



LET US INTROSPECT, REPENT AND PRAY FOR ISRAEL

JewishTimes

VOL. XIX NO. 19 — MAY 14, 2021

**CELEBRATING
3333 YEARS
OF THE BIBLE**

God's Proof that He Exists

and that
Bible is
His Only
Religion

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

IMAGE: The 10 Commands
given to 2.5 million Jews
3333 years ago this Monday

LETTERS
Insecurity
Superstition
Solomon's Advice
Tzedaka
Idolatry
Public Anxiety
Relying on God
Jesus' Blood
Salvation
Dying for
our Sins?

PARSHA
Intro to
Bamidbar

RABBI REUVEN MANN

SHAVUOS
The "Oral"
in Oral Law

RABBI BERNIE FOX

I STAND BY ISRAEL
I wont cower
to the mob

REP. RITCHIE TORRES





WEBSITE UPDATE

MESORA

New mobile-friendly site

Please acquaint yourself with the all new www.Mesora.org

Mesora has toiled tirelessly to create a better design and user experience. New homepage sections will be updated regularly, and now access all library portals easily on smartphones with horizontal scrolling and drop-down menus. Please enjoy!



OUR PURPOSE: WISDOM & MORALITY



God created man to live by truths concerning Him, creation, others and ourselves.

We must study God's instruction about what He is, what is idolatrous or fallacy, we must study nature, psychology, philosophy and morality. This draws us closer to God and He to us, and creates societal harmony which fosters greater Torah for all.

MORE BELOW

Kindness: As equals, all humans must treat others as we wish to be treated. Charity, kindness and justice demand we rise above personal and selfish emotions and recognize that God made others as He made ourselves. Doing so creates harmony, and earns His kindness.

Racism: A Lie: Man descends from Adam. **Black/white twins** unveil the lie of racism. Bible denounces it: Moses' wife was black, our kings married Egyptians and Messiah descends from Moabites. "Better is the day of death than the day of birth" (Ecc. 7:1). Birth doesn't define us; how we live does.

Insecurity: Man's insecurities can be false, but reality is greater, as it is truth. Man seeks security about his future, accepting fallacies like astrology, amulets, omens, horoscopes and others. God prohibited such practices precisely because they are false. God is more powerful than false notions. Rely on Him alone.

Happiness: Many think wealth and success secure happiness. But Torah teaches happiness stems from study. When pursuing wisdom, one is most happy as Torah offers childlike amazement at every turn. Study offers the daily novelty necessary to retain interest and the depth that offers amazement.

Pleasing Others: Don't seek approval over truth. Torah says, "What can man do to me?" (Psalms 56:5). "Don't fear man" (Deut. 1:7). "Desist from man whose soul is in his nostrils, for what is he considered?" (Isaiah 2:22). Mortal attention is irrelevant. Following God earns all goodness.

EMAIL

ASK THE RABBI

JewishTimes

THE JOURNAL ON ORTHODOX JEWISH THOUGHT

| Please send letters and questions to: Comments@Mesora.org |

3 Letters

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM
Multiple questions are addressed.

6 God Proves His Existence and Torah's Truth

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM
Torah's precise wording regarding Revelation at Sinai reveals fundamentals.

9 Intro to Bamidbar

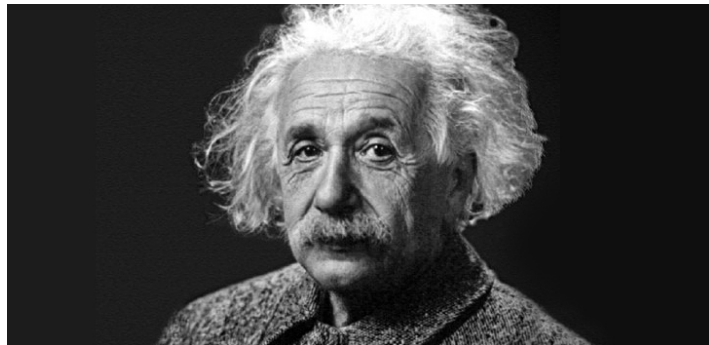
RABBI REUVEN MANN
Rabbi Mann provides a comprehensive outline and principles taught in our new sefer Bamidbar.

13 Oral Law

RABBI BERNIE FOX
Rabbi Fox provides understanding into Torah's educational goals, explaining why the Oral Torah was originally not to be recorded.

15 Supporting Israel

REP. RITCHIE TORRES
Rep. Torres, defiant to the mob, unwavering his support of Israel's right to defense, for one must support truth.



Einstein's Error:

"All religions, arts and sciences are branches of the same tree."

ALBERT EINSTEIN

LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Insecurity & Superstition

READER: Your statement in the JewishTimes is very interesting. You wrote, "Man seeks security about his future, accepting fallacies like astrology, amulets, omens, horoscopes and others. God prohibited such practices precisely because they are false (Ibn Ezra). God is more powerful than false notions. Rely on Him alone."

Can you elaborate?

Gabriel Schecter

RABBI: Insecurity is human. But as one develops, he must distinguish fantasy from reality and direct his needs for security towards only He who can offer security. Astrology, magic, superstitions, idolatry etc. are imaginary, and what doesn't exist, cannot protect you. God is real and promises goodness for those who follow Him. ■

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

Subscriptions are free. To subscribe, send any email to subscribe@mesora.org

Subscribers also receive advertisers' emails and our regular email announcements. We invite feedback at comments@mesora.org

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

King Solomon's Advice

READER: Can you also please explain this Talmudic portion:

Rava expounded Ecclesiastes 12:12: "What is the meaning of that which is written, 'And more than these, my son, be careful of making many books; there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh'?" Rava said this means to be careful to fulfill the words of the Rabbis even more than the words of the Torah. For the words of Torah have positive and negative commands. But regarding the Rabbis' words, whomever transgresses is punished with death." (Eruvin 21b)

Gabriel Schechter

RABBI: Rava quotes the end of Koheles (Ecclesiastes). Here, King Solomon first praised Moses' words, and then he admonishes the reader to obey the Rabbis, whose words are extensive. And although their words don't form part of the Written Torah, nonetheless, they must be heeded. Evidently, man tends to diminish the value of the Rabbis who came after Moses, whose words are not part of the Five Books of Moses. King Solomon therefore warns against belittling the Rabbis' words. ■

Tzedaka

READER: We are to give 10% of our profits. As someone who crafts a product (lighting) or even a design or website, am I supposed to also deduct my labor time on top of product costs before calculating 10%? And if so, what is a reasonable way to come to this number...i.e., and hourly rate?

Shlomo Raphael

RABBI: Correction: as Maimonides and Shulchan Aruch state in their respective Laws of Charity, the highest form of charity is 20%; 10% is only the average fulfillment of tzedaka.

We don't deduct our time for 2 reasons. For if we do, one can work his whole life as a slow worker and never give tzedaka. But primarily, one charges for both: parts and labor. Each has a value, so one's fee compensates him for both. Let's say parts cost \$100. You're happy to sell that part alone for \$150. But as you spent a week searching for that part and preparing it for sale, your labor is another \$200. When you sell at \$500, you are already trading your labor for \$200 of that \$500. To deduct your time again doubles the compensation for your time, which is unethical. This would be equal to you deducting the parts cost twice. Therefore, deduct only cash costs. ■

Distancing from Idolatry

READER: If an idol worshiper gives us a gift i.e., a shirt, are we allowed to use it if we know that the idol worshiper works in the church or sells idols, but we're not sure whether the money he used to buy the gift was earned by means of idolatry i.e., benefiting from impure money?

RABBI: Maimonides explains [1], one must not transact durable items 3 days prior to an idolaters' holidays. But perishables are permitted. One also cannot make or pay loans, pay or get paid, or collateralize. But this applies only in Israel. Outside Israel such transactions are prohibited only on the holiday itself. This concerns a prohibition on "action." But after the act, if one had sinned and transacted, the money or item is permitted in use. The reasoning is to avert from benefitting from idolatry in any measure, or in strengthening idolatrous practice through enriching an idolater. This distances us from idolatry. But the prohibition applies only to the act, not to the benefit via usage. Thus, one is prohibited from acting a certain way, but not from the resulting benefit. ■

[1] Laws of Star Worship 9:1

Dealing with Public Anxiety

READER: What is the torah's remedy and your advice for general anxiety [social anxiety, nervousness, shivers] apart from medical treatment? I am a person who is not very comfortable in public and I have been suffering from anxiety.

RABBI: It is not a Torah value to be a social butterfly and be accepted and praised by the public. The Torah personality is modest: "And the man Moses was exceedingly more humble than all men on the face of Earth" (Num. 12:3). The Torah personality seeks more time in communion with God through Torah study and mitzvahs than his involvement with man. The Torah personality seeks God's approval, not man's. As Rabbi Israel Chait quoted, "Remove yourself from man, who has breath in his nostrils, for what is he worth?" (Isaiah 2:22) Rabbi Chait explained how man seeks social approval: he is insecure, and craves the infantile state of approval (later projecting the parental image onto society, seeking societal approval in place of parental approval). This verse alone should mitigate the stress our societies place on us to be socially acceptable. Fame and success are not the Torah personality's dream.

That being said, Torah asks that we are friendly and kind to others, to greet others before they greet us. But we need not amass friends as is popular today on social media and in general: "the more friends, wins." The stress felt from social settings is typically a feeling of inadequacy, incompetence or the lack of confidence associated with impressing others. By shifting our value away from

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

pleasing others towards following God instead, stress is slowly weakened. This is because God created our minds to be stronger than our emotions. Otherwise the Torah would be impossible to follow. The more we see the truth of Torah values, the less we value our insecure societies and the more secure we become. ■

Relying on God

READER: "You do the best, God will do the rest."

What's your take on this? Complete trust and faith in Hashem without taking action, or taking action without trust and faith in Hashem, or both?

RABBI: That is not a Torah quote, but this is: "Cast your burden on God and He will sustain you; He will never let the righteous man collapse" (Psalms 55:23). But this does not mean to abandon human effort and strategy. Jacob was threatened by his twin Esav. Jacob's response was to prepare a gift—a bribe, to prepare for battle if the gift failed, and to pray to God. He used all methods, never relying on his merit alone, or on a miracle alone. ■

Jesus' Blood

READER: In one of your recent articles, you said, "Taking the body and blood of Jesus as referred to in the Book of John, is like vampirism." And yes, it is more than that, it is also cannibalism! But when Jesus said that, he was speaking an allegory, in the same way that he referred to himself as the "door", or gate, or the "vine", and He also is referred to as "bread," the Bread of Life." My point is that if you don't understand allegory, versus literal statements, then you should NOT be posting material for public consumption, particularly about something as critically important as the salvation of the world! And, BTW, you also take issue with a "man dying for our sins." Why do you NOT have trouble with animal dying to COVER your sins, but you certainly object to Jesus dying to deliver you from your sins?! It doesn't make sense! The blood of animals merely COVERED sin, and had to be repeated over and over again! Messiah's ONCE FOR ALL TIME sacrifice "takes away the sin of the world". But it is only effective IF a person responds to the divine invitation to enter into Covenant with the Creator, YHVH, by the blood, as HE ordained it!! HalleluYah!!

RABBI: Don't treat the heretic religion of Christianity with respect, seeking to defend all that its fable writers scripted. You blindly accept doctrine without proof, doctrines that violate God's Bible. But I am certain you would not blindly submit your body for surgery without validating the doctor's credibility and past successes. You won't let him practice on you. Clearly, Jesus and Christianity are less important to you, that you find blind faith acceptable. But I agree with you, Jesus and Christianity are not validated.

Metaphor

Torah metaphor has limits; it will never fully contradict truth or incite sin. By "fully contradict," I mean that while God allows the references to Him of "anger," "jealousy," "gladness," and the term "God's mighty hand," God permitted these references as He knows that uneducated people require Torah to speak their language: "Torah speaks in man's language." Torah must begin its appeal to man immediately from his youth. But man then learns that such sayings are metaphoric (God has no emotions) and he then abandons any literal understanding. Unlike Christianity that does not say Jesus' blood is metaphor as you suggest, the Rabbis unanimously wean man away from Torah's metaphors regarding God, replacing such false ideas with truths. Secondly, Torah does not contain any metaphor inciting sin, as drinking a human's blood. You will never find a metaphor suggesting murder, adultery, or idolatry. God being "angry," "happy," etc. points to truths, so they can be used until a child grows and learns that God has no emotions. God's "happiness" with man means certain acts by man truly help man, as is God's plan. But murder, adultery, idolatry or drinking blood cannot point to any truth, but to harsh sins. No Torah metaphors are associated to sin. And if we find a metaphor like "circumcise the foreskin of your heart," we immediately know from the inclusion of "circumcision" in this metaphor, that a good—circumcision—is the goal. But "drinking blood" targets no good in any form of that phrase.

Salvation of the World

You have been lead astray by words without meaning. God tells us that salvation is His alone, unrelated to Jesus or any man. God needs no help. Deification of man is idolatry, one of the 10 Commandments. It's astonishing that Christianity endorsed the single worst Biblical sin of deifying man in Jesus.

Man vs. Animal Dying for our Sins

Torah's animal sacrifice is God's command. It aims at causing man to identify with the animal that is killed, to parallel that man should be killed for his sin. But God in His kindness allowed a replacement. It is also vital to distinguish between sacrifice which operates on an individual basis, and Jesus. Only the sinful man needs a sacrifice. But to create a wholesale human sacrifice (Jesus) for mankind again violates the Bible's sacrifice laws and Bible's philosophy.

Man Cannot Atone for Another Man

"Fathers are not killed for sons, and sons are not killed for fathers; each man for his own sin is killed" (Deut. 24:16). Here is yet another flagrant disregard for God's Bible. And this verse is sensible, as a man who does not repent, earns no atonement from God. Jesus cannot remove a person's sins. Only repentance atones: "Let us search and examine our ways, And turn back to God" (Lam. 3:40). Introspection, remorse, and a commitment to never sin again are required for God's forgiveness. Your death won't atone for my sins. And Jesus is no better than you; he is worse: he led you and others away from God. ■

HOLIDAYS

God's Proof that He Exists and that Bible is His Only Religion

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

IMAGE: The 10 Commands given to 2.5 million Jews 3333 years ago this Monday

This Monday is the 3333rd anniversary of the world's greatest event: God's revelation of Himself and His Bible to 2.5 million Jews at Mount Sinai. This event renders Judaism the only religion based on mass witnesses, and thereby the only proven religion.

This event contained a few unique elements: God created a voice emanating from fire, He gave 2 tablets of sapphire bearing miraculous text of the 10 Commandments, He caused earthquakes and the sound of a shofar. Can we understand why God orchestrated Revelation in this precise form?

1. Why must revelation include fire? This question is strengthened as 8 times in Deuteronomy Moses reminds Israel that "God's voice emanated from inside the fire."

2. Why are tablets needed? Why can't those 10 commands be written in Torah like all other 603 commands, and do away with the tablets? The need for these tablets is further seen, as after Moses breaks the tablets, God instructs him to hew a replacement set.

Exodus 32:15,16 reads as follows:

And Moses turned and went down from the mountain and the two Tablets of Testimony were in his hand, tablets written on both sides, from this side and that side they were written. The tablets were God's work, and the writing was God's writing, embedded (charuss) on the tablets.

3. What is the plain meaning of the tablets' script written "from both sides"? What purpose does this serve? Moses broke the tablets, as Rabbi Israel Chait said, lest the Jews worship them as they worshipped the Gold Calf. The tablets were significantly superior than other stones. How so?

4. What is meant by "God's tablets" and "God's writing"? "Charuss" (Ibid. 32:16) can be understood as Maimonides states, naturally formed letters, not subsequent engraving upon the tablets:

"The tablets were God's work, and the writing was God's writing" (Exod. xxxii. 1:6), that is to say, they were the product of nature, not of art, for all natural things are called "the work of the Lord." The writing may also have been produced by His direct will, not by means of an instrument (Guide, book I, chap. lxvi).

Ibn Ezra offers no conclusive translation as he says Torah contains no other instance of “charuss.” Therefore, charuss need not be translated as carved or incised, but merely as somehow “embedded.” What is Maimonides’ message that the writing was “natural”?

5. Earlier (Exod. 31:18) Torah says, “When He finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the pact, stone tablets inscribed with the finger of God.” Why does God divide the tablets’ description into 2 Torah sections?

Appreciating the details and hints about Sinai’s astonishing miracles, God’s precise Torah formulations direct us to the answers.

Fire: The Source of Torah is not Biological

In front of 2.5 million Jews, God created a voice to emanate from the fiery mountain. Maimonides says the Jews heard no distinct words, only the “sound” of words, following the verse, “The Lord spoke to you out of the fire; you heard the sound of words but perceived no form—nothing but a voice” (Deut. 4:12). Life exists in all substances and regions, in ice, under sand, and in water. But all biological life perishes in fire. A voice emanating from fire teaches that this intelligence is not earthbound. But as Maimonides says the Jews heard no distinct words, only the “sound” of words, validation was yet required that Torah’s content was of a divine source. The voice emanating from fire taught that God is not physical. But how was God’s communication verified?

Astonishing Tablets

Torah’s divine source is validated through miraculously formed commands. “From both sides” doesn’t mean “etched” writing, for the Jews could have believed that it was not God, but Moses who fabricated that writing, thereby stripping the tablets of their divine nature. And proof that this was possible for Moses, was that Moses hewed a second set of stones (Exod. 34:4). Certainly he could have scratched their surfaces. Rather, “From both sides” means this: as sapphire is translucent, the internal sapphire grain is viewable from both sides, all angles. God selected a translucent object for this purpose. As these 2 bricks of sapphire formed during creation (Avos 5:6), sentences also formed naturally inside the sapphire. This is a feat impossible for Moses to have fabricated; there is no manner in which Moses could have written inside the stones. Only the one Who formed sapphire, also authored Torah text within the sapphire. These stone tablets must have been an amazing sight. It is akin to cutting a tree open to find the rings inside are composed of Torah text. The creator of trees is Torah’s author. This means that the sapphire—creation—is subordinated to Torah. That is, nature is harnessed to share Torah...the physical world is subservient to Torah. The message at Sinai is that Earth was designed for a goal: for man to find God through studying Torah and nature. This message of nature facilitating the greater goal of sharing Torah is also demonstrated in the voice God created emanating from fire: God harnessed fire and sound, and enabled Torah to emanate. The Rabbis teach, “God viewed Torah and created Earth.” Meaning, Torah is Earth’s blueprint; Torah is prior and superior to Earth. Rashi on Avos 2:8 says that if the Jews don’t follow Torah, God will reverse creation back to voidness.

Shofar

This sound cannot be produced naturally, but only by intelligent life...and certainly so as the shofar sound grew in strength: “The blare of the horn grew louder and louder” (Exod. 19:19) which man

cannot do. When man blows a shofar, his breath weakens until he must stop and inhale once again. Thus, this shofar blare conveyed the presence of an intelligence. And this was necessary as the Jews heard no distinct words. Therefore it was necessary to convey the presence of intelligent life as the source of this event. Similarly, “When Pharaoh does not heed you, I will lay My hand upon Egypt” (Exod. 7:4), Rashi comments: “A literal hand to smite them.” God tells Moses that he will create a physical hand to smite the Egyptians, in addition to the 10 Plagues. Why? For Egypt might attribute the plagues to natural catastrophe. But seeing a hand smite them indicated intelligence behind the plagues: a hand does not function without a mind directing it. Thereby they learned that a “Will” disapproves of them, whereas natural catastrophe does not make Egypt feel victimized for their corrupt lifestyle. Again we read: “Just then, the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace opposite the lamp stand, so that the king (Baelshatzar) could see the hand as it wrote” (Daniel 5:5). Baelshatzar saw hands writing on the wall. He too required this lesson.

Alternatively, if we posit that the Jews did in fact recognize an intelligence, explaining why they feared hearing the voice lest they die (Exod. 20:16), the shofar also functions as an alert, generating awe of this great event. And as sound cannot be totally blocked out as vision can be (by closing one’s eyes), sound was the appropriate stimuli to cause the people’s attentiveness for the event’s duration.

Earthquakes

This displays God’s control over Earth as a whole.

2 Accounts of the Tablets

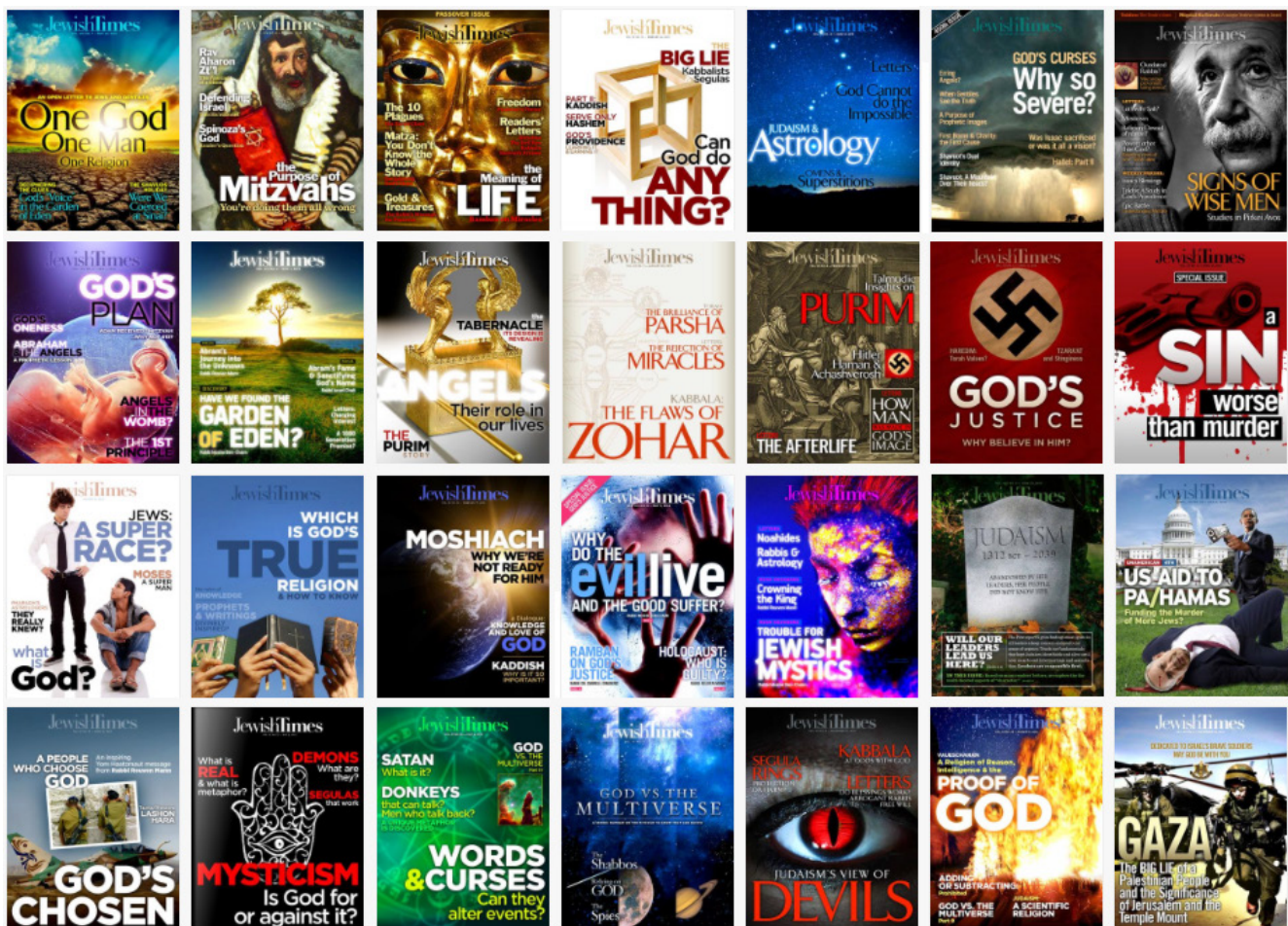
“When He finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the pact, stone tablets...” Here, the operative word is “finished.” Yes, God finished speaking to Moses, but He did not wish this lesson to be finished. This explains why only here God mentioned the tablets “stone” nature. God selected stone as a means to encapsulate His commands in an eternal substance. His delivery to Moses was finished, but not His eternal lessons for man. But the second account of the tablets does not mention stone at all. Rather, it highlights the tablets’ miraculous nature. Why? As Moses was now descending Mt. Sinai to the idolatrous Jews, God highlights miracles, in contrast to the imagined deity of the Gold Calf. The tablets’ miraculous nature was now relevant to contrast the inanimate Gold Calf and teaches a lesson about what to deify: God alone. Sinai’s lesson was now complete: Fire taught that God is not physical and that He is the source of Torah. The miraculous stones and writing taught what exactly are His commands, and that they were not Moses own inscriptions, but were miraculous writing which only God could have created inside the translucent stones for all to see. And due to the lack of clear words, the shofar sound eliminated any doubt of an intelligence; nature was thereby discounted as the cause of this event. Earthquakes showed God’s complete control of the world. God proved His supernatural existence, Torah’s commands were validated as divine and the tablets “testified” as such, earning their title “Tablets of Testimony.” Judaism was formed based on witnessing God and His commands. No other people or religion make this claim.

This Shavuot celebrates 3333 years since God gifted all mankind a system to direct our lives towards the most happiness and fulfillment, in pursuit of God via His wisdom shared in His Torah. God orchestrated Revelation on Mt. Sinai to serve as everlasting validation of His existence and as the source for Torah, the Bible. ■

JewishTimes

Share a **FREE** subscription with others. Click below:

 <http://bit.ly/jtimes2020>



Invite others to join 15,000 subscribers.
Original thought-provoking articles on Torah,
Israel, science, politics and readers' letters.

23 Years. 575 Issues

PARSHA

Intro to Bamidbar

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Part I: Doom in the Desert

Bamidbar, the fourth Book of the Torah, begins at a propitious moment in Jewish history, the second year after the great redemption from Egypt. Much had transpired during that time: the nation had “encountered” God on Mount Sinai and received His Torah.

The Israelites then remained encamped around the mountain for a year, because there was much to accomplish. They had to study the Torah and learn to perform the mitzvot (commandments). In addition, the nation was preoccupied with building the Mishkan (Tabernacle), the precursor to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.

The year had been marked by an especially grievous calamity. The sin of the Golden Calf was one of the worst in Jewish history, bringing the nation to the precipice of destruction. Fortunately, Moses’ prayerful intervention saved the day and the people resumed their tasks. In the second year after the Exodus, the dedication of the Mishkan was complete, and all preparations were made for the conquest and settlement of the Land that God had promised Abraham to give to his children.

The Book of Bamidbar begins on a certain high note. One can sense Moses’ enthusiasm as he entreats his father-in-law, Jethro, to join the people in settling Israel so he can partake of all the blessings that Hashem has in store for the Jews.

However, Moses’ initial excitement did not endure. The Book of Bamidbar, which was supposed to be filled with glory and accomplishment, turned out to be the saddest and most disappointing in the entire Torah.

It did not take long for a spirit of rebelliousness to break out. We read about the revolt over food, with the people complaining about the monotony of the manna. (See “The True Leader,” page 42, and “Rebellion in the Wilderness,” page 59). This brought forth a severe punishment from God. Why,

at this point, did the people see fit to complain about their diet? Did the sudden outbreak of discontent manifest an underlying anxiety about the imminent invasion of Canaan?

One might think so, because the Book of Bamidbar is dominated by the tragic incident of the Spies. In response to Moses’ injunction to “go up and conquer” (Deuteronomy 1:21), the people asked to send men on a mission to scout out the land and return with a report about their findings.

This turned out to be a disaster, because the Spies infected the people with extreme panic about the might of the land’s inhabitants. (See “The Sin of the Spies: Excessive Guilt,” page 66, and “The Spies,” page 73). God responded with His decree that the conquest of the land would be postponed for 40 years, until the entire generation of adults who had left Egypt passed away. This development converted Bamidbar into a Book of sadness and failure.

The terrible decree further impacted the people in that it generated a series of rebellions. Most outrageous was that of Korah and his “congregation,” who openly plotted to derail Moses’ religious authority. Korah sought to overturn Moses’ appointment of Aaron as the Kohain and the Levite Tribe as the administrators of the Temple.

It is important to note that Korah’s rebellion and the debacle of the Spies were the work of distinguished, national leaders. Only Hashem’s providential intervention enabled Moses to retain his authority and control over the nation. But he was continuously challenged by the insubordination of discontented personalities.

Bamidbar illustrates that, indeed, even our greatest leaders are subject to sin. In this Book, we learn about the transgressions of Moses’ sister, Miriam, and his brother, Aaron. Incomprehensibly, she “complained” that Moses had separated from his wife (Rashi on Numbers 12:1). He had done so at

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

God's behest, because he had reached the highest level of prophecy, and had to be constantly ready for divine communication. However, Miriam was not aware of this, and her criticism was deemed to be inappropriate.

The rebellious spirit of the people eventually took its toll on Moses and Aaron, and they stumbled. When the people complained about the absence of water, God told Moses and Aaron to "speak to the rock, that it give forth its waters" (Numbers 20:8). Inexplicably, Moses hit the rock, and Hashem regarded this as a failure to sanctify His Name in the midst of the Congregation.

The punishment was harsh and irrevocable. Moses, who had led the Jews out of Egypt, brought down the Torah from Mount Sinai and guided the Israelites on their trek through the Wilderness, would not complete the mission by leading them in their glorious conquest of the Land.

The Book of Bamidbar contains many other sad stories, such as the encounter with the wicked Balaam. It is true that God thwarted his desire to utter "curses" against the Jewish people. However, this evil "prophet" left his mark, as Jewish males fell prey to his nefarious scheme of entrapment. Balaam advised the women of Moab to use sexual seduction to lure the Jewish men into the worship of the idol Peor (see "Religious Zealots," page 180.) This trespass was so egregious that it caused a plague, leading to the death of 24,000 people.

Part II: Greatness of Spirit

While there is much that is of a negative character in Bamidbar, that is not the Book's total story. Alongside of the failures we have recounted, there are episodes of spiritual grandeur.

Prior to the first anniversary of the Exodus, Moses commanded the Nation to bring the Passover Sacrifice on the 14th of Nissan in accordance with all its "Statutes and Judgements" (Numbers 9:3). Among its requirements is the rule that anyone in a state of ritual impurity, because of contact with a corpse, is disqualified from performing this mitzvah (commandment). According to Jewish law, a person who fails to fulfill a commandment because of circumstances beyond his control bears no guilt before God.

In spite of that dispensation, a group of such "impure" people came before Moses and implored him to be given another opportunity, at a time when they would have become ritually pure, to bring the Passover offering. Moses inquired of God, who responded by establishing the Law of the "Second Passover," which commands all who were unable (or unwilling) to offer the Passover on its initial date to do so at an alternative time (the 14th of the Hebrew month of Iyar).

Let us recognize the nobility of spirit which motivated these "impure" people to issue their request. They would have suffered no consequences for failure to perform the ritual, so what was it that motivated their plea?

Apparently, these people recognized and appreciated the great spiritual benefits afforded by fulfillment of the Commandments, especially the Passover, whose central theme is the renunciation of Idolatry. Moreover, they understood how fundamental this particular mitzvah is to the Jewish People as a commemoration of the Exodus. They did not want to be prevented from bonding with their brothers and sisters in this great experience. This expression of commitment to Torah and the Jewish People represents a high point in the history of the Jews.

Greatness of spirit can also be seen in the interaction between Moses and the representatives of the tribes of Reuben and Gad. Moses had conquered the land on the Eastern side of the Jordan. (See "Dealing with Chutzpah, page 174). This territory contained vast expanses of rich pasture which was perfectly suited for these tribes, who had large holdings of livestock. They requested that Moses allow them to forfeit their portion on the Western side of the Jordan and instead take their inheritance on this newly acquired area. Upon hearing this, Moses became furious and lashed out, accusing them of repeating the crime of the Spies, who induced the national panic that halted the forward march to Israel.

The leaders of the two tribes got the message. They offered to be in the vanguard of the invading forces and lead the battle for the Promised Land. They would remain with their brothers until the land of Israel was conquered and settled. Only then would they return to their families on the other side of the Jordan.

An agreement was struck between the parties and peace was preserved. Subsequently, the two tribes fulfilled all their guarantees. They fought at the head of their brothers for 14 years until the conquest was complete. The ability of the

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)




SHARE



SHARE

Share

Share us on facebook by clicking any  icon in the magazine. Try the one above.

Subscribe FREE!

To receive a free Jewishtimes subscription, email us at Subscribe@Mesora.org and confirm when asked.

people to rise above partisan interests and work out viable compromises that retained national unity reflects a high level of idealism and commitment which should motivate and inspire us today.

Part III: Rectification of Sin

Beyond the stories recorded in Bamidbar, a number of new Commandments are revealed by Moses in this Book. In addition to Second Passover they include Sotah, Nazir, Tzitzit (fringes on garments), Red Heifer, Purging of Vessels and more.

One may rightfully ask, is there a connection between the Mitzvot detailed here and the narratives communicated in this Book? What philosophical relevance do these religious imperatives have to the moral themes of the stories we read here?

Addressing these questions necessarily entails a bit of speculation, but I would like to put forth a certain hypothesis. As I see it, the narratives of Bamidbar are primarily about the failures and setbacks experienced by the Jews on their journey to God's land. Thus, we must ask, what is the teaching of the Torah on the subject of man's defeats in the Milchemet HaChaim (the "Battle of Life")?

I would like to suggest that it is that we are never to be broken by our inability to attain our goals or live up to our standards of moral excellence. While Bamidbar is a Book of failure, it is also one of hope, because Judaism is rooted in the doctrine of the perfectibility of man and of mankind.

Many of the Commandments in Bamidbar are based on the idea of correcting defects and repairing sin. They presuppose that man is prone to failure, but, that he can overcome it. The Torah prescribes corrective measures to transform weaknesses into strengths, flaws into capabilities. Setbacks can become the catalyst for growth and progress.

For example, the institution of Nazir consists of a vow to abstain from wine, not cut one's hair, and avoid any contact with a corpse. This is a completely voluntary mitzvah, as no one is obligated to become a Nazirite.

In general, Judaism eschews asceticism and favors disciplined and moderate gratification of one's desires, and this seems to be at odds with the suppression of bodily pleasure symbolized by the restrictions incumbent on a Nazir. However, sometimes a person goes to extremes of indulgence and needs to be weaned of his excesses. It might then be wise to take upon himself, for a limited amount of time, a vow of abstinence. This temporary extreme of self-denial will allow him to regain his moral equilibrium. The mitzvah of Nazirut guides a person who has allowed himself to get caught up in a hedonistic lifestyle to find his way back to the intelligent and moderate pathway of Torah. (See "Reverence for the Soul" on page 33).

Another theme expressed in Bamidbar's Mitzvot is that of purification from sin and rebirth of the personality. Judaism asserts that man is a sinner by nature (although it vehemently rejects the notion that he is evil by nature). Because of this very nature, our path to perfection inevitably entails foolishness and irrational behaviors. However, the Creator also implanted in man the ability to recognize failures and overcome them.

It is therefore not by accident that the Commandment of the Red Heifer and that of Purging of Vessels make their appearance here. The former is concerned with man's purification from the tumah (spiritual impurity) he acquires from his encounter with a dead body. The latter teaches that a vessel which has become ritually tainted by absorption of unkosher substances can be cleansed of those elements and once again become functional.

So too can the human personality expunge the negative attitudes and dispositions it has internalized, to become a new and better person. In fact, that is precisely what God did in

response to the sin of the Spies. The decree of a 40-year trek in the wilderness was not exclusively a punishment. It was intended as an experience of training and growth. The Rambam explains, "It was the result of God's wisdom that the Israelites were led about in the wilderness till they acquired courage. For it is a well-known fact that traveling in the wilderness and privation of bodily enjoyments such as bathing, produce courage, while the reverse is the source of faint-heartedness; besides another generation arose during the wandering that had not been accustomed to degradation and slavery"(Guide for the Perplexed, part 3, chapter 32).

Thus, in the book of Bamidbar, the Torah merges narratives of setbacks and rebellions with Commandments that pertain to man's ability to rectify his transgressions and renew his spirit. The Torah is very optimistic about man's ability to overcome sin and attain perfection.

Part IV: A World Redeemed

Despite the ominous events that seem to mark Bamidbar as a book of tragedy, Bamidbar may be rightly described as the Book of both failure and hope. That is because it emerges that the Jews are an eternal People.

In the words of the Rambam, "We are in possession of a divine assurance that Israel is indestructible and imperishable, and will always continue to be a preeminent community. As it is impossible for God to cease to exist, so is Israel's destruction and disappearance from the world unthinkable, as we read, 'For I the Lord change not, and you, O sons of Jacob, will not be consumed' (Malachi 3:6). Similarly He has avowed and assured us that it is unimaginable that He will reject us entirely even if we disobey Him, and disregard His behests, as the prophet Jeremiah avers, 'Thus says the Lord: If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, then will I also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, says the Lord' (Jeremiah 31:36)." (Rambam's "Epistle to Yemen," in A Maimonides Reader by Isadore Twersky [1972], p.445).

However, this assurance should not give rise to a sense of complacency or reduction of energy in pursuit of our national spiritual goals. For God will not miraculously transform us into righteous people. Neither will we be magically "saved." He has implanted within us a divine soul that gives us the ability to choose. And He demands that we use that capacity to choose the good.

Therefore we must soberly recognize that there is a lot of work that needs to be done. We must assiduously pursue truth and strive to live by it in all areas of life. We must not be deterred by failures and setbacks. We must never quit the moral and spiritual battlefield. Bamidbar is a Book that gives us hope, but does not relieve us of responsibility.

We should remember that in spite of the many tragedies recounted in Bamidbar, the Jewish People did enter the Promised Land and established a society which rose to great heights. Both Temples were destroyed and a long and bitter Exile ensued. And yet, our generation has been granted the privilege to witness and participate in the fulfillment of the great Biblical prophecy of the return and regeneration of National Jewish existence.

This historical odyssey has been a long and difficult one, but Bamidbar inspires us to believe that the vision of mankind perfected and redeemed and a world at peace and harmony will be achieved. May it happen speedily and in our time.

Shabbat Shalom. Chag Shavuot Sameach. ■



NYDesign.com

Building loyalty and sales through design strategies
studio@nydesign.com | 516.569.8888

Branding	Dataviz/Charts	Websites	Social Media
UI/App Design	Infographics	Landing Pages	Advtg/Promo
Wires/Prototypes	Iconography	Editorial Design	Animation
App Store Design	Illustration	Presentations	Packaging



CONDÉ NAST



SHAVUOS

The “Oral” in Oral law

RABBI BERNIE FOX



I. Introduction: The goals of education

I once attended a seminar on student-directed learning. In the presenter’s model, each student selects a subject that he or she would like to study and researches the area. The teacher is not expected to be knowledgeable in the variety of subjects selected. The teacher’s role is not to be the instructor. Rather, the teacher is the facilitator, mentoring the students and providing guidance in researching their subjects and designing their presentations. The presenter shared research projects completed by her students. These were impressive. Each project demonstrated that the student had researched his or her subject extensively and created a coherent and engaging multi-media report.

The seminar encouraged participants to consider modalities of learning. How do students learn best? Is instruction the best means of educating students? Should we provide students more opportunities to pursue their passions and direct their own learning? What is the best role for teachers; should a teacher be an instructor or a facilitator? These questions do not have absolute answers. Each group of students and individual student is unique. Teachers must consider this uniqueness in determining the model for his or her classroom. The best educators approach the classroom with a toolbox rather than a blueprint. These educators are not committed to a single classroom model but build the model to suit the students.

The discussion of these issues must take place within a framework. To evaluate classroom models and modalities of learning, we must first identify and prioritize the objectives of education. What is our highest priority? Is it to instill in the student a love of knowledge? Are we prioritizing mastery of the subject area? Our goals shape the conversation about models and modalities. One goal which is stressed by the Torah is often overlooked. What is this goal?

Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Yehoshua, and Yehoshua [transmitted it] to the Elders, and the Elders [transmitted it] to the Prophets... (Pirke Avot 1:1)

II. The Oral Torah and Written Torah

Shavuot celebrates Revelation and receiving the Torah. Moshe received two Torahs at Sinai. He received Torah SheBiChtav – the Written Law – and Torah SheBeAl-Peh – the Oral Law. The Written Law includes the five books of the Torah. The Oral Law includes all the interpretation and commentary. All our laws have a basis in the Written Law, but the specific details are provided by the Oral Law. Consider an example. The Written Law tells us to rest on Shabbat and refrain from melachah – work. What is specifically included in this prohibition? What is considered melachah? The thirty-nine general categories of melachah are provided by the Oral Law. To observe the commandments of the Written Law, we need the commentary of the Oral Law.

Moshe received the Oral Law at Sinai with the admonition to not record its contents. The Oral Law was to be transmitted by the teacher to the student and not studied from a text. The Oral Law was transmitted by this method for thirty-four generations – from Moshe to Ribbi Yehudah. Ribbi Yehudah initiated the recording of the Oral Law. He created the Mishne. This began a process that continues to this day. The creating of the Mishne was followed by the redacting of the Talmud. Commentaries on the Mishne and Talmud were composed and printed. Today, new insights continue to be developed and published in journals and books.

Why did Ribbi depart from tradition and forsake the admonition against recording the Oral Law? He assessed the condition of the Jewish people and the state of scholarship. He concluded that the Oral Law would not be preserved if it was completely dependent on oral transmission. A concession was necessary. The restriction was set aside to preserve the Oral Law.[1]

Why was recording the Oral Law prohibited? Why were we required to transmit it from teacher to student? Why could it not be recorded and studied from books? There are multiple reasons. Let us consider one of these.[2]

And these are the descendants of Aharon and Moshe on the day that Hashem spoke to Moshe at Mount Sinai. (Sefer BeMidbar 3:1)

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

III. Teachers are parents

This passage introduces the Torah's enumeration of Aharon's sons. Oddly, the passage describes Aharon's four sons as the descendants of Aharon and Moshe. Why is their parentage shared with Moshe? Rashi comments:

The [Torah] mentions only the sons of Aharon and they are called the descendants of Moshe. [This is] because he taught them Torah. This teaches that anyone who teaches Torah to the son of his friend is regarded by the Torah as if he parented him.

Rashi explains that a teacher of Torah is regarded by the Torah as a parent of the students. Why is the teacher a parent to the students? The answer lies in a fundamental truth of the Torah. Human beings are more than biological creatures. We each are endowed with a spiritual soul. Biological parents are the source of the organic component of their children. The teacher gives life to the spiritual component. However, there is a deeper level to Rashi's comments. To more fully understand Rashi, we must consider a difficult comment of the Talmud.

Ribbi said, "The reason I am sharper than my colleagues is that I saw Ribbi Meir from behind. And had I seen him from in front, I would be even sharper." (Mesechet Eruvin 13b)

IV. Ribbi and Ribbi Meir

Ribbi was the preeminent scholar of his generation. He was recognized as the most ingenious and insightful. He attributed these qualities to his studies with Ribbi Meir.^[3] However, he explained that he saw his teacher only from behind. He did not see him from in front. He proclaimed that if he had seen Ribbi Meir from in front, he would have attained an even greater level of scholarship. What does Ribbi mean? Is he attributing his attainments to where he sat during Ribbi Meir's instruction? Is his contention that because he did not see his teacher's face but only his back, his development as a scholar was stunted?

And I will withdraw My palm. And you will see My back, and you will not see My face. (Sefer Shemot 33:23)

V. The meaning of "front" and "back"

Rav Yitzchak Volozhin in a note to his introduction to his father's work Nefesh HaChayim provides a key for interpreting Ribbi's statement. He notes that there is an instance in the Torah in which the same metaphor of seeing one's back and not face is used. Moshe asked Hashem to reveal to him His glory. He was

seeking an understanding of Hashem. Hashem responded to Moshe that the knowledge he sought is inaccessible to mortals. However, He told Moshe that He would grant him a revelation. Moshe would see His back but not His face. In other words, seeing Hashem's face is a metaphor for a more complete or a deeper understanding of Hashem. Seeing Hashem's back is a metaphor for an understanding that is profound but not complete. Rav Yitzchak Volozhin suggests that Ribbi was employing the same metaphor to describe his understanding of Ribbi Meir's teachings. He gained much from his teacher, but his understanding was not complete.

Can we understand what Ribbi acquired from his teacher and what remained beyond his grasp? To answer this question, we must return to Moshe's encounter with Hashem. What knowledge was denied Moshe and what knowledge was granted? Rambam – Maimonides – explains that Moshe wished to understand Hashem's essential nature. He was granted knowledge of His ways. Hashem revealed to Moshe the secrets of creation – its nature and Hashem's governance of it.^[4]

What does Rambam mean? An analogy will provide a working understanding of his comments. The study of computers can be divided into two general areas. Computer science is the study of software programs. It includes computer languages and programming. Computer engineering focuses on the hardware – the internal components of the computer. In other words, computer engineering deals with the question, "What is a computer? Of what is it made?" Computer science addresses the question, "What does a computer do?" Moshe wanted to know the answer to the question, "What is Hashem?" He was granted a response to the question, "What does Hashem do?" The response included insight into the structure and nature of the physical world and Hashem's governance of it. It did not include an understanding of the Divine Essence.

What did Ribbi acquire from Ribbi Meir? What knowledge eluded him? Let us apply Rambam's explanation of the metaphor. Ribbi attained an understanding of Ribbi Meir's teachings. He was not able to look inside his teacher and understand his methods and his manner of thinking. This more profound understanding of his teacher alluded him.^[5] Ribbi laments that he did not master his teacher's manner of thinking.

VI. The role of the teacher

An important insight into the role of the teacher emerges from this analysis. Ideally, the teacher not only transmits knowledge. The teacher provides students with a method of analysis and a way of thinking. Now, let us return

to Rashi's comments about a teacher and student. We will begin with an analogy.

As a young man, my father was a cabinet and furniture maker. Before attaining the status of craftsman, he apprenticed for many years. Why was apprenticeship required and what did it accomplish? Fine furniture is not made by tools. It is made with tools. A craftsman with highly developed and refined skills uses the tools to create an exquisite product. Through his apprenticeship, the apprentice develops these necessary skills.

Our minds, our innate intelligence is a tool. It can penetrate mysteries, elucidate, replace the darkness of ignorance with the light of knowledge. But like every powerful tool, it can only be effective in the hands of a properly trained craftsman. This training is an important role of the teacher. The teacher must train students to think precisely, to distinguish between truth and falsehood, to recognize sophistry or the influence of a bias in one's thinking. This is certainly true of a Torah teacher. The role of this teacher is to impart knowledge and to develop and refine the students' thinking. This teacher is a parent. This teacher is engaged in forming and cultivating young minds.

VII. Preserving the teacher-student relationship

Why was the Oral Law intended to be transmitted from teacher to student? Why was it not immediately recorded? This discussion provides one response. It identifies an important aspect of oral transmission. Books cannot teach the student how to think. The development of a student's thinking takes place through the intimate work of teacher and student. The Oral Law is not composed of a body of facts. It includes a manner of analysis and a highly developed method of thinking. These skills require collaboration between student and teacher. The Oral Law's transmission from teacher to student assured that each generation's scholars would be more than repositories for information. They would be trained in the methods of analysis and thinking. ■

Footnotes

1. Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Introduction.
2. See Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, Bais HaLeyve, Responsa, Derush 18 for another explanation.
3. Rambam (Mishne Torah, Introduction) identifies the teachers from whom Ribbi received transmission of the Oral Law. He does not include among them Ribbi Meir. This suggests that Ribbi had limited exposure to Ribbi Meir.
4. Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Moreh Nevuchim, volume 1, chapter 54.
5. Rav Yitzchak Volozhin explains Ribbi's metaphor using Kabbalistic terms. I cannot determine whether his explanation corresponds with that offered here or is an alternative explanation of the metaphor.

OPINION



Rep. Ritchie Torres (D-Bronx) got backlash on Twitter for his remarks supporting Israel's right to self-defense in the face of Hamas rocket attacks

Rep. Ritchie Torres: “Here’s why I’m supporting Israel — despite the Twitter mob”

By Ritchie Torres

“What is under siege is the truth itself. Circulating on social media is a vicious lie— a lie that deceptively reframes the terrorism of Hamas as self-defense and deceptively reframes the self-defense of Israel as terrorism. Increasingly, we seem to live in an Orwellian universe where the truth no longer matters.”

As Israel faced Arab riots and endless rocket attacks from Gaza this week, progressive Rep. Ritchie Torres (D-The Bronx) voiced his commitment to the Jewish state’s safety and sovereignty at a Zoom event sponsored by the UJA — triggering a harsh backlash for doing so. His comments appear below:

“Israel is under siege not only from relentless rocket fire at the hands of Hamas but also from an endless propaganda war that has taken on a new intensity here in the United States and elsewhere.

I am here to affirm that, as a member of Congress — one who intends to be here for a long time — I have an unwavering commitment to both the sovereignty and security of Israel as a Jewish state. With sovereignty and security comes the inherent right of self-defense, a right that every state, including our own, takes for granted. Why should Israel be an exception to the rule? Why should Israel be held to a deadly double standard in a moment of terror?

It is unreasonable to expect a nation state to be the passive target of hundreds of rockets and then forfeit the right to defend itself amid a constant stream of terror. No right-minded person would impose that kind of self-destructive burden on any other country.

What is under siege is not only Israel. What is under siege is the truth itself. Circulating on social media is a

vicious lie — a lie that deceptively reframes the terrorism of Hamas as self-defense and deceptively reframes the self-defense of Israel as terrorism. Increasingly, we seem to live in an Orwellian universe where the truth no longer matters.

Now is not the time to be silent. All of us, especially those holding elected office, have to be visible and vocal — fearless and forceful — in standing up for our greatest friend in the Middle East.

Support for Israel, especially in moments like these, is not for the faint-hearted. The moment I sent out a statement denouncing the terrorism of Hamas, I was swiftly demonized by extremists as a white supremacist, as a supporter of apartheid, ethnic cleansing, genocide. Although these comments cause great pain to my loved ones, I remain as determined as ever to speak out. And if I can speak out, then anyone can. And everyone must.

We cannot allow ourselves to be silenced by an overbearing Twitter mob, dominated by the extremes of American politics. If we, in elected office, are not willing to say and do what is right, then we are unworthy of the office we hold.

I am here to state, in clearest possible terms, that I stand with Israel, because doing so, quite simply, is the right thing to do.” ■

ALL HOME IMPROVEMENTS

SERVING THE 5 TOWNS & ORANGE COUNTY

(347)489-2048



HOME REPAIR **DONE RIGHT!**



- *Lowest Prices*
- *Fully Insured*
- *17 Years Experience*
- *Free Estimates*



Spring Special!

Vinyl Siding Powerwashing \$275.00
includes algae, mildew, and mold treatment
(high ranch bi-level homes)

(347)489-2048

www.BBGHandymanServices.com
BBGHandymanServices@yahoo.com

Deck Powerwashing & staining
\$100.00 off total price

Subscribe to the **FREE** Jewishtimes.

Subscribe by emailing: Subscribe@Mesora.org



Original, thought provoking articles on Torah, Israel, science, politics and readers' letters.

Enjoy all 575 back issues free: www.Mesora.org