

Nature: A Teacher II

Which image is a view of Earth from space, and which is the leaf? See "Design in Nature" in this issue for some thoughts on nature's parallels.

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www.mesora.org/openletter/openletter2.html**VaEtchanan****RABBI BERNARD FOX**

"I am Hashem your G-d that has taken you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." (Devarim 5:6)

Moshe reviews the Decalogue – the Aseret HaDibrot. Our passage is the first pasuk of the Aseret HaDibrot. Hashem declares that He is the G-d that redeemed Bnai Yisrael

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SPEECH to the Knesset

HOUSE SPEAKER REP. TOM DELAY

July 30, 2003

"Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for your invitation and for that warm reception.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the citizens of Israel for their generous welcome and hospitality to my wife, Christine, and me over the last three days.

My traveling partner, Ander Crenshaw, and I look forward to bringing the lessons we've learned here back to America and to our colleagues in Congress.

I also look forward to sharing my experiences with President Bush, whose leadership and clarity make peace in the Middle East possible and victory in the war on terror inevitable.

In his comments yesterday, the

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Perception & Reason

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The Talmud in Chagiga (11b) discusses what man is allowed to ponder. This is of great impact, as this prohibition limits topics allowed to be studied by Torah law. But this presents a difficulty: are we not to use our minds in all areas? If so, how can any imposed limit on our minds be acceptable, and condoned by the Torah? The source for this prohibition is found in our Parsha VauEschanan, 4:32, "When you now ask of the earlier days that were before you, to the days that God

created man on the land, and from one end of the heavens to the (other) end of the heavens..." The Talmud says, "you might think it permissible to inquire of matters preceding Creation, therefore we are taught, "from the first days". Meaning, up until Day One we may inquire, but no earlier. The Talmud continues, "you might think you may ask what is above (the heavens) and what is below (the Earth), therefore we are taught, "from one end of the heavens to the (other) end of the heavens."

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Perception & Reason

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

(continued from page 1)

The Talmud concludes that one may not investigate what is above the heavens or below the Earth, nor what is before Creation or what will be at the end of time. So our question is an emphatic, "why?" To compound this question, we are told by none other than Rabbi Bachaya ben Josef ibn Paquda, author of "Duties of the Heart", that we are not to simply listen to the Rabbis, but we must earnestly study their words until we see, with our own reason, the truth of their teachings, and the teachings of the Torah. And if we fail to do so, we commit a grave injustice. Rabbi Bachaya ben Josef ibn Paquda says, "...you should reflect on your own mind, and use your intellect in these matters. First learn them from tradition - which covers all the commandments in the Torah, their principles and details - and then examine them with your own mind, understanding, and judgment, until the truth becomes clear to you, and falsehood rejected, as it is written: "Understand today, and reflect on it in your heart, Hashem is the G-d in the heavens above, and on the Earth below, there is no other". (Ibid, 4:39 - Another quote from this weeks Parsha.)

Based on Rabbi Bachaya's teachings, and the words of the Torah, we must use our minds. So I reiterate the question: how can the Torah also demand we halt our investigation in certain areas? And what is the significance of these areas?

My first step is to suggest that as God willed we all have intelligence, then, we are to use this intelligence in all areas of our lives. If our mind has a question on God's universe, His justice, or any other matter, we should investigate it to the best of our abilities. Knowledge for the sake of knowledge is man's highest level, as he is naturally interested in God's creation. Similarly, if we are faced with a subject matter beyond our abilities, we should be equally honest and say, "I don't know", or "I can't figure it out." The bottom line is honesty, and this pervades both scenarios; A)when we have not exceeded our abilities, and B)when we

have. Knowledge means "knowledge of reality", and if we have no honesty, we have no knowledge.

An illustration of A, when our abilities are not exceeded, is easy: We are asked at 12:00 noon, while standing next to an apple tree, "what color is this apple is in front of us?" Our abilities of perception and comparison are fully functional. We have not exceeded our abilities. An honest answer is possible. (I say comparison, as identification of color requires a comparison to our memory of all other colors. In truth, all knowledge is based on comparison, which our minds do without will, and by design, just as our hearts pump without will.)

An illustration of B, exceeding our abilities, would be as follows: One who is blindfolded, and led into a pitch-black room is asked to describe the room. He must abandon any attempt to describe the wallpaper, the furniture, or any object requiring visual perception. Honesty in this scenario demands one admit his perception has been completely inhibited.

But these two cases deal only with "perception". There is one other area wherein man has a limited scope of ability, and which contributes to man's thinking: I refer to "reasoning". Here too, man can exceed his ability. Suppose we were asked to judge a robbery case, before we learned what robbery meant. We would be incapable, as our reasoning would be lacking an essential element. Similarly, if a judge was complimented by a litigant, he would be biased towards him, and again, possess a flaw in his reasoning abilities, this time due to an exaggerated opinion of the litigant, and not due to lacking a principle. But in both cases, "reasoning" has been distorted, and incapable of seeing reality.

Eta Carinae (a distant star) is captured by the Hubble telescope, putting on a magnificent show; in an earlier episode of mass ejection. Does our verse suggest we ignore true, scientific findings, that increase awe of God?



The Hubble Space Telescope, launched 13 years ago

We learn from these cases that our thinking is compromised when one of two abilities are lacking; 1)either we cannot perceive the facts, or 2)we have the correct facts, but our reasoning of these facts is corrupt, either due to a lack of principles, or to a distortion of a principle - usually due to an emotion. So when "perception" or "reasoning" is compromised, so must our thinking be compromised, and we will produce fallacy. We will not see reality. The verses (Exod, 23:8 and Deut. 16:19) express this exactly, "...a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise, and distorts the words of the righteous." Note that these verses refer to "eyes", and "words". "Eyes" means perception, and "words" means that which expresses one's reason. The Torah defines the two areas in which a judge's rulings - his thinking - will be compromised. Again, perception and reasoning, if not pure, will result in fallacy, and Torah study. Comprehension of God's one reality requires 100% honesty.

We return to our Talmudic teaching, "limiting" our study. I do not believe our verse above commands us to cease our investigation into specific 'topics' per se. The topics mentioned are mere illustrations of a greater rule. Studying history, "When you now ask of the earlier days", or studying the heavens, "from one end of the heavens to the other" comes to illustrate what we have said. This verse commands us to recognize our limited ability to "perceive" and to "reason". The prohibition not to study what is above the heavens means,

"don't try to perceive with your eyes what is out of your range of vision." Of course, now, with the Hubble space telescope, our range is significantly increased. But it too has a range. Trying to look further than this telescope's range is futile. "...from one end of the heavens to the other" means, do not try to exceed your perceptual limits. But not only is perception limited, but so is our reasoning. This is taught by the limit imposed on our timeframe of study, "When you now ask of the earlier days". The Talmud says we cannot study that which occurred before Creation. Scientists today concur, stating accurately that since reasoning is based on cause and effect relationships, in an epoch where cause and effect had not yet operated - before Creation - our minds are useless.

All our thinking depends on two faculties, perception, and reasoning about that perception. There is nothing else required for man's thought. Therefore, only perception and reason are those issues discussed when treating of the subject of man's thought.

Our initial, incorrect understanding that the Talmud makes certain topics a 'taboo', is now replaced with an accurate understanding: The Torah warns man from delving into perception and reasoning that exceeds his capabilities. The Torah once again proves to be perfectly in line with the reality of the workings of the universe. God created both, Torah and creation. Therefore, both must be complimentary, by definition. □

VaEtchanan

RABBI BERNARD FOX

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from Egypt. Maimonides maintains that this passage contains a positive command. What is this mitzvah?

In his Mishne Torah, Maimonides defines the commandment as an obligation to know that there is a G-d who is the cause of all that exists. It is clear from this formulation that blind faith in Hashem's existence does not satisfy this commandment. According to Maimonides, a person must have knowledge of the Hashem's existence.

Maimonides also discusses this commandment in his Sefer HaMitzvot. Maimonides wrote this work in Arabic. The standard translation of the Sefer HaMitzvot was composed by Moshe ibn Tibon. The first mitzvah in Sefer HaMitzvot is affirmation of Hashem. In Ibn Tibon's translation, the mitzvah obligates us to have faith in the existence of a G-d that is the cause of all that exists. This seems to contradict Maimonides' formulation in his Mishne Torah. There, Maimonides insists on knowledge. Here, Maimonides establishes a more general perimeter for the obligation. Faith is adequate. According to the formulation in Sefer HaMitzvot, it seems that blind faith is sufficient for fulfillment of the commandment.

Rav Yosef Kafih offers a simple resolution to this contradiction. He explains that the confusion is based in the Ibn Tibon's interpretation of Maimonides' original Arabic. Rav Kafih studied the original Arabic text of Maimonides' Sefer HaMitzvot. He notes that in the original text, Maimonides uses an Arabic word that should more properly be translated as "knowledge". According to this rendering of the original Arabic text, there is no contradiction. Sefer HaMitzvot defines the mitzvah as knowing that there is a G-d who is the cause of all that exists.

Rav Kafih's resolution of this problem is certainly reasonable. However, it does assume that Moshe ibn Tibon's scholarship is flawed and that he mistranslates the original Arabic. Moshe ibn Tibon was a prolific writer and translator. He wrote translations of various philosophical works. He composed a commentary on the Torah. He wrote on a commentary on a portion of Maimonides' Moreh Nevuchim. In short, he was an accomplished scholar and translator. He was well aware of Maimonides' outlook and formulations. It is likely that he felt his translation of the Maimonides' Arabic was consistent with the author's intentions. It is appropriate to consider the possibility that Ibn Tibon's translation is accurate.

If we accept this translation, how can we reconcile Maimonides' formulations? Why does Maimonides insist on knowledge of the Almighty's existence in his Mishne Torah and in Sefer HaMitzvot define the mitzvah as faith?

The answer lies in understanding Ibn Tibon's translation. The Hebrew word that Ibn Tibon uses to describe the mitzvah is emunah. This word is generally regarded as the Hebrew equivalent of "faith" or "belief". However, a simple analysis of the term's use in the Torah indicates that emunah indicates a firm conviction. It does not refer to a conviction based upon faith or unfounded beliefs.

Let us consider a few examples of the Torah's use of the term emunah. Yosef uses this term when speaking to his brothers. The brothers come to Egypt to purchase food. Yosef, as Paroh's regent, rules the land. He accuses the brothers of spying. The brothers deny this charge. Yosef devises a test to determine the truth. He asserts that through this test – v'yaiamnu - the brother's claim will be established.[1] Yosef uses a term that is a conjugation of emunah. Rashi explains that the term used by Yosef means that the truth of your claims will be established.[2]

Rashi provides a wonderful example to support his interpretation. The Sotah is a woman suspected of adultery. She denies these charges. She is required to drink a special potent. If she is guilty, this potent will kill her. The Kohen administers the test. He first confirms that she maintains her innocence and that she understands the consequences of the test. The woman responds to the Kohen's query, "amen, amen". Rashi maintains that the Sotah is providing an affirmation. She affirms that she maintains her innocence. She affirms that she understands the consequences of the test.

Let us consider one final example. Bnai Yisrael are attacked by Amalek. As long as Moshe's arms are lifted in prayer to Hashem, Bnai Yisrael dominates the battle. Moshe keeps his arms lifted the entire battle and Amalek is vanquished. The Torah describes Moshe's arms as emunah. Nachmanides, Rashbam and others define this term as meaning firmly established. Moshe's arms were firmly established in their uplifted position.

All of these examples illustrate that the term emunah and its derivatives are not references to faith or unfounded belief. Instead, the term refers to a conviction that is strongly established or affirmed as true. Ibn Tibon was an accomplished scholar of the Torah. He probably used the term emunah in the manner it is employed in the Torah. His rendering does not contradict Maimonides insistence on knowledge of Hashem's existence. Ibn Tibon is indicating that we are obligated to firmly establish our conviction in Hashem's existence. This is completely consistent with Maimonides' requirement to base the conviction on knowledge.[3]

"Comfort, comfort My people, says your G-d."
Haftorah of Shabbat Nachamu, Yishayahu 40:1

This week the fast of Tisha BeAv was observed. This fast commemorates the destruction of the Bait HaMikdash. The Haftorah for this Shabbat is a related to the theme of Tisha BeAv. The Haftorah begins with our pasuk. In this passage, Hashem offers comfort to Bnai Yisrael. In the Haftorah, the Almighty assures His nation that their suffering in exile will end. The Almighty will reveal His kingship over all of humanity. The land of Israel, Yerushalayim and the Temple will be rebuilt.

This Haftorah offers an important insight into the observance of Tisha BeAv. In order to identify this insight, an introduction is needed.

Tisha BeAv is a date that is reserved for tragedy. Both Sacred Temples were destroyed on this date. Many other misfortunes befell Bnai Yisrael on this date. All of these catastrophes are historical events. None is part of our recent experience. Yet, despite the passing of time, we continue our annual observance of Tisha BeAv. This creates a problem. The tragedies commemorated by Tisha BeAv do not seem very relevant to us. These misfortunes are part of the distant past. Nonetheless, every year we repeat our commemoration of these events. It is difficult on a beautiful summer day to mourn a Temple we never saw. We are expected to feel genuine sadness over events that are not part of our experience. Other nations have also experienced tragedies. At first, they bemoan these misfortunes. However, with the passage of time, the memory of the trauma recedes. The nation moves on and focuses on the present and future. Why do we not place the past behind us?

Let us consider the problem from another perspective. Assume a person loses a parent. This is a terrible experience. The bereaved son or daughter is distraught. The child mourns the parent for a period of time. Halacha requires twelve months of mourning. Slowly, the son or daughter recovers from the loss. Mourning ends and life proceeds. Imagine the child could not overcome this loss. The son or daughter remained fixated upon the misfortune. We would conclude that this person is ill. We would suggest that the child seek help in overcoming this morbid depression. Are we not this child? Why do we not overcome our sorrow? Are we morbidly fixated on the tragedies of the past?

There are various answers to this question. We will consider one response. Tisha BeAv is a day of mourning. However, there is another element expressed in our observance of the day. This element is evident in an unusual halacha – law — of the day. On the eve of Tisha BeAv, the supplication Tachanun is not recited.[4] This supplication is also omitted on Tisha BeAv itself.[5] The reason for the omission of Tachanun is that Tisha BeAv is referred to in the Navi as a Moed – a festival. The prophet Zecharya

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VaEtchanan

RABBI BERNARD FOX

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prophesizes that in the Messianic era, the Temple will be restored and Tisha BeAv will be celebrated as a festival.[6] This element of festivity associated with Tisha BeAv is expressed in other laws as well.

It seems odd that in deference to Zecharia's assurance we add these elements of festivity to Tisha BeAv. We await the Messianic era. It has not yet occurred. Now we are in exile. The Temple is destroyed. What is the relevance of Zecharia's prophecy to our current observance of Tisha BeAv?

The answer is that the destruction of the Temple is not merely a historical event. Its destruction and our exile represent an aberrant relationship with Hashem. This is the message of our pasuk and the Haftorah. We are the Almighty's nation. Our redemption and the restoration of the Bait HaMikdash are inevitable. The Messianic era is only delayed by our own failure to completely repent and return to the Almighty. With our wholehearted teshuva – repentance – the Messianic era will arrive.

This is the reason for the presence of a festive element in the observance of Tisha BeAv. This element reminds us that our fasting is in response to a current tragedy. We have not yet repented. Therefore, we remain in exile and the Temple remains destroyed. We can convert Tisha BeAv into a festival through changing our behaviors and attitudes!

Now we are prepared to understand the relevance of Tisha BeAv to our current generation. Other nations experience tragedies. They move forward. They forget the misfortunes of the past and enjoy the present and hope for an even better future. We too are not fixated on the past. We are not remembering an irrelevant past tragedy. We are commemorating a present misfortune. We are in exile and the Bait HaMikdash has not yet been rebuilt. We must repent in order to end our misfortune. In short, Tisha BeAv should not be regarded as a day that recalls a past misfortune. It should be observed as a day on which we mourn an ongoing tragedy. This tragedy is our own distance from the Almighty. It is a day that should inspire us to repent and restore our relationship with Hashem. □

[1] Sefer Beresheit 42:20. [2] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 42:20. [3] Based on comments of Rabbi Israel Chait. [4] Rav Yosef Karo, Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayim 653:12. [5] Rav Yosef Karo, Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayim 559:4. [6] Sefer Zecharya 19:19.

VaEtchanan

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

What is the concept intended by the numerous times the parsha states that the Jews heard G-d speak from the midst of the flames?

The reason why G-d created the event at Sinai as a voice of words emanating from a fiery mountain is as follows: G-d desired that this event be a proof to all generations that the Torah is of Divine origin - not man made. The one element in which a biological organism cannot live is fire. By G-d creating a voice of "words", meaning intelligence, emanating from the midst of flames, all would know for certain that the cause of such an event was not of an intelligence on Earth. They would ascribe the phenomena solely to that which controls the elements, that being G-d Himself. Only the One who controls fire, Who formed its properties, can cause voices to exist in fire. As the sounds heard by the people were of intelligent nature, they understood this being to be the intelligent, and metaphysical G-d.

The purpose of the repetition was to drive home the concept which is supreme and more essential to man's knowledge than all other concepts, i.e., that G-d gave the Torah, and that He is metaphysical.

A question was asked, "Why would the people not err and assume G-d to be fire itself?"

We see the first words heard from the flames were "I am the G-d who took you out of the land of Egypt". This means to say that the Cause of the miracles in Egypt is now claiming responsibility for this event at Sinai. The fact that there were no fires in Egypt shows that fire is not indispensable for the performance of miracles, all claimed by the voice at Sinai. The Jews therefore did not view the fire as G-d, as they experienced miracles prior to this event without witnessing any fires. It is true there was a pillar of fire which led them by night, but as we do not find fires connected with all miracles, we conclude that fire is not the cause of those miracles, or of revelation at Sinai. There must be something external to fire, which controls the laws of nature, and is above nature. That can only be the Creator. □

Hindu, vs God's Unity II

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: In your second paragraph you state, "Even in your own framework, this implies a limit on each god, as each god maintains only "some" powers. If a god is limited, then what imposed this limit upon them? You are forced to say that something even greater exists which determines each god's capabilities and scope of power." You argue that if a being is limited, something must have limited that being. I don't see why this has to be the case. Couldn't the reality of existence be that this being is limited and imperfect by nature? In your framework you maintain that your God is perfect, whereas in my paradigm a different nature is attributed to the Divine beings. Is not your God limited as well? Can He create a rock that he can't lift? Can He make a circle-square? Can He make $2+2=5$? The argument refuting my argument will be that these "limitations" don't take away from His perfection, therefore they are different than your gods limitations. But you

state that "If a god is limited, then what imposed this limit upon them." Because your God too has limitations, what imposed the limitations on Him? Does this mean that some other being must exist that put these limitations on your God?

Mesora: The Creator's "limitations" are actually, His perfections. He is incapable of the impossible, i.e., $2+2=5$, the infinitely heavy rock, etc. Perfection means impossibilities are mutually exclusive to His Essence.

God exacts perfect justice due to His essential perfection - not due to an imposed limit by another being. For example, if a judge learned the court system perfectly, and could never err, you would not say his limitation to perfect rulings 100% of the time is 'imposed' - as you suggest with no basis I may add - but rather, it is a reflection of his own perfection in judgment.

So too, this applies to God. His perfections are due to His nature alone. □

Design in Nature - Why?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

This paper departs from typical writings that are usually based on Scriptural and Talmudic analyses.

I observed the design embedded in the natural world. The Rabbis used analogy to derive truths from them. For example, in Pirkey Avos, "Ethics of the Fathers", we find numerous comparisons between man and nature. Certain, praiseworthy qualities of animals are to be resembled by us in our dedication to God's service. We are taught that the righteous are equated to trees with many roots. The wise are viewed as an overflowing well. King David's first Psalm equates one who is praiseworthy to a tree, of which its leaves don't wither, and gives forth fruit in due season. King Solomon equated Torah to a "tree of life". We are taught to resemble water, which seeks the lowest elevation, so too, we are to seek lowness, to be humble. Moshe instructed Pharaoh to bend like a soft reed, so as not to be broken. Rabbi Akiva took a lesson from water's persistence that penetrated rock, and thought, he too could be penetrated by the wisdom of Torah. And God Himself uses metaphor, "As the heavens are higher from the land, so also is My way higher than yours, and My thoughts from your thoughts." (Isaiah, 55:9)

But this is all in the realm of "moral instruction." Similarity between nature and ideals "spills" over into other areas too.

World events and population begin with very few numbers: a species started with just two members, growing to billions. World events were initially few, causing chain reactions of more and more events.

In the food chain, smaller animals serve as food for the larger, and those, serve as food for those even greater. There is a flow of nourishment within the animal world.

On the smallest scale, plant life derives nutrients from soil and water. Nutrients are drawn up through the stem or trunk, into the branches, and to the leaves and its fruit. Even a microcosmic element of the tree - the leaf - works in this fashion. Its stem derives nourishment from the branch, and then delivers this

nourishment to the leaf's veins, and to the smallest capillary vessels. This design is identical to animal's and human's vein structures. Blood is pumped through larger arteries, to veins and to vessels. Also identical, are the forms of rivers emerging from snow capped peaks. Single, large rivers are formed, which offshoot into smaller streams, nourishing all life.

On the largest scale, the universe is expanding, with all galaxies of billions of stars each, propelled away from some previously located center by some huge, "big bang."

In all cases, a life force feeds all life along its course. Why is this design so pervasive throughout the physical world? I believe God has designed the physical world, with numerous reminders of His reality as the Single Cause and Life of the universe. Using the tree as a paradigm, there is nothing escaping this "branch design". Not only is there parallel in structure, but the concept of a "source of nourishment" is also paralleled to God, as the Source of all life. But the design does not end in the physical world.

Let us look to the world of knowledge. At the "root" (the tree analogy again) of true knowledge of any phenomena or Torah law, is what we call a "definition". If something is to be apprehended as what it truly is, we must define its exclusive properties. I cannot define elephant as 'animal' alone, as this term includes all other beasts, and does not specify the elephant's unique design. But, if I mention the trunk, its large ears and its weight, I have come closer to what makes an elephant, an elephant. As we study any area, we see that true knowledge of anything, finds "categorization" indispensable. Without the ability to categorize, we cannot learn. "Is this an animal? A plant? A Torah law pertaining to 'action', or a law regarding an object's 'status'? Is this morality or corruption?" All these questions which lead to knowledge, partake of the system of categories. Once we successfully categorize something by its most unique quality, we

have arrived at a definition of that thing - what we term as "true knowledge" of that object or phenomenon.

There are many categories in the universe. Starting with one; all of creation. Within creation, we find two categories; metaphysical and physical things. Within the physical, we find three things; objects, events and laws. Within objects, we find three categories; plants, animals and elements. As we expose each category, we delve into each member, differentiated only by quantitative variations. But the design once again appears; there is a branch-like system of categories, identical to the branches of a tree, of veins, and of rivers.

The physical world, in all its objects and workings, serves to call our attention to proper moral behavior, as is seen from the Rabbi's comparisons. But morality is only one area of teaching. Nature's cohesive design reminds us that there is a "Source", from which all things and life flow. Such reminders help man return his thoughts to pondering the "Cause", from Whom, all life owes its existence and sustenance. In knowledge, when we study any area, again we are using categories, and they too are structured with "branches" of knowledge. We trace back our categories of knowledge to a "First Cause", as stated in the opening sentence of the previous paragraph.

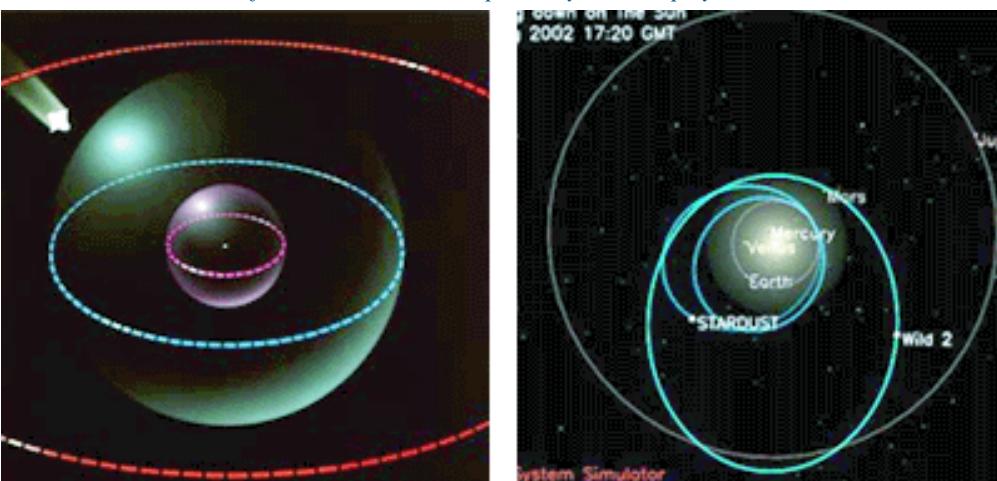
Why the world was designed by God in such a manner, we cannot say conclusively. That is God's knowledge. But if we see a design permeating so much of creation, we might suggest a reason. And if this reason is consistent with the primary goal of man, to acknowledge the Creator, then our assumption is all the more safe. Maimonides' chapter in the Guide, "A Parallel Between the Universe and Man", although aligning different parallels, may teach that our foremost thinkers made similar observations.

I end my observations with the "end" of the physical, I mean the phenomena of "decay". This too is part of God's design, that objects age and die, as do people. We learn that the physical is not the objective of this physical world. The physical universe is merely a vehicle which may, in part, embody parallels to truths, assisting man's brief exploration of knowledge, guiding him into the metaphysical world of ideas. Decay teaches that our attention must not be absorbed by the temporal, but by what is eternal, and that is knowledge of the Creator. We use the temporal, physical world for its true purpose, as a means to progress into the metaphysical world of God's wisdom. This is our purpose, our obligation, our true happiness, and our design.

For a few thousand years, Torah was not necessary in God's eyes for man to reach his perfection as a creature pursuing knowledge. The world alone afforded man all he needed to reach his goal. However, God's knowledge dictated that at a certain point in history, the Torah was indispensable to man's goal, and in His kindness to mankind, God gave us a Torah system to avoid man's shortcomings, and advance our knowledge and perfection.

"The Torah is a tree of life to those who seize it, and those who support it are made happy." (Proverbs, 3:18) □

At the extreme ends of the scales: Atomic and planetary orbits display almost identical structures.





SPEECH to the Knesset

HOUSE SPEAKER REP. TOM DELAY

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president reaffirmed America's support for Israel's security and our commitment to fight "terrorism wherever it is found."

He made clear that the prospects for peace are the responsibility of the Palestinian Authority. They must maintain sustained, targeted and effective operations to fight terror and dismantle terrorist capabilities and infrastructure.

After my time here, I have a new appreciation for threat terrorism poses, and for the president's sense of urgency in fighting it every day and every where.

It has been an amazing six days here. I know I speak for everyone who made this trip with me when I say none of us will never forget the things we've seen here or the people we've met.

I sat with former refuseniks, heroes who spoke truth to power and helped bring an evil empire to its knees.

I visited the Kohtel, the ancient Western Wall of the temple that still stands as a symbol of God's infinite strength and love to billions of believers of many faiths all around the world.

I shook the hand of the owner of the Moment Café which was bombed last year. Today that café has been rebuilt. Moment Café is now open for business in defiance of terror.

And I listened to another woman who told me her story.

Just a few years ago, she was, like me, a grandparent, and excited with the news her daughter was expecting again.

Her daughter and son-in-law were on their way back from the doctor's office where they had seen *<* in the sonogram image *<* the tiny form of their third baby.

On the bus ride back home from the doctor, their joyful path met the profound cruelty of a homicide bomber's. The terrorist detonated his weapon, and this family and their baby were gone.

She told me this story this week in

a park, surrounded by the play of children directly affected by Palestinian terror. She called two of them over, and introduced me to her two grandchildren who were orphaned that day.

Despite the story I heard, these children played, and laughed, and seemed as hopeful about the future as any child could be.

And despite my heartache, I smiled too, because hope was with us in that park.

Even now, I am filled with a gratitude and humility I cannot express, I stand before you today, in solidarity, as an Israeli of the heart.

The solidarity between the United States and Israel is deeper than the various interests we share.

It goes to the very nature of man, to the endowment of our God-given rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

It is the universal solidarity of freedom. It transcends geography, culture and generations.

It is the solidarity of all people *<* in all times *<* who dream of and sacrifice for liberty.

It is the solidarity of Moses and Lincoln. Of Tiananmen Square and the Prague Spring.

Of Andre Sakharov and Anne Frank.

And in its name I come to you *<* in the midst a great global conflict against evil *<* with a simple message: "Be Not Afraid."

I do not say this as a foreigner, cavalier in my estimation of the dangers that surround you.

Instead, I say it as an ally, in spite of the terrifying predators who threaten all free nations, especially Israel.

My country is not ignorant, nor are we indifferent to your struggle.

We know our victory in the war on terror depends on Israel's survival.

And we know Israel's survival depends on the willingness of free nations *<* especially our own *<* to stand by all endangered democracies in their time of need.

We hear your voice cry out in the desert, and we will never leave your side.

Because freedom and terrorism cannot coexist.

Terrorism cannot be negotiated away or pacified.

Terrorism will either destroy free nations, or free nations will destroy it.

Freedom and terrorism will struggle *<* good and evil *<* until the battle is resolved.

These are the terms Providence has put before the United States, Israel, and the rest of the civilized world.

They are stark, and they are final.

Those who call this world-view "simplistic" are more than welcome to share their "sophisticated" theories at any number of international debating clubs.

But while they do, free nations of courage will fight and win this war.

Israel's liberation from Palestinian terror is an essential component of that victory.

And it's a liberation we are determined to secure *<* not merely a paper-thin cease-fire.

False security is no security, and murderers who take 90-day vacations are still murderers.

The violence must stop.

An immediate and total end to Palestinian terrorism is not a concession the civilized world asks of the Palestinian Authority to advance the peace process.

It is a prerequisite to the Palestinian Authority's invitation to it.

In the United States, we have two chambers in our national legislature: the House of Representatives, where I serve, and the Senate.

But the voice of the people resides in the House.

And one month ago, the House overwhelmingly passed a resolution *<* which I was proud to co-author *<* that states unequivocally the position of that body.

That resolution reads in part *<*

"Whereas Israel has no choice but to use its own measures to fight terrorism if the Palestinians are unwilling to do so..."

...Therefore be it resolved that the House of Representatives recognizes and respects Israel's right to fight terrorism and acknowledges Israel's fight against terrorism as part of the global war on terrorism."

This echoes years of continuous support for Israel in Congress, where we remain committed to Israel's strength, security, and qualitative military superiority.

In short, it is the position of the people of the United States, as expressed by their representatives in Congress, that Israel's fight is our fight.

And so shall it be until the last terrorist on earth is in a cell or a cemetery.

The United States does not seek conflict.

We are a peaceful people whose military strength has been consciously built to deter aggression so that we might live in peace.

Ideally *<* and I believe, eventually *<* we will live in peace, with friendly democracies in every corner of the earth, committed to justice and human rights, "with malice toward none and charity for all."

In nations with governments of the people, by the people, and for the people *<* as in our two nations *<* no tyrant or wicked regime can exert their brutality.

It is in democracy that the hope for peace resides.

Democracies do not starve their citizens, nor torture their dissidents, nor threaten their neighbors.

In democracies, governments serve the people; not the other way around.

And, by their nature, democracies neither enable terror nor instigate war.

Citizens in democracies are too busy engaging in "Tikkun Olam" ... "repairing the world."

Raising their children." □



Tishah b'Av: A Paradox

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"Whoever mourns for Jerusalem will be will [merit to] see its rejoicing, and all who do not mourn for Jerusalem will not [merit to] see its rejoicing."^[1]

The simplest understanding of this statement of the Sages is that Hashem operates middah k'neged middah (measure for measure). If a person acts according to God's wishes and is appropriately distressed over the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash, he will be rewarded with the opportunity to rejoice when it is rebuilt. If not, he won't deserve such a reward. In short: "If you show me you really want it, I'll give it to you, but if not, then I won't." This simple understanding might be true, but it is probably not what our Sages were getting at. There is a deeper meaning here.

In order to attain a deeper understanding of this statement of our Sages we must first examine the obligation of aveilut (mourning) on Tishah b'Av. Many people ask the question, "Why do we mourn for Jerusalem on Tishah b'Av?" This may be an important question, but it certainly is not a strong question. One could simply answer: "Because we are sad about the destruction of the Jerusalem and the Beit

haMikdash," and that would be the end of it. There is a stronger, more specific question we can ask: "Is our mourning on Tishah b'Av consistent with the structure of normative, halachic aveilut?" To understand this question and find an answer we must take a brief look at the halachic structure of aveilut.

Normative halachic aveilut takes place in three stages: the seven days of lamenting, the thirty days of weeping, and final twelve months, after which no more memorials may be held for the dead.^[2] In each progressive stage, the severity of the strictures imposed upon the mourner is reduced. In each stage, the mourner is expected to grieve less intensely. After the end of the period of mourning, the mourner is expected to move on with his life. The main point: normative aveilut is time-bound.

Ostensibly, it seems as though the aveilut of Tishah b'Av is not normative. Normative aveilut shouldn't last past twelve months, and here we are, still crying over the destruction of Jerusalem after nearly two thousand years – a blatant breach of the clearly defined time boundaries of halachic aveilut! Not only that, but normative mourning lessens in intensity as

time goes by, but with each Tishah b'Av that passes, our mourning increases! Furthermore, the Rambam says, "One should not indulge in excessive grief over one's dead, as it is said: 'Do not weep for the dead, nor bemoan him,'"^[3] meaning, (do not weep for him) too much, for [death] is the 'way of the world,' and he who frets over the 'way of the world' is a fool."^[4] It comes according to the Rambam that our aveilut on Tishah b'Av not only oversteps the bounds of normative aveilut but is also considered to be foolish! What is going on here?^[5]

It turns out that we are not the only ones who mourn (or have mourned) excessively. We know that Ya'akov Avinu mourned for twenty-two years for (what he believed was) the loss of his son, Yosef:^[6] "Then Ya'akov rent his garments and placed sackcloth on his loins; he mourned for his son many days. All his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted."^[7] This is an outright contradiction to the halachic principles mentioned by the Rambam! How can it be that Ya'akov, one of the most righteous men to walk the earth, refused to be consoled, in stark

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Tishah b'Av: A Paradox

RABBI BERNARD FOX

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opposition to the demands of halacha?

The answer lies in a distinction between normative aveilut and the aveilut of Ya'akov Avinu. This distinction is alluded to in the Midrash: "A person does not accept consolation over a living person whom he believes to be dead (savur sh'meit), for a [Divine] decree has been issued over one who has died that he be forgotten from the hearts [of the living], but this decree is not [issued] over one who is still alive."^[8] The simple meaning^[9] of this statement is as follows: one cannot be consoled over the death of a loved one until he has undergone yei'ush – until he has given up hope. The mourner must know and feel with absolute certainty that the person is dead and won't be coming back. When a person loses a loved one, he intellectually knows that that person is dead, but emotionally, his love still reaches out for that person. When he (emotionally) realizes that the person is no longer there, he becomes incredibly frustrated and distressed. The gap left behind by the deceased creates a gap between the mourner's mind and his heart, generating intense feelings of anxiety, confusion, and depression. Mourners tend to go through this intellectual/emotional battle for a period of time after the death, but eventually, their emotions catch up with their intellectual realization that the person is dead. Only then do they truly give up hope in both their minds and their hearts. Only then can they fully be consoled, and continue on with their lives.

Now we can see the distinction. Ya'akov's case was different. He could not be consoled. Why not? Because he had not given up hope. He was only believed that Yosef was dead, but he didn't know with complete certainty. He lacked that absolutely conviction necessary for the intellectual confirmation. If a mourner knows in his mind that his loved one is dead he may struggle emotionally, but his heart will eventually catch up with his mind. Emotional acceptance will eventually follow intellectual acceptance. But if a person lacks that intellectual conviction, consolation is impossible. As long as there remains room for doubt – even a remote possibility that the person is still alive – the mourner will invest his entire mind and heart into that possibility and refuse to let it go. The emotional acceptance will never come because the intellectual acceptance never took place. That is why Ya'akov's aveilut exceeded the normative boundaries of halacha. He was unable to be consoled because his mind had never fully accepted Yosef's death. To summarize, there are two objectives accomplished by mourning: 1) honor for the

deceased, 2) closure for the living. The process of aveilut helps the living recognize and acknowledge the tragedy that has occurred, and helps them get over it. So long as that second step remains unfulfilled, the process of aveilut can never end.

Back to Tishah b'Av. The Shulchan Aruch writes, "We do not say tachanun (Rema: or selichot) on Tishah b'Av and we do not fall on our face in supplication because Tishah b'Av is described as a moed (festival)."^[10] This is a very strange phenomenon indeed. On Tishah b'Av we cry, mourn, afflict ourselves with fasting and the other four forms of affliction, refrain from studying Torah, refrain from donning festive clothing, and deprive ourselves of nearly every single pleasure – yet, we modify our observance of Tishah b'Av because we recognize it as a partial moed. Why should this be? It would be understandable if we made it a point to omit all moed-aspects until the arrival of Moshiach, when all fast-days will be nullified and celebrated as festivals^[11]; that way, we would be drawing a full contrast between now (exile) and the future (redemption) . . . but that is not our practice. Instead, we take two completely antithetical themes – joyous moed and mournful fast – and bend over backwards to make sure both aspects are demonstrated and acknowledged. Why do we do this? Why try to uphold this paradox of including aspects of moed on a day of nation-wide mourning?

The Aruch haShulchan provides an insight into this conundrum. He explains that we refrain from reciting tachanun as a demonstration of our faith in the redemption.^[12] Based on our understanding of Ya'akov's aveilut, we can understand the paradox. Our aveilut, like that of Ya'akov Avinu, oversteps the time-boundaries of normative halachic aveilut. Ya'akov continued to mourn because he could not be consoled. Why not? Because he had not yet given up hope over his situation. The same is true for us. The reason why we continue to mourn is because we have not given up hope over our situation. We fully trust in Hashem's promise that He will redeem us from our exile. We know that the exile is only temporary, and that the redemption can come at any moment. In fact, we are better off than Ya'akov. He was only savur sh'meit – he just thought that there might be hope. We know that there is hope, because Hashem has given us His promise!

Now our previous problem can be resolved. The clash of moed and aveilut on Tishah b'Av is no paradox. In fact, quite the opposite is true. By observing the moed

characteristics of Tishah b'Av, we are demonstrating the reason why we continue to mourn and why we can't accept consolation: we can't be consoled precisely because we haven't given up hope! We have refused to be consoled for nearly two thousand years because we have not given up hope. We know that Hashem will redeem us.

Now we can fully appreciate the statement: "Whoever mourns for Jerusalem will merit to see its rejoicing, and all who do not mourn for Jerusalem will not see its rejoicing." Why does a person who mourns deserve to be redeemed? Because the fact that he continues to mourn is a demonstration of his conviction in the redemption! Conversely, one who does not mourn demonstrates the fact that he has "gotten over it;" by not mourning he is demonstrating that he has given up hope of redemption. Since he has demonstrated a lack of faith in the redemption and the rebuilding of Jerusalem, he does not merit to see its rejoicing □

[1] Masechet Ta'anit 30b

[2] Rabbeinu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides), Mishnah Torah: Hilchot Aveilut 13:10

[3] Sefer Yirmiyahu 22:10

[4] Rabbeinu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides), Mishnah Torah: Hilchot Aveilut 13:11

[5] At this point, Rabbi Fox made it clear that he was not in any way denigrating the aveilut on Tishah b'Av. He said that all of the mourning practices on Tishah b'Av make perfect sense, and that he is merely questioning the fact that the aveilut of Tishah b'Av deviates from normative halachic guidelines.

[6] Rabbeinu Shlomo ben Yitzchak, Commentary on Sefer Bereisheet 37:34

[7] Sefer Bereisheet 37:34-35

[8] Cited by Rabbeinu Shlomo ben Yitzchak, Commentary on Sefer Bereisheet 37:34 from Bereisheet Rabbah 84:21; see also Masechet Pesachim 54b

[9] Rabbi Fox explained that although the term "decree" sometimes refers to miracles, that simply cannot be the case here. If this were a miraculous phenomenon, then Ya'akov should have known that Yosef wasn't dead from the fact that he was still sad after a year had passed. Furthermore, if this phenomenon were miraculous, we wouldn't have to worry about agunot (an agunah is a woman whose husband is believed to have died, but his death is not confirmed. She cannot remarry until it is established for a fact that her husband is dead). All you would have to do is ask the agunah, "Are you still sad?" and if she answered negatively, you could just say, "Yup! He's dead!" Obviously, if this phenomenon were miraculous, we wouldn't need the entire halachic process of establishing the death of the husband and we would never have to worry about agunah problems. Thus, the Midrash must be referring to a psychological phenomenon.

[10] Rav Yosef Kairo, Shulchan Aruch: Orach Chaim 559:14

[11] Rabbeinu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides), Mishnah Torah: Hilchot Ta'anit 5:19

[12] Rav Yechiel Michel Epstein, Aruch haShulchan: Orach Chaim 559