your first case where people put Havdala wine on themselves as a segula. Here, he doesn't say his speed in leaving shul caused the lights, but it was God who caused this as a punishment.

Witchcraft: A Fallacy

Hello rabbi. I appreciate your site, and your perspective, but I'm curious: in your article about how you guys think the Baal Ha Ov or witch that Saul spoke to put on a ruse to make him THINK he was hearing Saul, you never mentioned how she also seemed to automatically become aware, without prior knowledge, of Saul's true identity. This happened only AFTER she supposedly saw Saul's specter. It seems the book is implying that she received knowledge from some kind of spiritual-means through the craft she was practicing, perhaps her familiar spirit appeared with his spirit and told her?

I don't believe in ghosts and witchcraft, but this part section seems to kill your argument. What do you think happened?

—Elliot

Rabbi: Why is it difficult to accept that the most popular figure - the king - is not known by face to the masses? Or, perhaps, his promise that the witch would not be harmed can only be ensured by the king himself.

In any case, there is nothing in this account forcing our acceptance of powers never evidenced. The path of the Torah and reason is just the opposite: we only state something is fact based on evidence or reason. Both are lacking here. Additionally, God's prohibition against witchcraft is precisely because it is false. Ibn Ezra (Leviticus, 19:31) says the following, "Those with empty brains say 'Were it not that fortune tellers and magicians were true, the Torah would not prohibit them.' But I (Ibn Ezra) say just the opposite of their words, because the Torah doesn't prohibit that which is true, but it prohibits that which is false. And the proof is the prohibition on idols and statues."

Easier to Bear

"When we know this we shall find everything that may befall us easy to bear; mishap will create no doubts in our hearts concerning God, whether He knows our affairs or not, whether He provides for us or abandons us. On the contrary, our fate will increase our love of God." This is a quote from Maimonides.

Since your last email about repentance, wherein you quoted Maimonides analysis of Job in the Guide for the Perplexed...I have been going over that section...I highlighted the portion above, whose conclusion still eludes me.

How does knowledge that God's providence, intention, rule and management is so different from any concept we can conjure up in our minds of what those terms mean in relation to God, make anything that may befall us "easy to bear?" I can see how knowing that God management and knowledge (being so different in nature to our

own) would help relieve doubts of whether God is aware of our affairs, and that He does not abandon us, but not sure how that knowledge makes mishaps easy to bear.

Did I make myself clear?

—Dov

Rabbi: God knows our suffering and can respond. We are not left without an avenue for relief. God is there, He knows. He can help. This is in contrast to one who does not know about God, or HOW God operates, so when he is in pain he despairs:

"mishap will create no doubts (whether He knows...whether He provides)" meaning we know He CAN do these, we have no doubts. This conviction does not lead to despair, but in trusting God, who can perform, since He knows our plight.



Why Wait?

You wrote, "There is no contradiction to say that the world is both 5761 years old, and 16 billion years old. Time is different when measured from different portions of the universe, as proven by Einstein's law of relativity".

Given that the Torah was accepted 1200-1300 BCE, why did G-d wait so long to give the Torah? Why has the vast majority of human kind been forced to live without it or observed other beliefs? It makes no sense that such a small minority would be given the truth? This makes me think that Orthodox Judaism can't be the only way. Where do I start to rectify this?

—Yael

Rabbi: Please see my article in this issue, "God's Plan for You". I answer your question.

Judaism: Incomparable

Where do other religions share Judaism's view not to teach those who aren't of our religion.

—Matthew

Rabbi: The concept of not teaching Torah to gentiles targets the same idea as their prohibition to observe sabbath. That is, that the Jew to the exclusion of all others, must retain the identity as the authority on Torah. Had the lines been blurred between Jew and gentile via gentiles sharing a "Jewish" identity through similar Sabbath practice or positions as Torah educators, the world might turn to them – and not Jews – to learn God's will. The problem that ensues is this: their lack of obligation in the 613 will not compel their exhaustion of the laws, so as to practice properly. Their teaching must, by definition, be compromised, and Torah thereby will eventually become distorted.

That's the reason we don't teach gentiles, unless they wish to add to their 613, or concerning their 7 Noachide laws. The Talmud is actually more forbidding as it says a gentile who learns Torah is worthy of death (Sanhedrin 59a). We understand the severity: God desires all mankind to have the Torah available in its original form, and unless a person accepts 613, the lack of commitment must distort Torah, causing the next generation of Jews and gentiles to receive a faulty transmission, and a corrupted version of Torah.

There is no parallel between Torah and other religions. Torah is of Divine origin, addressing every aspect of human nature to ensure the happiest life. Only the Creator has complete knowledge to create such a system. In contrast, literally all other religions are man made. Thereby, all other religions are built around human consider-



ations for all their principles. Even the best works of man cannot approach the perfection of our God-made Torah.

This explains why other religions jump at the opportunity to convert alines to their religion. Ego, fame, power, and the human misconceptions that "might makes right" and "there's power in numbers" – all human insecurities – fool the masses to believe that with more followers, a religion is "more correct." Their insecurities compel them to make others convert, as if this corrects their flawed teachings in any measure.

It is wrong to seek parallels between Judaism and any other religion. Doing so suggests we share common ground. And as most other religions are based on the deification of man, a heresy, this core fundamental difference makes the comparing of Judaism to others, like comparing color to weight. There is no relationship at all.

Submit questions to: Rabbi@Mesora.org

"As Numerous as Stars"

Where did God fulfill His promise "to make the Jews as "numerous as the stars of heaven", for God said, we are "smallest among all nations (Deut. 7:7)." ■

—Eugene

Rabbi: That quote is to remind the Jews not to feel arrogant, as the following verse says, He made us numerous "to keep His oath to our forefathers (Deut. 7:8)," and not due to our own greatness.

But despite this, that we are smallest, nonetheless, Moses says, "God has made you today as numerous as the stars of heaven (Deut. 1:10)," and "And now Hashem your God has placed you numerous as the stars of heaven (Deut. 10:21)."

So, although we are smallest, God did fulfill his word to make us many.

The question is, what was God's intent in making us numerous? Why is this of such importance, that He promised this to Abraham, and without his asking? We can suggest that as Abraham desired to teach the masses how foolish their religions were, and to help them, to guide them towards truth using reasoning and proofs...God encouraged Abraham and endorsed his mission by promising to assist in spreading Abraham's message of monotheism.

God desires the good for all mankind. This is precisely why God created the human species. It is therefore reasonable that God desires to help religions who err, to see the light, and abandon idolatry, deification of man and other fundamental errors. Once Abraham found God, God desired to assist Abraham, so as to assist all mankind in our most vital purpose on Earth; to recognize the One Creator and appreciate His amazing wisdom, "For this is all of man (Koheles, 2nd to last verse)." ■

Chastisements of **LOVE**



**RABBI
REUVEN
MANN**

This week's Torah reading initiates the final Book of the Torah, Sefer Devarim. It is comprised of the talks Moshe addressed to the Jews in his last days. He knew that death was imminent yet chose to devote all his energy to the needs of the people. They were poised to begin the conquest and settlement of the land. Success in this endeavor depended on adhering to Torah and behaving as a "kingdom of priests and holy nation." He expounded the Torah to elucidate its laws, ideals and philosophy of life. However, he did not restrict himself to abstract theological topics. To fulfill their national mission the people would have to recognize their flaws and repent. He, therefore, reviewed some of the unsavory moments of their recent history starting with the episode of the spies. Moshe was a fearless leader who did not refrain from speaking the harsh truth. He understood that a capacity for introspection is vital to the success of individuals and nations and that there is no better time to express criticism than when one is about to depart the earthly scene. At such moments people are more apt to comprehend that these are "chastisements of love."

We can understand why Moshe called attention to the sin of the spies as it caused the death of that generation in the wilderness. However, some commentators question his failure to mention the Golden Calf at this point. This was arguably their most egregious trespass yet it is not mentioned until chapter nine. Why would Moshe defer discussion of this sin, given its gravity and consequences?

We must understand the motive behind Moshe's rebuke. His intent was not to insult the people or cause them to feel guilty. His goals were entirely positive. The concept of rebuke is unpopular in contemporary culture. We are a pleasure seeking society which rejects the notion of an objective moral truth. We believe that ethics are purely subjective and that each person can determine what is right and wrong. When people seek to impose their values on others our instinctive reaction is, "why don't you mind your own business?" Judaism maintains that withholding valid criticism from one who needs it displays indifference to the welfare of one's fellow. The Torah proclaims, "Whom G-d loves does He rebuke." Moshe emulated this Divine attribute. He wanted the Jews to prosper and endure on the land. He sought to point out their flaws without overwhelming them with excessive criticism. He cited the incident of the spies because it was most relevant to the task at hand. The report of the spies engendered fear. It also caused them to disparage the land and say, "let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt." Had they properly appreciated the opportunity to become G-d's chosen nation in His specially designated land, they would have been able to overcome all fear. This event took place on the ninth of Av which ever since has been the designated time for our national catastrophes.

This Sunday Jews worldwide will observe the fast of Tisha B'av. On this day we mourn all the tragedies of Jewish history, beginning with the destruction of the Temple and including the Crusades, pogroms, Inquisitions and the Holocaust. It is a time for us to reflect on our sins, personal and collective. It is manifestly not a time to point fingers and assess "blame." Let us rather be humble and genuinely seek to become better Jews and finer people. Let us strive to renew our love of Torah, the Jewish people and the Land of Israel. May our heartfelt Teshuva and prayers find favor with Hashem and bring us closer to redemption.

Shabbat Shalom and a meaningful Tisha B'av.



God vs. the Multiverse VI-VIII: Part 6: Summary of Stage One

RABBI E. ZIMMER, RABBI E. FEDER

Before moving on to the second stage which is primarily about the multiverse, we want to summarize the proof up to this point. In the proof, we used inductive reasoning from the fine tuning to infer an Intelligent Designer of the universe. What we mean by 'proof' is that a reasonable person would logically draw the same conclusion after understanding the arguments. We do not mean 'proof' in the sense of a mathematical proof or deductive reasoning.

We have presented, explained, and supported the fact of the fine tuning of the constants of nature and the initial conditions of the big bang with many renowned scientists (like Stephen Hawking, Martin Rees, Roger Penrose, Leonard Susskind, etc. We will present even more multiverse scientists who agree with the fact of fine tuning, and use it as proof for the multiverse.) In stage two, we will explain why we believe that the scientists' position of a multiverse is not a viable scientific theory.

Our main objective for stage one was to reject two theories as possible explanations for the fine tuning of the constants and the initial conditions: the Master Mathematical Equation theory and the Necessary Existences theory. We have tried to establish that the only two viable theories at this point are either an Intelligent Agent or the multiverse.

Based on the excellent feedback we received from the readers, it seems that the most abstract part of stage one was the relationship between Feynman's mystery in post 2, and the teleological explanation for the fine tuning in post 3. This is the key point, and is what separates this proof of an Intelligent Designer from most of the other ones that we've seen. (The way it is commonly presented is by starting with the fact of fine tuning, and arguing from the improbability of getting fine tuning by chance alone.)

The main idea is that the mystery that all good theoretical physicists worried about for 50 years had nothing to do with fine tuning. It is a problem that is rooted in the aim of fundamental physics of uncovering the most basic, simple reality in the universe. All good theoretical physicists realized that an arbitrary number has no role as a fundamental (Necessary) Existence. All good theoretical physicists realized

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that it was highly implausible that arbitrary, highly specific numbers would ever be derivable from a Master Mathematical equation.

The discovery of the fact of fine tuning in the constants provided an excellent solution to this mystery. The numbers were not fundamental, nor were they arbitrary. They had a purpose. The purpose of the numbers was in order to create an ordered and complex cosmos, in all its beauty and grandeur. It is the natural solution to one of the greatest mysteries in physics. Fine tuning did not create the problem. Fine tuning is the solution.

We inferred from the fact that the constants of the universe were designed to produce an ordered universe, that the Cause of the fine tuning of the constants was Intelligent. (Meaning, God knew what He was doing when He chose those numbers. He didn't just get lucky.)

The discovery of fine tuning dealt the death blow to the other two theories mentioned above, as they could not explain the causal relationship between the numbers and the universe. The significant knowledge we had about the constants could not be incorporated into those theories. In both theories, the relationship between the particular numbers and the resultant ordered universe was purely coincidental. This flew in the face of the fact of fine tuning.

Even though we had sufficiently made the case for the fine tuning of the constants and rejecting the two theories from posts 2 and 3, we added an additional proof from the fine tuning of the initial conditions in post 4. What was unique about this proof (as opposed to that of the constants) was that it was probabilistic. The nature of the problem is so great with regards to the initial conditions, that it is not even clear how such an explanation would even be formulated, as the "law for initial conditions" seems to have a qualitatively different character than our current understanding of physical law.

We noted that if someone wanted to deny an Intelligent Designer, the burden of proof is upon them to develop a theory to explain how the correlation between the fine tuning and the resultant ordered universe occurred through chance alone. In the next post, we will begin the second

stage and present the main attempt among scientists to provide such a theory. As we will see, the essence of multiverse theory is the combination of random chance and a near infinite number of tries.

In summary, we have shown that an Intelligent Designer is the best logical inference, and it is upon atheistic (or agnostic) scientists to establish a valid scientific theory which explains the fine tuning based on some unintelligent mechanism, thereby invalidating our proof.

sary condition for the existence of life and intelligent observers, it is no longer surprising that we find ourselves in this beautiful universe. There are no intelligent observers in the other multiverses. This argument is identical in form to the solution for the origin of life on Earth after knowing that there are many planets.

It is readily apparent that there is a big 'if' and a big 'maybe' going on here. Scientists frequently try to justify these speculations by appealing to a slippery slope argument. (See the video below.) They argue that humans once thought the universe was really small. Then we observed it to be bigger. Then we observed it to be even bigger... Even though we haven't observed it to be, it's most definitely even bigger than we think now. Maybe it's an infinitely big multiverse. Maybe, in all the other multiverses the constants are different, thereby leading to meaningless chaos in almost all other universes.

We can understand the sense of awe one has from realizing just how small humans are relative to the vastness of the cosmos. We can also appreciate the intuitive sense that the universe is bigger than the diameter of the observable universe. We simply don't know just how big. We can start speculating, but then we have left the province of science. All other times in history that science has expanded the size (or age) of the known universe, it was based upon observation. Never has it been extended purely based on the speculation that it should be bigger. Certainly not infinitely bigger.

This is the first major difference between how the weak anthropic principle was used by biologists to explain the origin of life, and how physicists are attempting to use it here. Regarding biology, we know that there are many, many planets that are theoretically hospitable to life, because we observe them. First, biologists observed the planets, then they made use of the weak anthropic principle. Physicists are using the weak anthropic principle (and the fact of the fine tuning of the constants) as one of their proofs for the existence of other universes!

There is a second major difference which is a far more critical mistake. This flawed logic contradicts the cosmological principle, which has been one of the guiding principles in

Part 7: The Multiverse

As we saw in the prior posts, scientists (we will be using the generic terms 'scientists' and 'physicists', but please understand by the context that we mean 'multiverse scientists') were loath to accept a teleological explanation for the fine tuning of the constants, as that implied an Intelligent Agent which caused the universe. Intelligent beings do things for a purpose. Intelligent beings do 'x' because 'y' will result. That is what we mean by an Intelligent Cause.

There was one alternative solution left for scientists. They could try to change the problem of the constants from one which implied a teleological explanation (how we used the strong anthropic principle), to one which could be solved involving a very different form of causal relationship (the weak anthropic principle of post 5).

They speculated as follows: If there are a nearly infinite number of universes (by 'near infinite' they generally mean as big a finite number as is necessary to explain the constants through chance), then maybe each universe has a different set of values for its constants (we should probably call them 'variables' in this theory). Almost all of these multiverses would be chaotic nonsense (the term 'multiverse' can sometimes refer to the entire collection of universes, or sometimes just one of the many different universes), but a few of them would by chance alone have the perfect values for the constants. Since the illusory fine tuning of the constants is a neces-

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cosmology since the time of Newton. The cosmological principle essentially says that every observer in the universe sees the same universal features. (Without this principle, universal features don't even exist.) It says that our point of observation from Earth is not special. Just about every physicist holds by this principle in every other context. But it gets tossed out the window because of the pressing need to explain the fine tuning of the constants. (See the first comment and response for an elaboration on this point.)

There is no evidence whatsoever that the constants have different values in these speculated alternate realities. None. The only theoretical reason to believe that they do vary, is the fact of fine tuning itself, in conjunction with the a priori rejection of an Intelligent Designer.

Even if we grant that there are an infinite number of universes, we have every reason to believe that just like we suppose that the qualitative laws of nature (general relativity and quantum mechanics) are the same in those parallel universes, so too the constants of nature are the same and do not vary. To say the point more clearly, this slippery slope reasoning fails because this logic itself would lead us to believe that this new region of space is also ordered and structured with the same laws and constants that we observe in our current universe. In no way could slippery slope logic lead us to posit a different type of universe as a logical inference from the universe we see.

The theory of the multiverse is riddled with holes from every angle of analysis. We will try in the following posts to concentrate on its major flaws and we will point out some of the absurd conclusions scientists have embraced in their effort to deny the Intelligent Cause of the universe.

The first modern usage of the multiverse was by the discoverer of the statistical law of entropy, Ludwig Boltzmann in 1895, to answer the entropy problem of post 4. The theory is even more ancient than that. The Roman philosopher Lucretius (55 B.C.E.) is the first recorded multiverse theorist. (The argument of design goes back even further than that.) Twenty years ago, multiverse theory was considered a speculative,



non-scientific theory held by very few people. It has now become mainstream physics, and many physicists believe and have faith in it. New books are coming out about it at an increasing rate. However, some physicists do realize its flaws and speak against it.

The video below is an entertaining, lucid explanation by Brian Greene of the major pillars of support that prove the multiverse. It shows Steven Weinberg saying that the multiverse "is a pretty good bet." It also shows a few physicists who think it's not science. We will be assuming in the next few posts that you will have either watched the video or read the recent article in Newsweek, May 21 which is a fairly concise summary of the video. (The video is better, but longer.)

tinyurl.com/862xf3v

We encourage the more advanced reader to read a slightly more sophisticated article entitled Universe or Multiverse, written by Bernard Carr and George Ellis. In this article, the two authors debate the merits and flaws of the multiverse. It does a good job of explaining the theory of the multiverse, as well as exposing many of its serious problems.

Part 8: Multiverse of the Gaps

In the previous post we introduced multiverse theory, which is the main theory proposed by scientists to explain away the fine tuning found in the universe, in a way which denies the teleological explanation from part 3. We showed that the comparison between explaining the origin of life based upon chance as compared with explaining the constants based upon chance does not hold up. In the next few posts we will lodge several questions on multiverse theories and refute their supposed proofs.

Before we take up specific critiques against the main proofs for the multiverse, we would like to set forth what we believe to be the most general, devastating argument against multiverse theory. What we mean by 'multiverse theory' is any theory which attempts to explain order and apparent design through randomness and a near infinite number of tries. (See the first comment for some discussion of 'infinite' and 'near infinite'). Any theory of many, ordered universes designed by an Intelligent Agent, has no relevance to the proof and we are not speaking about it when we say 'multiverse theory'.

Every multiverse theory commits a fallacy which is nearly identical with the God of the gaps argument. A good illustration of this kind of reasoning would be if someone tried to explain the mystery of the seemingly arbitrary constants to Feynman in 1985 (before we fully realized the fine tuning) using the argument that "God made the number 137.03597 and we no longer need another explanation for it." To simply posit that "God did it" is not a satisfactory explanation.

The theory that every time there is a gap in our knowledge we should posit God as a solution, commits the fallacy of an argument from ignorance. Everything can be explained by saying that God did it. An answer that can always be employed to explain anything, in truth explains nothing at all (this is a critical point that is worth thinking about for a moment). When a

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reasonable person is ignorant, he admits that he simply doesn't know. It is a mystery. When we gain more knowledge, maybe we'll be able to understand where these numbers come from, and why they are the way they are.

By the late 1980's however, patience paid off and we did develop more knowledge about these numbers. We started to realize that these numbers were not arbitrary. Rather, we understood that they needed to have their particular values in order for the universe to be ordered, complex, structured, etc. This teleological explanation (which implies an Intelligent Cause) is an argument from knowledge, not from gaps. We have knowledge about the values of the constants (their fine tuning) which points towards an Intelligent Designer, and away from an unintelligent, random cause.

God of the gaps is a fallacy that someone commits when they plug a hole in their understanding of the already existing universe by saying "God did it". The only reason to be positing God in such an instance is because they have no other answer. There is no direct inference to God, only the lack of knowledge. This is a fallacy because science is attempting to explain the existing universe in its own terms. A particular gap in a scientific explanation is likely due to our current lack of knowledge, and is no indication of the failure of science. Positing Divine Intervention at each gap in our knowledge is bad methodology and hinders the advancement of science.

However, here we are discussing the fundamental constants of nature and the initial conditions which were set at the big bang, the observed beginning of our universe. This begs a metaphysical explanation about the cause of our physical universe, its constants and initial conditions, as physics (even if it didn't break down at the first moment after the big bang) cannot go any further. Since fine tuning is manifest in the big bang and the fundamental laws, the metaphysical explanation which is indicated by knowledge (not by a gap), is an Intelligent Designer.

On the other hand, the multiverse theory falls prey to a very similar fallacy as the ordinary God of the gaps argument. It posits an infinite number of universes with random numbers.

The combination of an infinite number of tries together with chance is the essence of multiverse theory, and can be used to explain any configuration of particles that you can imagine. It can be used to explain the sea splitting and allowing a nation to cross through. It even explains Santa Claus. It can be used to explain this universe, or any other logically possible universe. (This is because according to the laws of quantum mechanics, just about everything is statistically possible. While it is highly improbable to get a quantum fluctuation of Santa and his little helpers, if there are an infinite number of universes, it will happen an infinite number of times.)

In fact, if there really were a near infinite number of multiverses and everything was random, we no longer need the laws of physics or the laws of biology. Even if it really was totally random whether any two particular masses attracted or repelled (lets assume 50/50 each time), there would be at least one of the infinite multiverses where by chance alone, masses always came together. It would look to observers in that multiverse like there is such a thing as gravity, but since only in a universe with gravity or something close to it, is it even possible to have observers (as the phenomenon of masses attracting is a necessary condition for the existence of life), physicists should simply reject the explanation of gravity as superfluous.

The same arguments can be made to explain biology. Randomness and infinite multiverses explains chickens too. There is no need for the theory of evolution altogether. It would also explain unicorns and flying pigs. It would explain total chaos too, which is the key point. No matter what the universe looked like (incredibly ordered, totally disordered, or anywhere in between), a theory of randomness coupled with infinity provides an explanation.

There is a subtle point here. Multiverse theory does not predict unicorns. (In fact, it makes almost no predictions at all. More on this in later posts.) Rather, the multiverse theory would explain an observation of unicorns. We'll illustrate with the example of the lottery from the previous post.

If you and a trillion other people each had one lottery ticket, you would not predict in advance of the lotto drawing

that you are likely to win. However, after the drawing and the observation that you did win, you would be able to explain it by saying that someone had to win and apparently it was you. It would be unnecessary to look for another explanation (i.e., cheating, Divine Providence, etc.), since someone had to win.

Likewise, since according to multiverse theory there are universes with unicorns (an infinite number of them in fact), while you would not be able to predict in advance that you would observe a unicorn (since most universes conducive to intelligent observers do not contain unicorns), after you observed a unicorn you would be able to explain the observation by positing that apparently you're one of the lucky observers in a multiverse which does have unicorns.

On the other hand, an Intelligent Cause is only validly inferred because we observe a meaningfully ordered, intelligible universe. Were the universe nonsensical chaos, it would be God of the Gaps to posit an Intelligent Designer. (In fact, in that case unintelligent randomness would be a good explanation.)

Multiverse theories could explain any possible observations without demanding any knowledge of the phenomenon. To put it simply, the theory of the multiverse, when taken to its logical conclusion, undermines all scientific knowledge. It takes the observation-based belief that the universe we live in is full of order and wisdom (thereby lending itself to explanations like the laws of physics and biology), and it replaces it with a meaningless, chaotic mess of total randomness with a coincidental illusion of order in our universe.

The multiverse of the gaps is the same fallacy as God of the gaps, except it substitutes chance and infinite tries in place of one all-powerful force. Even before we knew about the fine tuning, it would be fallacious to try to explain away the mystery of the constants by positing a multiverse and random chance. How much more superficial is the argument of the multiverse after we have concrete knowledge that there is a real relationship between the fundamental constants of the laws of nature, and the universe that results from those laws and constants. ■



RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

GOD'S *plan for* MAN

I recently had a discussion with an intelligent woman. She shared her desire to seek out God so as to live the best she could.

Having experienced other religions and recently learned elements of Judaism and Torah, she was very impressed by its wisdom. After researching, a family member may have found evidence of Jewish lineage. We spoke for a while, and to assist her journey, I decided to write this article which I hope offers her a cohesive structure of Judaism, significant historical events, Torah's defining truths and values, and God's plan for mankind.

This Sunday, July 29th 2012, is the Ninth of the month of Av, or "Tisha B'Av." This is a fast day in commemoration of the many tragedies God visited upon the Jewish nation throughout time, and for our own sinful state, as the continued absence of the third and final Temple conveys.

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It is a time of reflection and repentance. And repentance cannot be performed unless we each understand exactly what God commands mankind, thereby realizing where we each have failed, why we failed, and how to correct ourselves. When we learn God's will for ourselves by studying His Torah from our great Rabbis, we can attain the most fulfilling lifestyle.

To appreciate God's will, it is vital to briefly review mankind's history and God's involvement in human affairs aimed at correcting our distortions. We have but one life; God wishes that each person He created benefits to the greatest degree.

IN THE BEGINNING

God created a perfect world, containing all that man needs, and in their correct proportions. Air is most vital, so it is everywhere. Water is next in vitality, and is almost as abundant as air; also designed in a manner that it can flow to remotely-inhabited regions. And for those inland peoples, rain delivers their water. Vegetation is inexpensive and easily reproduced. This sustains our nutritive needs, as well as our clothing. Homes and heat are necessary, so wood is abundant, and inexpensive. All else man

pursues are unnecessary distractions.

God created Adam and Eve with perfect minds. He gave them one command: to accept Him alone as the sole force in the universe; the "Creator." This command was necessary, as this Master/servant relationship might not be derived from studying nature. Nature teaches there must be a Creator, but not that man is to serve Him. This one command fills that gap.

But for all other discoveries, man could engage his mind to and uncover the sciences, math, and justice.

5772 years ago, Adam's birth date (billions of years after creation evolved) no Torah was given. It was unnecessary, and still largely inapplicable, as man-made religions had not been fabricated; the subject of many Torah laws.

The tools needed to unlock continued insights are planted in the patterns of natural human thought. Truth, false, deduction, induction, equality, comparisons, a fortiori arguments and others, are all natural, not learned disciplines. (For example, no child need be taught "comparison": he intuitively compares; recognizing that black is not equal to white, or that this person is not his mother.) Our senses combined with these disciplines enable us to grow in knowledge,

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Egypt's scorpion god

and in our appreciation for our Maker. God created the world permeated with His wisdom, as He desired that mankind enjoy life, and the pursuit of wisdom offers the greatest life.

God needs nothing, so His act of creating one intelligent species – man – was purely so this creation could ponder the universe and become amazed and awed by the Creator. Countless intellects were infatuated by the workings of our universe, and this continues to be true for all mankind, Jew or gentile...

HUMAN EQUALITY

It makes no difference whether we are born to Jewish or gentile parents. What is relevant are the choices we make. And if one chooses to follow God, regardless of how he or she commenced life, then that person is cherished by God. The greatest people began life as children to gentiles, like our patriarchs and matriarchs, Ruth, Unkelos, and many Rabbis. And the worst villains had Jewish parents, like King Mennashe. You notice I do not refer to the child as "Jew" or "gentile" for these are choices, not birthrights. We cannot ask why God determines that one person is born to a specific set of parents. Only God in His wisdom knows why this is best. Abraham

was born to an idolatrous father, while King David and Moses both had fathers who never sinned their entire lives. Perhaps specific people and events influence us differently, depending on each of our unique psyches. One personality type will have better opportunities if born to gentiles, and another person will do better with parents who are perfected themselves. Abraham was not a Jew, he was born to an idolater, and yet he reached the highest level a person can reach, as he was a prophet. What Jew today can say that?

Be clear on this, God does not create Christian, Catholic, Muslim, or Jewish infants. God creates "humans." Just as He created Adam and Abraham before Torah was given, and they were simply humans (not Jews, since Torah was not given yet), we too are all equal at birth. God made no changes to how humans are created, after the Torah was given. We all possess the identical potential to follow God's will. We all have the same soul, despite foolish Jews claiming their souls are "better." How distasteful this must sound to a gentile! What a low estimation of God will gentiles have, thinking a Jew is favored, and given a "better" soul at birth, when no merit yet exists at birth! In fact, it was the "gentile" Abraham who earned his perfection, and only

thereafter, did God create a Jewish nation from him. Judaism is actually founded by perfect gentiles. It is only the ignorant and arrogant Jew who claims the nonsense that he has a superior soul. We should be mindful that the role of the Jew is to "serve" all others, sharing God's Torah with the world. In this manner, the Jew is actually subservient to the gentile.

If a Jew follows God completely, he is loved by God. If a gentile follows God completely, she too is equally loved. Of course, a "complete" following of God means His 613 laws. Those Jews who look down upon gentile or converts, violate God's words. For God says numerous times in Torah, "One Torah for the Jew and convert," (Exod. 12:49, Num. 15:16, Num. 15:29) thereby proving complete equality among each and every soul. Not only this, but Talmud Sanhedrin (59a) states, "A gentile who engages in Torah is like the High Priest" — meaning this gentile is greatly exalted. And this is only in reference to a gentile who observes the minimal seven Noachide laws. How much more praiseworthy is a gentile who converts! Such a gentile appears to surpass even the Jew's greatest individual. And rightfully so, for how humbling must it be for a gentile to accept his or her very being is not on par with the highest level, of one obligated to observe all 613 laws. When a gentile converts, this person willfully accepts a burden of laws, while the Jew did not make this conscious decision. The Talmud also states (Brachos 34b), "Where a penitent person stands, wholly righteous people cannot stand [compare]." There is no difference between a person who repents, or a gentile who converts. Both have abandoned a life without Torah, and have accepted God's complete will.

MANKIND'S DESCENT INTO IDOLATRY

Over time, man abandoned the life of intellectual pursuits, and instead, chased after lusts, passions and imagination. They veered far from the plan that they use their senses and reason to determine what is real and what is true.

Part of this emotional lifestyle is the caving-in to human insecurity. Mankind realized his mortality, he feared death. He also feared the unknown: "What will be tomorrow?" many people worried. The need for the parent or guiding figurehead was retained, instead of God's plan, that man mature, and recognize that his infant view of "powerful parents" be abandoned, and they be viewed as simple humans as himself. But those who could not escape the infantile dependency on parents, coupled with the

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baseless view that the cosmos were deities, started to invent gods. They felt that figurines shaped as the planets and stars "drew downwards their powers." The idols, they felt, became repositories of power, deserving of worship, and in reciprocation, worshippers would realize success in all they desired. They accepted liars claiming to know how to worship the stars and idols, and soon enough, generations lost all knowledge of the Creator, as numerous religions flourished. Additional ceremonial rites and superstitions were invented that offered mankind a false security and promises of success and health, until the world was predominantly comprised of stone gods and witches.

ABRAHAM

One unique man, Abraham, was raised in this world culture of idolatry. He too worshiped. But at a young age his mind started to probe, as Maimonides teaches in his Mishneh Torah (Laws of Idolatry, chap I). He began to use his intelligence, which became sharper over many years of thought. With no teacher or books, he extricated himself from the false beliefs of all others, and realized the Creator. He started forming arguments and writing texts, teaching the masses that idolatry was false, and there is but one God. When the people would gather around him and ask him about his statements, he would explain [them] to each one of them according to their understanding, until they turned to the path of truth. He soon amassed tens of thousands of followers.

God revealed Himself to Abraham, and promised to establish his offspring as His nation; a people who would possess and transmit the truth and monotheism to the world. God gave to Abraham Isaac, and to Isaac, the Twelve Tribes. Due to famine, the tribes descended to Egypt where Joseph was ruler and provided sustenance. Joseph originally came to Egypt due to the divine dreams God gave him of leadership. His brothers deemed him dangerous, and sold him. Joseph's buyers sold him to Egypt, where he was framed and imprisoned. But his mind pondered his dreams, and over the many years, he became a great psychologist and dream interpreter. This knowledge helped him advance from prison to viceroy. We appreciate God's plan that the original dreams cause both: Joseph's descent to Egypt, and his emancipation from prison so as to sustain his family and the country years later. God's hand was clearly at work. Bit God had greater plans...



Animal deification

FROM EGYPT TO SINAI

The twelve sons of Jacob died. Their offspring living in Egypt absorbed that idolatrous culture. They were punished with slavery for 210 years. To offer Egypt and the Jews a chance to abandon their idolatrous ways and realize the true God, God sent Moses and 10 Plagues: clearly miraculous demonstrations with precise predictions of their onslaught. They were a message that one God exists, and all Egyptian idols and deities are powerless against Him. Pharaoh refused to heed the Ten Plagues and the numerous lessons contained therein; each one a testimony to a single God who alone controls the universe He created. Egypt was destroyed (as were many Jews) and their army drowned in the Reed Sea.

God delivered the sons of Jacob, the Israelites, from Egypt, to Mount Sinai where they would receive a divine religion as contained in 1) the Ten Commandments, 2) the Written Torah scrolls, and 3) in the explanatory Oral Law or Mishneh that God communicated to Moses.

A RELIGION OF PROOF & REASON

Revelation was the seminal event in forming the nation of the Jews. For it was Revelation that proves God's existence, and rejects all other religions to this day as impostors. Had Moses lied to any the people, telling them they heard a voice emanating from a fiery mountain, and besides each one he addressed, there were 2 million other attendees...they would laugh at him. They would not replace their true histories with Moses' fabrication without evidence. Nor would the world today be in unanimous acceptance of the Torah (Bible).

No. Moses, or anyone, would fail to make masses accept that they witnessed miracles. The only explanation for the world's acceptance of the Torah, is that it is true. The Jews did in fact witness Revelation at Sinai. They did see a mountain on fire, and hear intelligent speech emanating from fire, which is impossible, unless the source of that speech is not of this world. Had Revelation never occurred, there would be at least one other version of Jewish history today. But there isn't. It is impossible that only one account of Jewish history exists, and that it is false. That cannot occur. Therefore, we know that what we have received unanimously transmitted from all Jews, is accurate. God gave mankind only one religion, Torah. It applies to all peoples. Jews must observe 613 commands, and gentiles must observe 7 Noahide laws. If a gentile wishes, he or she may accept the other 606 laws, and become a Jew, identical to a born Jew. No other religion claims mass attendance at a miraculous event, since it never

(continued next page)

happened to those religions. And this is reasonable. For God created only one mankind, so only one religion makes sense. Only one revelation of one perfect system could occur. There can be only one best way for mankind to live, since we all share the identical design. And as God knows all, and the future, His Torah never expires. He knew how to create a system that applies to man throughout time. Changes in culture over the millennia, do not change man's make-up. Torah is applicable forever.

Despite their attempts to validate their historical or miraculous claims, all other religions are at best, a belief or a blind faith, not based on any evidence of truth. We are not concerned that other religions largely outnumber Jews. We understand that appealing notions like being forgiven for one's sins attracts millions of followers to Christianity. A man-god is very appealing, and so is a Golden Calf. But the intellect reveals the gross errors of their religion: one god cannot be three gods, just as the number 5 cannot be greater than 10; God does not become a man, and other idolatrous nonsense.

After God gave the Jews the Torah, the Tablets and the Mishneh, He included the command to follow the Rabbis' rulings on law (Deut. 17:11) formulated in what we call the Talmud and written over hundreds of years, about 2000 years ago. The Talmud presents tremendous insights into the precise and abstract structures of Jewish law that are like beautiful mathematical equations, also including philosophy and allegories. From the Talmud, the Rabbis formalized Jewish law that we follow today, the Shulchan Aruch, or Halacha.

Originally determined by God's Torah verses, and elaborated by the Mishneh (Oral law) all aspects of life are governed by Halacha. This includes idolatry, Torah study, morality, charity, dietary laws, prayer, speech, holidays and Sabbath, monetary laws, worship and marital laws.

Torah was given at this point, 2448 years since Adam, partly due to man's need to be warned against man-made religion and the numerous idolatrous practices that had risen over time. Many prohibitions like copying Egypt's ways could not be commanded before Egypt was formed. And as we said, originally man had all the tools to live intelligently without a formal Torah system. Of course, we do not know the final answer why Torah was not given in part earlier; this is God's knowledge.

It is important to know that Torah contains laws of varying degrees of importance. Realizing certain ideas are more vital than others, imbues us with Torah's primary identity. As the Rabbis teach, "One who rejects idolatry is as if he kept the entire Torah. And one who

commits idolatry is as if he abandoned the entire Torah." Thus, the knowledge and laws relating to what God is and is not, worshipping God and the error of idolatry are most crucial; they carry far more weight than laws governing the placement a parapet on one's roof, or kosher laws.

The greatest law (mitzvah) is the study of Torah itself. This surpasses giving charity, setting up courts, prayer and all other laws. The Talmud derives this from King Solomon's words (Proverbs 8:11): "All desirous things do not compare to it [Torah study] ." (Moade Kattan 9b) That is, all desirous things (i.e., all other commands) do not equate to the command of Torah study. The intellect, our distinction over all created things, is to be our primary pursuit, and affords the greatest fulfillment. This explains why the greatest minds were absorbed in Torah and the sciences.

THE TRAGEDIES OF THE NINTH OF AV

Now we come to this holiday. What is the theme of the tragedy of the Ninth of Av? Talmud Taanis 29a recounts the Spies' sin, the ten corrupt leaders who had no faith in God's promise of Israel's conquest, and wished to spy out the land first. God did not instruct the Jews with any need for spying the land. God told them they would be successful: "Just go in and I will guarantee your victory!" The spies and the Jews should have trusted fully in God's capabilities and promises. Instead, the spies scouted Israel for forty days and returned with an evil report. They told the Jews the current inhabitants were invincible. Despite God's promise, they said the Jews would fail, had they tried to conquer the land. The Jews became frightened. As a punishment, God prohibited that generation from entering Israel to enjoy its great goodness. They were sentenced to travel the desert for forty years until they perished. Their children would inherit Israel. The day of the spies' sinful report and the Jews' fear, was the Ninth of the month of Av.

Rabbi Yochanan said, "God said to the Jews and the spies, 'You cried a cry without justification; [therefore] I will establish a cry for you for generations'." Rabbi Yochanan referred to the destruction of both Temples that took place on the Ninth of Av; this would be the cry for all generations. God did not say these words, they are Rabbi Yochanan's metaphor. Rabbi Yochanan meant that just as the spies and that generation had a specific sin – they rejected God as omnipotent enough to vanquish the enemies – so too, future generations in both Temple eras continued in this sin, and were punished on the same date to

indicate the common flaw.

The first Temple fell due to idolatry, and the second due to baseless hatred. Idolatry is a clear expression of man's failure to view God as omnipotent. Disbelief in God drives man to other means of securing his wishes; idolatry. And baseless hatred towards others only occurs when we seek social approval, and fail. We hate others as a means of saying, "I don't really need your approval." But if we don't, we should not care enough to expend energy hating someone. Hate only exists when we care enough to hate, when we truly want that person's recognition of our existence. Jeremiah chapter 17 teaches that seeking man cannot coexist with seeking God. If one seeks human approval, he thereby says this is to be valued, and rejects a life where God determines his fate. Here too, man does not view God as omnipotent. If he did, he would care less about what people say, he would not focus on himself, but on God.

So God didn't predetermine that future generations would sin with idolatry and hatred, and that the Temples would be removed as a response. God didn't say that phrase, it was Rabbi Yochanan. Man sinned of his own will. Rabbi Yochanan scripted this "quote of God", to link a few sins, as he saw the dates of the tragedies were linked.

These two tragedies occurred when man is not pursuing Torah knowledge. Had the Jews adhered to God's Torah truths, they would not view idolatry as offering any value, nor would man seek social approval over the pursuit of God's wisdom.

APPLICATION TO OURSELVES

Today, mankind still falls prey to both crimes that destroyed our Temples: idolatry and social dependence. In Jewish and gentile circles, the world still seeks baseless security in false religions, amulets, the dead, astrology, superstitions, and idolatry. People still crave human accolades, laboring to keep up with the Jones', keeping in style, and talking behind the backs of others to elevate themselves...in their imaginations. So the third and final Temple must wait. Man is still not ready to follow God; to make Him our focus. Only very few people truly desire this.

May it be, that soon, we all realize the error in idolatrous practice and seeking social approval. Only through dedicated study, where we seek the truth in all its forms do we live happily and fulfilled, the way God planned we each live. These include the search for truths in areas scientific, mathematical, philosophical, moral, and of course through Torah observance.

I thank my friend in Texas for inspiring many of these comments. ■

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