



JewishTimes

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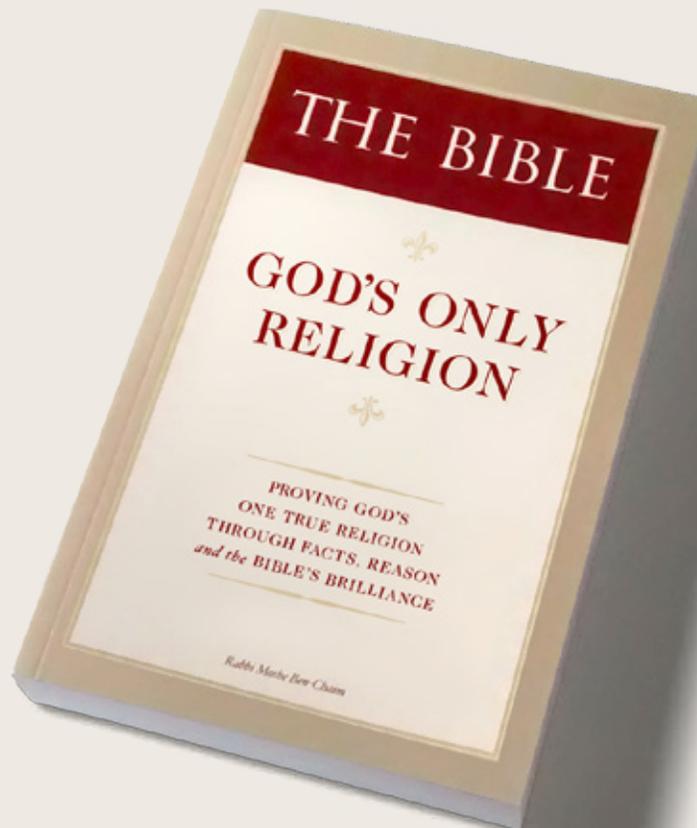


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LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Explain this Medrash

Saul: How do we understand the medrash Rashi cites that either the magicians or Micha created the Gold Calf?

Rabbi: Let's cite the verse and the entire Rashi, and then proceed to analyze it:

"When the people saw that Moses delayed in coming down from the mountain, the people gathered against Aaron and said to him, 'Arise, make us a god who shall go before us, for that man Moses, who brought us from the land of Egypt—we do not know what has happened to him.' Aaron said to them, 'Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.' And all the people took off the gold rings that

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)



were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. This he took from them and formed it with a stylus, and made it into a molten calf. And they exclaimed, "This is your god, Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt (Exod. 32:1-4)."

Rashi (Exod. 32:4) comments:

"As soon as Aaron had thrown the gold into the fire in a melting pot, the Egyptian magicians who joined the Jews' exodus made the golden calf through their magic. There are some who say that Micah the idolator was there, who had been drawn forth from the foundations of a building in Egypt where he was nearly crushed. He had in his possession God's name and a plate upon which Moses had written "Come up, ox, come up, ox!" in order to raise the coffin of Joseph (who is compared to an ox) out of the Nile, and Micha cast that plate into the melting pot and the calf (the young ox) came out (Tanchuma, Ki Tisa 19)."

These conflicting histories regarding who crafted the Gold Calf indicate that they are not literal, but metaphors or allegories. Certainly this is so, as the Torah openly identifies Aaron as the one who made the Calf. Had these been literal accounts, just as the Golden Calf was retained in both versions, those who created the Calf would have equally been retained, and the Torah would not state that Aaron made the Calf. But the verse clearly states Aaron sculpted the Gold Calf with a tool.

What is unique to the Egyptian magicians and Micha, as opposed to other personalities, that the rabbis connected them with the Calf? Furthermore, unlike the magicians, why did Micha require an object to create the calf, and why was that object God's name?

When blaming either the magicians or Micha, we are attributing to them not the creation of this idol, but some other element. That element is idolatry's dynamics. I believe the rabbis intend to convey the two forms of idolatry.



One form is expressed by the magicians. The magicians and the Egyptians were primitive and infantile in their understanding of the universe. The root of idolatry is youth, where children view parents (physical entities) as powerful. When mature, one's psychological nature finds conflict in the realization that his parents are in fact not powerful. Where does the adult displace his image of the powerful parent? Idolatry is the response, where man projects a powerful character onto any one of an array of physical entities—usually humanoid or beast-like to resemble the parent. As this projection exists only in fantasy, the rabbis said the magicians used "magic" in making the Calf. As noted, the verse cannot be contradicted which says that Aaron sculpted the Calf. The rabbis intent is that the magicians merely deified that gold idol. Their relationship to it as a god is akin to making the idol. The rabbis

identify one idolatrous methodology—fantasy—saying the magicians "made" the calf. But in truth, they only deified this gold idol.

Another idolatrous method is not mere abstract projection, but a physical cloaking. All people possess the infantile psychological dependency on parents. This is to be abandoned, like all other poor traits. Jews too face this challenge. No human is exempt. But if a Jew fails to extricate himself from the idolatrous emotion of deifying physical entities, having been raised with monotheistic teachings, he has a more difficult task. He experiences a conflict of which gentiles are unaware. Gentiles seamlessly grow from infantile infants, to infantile adults. They have not confronted monotheism, so their transition to adulthood experiences no conflicts; they maintain their idolatrous emotion with no bumps in the road. But the Jew must either abandon idolatry, or mesh it with his Judaism. He does so by cloaking his idolatry in "Jewish garb."

Micha was idolatrous, but used Jewish raiments (ephod) and retained the services of a Levite, thereby resolving his conflict between Judaism and idolatry by dressing his idolatry in a Hebrew guise. Micha is the perfect candidate for the rabbis lesson of this second mode of idolatrous dynamics. Additionally, Micha also used a plate bearing God's name or identity, teaching that behind idolatry is the need for the supernatural. Ramban and Or Hachaim dismiss the notion that the Jews thought the Calf to be God. Ramban said, "No fool would say the gold that was in their ears is what brought them up out of Egypt (Exod. 32:4)." They merely used the Gold Calf as a means to relate to God. Idolatry aims a relating to a deity, thus the plate was related to God's name. The Role of Moshe and Joseph in this medrash may point to the Jewish leaders responsible for Jewish monotheism, and Micha's conflict. Thus, using an item related to both Moshe and Joseph, Micha assuaged his conflict, and retained a Jewish identity for his idolatry.

Depending on one's origins, his relationship to idolatry will have one of two dynamics. ■

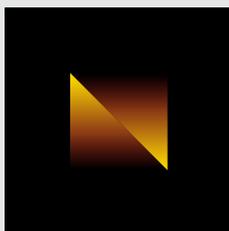
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KEDOSHIM

Kedusha: Sanctity

Rabbi Israel Chait – Written by Rabbi Mendy Feder

A very central theme throughout Judaism is the concept of “kedusha”, sanctity. Although the term seems rather abstract, as Torah Jews, we are commanded to constantly strive to be kadosh, to be holy. In Leviticus chapter 19 verse 2, we are commanded to be kadosh because “I the Lord your God am holy.” Chazal teach us that kedusha means to be “poresh mey arayot”, abstain from the sexual prohibitions. This implies that if not for this commandment, there would be no reason for one to live a moral life style. Throughout the generations, the greatest philosophical minds without the benefit of the Torah have come to the same conclusion, based upon their rational faculty. The best life is one of abstention from the physical pleasures. It would therefore seem that the Torah is redundant.

The Torah additionally instructs us to be holy because God is holy. This creates a dilemma based upon our aforesaid definition. If holy means merely to abstain from the sexual prohibitions, what relevance does it have respecting God?

The concept of a “poresh”, an abstainer, must have greater signifi-

cance than simply abstaining. Pure abstention infers that the person is withholding something from himself. This would imply that the person really has the desire to do the prohibited action but he is just controlling himself. Such an idea would be nothing more than an exercise of self-restraint and denial. The Torah’s concept of a poresh is not so trite. The essence of a poresh is an individual who is poresh because it is a reflection of his true nature. His energies are no longer attracted to the areas of the sexual, but flow naturally to the area of wisdom. Insofar as one’s essence is truly that of a poresh, he partakes of the “image of God” in himself. The Creator by His very nature, is extraneous to, and not limited by, the physical. Thus, in order for one to be a poresh from the Torah perspective, requires great intellectual conviction, whereby all ones energies flow to the acquisition of knowledge.

There is a critical distinction between the Torah’s concept of “prishah” – abstention – and that of the philosophers. The philosophers, although advocating a lifestyle of abstinence, based it upon their appreciation of human nature. They recognized that human nature has two

components. Man has an instinctual nature and an intellectual nature. Based upon their investigation of human nature they concluded that man could only achieve true happiness in the pursuits of his essential, intellectual nature. They therefore preached a lifestyle of abstinence. However to the Torah Jew the concept of abstinence has much greater significance. We are taught that if we lead a lifestyle of abstinence, then we can have a relationship with G-d. We strive to mold our nature to be essentially a Poresh - one who abstains - and attain sanctity in order that we can relate to God. In Judaism, there is a metaphysical dimension if one is a true Poresh. This metaphysical relationship with the creator is only possible when one is a poresh. If one succeeds in redirecting his energies so that they naturally flow to wisdom, only then will he relate to the creator, the source of reality. If a person abstains from the physical because of fear of punishment than he is not truly a poresh. Such a person is still guided by the pleasure principle. The fear of punishment is merely a means to control the person from being punished, and thereby remain in a state of pleasure. He is abstaining from the physical prohibition only

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because he feels that indulging said physical desires would ultimately cause him greater physical pain. However a talmid chacham – a wise person – is naturally drawn towards the principles of the Torah. He is in a unique state, whereby his energies naturally flow to the metaphysical. Thus we can appreciate the Torah imperative to be holy because “I your God am holy.” At such a high spiritual level a person can relate to God as his energies naturally flow to wisdom.

The Rabbis agree with the philosophers, that the life of the ideational is the best life since they hold that “kol d'racheha darchay noam”, “all the ways of the Torah are pleasant”. It would be absurd that God would command man not to live life the best way. It is obvious that God desires man to achieve happiness by living life in line with his essential nature. However the Torah recognizes that by living a life of wisdom, one initiates a relationship with the creator. God, who is not physical and whose essence is mirrored in the world of the ideational, commands that man aspire to live a life based upon the intellectual dictates of the Torah not predicated on the physical. Only then is one able to approach God through wisdom. Since God is not subject to physical whims and passions, so too man is directed to be holy because “I your God am holy.” We are taught that the Rabbis did not fully partake of the pleasures of this world. This does not mean that they essentially sought an austere existence. They did not believe in repressing their desires simply because they felt there was a virtue in moral

restrictions. This philosophy is characteristic of Catholicism, which venerates the lifestyles of priests and nuns. Nor did they have an emotional repulsion to pleasure. Quite the contrary is true because we are taught “ei efshar bli basar chazeer”; one should not refrain from eating pork because he doesn't like it. The proper attitude is for one to say that he really desires pork, but that he is not having it to demonstrate his acceptance of the mitzvos. He struggles to elevate his behavior from purely the instinctual to the level of kedusha – holiness – which is based upon man's true nature, his tzelem Elokim, his intellect. Maimonides in his Mishna Torah in his book on kedusha incorporates the laws of the forbidden foods and prohibited sexual relations. His point is evident. One can only attain kedusha by channeling his energies from the basic instinctual drives of man, the sexual and appetitive and directing them to the intellect. This does not mean denial of the physical but rather an appreciation of the life of wisdom.

Chazal did enjoy the benefits that God offered in this world. We are told that Rabbi was very wealthy and there was nothing lacking from on his table. However, he did not direct his energies to the physical. He had the blessings of the physical world, which he did not deny, but his energies were not drawn to the physical. He lived the life of a kadosh as evidenced by his appellation. His energies naturally flowed to wisdom.

Alternatively, the Rabbis taught that the reason Job lost his wealth was

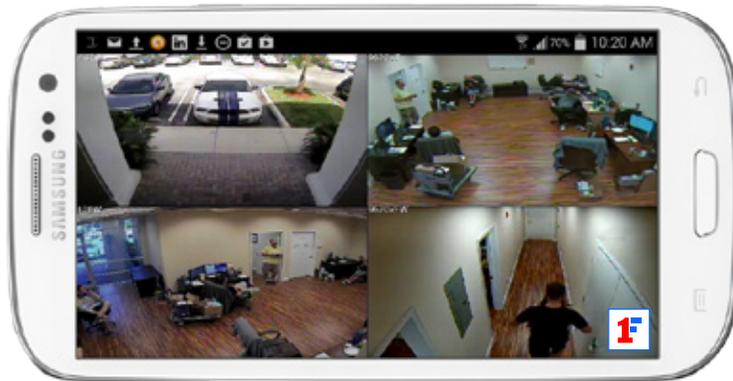
because he had an over attachment to materialism. He viewed it as an end in and of itself. However, after he realized that the physical was only a means to relate to God, not an end, was he capable of regaining his riches. After learning this lesson and redirecting his energies, he used his prosperity simply as a means in Avodas Hashem, worship of God.

The Vilna Gaon explains the concept of “pas bemelach tochal” that one should subsist on bread and salt. This is not to be taken literally as espousing an austere existence. The Gaon explains that at the beginning of one's learning he must “pas b'melach tochal”. This means that if one is to succeed as a talmid chocham – a wise student of Torah – he demands total commitment. If one is fortunate to live a life of kedusha his energies must naturally flow toward wisdom of Torah.

Rashi teaches us that the parsha of Kedoshim is so basic that “kol goofay hatorah teluyin bah”, all the basic principles of the Torah are summarized within it. This obviously cannot be taken literally for most of the 613 commandments are not within the parsha of Kedoshim. Rashi is expressing the importance of the concept of kedusha. It is such a vital and essential concept to the Torah observant Jew, that adherence to its basic principles can lead one to perfection as a Ben Torah.

Therefore, the mitzvah of kedusha is an extremely valuable concept in Judaism. The imperative of “kedoshim teheeyu” must be appreciated in the proper perspective. We must be scrupulous in our pursuit of true holiness. If one abstains from being a glutton because of health reasons, he is not fulfilling the commandment. He is simply pursuing one desire in favor of another. His desire for longevity has displaced his appetitive desires. Such a person's energies are still rooted in the physical pleasures. True sanctity requires a painstaking process where one works to channel his energies to the learning of Torah and its teaching. Ultimately he can aspire to kedusha where his energies will naturally flow to wisdom since the learning of Torah will give him the greatest pleasure. Thus, he will obtain true kedusha and be blessed with an appreciation of “I your God am holy” and be fortunate to have a metaphysical relationship with the creator. ■

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the Power of Words

by Dani Roth



It was a bright spring צפרא and Rabbi Lenwood was walking to school, היכא he educates many young children. At the סיפא of the day, להו out homework ירב. The next day when Rabbi Lenwood got to class he noticed עלמא was talking about one kid named מנשה. He also noticed how when they talked about מנשה they started laughing. The Rebbi asked, "מאי is going א?"

חד kid came up to Rabbi Lenwood

and answered him, "At הישא of class we saw מנשה only did one page of his homework!" "STOP!" Yelled the Rebbi in disgust. "לשון הרע" has no place in this class!"

"But Rebbi, its true." "Truth does not make it ניחא."

Rabbi Lenwood walked in front of the class and said שמע, I have a story to tell all of you. Once there was a kid named אפרים and he was very poor. His parents knew they would בעי to save up enough money to get

אפרים into school. This was hard for them because they had almost no money. They did it, though. They worked really hard and they נמי got as much צדקה as they could. When אפרים was in school one person found out and then the whole school knew that אפרים was poor. Everyone made fun of אפרים he was poor. אפרים stopped coming to school. Every single kid knew that it was because of הרע לשון.

"But Rebbi", one of the kids told his Rebbi, "הכא we're talking about a small thing." "Big or small, it's still לשון הרע."

The kids did not listen and continued saying לשון הרע but the next day מנשה wasn't in school. All of the kids told Rabbi Lenwood that מנשה wasn't there. "איני?" said Rabbi Lenwood. All the kids were wonder-ing what to do. "I have the תירוץ said Rabbi Lenwood "You should apologize. And don't טירחא him anymore." The kids all בעי "What would apologizing do?"

"Apologizing can do a lot. The story isn't over. When אפרים stopped coming one kid came to his apartment that his parents had barely enough money to rent. He apologized ליה and told אפרים to אזיל to school because something special was going on. אפרים came and saw that there was a welcome back party for him and everyone apologized. ה. מנשה you should apologize to ש תא. I will get him to אָחָב back to school."

The next day מנשה came back to school and everyone apologized. מנשה was very happy. At recess all of the kids asked how the Rebbi did it. Rabbi Lenwood answered, "I told מנשה that everyone misses him, so come back to school, איכא a surprise.

שמע מינא to never forget the **power of words.** ■



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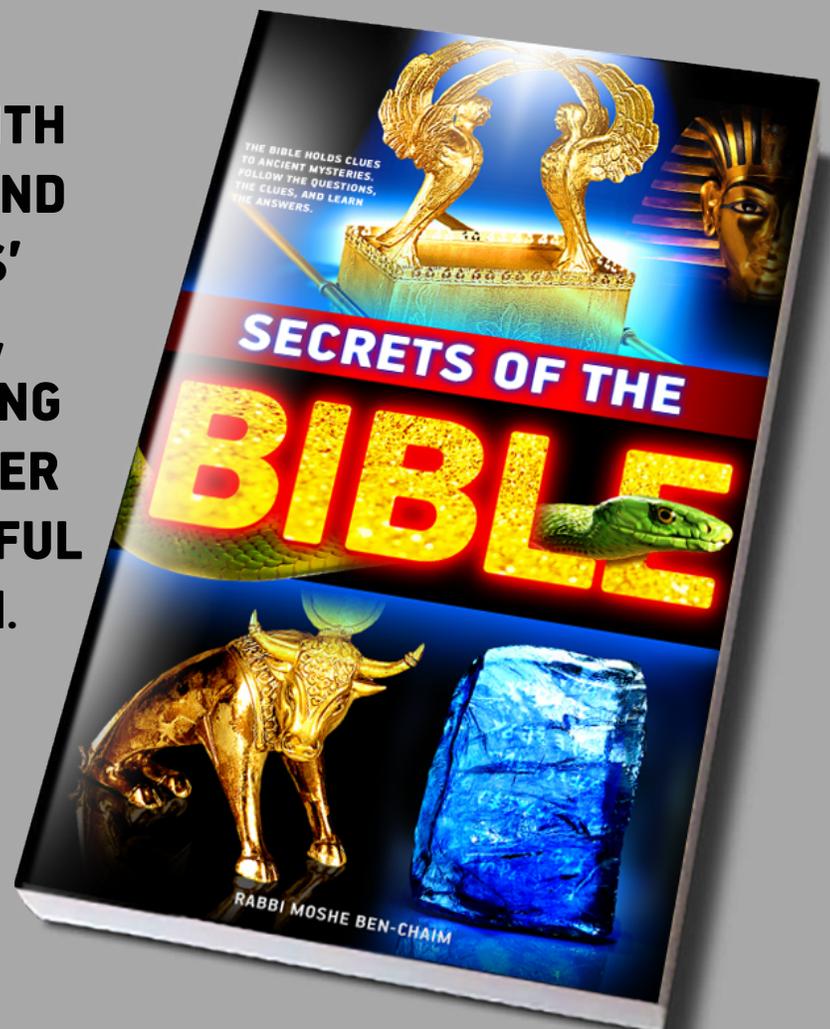


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A LIGHT UNTO NATIONS

RABBI REUVEN MANN

A few days ago many Jews throughout the world celebrated Yom Ha'atzma'ut, Israel Independence Day. It may seem strange that, 69 years after the founding of the State of Israel, we can only say many, but not all Jews observed this event. Where did this strange anomaly originate?

From the outset, Zionism was not endorsed by all segments of the Jewish people. Ironically, the most substantial resistance emanated from the religious sector. At first glance this seems odd. Religious Jews have never viewed the Exile as permanent and pray three times a day for the restoration of Zion.

However, our messianic hopes and expectations were always rooted in our religious beliefs. We expected that the redemption would come about through purely metaphysical means. We fully believed that when Hashem decided the time was right, He would lift us out of the diaspora “on the wings of eagles” and restore us to His Promised Land.

It never even remotely occurred to us that we would establish a political movement based on secular nationalistic principles and initiate a diplomatic and military struggle to liberate our ancient homeland.

Not surprisingly, most of the leading Rabbis were opposed to Zionism. They viewed it as an illegitimate movement based on secular ideologies that were inimical to Torah values. Zionism could not embody the Redeemer that the prophets had foretold and that so many generations had waited and yearned for.

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They, like the rest of the Jewish world, were in for a great surprise. The emergence of a secular Israel brought about by the political maneuvers of nonreligious activists was the most unanticipated event in Jewish history.

The words of Proverbs are pertinent: “Many are the thoughts in the heart of man, but the plan of Hashem, that will prevail.” Against all odds, the state emerged. Contrary to all human calculation, it survived the repeated attempts of its numerous enemies to crush it.

Not only that, but Israel has built up a world-class army that gained mighty victories and conquered precious places like Yerushalayim (Jerusalem).

This staunchly caring nation has absorbed Jewish immigrants from far and wide, and developed into an economic, scientific and technological powerhouse. Its medical innovations and ability to provide emergency first-responder care to crisis locations around the world has earned universal acclaim.

No one, not even the most starry-eyed Zionist dreamer, could have foreseen the emergence of an Israel which the American Vice President refers to as our “most cherished ally.”

We gaze in wonder at the magnificence of the Jewish state. In spite of their early resistance, virtually all elements of the religious sector have developed a respect and appreciation for Israel, which has become the center of Judaism and the Jewish people. Torah study thrives there, and Jews from around the world have access to their holy places, especially the Kotel HaMa’aravi (Western Wall).

Who makes all this possible? The brave soldiers of the IDF, male and female, kippa-wearing and secular, who man the battle fronts, make it possible for all of us to enjoy the blessings of this great country with peace and tranquility. We owe them our full support and gratitude.

Of course we must give thanks to Hashem for the great gift He has given us. We never know the Divine plan, but might ask, by what merit did we earn this treasure? Is this generation somehow more deserv-

ing than the ones that came before it?

One of Rashi’s teachings is relevant here. When Hashem charged Moshe to lead the Jews out of Egypt, he responded, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should take the Jews out of Egypt?” Rashi explains that Moshe posed two questions here: a) how am I qualified to negotiate with a king? and b) even if somehow I am, by what merit do the Jews deserve to be redeemed from slavery?

From Moshe’s second question, we learn that Hashem only intervenes if there is a basis of merit. The Jews had sunk to a low spiritual level in Egypt, and Moshe wanted to understand why they were worthy of Divine intervention.

Hashem replied, “For I will be with you, and this is the sign that I have sent you: when you take the nation out of Egypt, they will serve me on this mountain.”

Rashi explains that Hashem’s answer addressed both questions. He told Moshe that his lack of diplomatic experience didn’t matter, for He would be with him to assure a successful outcome.

And regarding the issue of merit, G-d said that it was not based on what the Jews did in the past, but on what they would do in the future. They are destined to receive the Torah on Sinai and to become G-d’s people and this makes them worthy of being redeemed.

We thus see that one can become worthy of a miracle after the fact. And this should be our attitude to the restoration of our homeland. We should view it as a historic opportunity to elevate our national existence to a much higher level.

We can become worthy of the miracle by establishing a society based on profound wisdom, justice, and the Torah’s unique brand of compassion.

Israel can become a shining light that illuminates the path of all mankind. May we all merit to become participants in this great endeavor.

Shabbat shalom. ■



ISRAEL

The First Rashi

David Rinde



The first Rashi in Breishis quotes a famous Chazal about why the Torah begins how it does with the story of creation. Chazal ask why the Torah does not begin with the first Mitzvah given to Bnei Yisroel, i.e. Rosh Chodesh at the end of Geulas Mizrayim? In answer to this straightforward question we see a cryptic answer.

Chazal explain that the Torah begins with the creation account to teach about HaShem's might creating the world. This way if the nations of the world accuse Bnei Yisroel of stealing the land of Israel from the Canaanim, we can reply that since HaShem made the world He owns it. If HaShem owns the world, it is His to give and take away. He willed that the land of Israel be given to the Canaanim, and He willed it be taken away from them and given to us.

This is a strange answer to the question Chazal asked about why the

Torah does not begin with the first mitzvah. How does this answer explain the need for all of sefer Breishis? Seemingly this only explains the need for the creation story.

Secondly how are we to understand the hypothetical dialogue between the Jewish people and the nations of the world? Is this argument supposed to work? Do we really expect making reference to our Torah and to the act of creation to carry political weight with the rest of the world?

Lastly what is the theory of the maskana (conclusion)? Chazal's question makes clear what it supposed the book of Torah to be, a book of Mitzvos. The maskana does not provide a clear alternative to this theory. According to the maskana what kind of a book IS the Torah if not a book of Mitzvos? Imagine trying to place the Torah in the appropriate section of a library. Chazal's starting premise suggests that the Torah

belongs in the legal section since it is a book of Mitzvos. Which section is the maskana suggesting the Torah belongs?

To answer these questions it is important to refine the scope of the discussion. Because the term "Torah" is often used as a ubiquitous reference to the entirety of Judaism it is easy to forget that there are two Torahs, Torah Shbichtav and Torah Shbaal Peh (the Written and Oral Torahs respectively). Chazal's question here concerns only the Torah Shbichtav. The Torah Shbaal Peh on the other hand IS a "book" of Mitzvos. Chazal are analyzing what kind of the book Torah Shbichtav is and are asking whether it is a similar kind of work to Torah Shbaal Peh or something different entirely.

In order to appreciate this distinction we need to understand the conceptual difference between the two Torahs. Were the two Torahs

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identical in kind there would have been no reason to separate their respective modes of transmission between an oral and written form. One basic deduction we can make about the difference between them is the effect each mode of transmission would have on people's access to that Torah. An oral tradition is necessarily restricted, with only those people entrusted with the tradition having full access. A written book however belongs to no one. It is in the public domain and anyone can read and interpret it as he likes.

The public nature of the Torah Shbichtav means that it speaks to all people, not just the scholars and chachamim concerned with Mitzvos and Halacha. It serves as a cultural orient that directs the nation's values and sense of self. Stories are often used in this way in the ancient (and modern) world, crafting the place that each society feels it occupies by framing heroes and villains and charting where the nation came from and where its destiny lies.

With this clarification of the scope of Chazal's question we can attempt to answer the questions. The dialogue with the nations is not necessarily diplomatic advice, rather it serves as a literary device to the hypothetical nations of the world asking the Jew by what right does he come to be and occupy space in the world? Who is he?

For a nation to even ask this question of itself is truly extraordinary. What other people even stops to question the basis of their legitimacy? The standard narrative is just the opposite. Each nation feels it is the blessed children of the gods or fate and the world rightly revolves around them, simply waiting for them to realize their grand destiny as the exceptional nation chosen to rule the world.

The Jewish people however cannot fall prey to such self-aggrandizements without losing the essential character of Israelite civilization – Kiddush HaShem. We as a nation must internalize that our role is but to play a part in fostering the knowledge of His Great Name amongst the children of Adam. We are not a special people by any inherent grace, but rather the recipients of His grace as the covenantal people in the covenantal land. The Torah therefore confronts the Jewish people with the uncomfortable fact that the land of Israel is not really their property, they are simply tenants who have been allowed to stay for as long, and only for as long, as the Owner pleases.

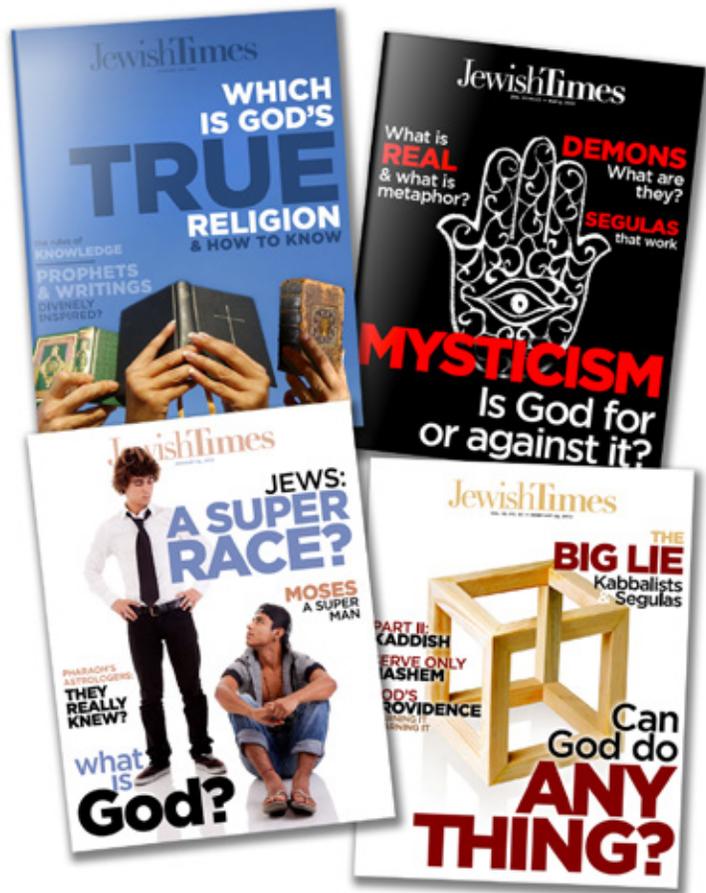
This sets the tone for the entire Torah Shbichtav which is a book that communicates to the entire Jewish people the code and ethos by which it is to live. Such a book will certainly include Mitzvos, but it is far more than that. It is a blueprint for society and must include role models, philosophy, ethics and every other cultural cue required by a people in its entirety. The Written Torah then is a political book in the ancient sense of the term (political philosophy in our times). Instructing the nation about what kind of body politic the Jewish people should form and what their place in His world is. ■

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