

THE BIBLE



GOD'S ONLY RELIGION



PROVING GOD'S
ONE TRUE RELIGION
THROUGH FACTS, REASON
and the BIBLE'S BRILLIANCE

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

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1ST EDITION

*Religions are in conflict.
They all cannot be God's word;
one religion alone is the truth.
We must choose. But how?*

*This book asks the questions
we each know we must answer.*

*Using intelligence and reason,
we can verify God's true religion,
unveil false religious claims
and demonstrate the brilliance
of the Torah, the Bible.*

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INTRODUCTION

Honest inquiry is guided by certain principles. First, we must admit error when proven wrong; our egos must play no role. We must be vigilantly aware of our emotional tendencies and refrain from judging truth based on our feelings. Reason and proof alone must be our barometer for assessing truth. We must not allow the fear of losing friends, family or condemnation to distort facts, or our decisions. If we can maintain objective thinking, remove our pride and our biases and decide what is true, relying on proof and reason alone, we can determine what is real and true, versus fallacy and what has never occurred. However, if we are guided by what is familiar and comfortable, the approval of others, or what feels emotionally pleasing, we will continue accepting lies and fallacies. We must also be dissatisfied with any religion that does

not possess the same brilliance revealed in the scientific marvels of the universe: God created the universe and His true religion. Both must equally reflect His brilliance. Simplistic religions offering nothing deeper than surface meaning, must be rejected.

This book is intended for a rational and intelligent person. If one wishes to follow feelings alone, he or she will not benefit from what is contained herein. In truth, people do follow reason to a degree. No one works for a year with the mere promise of a first paycheck only after twelve months: a binding contract, or more brief payment terms are demanded. No one relies on the mere feeling he will somehow obtain his financial needs, and abandons work based on this feeling. One does not interview for a job or hire someone based on feelings alone; the prerequisite knowledge is mandatory. Following a religion based on feelings is equally invalid.

The world operates through cause and effect. Therefore, we take proper precautions to ensure health and avoid danger. Individuals who believe in fortune tellers, palm readers or horoscopes do not quit work when these charlatans say they will win the lottery. They don't go that far in their superstitions. This displays their greater conviction in reality over fantasy. It is only in areas that do not place us at risk, that superstitions are entertained.

Why is it that no one leaps off cliffs or digests poison with the belief that Jesus, Mohammed, Rabbis or kabbalists will shield them from disaster? People recognize reality. No one who lost a limb believes his prayer to the aforementioned individuals will regrow that limb; no preacher has ever gone that far in his televised healing shows. Why? If they are powerful, what prevents them from doing so? If superstitions and religious belief are held

as valid, why do such people only go “so far?” Here we witness where belief ends, and reality sets in. We must therefore address this contradiction; building on our sense of reality, strengthening it, and abandoning religious blind faith, even in matters that pose no risk. Following a religion is no less subject to principles of truth and reality, and cause and effect.

It is my hope that you, the reader, gain clarity of truth, and an appreciation of God’s true religion so you may lead this life as God desires.

Part I

FUNDAMENTALS

There are a number of fundamentals, which are mandatory prerequisites for accepting and living a life of truth. They include knowledge and control of our emotions, methodology in thought, and primarily, determining what considerations render an idea or a historical claim as true. Then we must know what God is and His plan for mankind. Before embarking on the great pursuit to identify God's true religion, one must first follow these principles. Otherwise, the pursuit for truth will lead to a dead end since one is crippled by emotional bias, the inability to think and distinguish truth from falsehood.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE CREATOR

The first matter any religion must address is its definition of God. For if we possess the incorrect idea of God, our lives are wasted. God created man alone with a soul¹ for the primary purpose to obtain truths; this is the unique function of the human soul, and the most gratifying experience. The greatest truth concerns the existence of the universe; of less importance are its dimensions, location or color. Existence is the most primary feature of anything we encounter, for without existence, all other characteristics cannot be. This applies not only to matter, but to ideas, values and natural laws. These too have a Designer.

Now, as existence is most primary in understanding truth, our knowledge of how a thing came into existence is indispensable for man to actually “know” anything. If we do not recognize a Creator, then we have forfeited our purpose in life. We have missed the most basic truth of all we encounter. Our soul has not achieved what the Creator planned that it should: that being knowledge of God and all that comes with it like prayer, respecting Him, and studying His providence with man so we might imitate His perfections.

1) The soul refers to man’s non-physical faculty: his intelligence, which includes thought, reason and values. This part of man also survives after physical death, since death is a physical event, and effects only man’s physical portion his body leaving the soul unharmed.

THE MULTIVERSE THEORY

Furthermore, without the knowledge of a Creator and his justice over man, our other inquiries about the universe, morality, religion and any other science will meet with problems. For God designed the universe and all truths to be in harmony with, and reflect, the truth of a Creator. Without knowledge of God, we will find contradictions and errors in our findings. We will attempt to develop theories that cannot be explained without a Creator. With no God, or with a false view of God, morality and justice too will be misguided by faulty human feelings, with no consensus among men or communities.

One proof of this problem is the Multiverse theory that rejects a Creator. This theory suggests that with infinite time, a universe perfectly suited for human life will eventually evolve...including the human soul. However, this is met with a number of rejections. Throw ink randomly at a wall a trillion times; this process will never form perfect sentences containing ideas. So too, a Godless unguided evolution of the universe cannot create the high degree of design precision necessary for human life to evolve, not to mention plant life, oxygen, water, gravity, the human brain, weather patterns and a host of other entities requiring harmonious orchestration. And how will “physical” chaos develop a “non-physical” soul?

Proponents of the Multiverse theory claim that with infinite time, infinite universes can evolve. But an infinite number of universes does not equate to infinite variations. It is possible that within the infinite universes that evolve, many are duplicates, and many fail to sustain themselves. Infinite attempts does not equate

with infinite variations, allowing our universe to emerge. For example, infinite ink throws of black ink will never create red marks on that wall. The elements in the ink experiment are limited by their properties. Here too, infinite births of universes may yield complete no start systems, or chaotic star systems with no earth, no humans, and no humans developing souls.

A chaotic phenomenon resulting in a design and assembly of all mandatory precision parts to enable human intelligent life (i.e., the Multiverse theory) does not comply with the results of chaos evidenced in the universe. Simply put, this theory contradicts itself. We can cite meteors hitting the moon, volcanoes and tsunamis — all chaotic events, all resulting in no order or design. This chaos does not lead to an ordered universe. No intelligent person would suggest that such chaotic acts of nature will ever randomly develop a new solar system perfectly designed for man, or accidentally evolve man, as the Multiverse theory suggests. Evidence proves the opposite: natural chaos results in chaotic results, not a perfectly designed universe. It is more of a desire to reject God that propels one to propose such an outlandish theory.

MORALITY

Morality too requires the Creator's guidance. Since He alone created life, only He can determine when life begins, and thus, at what time abortion is not murder. At what moment exactly does the human sperm and egg change from inanimate to human, and when does the embryo receive its soul? We are certain there is no soul in the sperm and egg while inside man and woman. For this

would mean man possesses a number of souls according to the number of his sperm count. Woman would possess her soul, and additional souls in the same number of her eggs. Furthermore, if the egg and sperm have a soul, that means the embryo has two souls. We realize the difficulties.

Man is unable to answer when life begins, and therefore man cannot determine when abortion is not murder. God alone created morality, reserving the right for He alone to determine if homosexuality is acceptable. Man's ignorance goes on.

But God did not leave mankind without a guidebook of His principles. If we fail to live by God's definition of morality and justice, or imagine His commands to be other than His spoken words, we violate God's will and earn His punishment. As I will soon demonstrate how the Bible is God's true word, and considering too that all major religions accept the Bible, the Five Books of Moses, Prophets and Writings, I will quote primarily these books for our discussions on God, and His will. Remaining absolutely loyal to the Bible and the Sages, our teachers, we follow the path to truth and avoid the error of imagining what is not real.

CAN WE KNOW GOD?

Moses asked God to show him His "glory." Meaning, Moses desired that God share with him truths of God's nature. God said this is impossible, "*For man cannot see Me and live (Exod. 33:20).*" Isaiah too quoted God: "*And unto whom shall you equate Me that I will be similar (Isaiah 40:25)?*" God's message in both cases is that

physical man is not equipped with a faculty to perceive the metaphysical God, Who is outside the capacity our senses. From here we learn that all those cultures and religions violate God's words by creating idols, imagining new forces, or creating religions that suggest God is a certain thing: God said we cannot know what he is. They violate reason as well: God's words and reasonable matters are identical. The greatest man, Moses, could not know what God is. We certainly cannot know.

NATURE'S LESSONS

However, God did not leave us without any true concepts regarding Himself. He commenced Genesis and teaches that He is the First Cause. The universe, meaning all that existed, exists and will ever exist, does not exist of its own accord. All matter requires creation. Nothing can create itself. We also see that all matter is restricted to certain properties, and cannot veer at all. What prevents a rock from becoming water; birds from becoming iron, or matter from becoming space? Something is controlling each object. Each created thing is restricted by its precise laws. God not only created all matter, but He assigned limited properties to each thing.

AN ETERNAL UNIVERSE?

Some are of the opinion that matter can infinitely go back in time, where Z is created by Y, Y is created by X, and so on. Following this trend of thought, a First Cause will never be found. Thus, there is nothing which can be identified as the Creator. And without a Creator, nothing could be created! Also, with infinite time, the present can never be reached. Two huge problems. But as we have arrived at this point in time, there must be a First Cause.

But what of the Aristotelian and Platonic views of an eternal universe and eternal matter? Even Maimonides states, had Aristotle proved an eternal universe, we would need to reinterpret Genesis. This means we follow proof, even if it contradicts literal meanings of Bible verses. (The verse is true, but requires interpretation.) Thus, Maimonides does not view eternal matter as impossible. This view may stem from the idea that God does not change. As He is perfect, any change would be a decrease in His perfection. He possesses no needs, so change is inapplicable to God. This being so, He must have always acted as a creator. Thus, there was always a created entity.

PANTHEISM

On the topic of God and the universe, some suggest that God “is” the universe. This view is still spread today. It contradicts the Prophets, from Moses to Isaiah. God tells Moses that He is unknowable. But if God is the universe, or if He is “in” all mat-

ter, this is “knowing” what God is and violates the Bible. Isaiah quoted God saying “*To what can you equate Me, that I should be similar (Isaiah, 40:25)?*” God teaches that we can not equate Him to anything, including the universe. Pantheism, the belief that God permeates matter is a heretical notion. It is generated by the infantile mind that cannot divorce God from his senses. This crippled mind feels that for God to not occupy the human experience of space and time, is a lack in God’s omnipresence². However, we reply that as God created the universe, the universe is not Him. He preceded it. Therefore, the universe and God are two distinct entities. The Sages stated, “*He (God) is the place of the universe, and the universe is not His place.*” They mean that God is the necessary existence enabling all matter to come to be, just like a place is required for anything to exist there. For clarification, the Sages added “the universe is not His place,” to say that once the universe came into existence, God does not exist “within” it.

Pantheism carries with it disturbing and heretical ideas. It suggests, that since God permeates all matter, when one eats, he is eating “part of God.” It means God is within the most vile of substances. It means when one dies, part of God dies. It means God is within an idol, and many other such heresies. Our greatest thinkers added to God’s own words that He does not equate to creation, by saying God has no parts. This is reasonable, since only a physical entity is subject to division.

2) God’s “omnipresence:” the notion that God is encountered everywhere. This cannot be taken to mean God literally fills the universe, since the universe is physical, and God is not. But one can understand God’s omnipresence as encountering “evidence” of God’s existence, as we witness immense wisdom in every corner of the universe.

The motive in suggesting God is “in everything” is man’s need to find some goodness inside himself. He wishes to feel “Godly.” Again, man is so sensual, he cannot accept his ignorance, and demands that God complies with space and time. Man sins by forcing God into his physical world, instead of following God’s word that He is unknowable and equates to nothing.

WHAT IS GOD?

Our first step in understanding God, is to view Him as the sole Creator. As the sole Creator, He possesses no needs, and is completely independent. He is not subject to nourishment, sleep emotions, or any other physical trait. He is not “here” or “there,” as locations is relegated to physical entities alone. And as He created everything, He knows everything, and everyone; our actions and our thoughts.

Of course you will ask, “Who or what created God?” This was already answered in the previous paragraph. Meaning, we must arrive at a First Cause, which by its very nature exists, and does not need existence given to it by another entity.

Creation is only required for things that do not possess existence as an essential trait. For example, nothing demands that the universe exists, so it did not exist until God willed it to be. And if God no longer wills a certain person, object or galaxy to continue, it will no longer exist. Nothing remains in existence simply because it was created. Creation is one phenomenon, but to sustain

itself, nothing has that inherent ability and requires a secondary law that is continues. Therefore, creation and sustained existence are two separate matters; both requiring the Creator's will. The Sages say, "*God renews creation every day.*" This is precisely the point.

MAN'S DUTY AND EQUALITY

The truth of a First Cause, and His kindness in creating each of us warrants our response of following His will, offering Him praise, respecting Him, honoring Him, prayer, and educating man about God and His will. As God is in sole control of the universe, and as man possesses needs, we must direct our praises of this unfathomable God to Him alone, also requesting His goodness.

HUMAN EQUALITY

That man possesses the capacity to procreate, teaches us that God desires many people to live. This in turn teaches that God desires equality for all humans. That we all possess an intellect teaches that He wishes all mankind to obtain truths. Teaching others thereby follows as part of God's will.

TRUSTING GOD

What about justice: how do we know if God is to be trusted, is just, kind, charitable, fair, and the other traits we deem fitting for God? This can only be determined by reason, what God has communicated, and how He has treated mankind throughout time.

The fact God created man with needs, but also supplied us with air, water, food and materials to create clothing and shelter teach us that God is fair: He does not create a being that cannot attain its God-given needs.

GOD'S WISDOM IN CREATION

We witness God's wisdom in His production and placement of our needs in proportion with the need. Air is most vital, and therefore it is everywhere and free. Next in vitality is water, and this too is free and plentiful. Water also has the property of flowing, so as to reach inland societies, vegetation and animal life through valleys created by mountainous topography.

Vegetation is also plentiful and inexpensive. It also has the property of growth, so man might obtain small amounts, plant the seeds, and live on that single purchase his entire life. Clothing can be made from livestock or plants. These too reproduce at no further cost to man. And trees are in abundance to create shelters.

WHY MAN IS A DEPENDENT CREATURE

Examining this fundamental that humans possess needs, we appreciate God's design that man must depend on God. This first goal is that we never lose sight of our dependent existence. This leads man to the more primary goal that man always has his focus on God, fulfilling his purpose in creation to study God and His wisdom, providing man with the most rich and fulfilling life. No life compares to the life engaged in discovery. God designed man where the pursuit of wisdom is our deepest enjoyment.

God further created man with a biology and psyche in order that man can experience satiation, happiness, love, success and a host of other satisfying sensations and feelings. God gave man intellect and morals to discern truth from false, and good from evil. Thereby, we avoid what is harmful and follow what is beneficial.

ONE GOD. ONE MAN. ONE RELIGION.

It is historically accurate and accepted that all peoples descend from Adam and Eve. Varying races and cultural distinctions are literally skin-deep; a superficial matter. However, man is not defined by his physical properties. Rather, man's unique quality is his inner faculties: his intellect and psyche. Both faculties belong to all members of mankind. All peoples desire happiness over sadness, health over illness, union over isolation, and the myriad of our other attitudes and traits are equally shared. Just as the medical or psychological remedy for one disease does not vary

between races, so too, man's happiness and fulfillment obtained through his relationship with God and his religious life must not vary. Our identical design demands that we all follow an identical religion, just like an identical medical treatment. More essentially, all members of mankind agree to proven truths, and recognize a lie: $1+1=2$, not 3. What is provable to one man, is provable to all. Therefore, if we succeed in proving that one religion alone was given by God, and that all others lack that proof, all mankind will benefit by following that one proven religion, rejecting all others as fabrications and lies. How do we determine which is God's true religion?

PROOF VS. BELIEF

We do not trust just anyone to operate on our bodies. We take great care and time to search-out the best physician based on a proven and successful record. Similarly, one must analyze all religions and select only that religion he or she determines is based on proof. Defense of one's chosen or inherited cultural beliefs must not outweigh proof. You will agree: a person born into the Egyptian culture of idol worship would be wrong to follow idolatry, simply because his parents were idolatrous. Proof is demanded in all areas, including one's religion. As man would not allow a clumsy doctor to operate on him, even if it was his father, man must apply the same discretion in all areas vital to his life, and his soul.

PEER PRESSURE

Therefore, the intelligent man will not defend a religion simply because his parents, family or friends adhere to it. He won't fear being ostracized since he is attached to truth more than all other considerations. It is difficult to deviate from what our closest family and friends believe, but one must not live to impress others. In fact, when one sees truth in newly-discovered principles of an alternate religion, the truth will solidify one's beliefs, helping to diminish the emotional effects of ridicule. Additionally, when a truth is made clear, sharing that truth with those who reject you will dismantle their rejection: proof and reason eliminate all opposing views. In time, you will be admired for following reason, while others follow the baseless views demanded by blind faith religions and damaging fallacies. However, one must be completely honest with himself when realizing fallacies in his religion and be ready to change when he realizes his beliefs are false. Can you say with absolute honesty, if you realize you are wrong, that you would accept truth over cherished beliefs? Will you seek reason in all areas of life, except religion, and live a contradiction? It is vital that you recognize your own emotions at work. Do not allow peer pressure or other emotions to cloud clear thinking and proofs.

POPULARITY VS. TRUTH

Man-made religions are ancient. We mock primitive peoples who carved trees and stones into idols and prayed to them. The

fact that idolatry was followed by many cultures teaches that all mankind share this insecurity: we all possess a single psychological design. Today we are no different in design than ancient man. Over time, religions appeared in the same number as man's imaginations. From Adam's grandson Enosh, to Egypt and the Greeks, man fabricated religions, superstitions and other beliefs to calm his fears and cater to his fantasies. Thereafter, these fabricated beliefs became widespread, as people naturally feel what is widely adopted must be true. People also fear ridicule if they deviate from their culture. Thereby, man made religions spread and multiplied. But popularity does not equate to truth.

METHOD

Using reason and our senses, let us inquire why God gave man these two faculties. Granting us our senses, God wishes men and women to distinguish between what is real and true, and between what is non-existent and false. Had God wished man to follow blind faith, our senses and intellect would be futile. However, it is a fundamental that the Creator does not perform useless acts. His omniscience³ and omnipotence⁴ witnessed in His created universe teaches that He is perfect beyond any defect. All that He created has great purpose and design: from the galaxies to atomic structures, weather patterns to the smallest insect, to man's senses

3) Omniscience refers to God's complete knowledge: God created everything, therefore He possesses complete knowledge of everything.

4) Omnipotence refers to God's complete power: God created everything, therefore He possesses complete power over everything.

and intellect. A system of marvels abounds in every corner of His universe. Therefore, if a claim of any event was never witnessed, the Creator wishes man to reject what his senses did not witness, and what generations preceding him never witnessed. This is His design and objective in granting senses to all animate beings. Using our senses, we will identify false religions that ask man to believe without evidence. Any other consideration like the fear of God's wrath or promises of eternal sensual pleasures cannot render an unproven religion as God's true religion.

God also granted man reason so we might understand our sense perceptions and arrive at true conclusions. We may see a magician cause a tiger to vanish from the stage. With senses alone, we are puzzled. Therefore we must also employ God's gift of reason. We question why the magician must first place a sheet over the animal. Why can't he simply snap his fingers alone? Misdirection and concealment of the animal's escape route are the answers. Had early idolaters used reason, they would recognize that stone and wood gods are inanimate, and they never responded to prayers. But many peoples abandon their intelligence when it comes to religious matters. They accept that in religion, blind faith is praiseworthy. Of course, this is baseless; a notion carelessly adopted without analysis. Today is no different. Many religions endorse blind faith and the abandonment of reason. Yet, God granted both; the senses and reason in order that man applies these great tools in all areas, including religious beliefs. Which religion do our senses and intellect identify as a proven religion?

Many religionists accept claims and beliefs without the same proof they demand for accepting secular claims. They even accept religious doctrines that conflict with reason. But, as God gave

each of us intelligence, He demands we engage it, certainly in the most vital part of life, that being our religious life. Blind faith has no place in any aspect of life: religion included. There is one God. There is one mankind. There can be only one religion. As each religion conflicts with all other religions, all religions cannot be God's word: the omniscient God does not contradict Himself.

RELIGIOUS BIAS

Religion evokes man's passions. Tragically, zealots intolerable of infidels still brutally murder innocents in the name of religion. From the Crusades to ISIS, men have murdered in the name of their gods. The age-old lesson is that man wishes to justify his religious choice by eliminating adherents of other religions. But this only kills people, and does not validate a religion or one's beliefs. Reason and proof alone will validate which is God's true religion. What principles and evidence are available?

Additionally, the claim that the true religion is the one followed by its adherents is faulty: their religion is usually defended simply because one was born to parents observing that religion, and not due to reasonable arguments or proof. However, as the event of one's birth cannot validate a set of beliefs, this claim is discarded. One must also understand that man is not born "Christian," "Muslim" or "Jewish." Religion is a "choice," not a character trait or metaphysical brand of one's soul. Each religion validates this through their acceptance of converts. All men and women are created equal. It is one's free will that determines which set of beliefs

he or she follows. (The position of a star or planet at one's birth – astrology – does not affect “free will.” This is irrefutable. Thus, horoscopes are fraudulent.)

Religious choice is made through knowledge, emotional leanings or blind faith. But as emotions and faith are not defended by reason, knowledge alone is the only reliable faculty for determining God's true religion. What is that precise knowledge?

HISTORY

Bulan was king of the Khazars. Approximately 8th century, he welcomed representatives from the three Abrahamic religions to defend their views. Based on the arguments he heard, he eventually rejected Christianity and Islam for lacking reasoning, and accepted Judaism and converted his nation to Jews. What evidence did he find in Judaism, not found in the other religions?

3327 years ago on Mount Sinai, God gave His Torah (Bible) to Moses and 2.5 million of Jacob's descendants. The veracity of this event is not doubted by Christianity or Islam, and this truth actually forms part of their beliefs. This is because God's Revelation at Sinai was witnessed by masses, which removes any possibility of fabrication. Masses of witnesses is the sole criteria that verifies all historical claims. Conversely, the lack of masses within any historical account – secular or religious – casts doubt on such a claim. For this reason, all religions aside from Judaism fail to prove their claim to Divine origin. No other religion claims to

have received communication from God in front of mass witnesses. This explains their demand for blind faith.

Moses then told the people, *“Lest you forget what your eyes saw (Deut. 4:9),”* referring to Revelation at Sinai. *“You have been shown to know (Deut. 4:35)”* is another warning to accept this proof. At Sinai, the entire Jewish nation heard an intelligent voice emanating from the fire on the mountain. God used fire in specific to prove His existence and His will for mankind, as all Earthly life perishes in fire. Thus, the intelligent voice emanating from the fire could not have originated on Earth. It was God. God orchestrated a provable event — mass witnesses and supernatural phenomena. Moses recalls these provable elements as he understood that God wants man to trust only reason and proof, and that mankind possess a proof of God’s only religion for all time. Had Revelation never occurred, and instead, Moses lied to some group of people telling them *“Do not forget what you saw,”* they would dismiss Moses as psychotic, as they saw nothing. Judaism would never have reached us, had Revelation never occurred. However, the unanimous transmission that reached the entire world — the Bible — testifies to Judaism’s authenticity. Would anyone try to perpetrate such a grandiose lie today, that millions heard an *“intelligent voice emanating from fire,”* not a single person would accept such a story without corroborating mass witnesses. And 3000 years from now, that lie will not be a world religion. But the Bible, the Torah, is alive 3000 years later. It is the singular historical event unrivaled by any other religion.

We understand the necessity for God’s Revelation. Without it, those ancient witnesses and future generations would have

no proof, and God desires man to accept only proven matters. Christianity and Islam make no such claim. To be clear, masses of “believers” do not equate to masses of “witnesses.” You must distinguish this in your mind. Billions of Muslims and Christians who “believe” doctrines and stories, do not satisfy as proof to their historic claims. However, 2.5 million witnesses at Sinai is 100% proof.

Revelation at Sinai is obvious, as obvious as all historical events. But this is just the beginning of how God’s Bible religion differs from all others. As you read on the many chapters I have included herein, I will demonstrate that the Bible is written in a Divine fashion, unparalleled by all other religions. The precise wording and clues will emerge, directing you to unwritten messages that will astound you. You will, after a few chapters, begin to witness God’s wisdom as you have never seen. You too will view the Bible as unmatched by any other religion.

BIBLE IS UNPARALLELED

We understand the proof of Revelation at Sinai. This event is proven like all historical claims. We do not need artifacts or records to prove an ancient event. What is needed is the verbal transmission of an event where masses witnessed a phenomenon. Other religions claim miraculous events, but as their claims did not occur, they could not convince the masses that they witnessed the purported miracles. Thus, in no other religion do we hear claims of “masses” who witnessed supernatural phenomena. Without

this proof, we cannot accept other religions as God's words, for He never spoke them. This explains why the Crusades massacred instead of simply sharing historical evidence. Without proof, religions resort to the demand for blind faith, or violent coercion. In contrast, God's Bible relies on intelligence, for God orchestrated Revelation at Sinai in a specific design that offers proof.

And God spoke to you from inside the fire, a voice of words did you hear, and no form did you see, only a voice (4:12).

And be exceedingly careful regarding your souls, for you did not see any form the day God spoke to you in Horeb from inside the fire (4:15).

The people accepted and transmitted these words of Moses as truths. These words are part of the Bible. The nation of 2.5 million unanimously transmitted Moses' words as accurately depicting what they witnessed. The Children of Jacob (Israel) reiterated through history that they heard a voice emanating from fire, but saw no form. No other religion claims such a phenomenon, and that masses witnessed it. And not only Sinai, the major religions also accept the Ten Plagues, the splitting of the Red Sea, the Manna, and all other miracles witnesses by the Children of Israel. An honest person must admit to the unique Biblical histories and statements. One must realize all other religions possess no proof.

NOT ALTERING THE BIBLE

Every thing which I command you to do, that is what you should be careful to do. Do not add upon, it and do not detract from it (Deut. 13:1).

We must follow God by accepting His command not to alter the Bible. We must ignore our emotions of bias to favor a religion because we are emotionally attached to it. We must appreciate God's Biblical words:

And you shall guard them and perform them [the commands] for they are your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations, who will hear all these statutes and say, "Certainly this great nation is a wise and understanding people." For what great nation has God close to them like Hashem our God whenever we call Him? And what great nation possesses righteous statutes and laws as our entire Torah [Bible] that I give you today (Deut. 4:6-8)?

Here, God attests to the response of all other people when they hear the Bible's words. If Moses' Bible is upheld, all nations will admit to its truths. God says the nations will be impressed precisely because the Bible contains provable truths and commands that impress one's intelligence. It is only when man distorts the Bible with violations of adding to it, against God's word, that the truth is obscured. Therefore, let us follow God and no longer distort His words or invent new religions.

MAN HAS NOT CHANGED

God did not reinvent man, thereby requiring new forms of nourishment. Air, water and food have always sustained man perfectly, and still do. So too, His Bible was given to endure for all times, and for all people. God knew all considerations throughout time, and commanded man not to add to His Bible. It would never require any alteration as Christianity and Islam have perpetrated. Such alterations unveil these religions as viewing God as one who erred, not knowing at Sinai, man's later religious needs. But man has not changed. In fact, Jeremiah states other nations will eventually discount their own religions:

Our fathers bequeathed us falsehood; futility that has in them no help (Jer. 16:19).

The other nations will eventually recognize the Bible as truth, and their religions as lies. Therefore, it is the obligation of the Jew to offer all nations the opportunity to learn Biblical truths, starting with Revelation at Sinai. But if the Jew fears speaking the truth and following God's commands, he does harm to other nations by concealing God's word.

ESTABLISHED RELIGIONS

Man tends to respect religions that have years of history, numerous books, houses of worship with beautiful architecture, cer-

emonies, and many leaders who wear colorful and ornate garb. This engenders in man much respect, but in no way validates the religion. Be on guard against this blinding emotion. Follow knowledge and reason alone to identify which religion has remained firm in following the Bible, and which religions have violated God's prohibitions to alter the Bible.

PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

I hope my intent in publishing this book with complete honesty and openness is appreciated by all readers. I hope you will read all the chapters included, as there are many great insights that inspired me, that I hope will inspire your hearts and minds too. It is my wish that you can abandon any emotional reluctance or bias, suppress all peer pressure, and admit to truths when you recognize them. In this manner, you will live as God created you, to accept your senses, deny what has not been witnessed, and apply your intellect to guide your decisions in all areas of life, starting with your religion.

There is one God. There is one man. There can be only one religion.

Part II

FALSE RELIGIONS

Having concluded fundamental considerations, in the following chapters we will assess the claims of other religions and determine if they adhere to His Biblical truths, His words, His actions, and if they offer wisdom. Finally, I will display how the Bible is a unique work in terms of its divine design, its brilliance and its fundamental lessons not found elsewhere.

GOD'S WISDOM: CONSISTENT IN ALL AREAS

Man-made religions do not possess the brilliance, depth and precise design of God's Bible. Consider the Creator's astonishing wisdom displayed in the universe's design. Consider how God created man with such a great capacity for wisdom and thought as evidenced in thinkers like Einstein and Aristotle. In this light, how can one claim God's religion should be as simplistic as the other religions claim? Even worse, the universe follows a highly intelligent design while religions claim contradictory and impossible tenets such as God becoming man in Jesus. This does not reflect the wisdom of the Creator, but rather, human fantasy. The omnipotent God cannot become a frail human. God does not perform futility, creating man with enormous capacity for wisdom, while giving a religion of infantile fantasy that renders man's potential obsolete. There is absolutely no depth beyond the words of these religions, and many of their words are unintelligible or barbaric. These religions boast tenets inconsistent with rational man, and worse, they do not reflect the brilliance witnessed in God's universe.

Every thing which I command you to do, that is what you should be careful to do. Do not add upon, it and do not detract from it (Deut. 13:1).

Christianity and Islam have violated this Biblical command in adding the New Testament and the Koran. Christianity has further veered from Moses words in suggesting God became a man. Moses told the people quite clearly:

And God spoke to you from inside the fire, a voice of words did you hear, and no form did you see, only a voice (4:12).

And be exceedingly careful regarding your souls, for you did not see any form the day God spoke to you in Horeb from inside the fire (4:15).

Moses' message is that God is not physical, He has no "form." This is reasonable, for He created the universe, thereby preceding physical creation. Thus, God is not physical. Christianity contradicts Moses' words which God endorsed in His Bible. Christianity's and Islam's acceptance of the Bible should have demanded they observe God's prohibition not to alter it, which they have violated.

Intelligent people wish to live by truth, and not by falsehoods. The fact that all religions argue on each other indicates that only one religion is the true religion given by God. This is not an attack on other religionists. Just the opposite: it is a genuine concern that other religionists realize their widely accepted and long-standing error. God gave His one religion to the Jews, in order that it be shared. God desires that all people, who are equally created "in His image" enjoy the benefits of His Torah (Bible). Therefore, it is the Jew's obligation to make the Torah and its core truths available to all peoples. The Jew is not superior, and the gentile is not inferior. Jacob and his descendants were merely those during that era who were not idolatrous, and accepted monotheism. Therefore, they were suitable as God's emissaries to mankind.

GOD DOESN'T CHANGE HIS MIND

Consider that God never changed man's physical needs. Since Adam, air, water and food continue to perfectly sustain man. Just as God planned man's physical design to reproduce identical offspring with identical needs not requiring any change, His religion too would never need any alteration. This is because man's internal makeup also does not change. Therefore, God giving only one religion makes sense: there is only one man. Additionally, God's religion would never require an "update" or any alteration. The claim that God changed His originally-given religion imputes ignorance onto God. In other words, if, due to new considerations, God were to alter His original religion or add to it as man-made religions suggest, those new considerations were originally unknown to Him. However, as God knows everything, future events were considered by Him when He formulated His religion. Therefore, no change is ever warranted in the one religion He gave.

IDOLATRY

Re'eh (a section of Deuteronomy) includes God's commands to abolish idolatry and all its traces from the land we were about to inherit. Idolatry forms the second of the Ten Commandments as well as the fifth of Maimonides 13 Principles, giving it vital focus and demanding we fully grasp this fundamental. Additionally, Maimonides teaches⁵ that we derive a fundamental from the Rab-

5) Laws of Star Worship 2:4

bis: "One who admits to idolatry, denies all of Torah, all prophets and all that the prophets commanded from Adam through all generations. And concerning one who denies idolatry, the converse is true." Maimonides adds, "and it [idolatry] is the essence of all the commands". Let's start by understanding that last statement.

How exactly is the command not to violate idolatry the "essence", let's say, of waving the palm branch and citron? How is it the "essence" of rejoicing on the holidays through eating meat and drinking wine, or wearing Tzitzis?

Maimonides does not mean idolatry forms the essence of the "act" of all commands, but rather, the "objective." God gave literally each command with the goal being our realization of God's wisdom. If we don't understand the concepts in each command, Rashi says the performance is useless.⁶ This makes sense, for what benefit do we achieve when waving a palm branch and citron, if it is not motivated by some ideal? But if we study the Rabbinic words, we realize that waving up and down demonstrates our acceptance of the One who created all that is up (in heaven) and down (on Earth). That is, God created all corners of the universe. And when we wave in the four, horizontal earthly directions, we demonstrate our conviction that all man's horizontal travels and actions are recognized by God, and that we benefit from His providence. Thus, God created all, and governs all. Now we can appreciate this command of waving produce at harvest time. Our very sustenance is due to the Creator. And this idea rejects the notion of idolatry.

6) We are still obligated to fulfill all commands, even without understanding them. But the purpose of the commands is not the physical act; it is the knowledge of why such an act is proper. This affects our soul. Possessing this knowledge, our fulfillment of the commands thereby demonstrates our perfection, as we are following our intelligent convictions in our actions. Action is the barometer of our level of conviction.

Tzitzis calls to mind “all” mitzvos: “

And you shall see them, and you shall recall all the mitzvos of God and you shall perform them, and you shall not go astray after your hearts and after your eyes, after which you deviate”?

We possess senses and desires. We can easily be aroused by both, A) visuals and B) imagination. God commanded we wear an item that recalls the total Torah system. When about to sin, we are faced with this A) visual reminder, that reinforces B) recollection of God. Tzitzis visually obscures a tempting visual, and the command to recall all the mitzvos is a mental activity that combats another internal function – our emotions. This restraint on our desires also conditions us not to follow idolatry, which is found only in our desires and not in reality. Contemplating the Torah system as well focuses us on God, and mitigates the drive towards “other” beings.

Even the rejoicing with food on holidays generates good emotions associated with the holiday: a recollection of God’s providence. Thereby, we do not accept that an idol rescued us from bondage, or sheltered us in huts, or gave us the Torah. This is what Maimonides means by “idolatry is the essence of all the commands.” All commands are to increase our appreciation for the only God, simultaneously rejecting the notion of idolatry.

7) Numbers 15:39

IDOLATRY: THE CORE IDEA

Maimonides teaches the central theme of idolatry is that we must not worship anything created.⁸ This includes the sun, moon stars, angels, constellations, humans, animals, plants and all elements. We must appreciate that the source of idolatry is human insecurity. If man were self-sufficient, having no worries or cares, he would not pray or seek assistance. But we are in fact, dependent, with needs. Intelligent people realize that as all in the universe is created, they do not seek assistance from anything or anyone except the Creator, the only being truly capable of assisting us. Maimonides adds⁹ that we also do not admit of God, while seeking intermediaries. The practice of seeking intermediaries in any form expresses a false view of God: that one cannot relate to Him directly, nor that He can relate to man directly. Worse, it expresses the idea that God is not independently sufficient, i.e., He requires an intermediary or assistant.

IDOLATRY'S MAJOR THEMES

Idolatry includes a few major parameters: one cannot create idols or instruct others to make them; one cannot worship them; one cannot look at idols, one cannot derive any benefit from idols, one cannot create figurines for beauty even if not for idolatry, one must abstain from idolatrous practices like omens, horoscopes, amulets, consulting the dead, witchcraft, and one must destroy

8) Laws of Star Worship 2:1

9) *ibid*

idols and all that is used in its worship.

Regarding the various objects under this prohibition of creating idols, we wonder how both Maimonides¹⁰ and the Shulchan Aruch¹¹ state that creating figures of animals is permissible, while Deuteronomy 4:17 teaches we cannot create such figures. Was not the Gold Calf a primary example? To compound this question, Deuteronomy 4:16 groups man with animals as the forms prohibited regarding the creation of replicas (idolatry). Thus, man and beast should be equal.

Statues of Worship vs. Beauty

We must contrast the source prohibiting “idol” creation to the verse prohibiting the creation of figurines for “beauty” and not for worship. Exodus 20:4 (the Ten Commandments) prohibits all forms of idols:

Do not create for yourself a statue of any form that is in heaven above and that is in the Earth below and that is in the water under the Earth.

Deuteronomy 4:17 cites Moses’ additional warning not to do so. In both cases, the Torah prohibits the replication of any being for the sake of “worship.” In this prohibition, man is no different than animal. So in what sense are animals (and plants) permitted?

The permitted replication of animals and plants is for beauty, like statues on one’s lawn, or in his home. When not created for idolatry but merely for decoration, we are taught that animals and

10) Laws of Star Worship 3:11

2) Yoreh Daya 141

plants can be replicated. Even decorative replicas of man and the heavenly bodies and angels would be permitted, were it not due to the Torah's separate concern that erring individuals not be misled and follow idolatry. So as not to mislead people, even the creation of statues or figurines for decoration is prohibited, but this prohibition applies only to man, the heavenly bodies and angels.

The verse Maimonides cites for this second prohibition is Exodus 20:20:

Do not make with Me gods of silver, and gods of gold do not make for yourselves.

Notice the words "silver" and "gold", i.e., ornamental materials. It is thereby learned that this verse does not come to prohibit idolatry, what Torah already prohibited in Exodus 20:4, but it must add a new prohibition. This addition is the creation of figurines that are ornamental in nature, and not idolatrous. Nonetheless, they are prohibited.

My friend Rabbi Roth suggested the exclusion of plants and animals from decorative purposes is due to their lack of intelligence. Thus, the Torah only went so far to protect people from error, and only prohibited decorative statues that reflect beings possessing intelligence and capable of answering man's cries... those things that could possibly be treated as idols. But as plants and animals have no intelligence, the Torah did not go so far as to prohibit these categories of replicas, when not made for idolatry. Perhaps another reason is that plants and animals of each species are identical. One can barely distinguish two lions, two zebras,

or two maple trees. Thus, the individual member of each species offers man no satisfaction that “this one” is unique and worthy of worship. Thus, animals and plants are not prohibited when created for decoration or beauty. In contrast, the sun, moon, constellations and descriptions of angels are all unique. This uniqueness of each individual lends itself to man’s projection of “powers”, and thus idolatry. Therefore, these latter subjects are prohibited, even if created for beauty. But let’s further appreciate the Torah’s formulations.

Replica vs. Imagination

What is the need for this additional verse and command? Why are not the angels and the spheres subsumed under the primary prohibition taken from the first verse we quoted in the Ten Commandments, “*Do not create for yourself a statue of any form that is in heaven above and that is in the Earth below and that is in the water under the Earth*”?

Our second verse (Exod. 20:20) is precise...also saying Do not make “with Me.” “With Me” means to say, “*Do not make forms of ministers who minister before Me on high*”¹², referring to the various angels and the spheres. Of course, God does not occupy space, so the heavenly spheres and angels are not “with” God. Thus, “with Me” refers to subjects that man deems more closely related to God, such as the spheres and the angels. But “with Me” carries another idea...

12) Talmud Rosh Hashannah 24b, Laws of Star Worship 3:11

Do not Make "with Me"

This refers to a new category of idolatrous prohibition: objects not subject to replication.

We don't know what God is. And anything "with God" implies that it shares something with God. But nothing is comparable to God!¹³ What then does this mean?

I believe the equation is that just as God is unknowable and not subject to replication, the angles too are not subject to replication. Even the spheres cannot be replicated, as Abbayeh taught.¹⁴ Maimonides too points to this distinction, as he says we cannot create the "similitude" (*dimus*) of the angels or the spheres. Maimonides does not use "similitude" when describing replications of man, since man can in fact be accurately replicated. Since the concept of a replica cannot apply to angels (of which we're ignorant) or spheres (true replication is impossible due to sheer magnitude) Maimonides correctly includes these objects under a new heading, requiring a different verse for their prohibition. So the first verse in the Ten Commandments prohibits true idol creation. This includes those objects, which can be replicated, i.e., animals and man, and also anything made expressly for idolatrous use. But the Torah also warns against creating things incapable of replication: either due to its size (planets, sun, etc.) or due to our ignorance of what it is (angles). Such creation cannot be deemed "replicas" and thus, Maimonides places these laws under a different heading. We now appreciate the need for two verses.

As we said at the outset, Tzitzis guards against our nature to "see" and be led astray, or to "imagine" with our hearts and be led astray. The Torah is beautifully consistent, as we are warned not

13) Isaiah 40:18

14) Talmud Rosh Hashannah 24a

to replicate what we “see” (viz. animals), or what we “imagine” (angels).

God must be viewed as the Creator – the sole source of the universe. Idolatry assumes that God does not exist and there is something else, or that He does exist, but requires assistants to create or run His world.

The study of reality – science – and the study of the Bible both reject the notion of a Godless world that created itself or always existed; or a world where God is dependent on other imaginary forces. Thus, as Maimonides teaches, we have no need for, nor is there truth to intermediaries. No force exists other than God. There is no power except for God alone. For nothing can run the world, which He created. No man or object can help us. We are taught to pray to Him alone. We can reach Him from anywhere. Furthermore, nothing can stop His payment to the righteous or can save from His punishment – not even mitzvos. The only recourse is repentance from that flaw.¹⁵

Once we recognize that the Creator is One, we will find it easier to accept that He is the sole power the guides the universe. We will not seek imaginary intermediaries or fabricate other forces.

15) Deut. 10:17. See Sforno's commentary

NO RELIGIOUS COEXISTENCE

All peoples must respect one another's lives. We all must abstain from harming anyone, except those who physically attack us. However, today, this respect has grossly overgrown its borders to violate God's words. I refer to the current tide of mutual religious acceptance, and worse; the admiration of religions other than God's Torah, His Bible. Throughout the Bible, God warns against following other religions, altering His Bible, adding to it, subtracting from it, and deifying man. He also warns us not to lie, "*From a false matter, distance yourself (Exod. 23:7).*" These are perpetrated by all other religions, and today, by many Jewish leaders. God's Prophets discuss the corruptions of others nations and religions, their eventual rejection of their religions as lies, and their ultimate acceptance of the unaltered Bible, the Torah:

Nations will come from the corners of the land and say, "In truth, our fathers gave us an inheritance of lies" (Jer. 16:19).

Every thing which I command you to do, that is what you should be careful to do. Do not add upon, it and do not detract from it (Deut. 13:1).

And many peoples and mighty nations will come to inquire of the God of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat God's presence. So says God of hosts, "In those days ten men of all gentile languages will grab on the shirt corner of the Jewish man saying, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you" (Zech. 8:22,23).

So let us be clear: God rejects all other religions, and informs us of their future acceptance of the Torah, the Bible. Sadly, certain considerations are causing Jewish leaders to alter God's words, and Maimonides' words below. Such apologetics obscure the truth from the Jew and gentile alike. Maimonides writes:

[10] ...Can there be a greater stumbling block than this (Christianity)? That all the prophets spoke that the Messiah will redeem Israel and save them, and gather their dispersed and strengthen their mitzvot, and this (one, i.e., Jesus) caused the Jews to be destroyed by the sword, and scattered their remnants and humbled them, and exchanged the Torah, and caused the majority of the world to err to serve a god other than the Lord. [11] Nevertheless, the thoughts of the Creator of the world are not within the power of man to reach them, 'for our ways are not His ways, nor are our thoughts His thoughts.' And all these matters of Jesus of Nazareth and that of the Ishmaelite who arose after him are only to straighten the way of the king Messiah and to fix the entire world, to serve God as one, as it is stated (Zephaniah 3:9), "For then I will turn to the peoples (into) clear speech, to all call in the name of God and serve Him unanimously. [12] How (will this come about)? The entire world has already become filled with the mention of the Messiah, with words of Torah and words of mitzvos and these matters have spread to the furthestmost isles, to many nations of uncircumcised hearts, and they discuss these matters and the mitzvot of the Torah. Some say: "These mitzvot are true, but were already nullified in the present age and are not applicable for all time." Others say: "Hidden matters are in them (mitzvos) and they are not to be taken literally, and the Messiah has already come and revealed their hidden (meanings)." And when the true Messiah

stands, and he is successful and is raised and exalted, immediately they all will retract and will know that fallacy they inherited from their fathers, and that their prophets and fathers caused them to err (Maimonides, Laws of Kings, II:10-12, Capach edition).

We cannot suggest that God desired Christianity to arise. God desires no other religion than Judaism. In the Jewish year 2448 upon Mt. Sinai, God revealed Himself to man once. 2.5 million people witnessed this event. God publicly instructed man in only one religion: Judaism. God gave a Bible that includes prohibitions against altering His word. This is perfectly clear.

Maimonides does not indicate that God desired Christianity's existence. This directly opposes God's Bible. All Maimonides says is that God's plan will not be altered by the rise of other religions. The fact that Christianity spread the Mitzvos, is not equivalent to saying God desires Christianity, from the outset. The spread of Christianity may have brought about awareness, but a false one at that, and one that all nations will ultimately see as false, as the quote says, "*...immediately they all will retract and will know that fallacy they inherited from their fathers, and that their prophets and fathers caused them to err.*" Look at Maimonides' opening words: "*...Can there be a greater stumbling block than this (Christianity)?*" Also, "*and this (one, i.e., Jesus) caused the Jews to be destroyed by the sword, and scattered their remnants and humbled them, and exchanged the Torah, and caused the majority of the world to err to serve a god other than the Lord.*"

Christianity was pure evil.

What is preferable; that Christianity would never had existed, or actual history? God's will is the former, stated quite openly. However, now that Christianity exists, Maimonides indicates it cannot compromise God's plan:

Nevertheless, the thoughts of the Creator of the world are not within the power of man to reach them, "for our ways are not His ways, nor are our thoughts His thoughts."

We cannot fathom God's plan. Maimonides admits he fails to comprehend a positive goal in the spread of Christianity, but it can in no way compromise God's ultimate plan, as these events were not thwarted by God. A negative may be utilized for a positive. But Christianity remains a negative.

To say that Christianity "contributes" to God's plan, is much different than saying it "does not compromise" God's plan. The former suggest it is an inherent good, while the latter retains its true status as one of the worst evils in world history. Maimonides does not say it contributes to God's plan. He writes:

And all these matters of Jesus of Nazareth and that of the Ishmaelite who arose after him are only to straighten the way of the king Messiah and to fix the entire world, to serve God as one.

Maimonides openly states that Christianity is the "greatest stumbling block." He does not suggest in one breath that it is both good and evil. Keep all of the author's words in front of your eyes.

Let us understand Maimonides words:

How (will this come about)? The entire world has already become filled with the mention of the Messiah, with words of Torah and words of mitzvos and these matters have spread to the furthestmost isles, to many nations of uncircumcised hearts, and they discuss these matters and the mitzvot of the Torah. Some say: "These mitzvot are true, but were already nullified in the present age and are not applicable for all time." Others say: "Hidden matters are in them (mitzvos) and they are not to be taken literally, and the Messiah has already come and revealed their hidden (meanings)." And when the true Messiah stands, and he is successful and is raised and exalted, immediately they all will retract and will know that fallacy they inherited from their fathers, and that their prophets and fathers caused them to err.

Maimonides suggests that God's allowance of man's free will, expressed in the rise of corrupt religions, has a benefit. Not a benefit in their ideas, but in another manner. I will explain.

Again, "*immediately they all will retract and will know that fallacy they inherited from their fathers, and that their prophets and fathers caused them to err.*" I believe Maimonides wished to convey the following lesson: a prior fallacy serves to validate a subsequent truth. This is the core idea of the entire quote. Let me explain.

If one errs, believing a fallacy, and subsequently learns the truth, he then dismisses his previous error. Conversely, when the true Messiah arrives, and teaches Torah, others might then develop new, false religions, as was so during the rise of Christianity and all other religions. Through their false interpretations of true

Torah, Jesus and other false prophets deceived themselves and others that their interpretation of new events was God's fulfillment of His promise of redemption. But, as God plans, their error in determining the Messiah will be subsequently met with the arrival of the true Messiah. Other religions will be exposed as false by the true fulfillment of God's biblical words: *"Immediately they all will retract and will know that fallacy they inherited from their fathers, and that their prophets and fathers caused them to err."* This precise scenario prevents any future distortions of Torah and the Messiah, which would not be the case if there were no previous, false religions. The very existence of false religions, subsequently met with the arrival of the true Messiah, will eternally discount all religions, except for Judaism. In this manner, Judaism will forever remain as the true word of God.

I will give another example of this method of God instructing man, where a prior fallacy serves to validate a subsequent truth. Rashi quotes a Rabbinic statement:

(God said) By their lives, I will give them an opportunity to err with the words of the spies so they don't inherit the land of Israel (Num. 13:2).

This would seem like a vindictive statement. But as God is devoid of emotion, how do we understand it?

Had God not permitted the spies to spy out Israel, they would have harbored an incorrect notion about God. That is, their desire to send spies displayed their disbelief in God's promise that they will successfully conquer Israel. If this disbelief in God was not

brought into the open, they would remain with this false notion, and this is not tolerable by God. What is meant by “God gave them an opportunity to err?” It means that God gave them an opportunity to act out this notion in reality so it can be dealt with. God’s goal was not their loss of Israel. Giving them “a chance not to inherit Israel” is God offering those Jews a generous chance to realize their emotional conflict (they desired Israel, but denied God’s promise). “God gave them an opportunity to err” means that God’s allowance of the spies’ mission enabled the Jews to face their mistake. I believe this is also the case with God allowing false religions to rise prior to His delivering the true Messiah. God certainly prefers that the false religions never existed, but He allows man free will, and history to run a course until the truth will ultimately be unopposed. Allowing false religions to rise prior to the Messiah, God secures man a future where all arguments against Torah have been addressed.

Rabbi Judah taught, “Rav said, ‘Why does the Torah teach, ‘Lest you lift your eyes to the heavens and see the sun, moon and stars, all the hosts of heaven, and you turn aside and prostrate yourselves to them and worship them which God has smoothed them out for all nations under the entire heavens (Deut. 4:19)’.” Rabbi Judah continued, “This teaches that God made their ways smooth so as to remove them from the world” (Tal. Avoda Zara 55a).

What is the meaning of “God made their ways smooth so as to remove them from the world?” What type of divine justice is this? Do we not also read, “Do I truly desire the death of the wicked, says God? Truly, I desire his repentance so he may live (Ezek. 18:23).”

“God made their ways smooth” teaches that God designed man with freewill. God does not desire that man be forced to accept any view. For example, if a man couldn’t have intercourse more than once a month due to illness, he would not be abstaining based on an effort to curb his desires, but from adverse reactions. Internally, he still craves intercourse. In this scenario, man does not obtain the opportunity to perfect himself through his free will and intelligent mastery over his instincts. Similarly, Rabbi Judah is teaching that God did not create the world where idolatrous activity is immediately met with death, lightning, etc. For this would cause man to refrain from idolatry for the wrong reasons. God’s gift of the intellect is precisely that we engage it, and determine that idolatry is ineffective. Wooden and stone gods, or men viewed as gods, possess no powers. This was never witnessed. God wants man to agree to this with his senses and his mind. The meaning of “*God made their ways smooth so as to remove them from the world*” means God allowed man to exercise his free choice, with no impediment, what God means by “smooth.” God designed man with the choice to project smooth and emotionally appealing interpretations and err, or to use reason and abstain from lies and fallacy. To “remove them from the world” is not God’s goal, as we see from Ezekiel above, “*Do I truly desire the death of the wicked, says God? Truly, I desire his repentance so he may live (Ezek. 18:23).*” God’s goal is that man chooses between what satisfies his emotions, and what is right according to his mind. This is the plan for mankind, explaining why we have both; instincts and intellect.

This is exactly what Maimonides teaches. God allowed Christianity and Islam to arise and endure, for He does not force a man or a people to abandon false religion or any poor decision. God

desires man engages freewill. Eventually, "*Nations will come from the corners of the land and say, 'In truth, our fathers gave us an inheritance of lies' (Jer. 16:19).*" They will abandon their religions and accept Judaism.

The Messiah serves a primary goal: to unite all peoples in God's worship. God knew how history would unfold, that Judaism would be fragmented into numerous branches, and deviations in levels of observance would arise. A cure to this problem was necessary. The Messiah is this cure. Since all members of Judaism accept the coming of Messiah, all Jews will follow Messiah's teachings. Judaism will return to its pure, original form, hopefully soon, to be taught by the Messiah, God's true messenger. This is not only true regarding various Jewish factions, but also regarding all religions, as Jeremiah teaches above.

Messiah has become the center of religious difference. Upon his arrival, not only will all Jews unite in one practice, but all other religions too will abandon their fallacies, accepting Judaism as the one, true word of God. All other religions will be dismissed as complete falsehoods. Such a dismissal of prior fallacy insures that no future deviation from God's word will occur.

God preferred that man never deviate from Torah, be he Jew or gentile. And even though man has deviated by creating false religions, his actions cannot compromise God's plan. But God uses man's error for an ultimate good. Better that man does not err, but thankful are we that God utilizes our errors and implements corrective measures for all humanity.

TRINITY

“Hear Israel; God is our God, God is one (Deut. 6:4).”

Jacob (Israel) asked his children to affirm their conviction in monotheism. The verse above is their unanimous response. Christianity perverts the plain meaning of this verse, assuming a more accurate understanding of the Bible than the recipients that stood on Sinai. On Sinai, the Jews also received the Oral Law (Mishna) which is indispensable for explaining God’s Biblical verses, rendering the Jews the sole authority on Biblical explanation.

Here, Jacob’s sons, the Twelve Tribes, reassure their father Israel in the most simplest terms, that God is one.

Christianity counts the three references to God, claiming God is three. If someone stated, “John is my employer, John is honest,” we again find three references to John: his name “John” is mentioned twice, and the title “employer” is a third reference. Would any intelligent person suggest this means John is not one person, but three? Furthermore, what intelligent platform is Christianity seeking to endorse by saying one thing is three things? Impossibilities like this, or saying “a square is simultaneously a circle” are not rooted in a rational mind. One who defends such impossibilities announces to everyone that he cannot think on even a basic level.

POLYTHEISM

But let us examine this claim of polytheism, the belief in many gods, or parts to God. If God is not solely independent, suggested by polytheism, this means God is not in control of all; other deities are required. Each deity is thereby limited to a certain realm of control, outside of which, it has no power. Something other than these assumed deities must have determined that each deity controls only a limited sphere of matters. This renders each deity not only limited, but not a true deity. This is because another being has control on that deity. The true God of the universe by definition preceded all else. He exists without requiring creation, and functions with no restraint. There is nothing that can limit His sphere of power. Polytheism and a trinity is thus rejected.

CHRISTIANITY

The Lord thy God will raise unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me: unto him ye shall hearken (Deuteronomy 18:15).

Who can be the Messiah? Maimonides in his Laws of Kings lists the Messiah's qualifications: *"He must descend from King David's lineage, he must be fluent in Torah and performing the commands like David in accord with the Written and Oral Law, he compels all Jews in this lifestyle and strengthens all aspects, he fights the battles of God and does all this with success, he builds the Jewish Temple on its*

foundation, and ingathers all the diaspora Jews. Only then is such a person the Messiah.” Christianity claims Jesus had no earthly father, and therefore cannot be a direct descendant of David. (In the Bible, tribal lineage follows the father.) Jesus cannot be the Messiah. And if one claims he was a descendant of David, then he is not God incarnate. Either claim refutes Jesus as a deity or the Messiah. Christianity claims Jesus died for other peoples’ sins. What does God say?

There will not be killed fathers for sons sins, nor are sons killed for father’s sins. Each man in his own sin will be killed (Deut. 24:16).

This verse teaches that the theory of the death of Jesus on behalf of others’ sins is contrary to God’s words. God’s system is just: the one who sins pays the price, not another. God teaches us intellectually sound ideas that conform to justice.

CHRISTIANITY DEIFIES MAN

Christianity appeals to many through false ideas. One is a guilt-free existence, “Jesus died for man’s sins.” Accordingly, man’s sins can be absolved; he takes no responsibility for his corrupt actions. This is quite enticing, although baseless. Another primary idea is the satisfaction of the emotional need for approval from man, i.e., the man Jesus is the central focus.

Man is attached to his parents, projecting on them a supreme,

authoritative status. A child seeks approval, and finds parental disappointment most devastating. Many individuals never grow out of this emotion and seek this satisfaction even in adult life, by idolizing human figures and creating heroes. Christianity satisfies this need through its portrayal of Jesus as superhuman, a clear display of deifying man, not God. Conversely, Judaism teaches that man is simply flesh and blood, with no powers. God remains the central focus in authentic Bible Judaism. Numerous laws prohibit man from seeking human approval and the projection of superhuman qualities onto man. In contrast to Christianity's saints, Judaism's prophets shun the spotlight, as seen from Moses seven-day debate with God to find another leader to emancipate the Jews, and Elisha who himself did not approach Naaman with God's instructions for healing: Elisha sent his servant to give those instructions to cure Naaman's leprosy. Elisha wished God alone to maintain responsibility for the government of man and nature. Furthermore, God includes the accounts of His prophets' sins. God does not endorse sainthood. Bible Judaism also prohibits idolatry, warlocks, enchanters, and witches, to name a few. Each law is an example of Judaism's goal to extricate man from believing any power exists, aside from God. As Ibn Ezra and Maimonides state, all these practices are false. God created all matter and all laws governing them — He alone Who created these laws, controls them. Man, a creation, cannot over-power God, or nature. Man is the created, not the Creator.

DEIFICATION OF MAN: PART II

Prophets are replete with God's warnings against idol worship. In addition, God taught that human deification is rejected. This is learned from the Biblical account of the Egyptian plague of Hail:

And the astrologers could not stand before Moses because of the boils; for the boils were on the astrologers and all of Egypt (Exod. 9:11).

What is problematic with that statement? Think about it. It says the astrologers couldn't stand before Moses. But we wonder: how do boils — a malady of the skin, not bones or muscles — affect posture? Also, of what relevance are the boils on “all of Egypt?” Why mention that “all Egyptians” had boils, if the message concerns only the astrologers' inability to stand? Furthermore, of what significance is the astrologers' inability to stand before Moses, as opposed to standing before Pharaoh or others? And if they truly could not stand, let them sit. But “stand before” has another meaning.

We are being taught many lessons here. The primary lesson is that we use the verse as the starting point, and let it teach us. We must not start with our own unchecked thoughts and then look for some supporting verse.

The posture of lying mystics adds no great wisdom to God's Torah. The real lesson must address the basic theme of the Ten Plagues, as the plague of Boils was delivered together with the other nine.

Standing also means to “present” one’s self...to appear before others. The astrologers attempted to reproduce the Plagues, only to expose their inabilities. This is significant, since God records their feeble attempts. So significant is this point, that it appears from the very few words concerning the plague of Boils, that the objective of this plague was precisely to disarm the astrologers’ claims to superiority through astrology and magic. Biblical verses are selective in their messages, not merely recounting every single historical occurrence. Our verse means to teach that Boils’ purposefully targeted the astrologers.

And the astrologers could not stand before Moses because of the boils; for the boils were on the astrologers and all of Egypt.

This refers not to posture, but to their ability to sustain their dignity...they could not “appear” before Moses who outperformed them. They were ashamed. But why were they any more ashamed during the plague of Boils? The answer is the second part of the verse: “...for the Boils were on the astrologers and all of Egypt”. Here, God hints to us...

Let the Words Talk

What might we derive from this latter half of the verse? These words appear to make a comparison: both, the astrologers and the Egyptians possessed boils. We must now ask this: what about this comparison prevented the astrologers from appearing before Moses? Why was their “equal” status with all other Egyptians an embarrassment to them? We see the answer quite readily! It

was the very equality of their condition to that of all other Egyptians that disarmed their claims to greatness. They were no better! They could not defend themselves from the plague of Boils. What type of powerful astrologer allows painful blisters to afflict them over days? It is the liar, since in fact, he has no more defense from Boils than any other Egyptian. It was this diminution of status that was their embarrassment, and why they could not “appear” before Moses.

How God Teaches Us

As a wise Rabbi said, that the Torah’s (Bible’s) words are carefully selected. Our verse is just one example of thousands. With His meticulously crafted texts, God provides us with just enough information to discern a problem, and that hint being the very opening to the answer. “*Its answer is by its side*” is a Rabbinic statement describing this very phenomenon.

Knowledge is endless, but written words are limited. How then can God direct all generations to continuously uncover new truths? If knowledge was limited to the written word, when we concluded any text, we would have nothing more to gain. This is only true of human works. But Divinely inspired works are different. The Torah’s and Rabbis’ “apparent” inconsistencies, exaggerations and contradictions force the mind into the world of induction and deduction, and other forms of reasoning. Wisdom has a design. It has layers and curtains...where truths are only unveiled with the method of questioning.

We must appreciate the wisdom of the written words and search for God’s intended teaching by listening to the words with a great

deal of sensitivity and awe. “*For God gives wisdom, from His lips [come] knowledge and understanding (Proverbs 2:6).*” This verse teaches two matters: 1) to be cognizant that God is the “source” of all wisdom, and 2) that His “lips” offer an additional benefit. “Lips” refer to the written word — that which has been articulated. These articulations or *pasukim* can reveal great insights if we spend the necessary time considering the problems in each verse.

God’s messages embedded in the Ten Plagues are numerous. Clearly, the act of unveiling the astrologers’ lies through Boils was precise. For only with a plague that attacks the “body” would all others derive the lesson that one person is equal to another. This explains our previous question why Boils caused the astrologers’ shame, as opposed to any other plague. For it was Boils alone that made a comparison between all Egyptians, exposing the astrologers as equals, and not the superiors they claimed to be. The very fact that God chose to include this comparison as the exclusive effect of this plague, indicates the very purpose of this plague.

But why was the demotion of astrologers so essential that a separate plague was required to address it?

Leaders: Teachers, not Gods

From the astrologers’ inability to reproduce the plague of Lice and from their absence in all subsequent plagues, we realize God’s primary lesson is, as He said, “*There is none like Me in all the land (Exod. 9:14).*” God wished to educate the Egyptians away from idolatry, magic and astrology: all are false. And He did so by showing His exclusive reign over the universe and all of its laws.

We must then ask what more was achieved when demoting the astrologers' status via Boils. We already know that astrology is false; from the Plague of Lice and onwards the astrologers could not reproduce any miracle brought by Moses. What more was added in Boils? The verse says the astrologers could not stand before Moses. Again, we see a comparison: the astrologers are contrasted against Moses. I believe this lesson is to force us to consider what we must value, and what we must disregard.

Although holding higher social status than Moses, the astrologers realized their lowly state. It matters none that they were in positions of power, and that Moses and his people were slaves. Roles must play no role. Pharaoh and the Egyptians – as well as all other human beings – attribute more credence to a person in a higher status, simply because he or she possesses that status. At times, even the higher-ranked person dupes himself into believing he is superior. In his dream, Pharaoh saw himself standing literally “on” the Nile, the source of Egypt’s fertility. He too was subject to the fantasy of greatness.

The lesson here is to ignore reputations, and view one’s actions or ideas alone. The Torah says “*do not fear man*”, and “*do not respect the rich or the poor.*” In all cases, human emotions of favoritism will lead to corruption, not God’s truths or justice.

Moses was unaffected by the boils that reached the astrologers. This directed the Egyptians to the realization that although in high office, a person can be a fake. It is clear from the institution of leadership, that man enjoys subjugation to a director – people want a leader. But we must be so careful and accept as a leader, only he who is guided by reason and Torah truths. We must be sensitive to this human frailty of insecurity and the desire for a

father figure. We are to abandon that need, and mature into intelligent people. In no way should we respect leaders' words or actions alone: they must pass the litmus test of reason and Torah. The leader too must not fall prey to seeking popularity. That must not be his objective. He must lead only with the desire to educate others towards a life of reason, Torah, and ultimately a love of God...not a love of himself. Rabbi Reuven Mann once mentioned the Talmudic portion that says, *"Any leader whose subjects like him, is doing a poor job."* This means, that a true leader admonishes his followers, something distasteful, although he risks losing his post.

Summary

We conclude that the Torah (Bible) teaches in a very subtle and deep manner. It takes time to master this style, but it will offer us brilliant insights. We must study the verses, allowing the words to lead us, and not use them to support our whims. We learn that every Plague offered deeper lessons than meets the eye. And we learn that we are not to follow the leader, but we must use reason to determine truths. Moses, although of a slave population, spoke truth, while the astrologers attested to their lies by their inability to stand before him. Don't follow the leader. Follow the truth.

CHRISTIANITY'S PLAGIARISM

Christianity plagiarized the Bible to earn credibility. Compare the Bible's words to Christianity's plagiarism.

The Bible states:

God said to Moses in Midian, 'Go, return to Egypt, for there have died all the men that sought your life' (Exod. 4:19).

The New Testament states:

Rise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead (Matthew 2:20).

The Bible states:

And (the king of Egypt) said, "When the Hebrew women give birth, and look upon the birthstone; if it is a son, kill him, and if it is a daughter, let it live" (Exod. 1:16).

The New Testament states:

Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, was in a furious rage, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under...(Matthew 2:16)

In both statements above Christianity plagiarizes the Bible, provoking the emotion of pity. Christianity continuously portrays Jesus as the victim to foster identification and more adherents. Just like Pharaoh threatened Moses, the story fabricated in the New Testament makes Jesus the victim of King Herod. Coinci-

dentally, the events at the time of Jesus' birth were conveniently fabricated to mimic a similar threat, which had taken place during the time of Moses' birth. The reader of the New Testament feels pity and compassion for Jesus. The goal of the New Testament is to equate the statures of Jesus and Moses. In so many statements contained the New Testament, if read carefully, one will find authentic, Torah accounts plagiarized with slight changes, replacing true Torah personalities with Jesus.

Plagiarism is also seen clearly in the first quote: Moses was threatened and then afterwards informed to return as all those seeking his life were dead. The New Testament again attempts to plagiarize a known story of Moses and transpose it onto Jesus. For the very goal of engendering pity as a tool for identification with Jesus, Christianity adopted the symbol of the Cross. The Cross' unanimous acceptance as a central icon of their religion displays how correct the developers of Christianity were that pity is a sure-fire lure to attract adherents.

The Palestinians today follow the same approach in their propaganda war. And sadly, it is working. They incite attacks on Jews, and then cry when a terrorist is shot. Many of these attacks have Palestinian photographers on-hand as a staged means to flood the Internet with pictures that appear to display Palestinians as victims. The intelligent person sees through this facade.

Returning to Jesus, a most obvious plagiarism describes the sale of Jesus by one of the twelve disciples for thirty pieces of silver. It is almost identical to the Biblical sale of Joseph by one of his twelve brothers for twenty pieces of silver.

The Bible states:

And there passed by Midianite men, traders, and they drew him and lifted him (Joseph) out of the pit and they sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for 20 pieces of silver and they brought Joseph to Egypt (Gen. 37:25).

The New Testament states:

Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What will you give me if I deliver him to you?' And they paid him thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 26:14-15).

Christianity again plagiarizes the Bible in order to evoke empathy and identification with Jesus, portrayed as the “victim.” The goal of Christianity is to portray Jesus first as the victim, and finally as a leader. This exactly mirrors Joseph’s history.

In summary, Christianity lies to its followers, it contradicts God’s Biblical words, it is a religion where reason is replaced by belief, and deceit is the means of attracting to-be proselytes. Do not feel compelled to adhere to Christianity due to its popularity, or its leaders’ reputations. Many people are drawn in by the impressive structures of churches, ancient paintings depicting Jesus, the Church’s long history, and the sense of piety associated with nun’s and priests’ garb. Do not be impressed, for previous idolaters also made great structures, wore ornate clothing, and were widespread. Religion must be based in truth.

ISAIAH 53

Christianity's famous argument is that Isaiah 53 predicts Jesus. This chapter describes an afflicted "man" who carried the sins of others. They wish to suggest it refers to Jesus. However, one man is not justly punished for another man's sins, and nations are not punished for the sins of other nations (Radak, Isaiah, 53:4) as Jeremiah 31:29 says, "...every man will die for his own sin". How then do we understand Isaiah 53? Let us review the chapter:

The Nations' words:

1. Who would believe what we had heard? For whom has the arm of God been revealed? 2. Formerly he grew like a sapling or like a root from arid ground; he had neither form nor grandeur; we saw him but without such visage that we could desire him. 3. He was despised and isolated from men, a man of pains and accustomed to illness. As one from whom we would hide our faces; he was despised and we had no regard for him. 4. But in truth it was our ills that he bore, and our pains that he carried – but we had regarded him diseased, stricken by God, and afflicted. 5. He was pained because of our rebellious sins and oppressed through our iniquities, the chastisement upon him was for our benefit, and through his wounds we were healed. 6. We have all strayed like sheep, each of us turning his own way, and God inflicted upon him, the iniquity of us all. 7. He was persecuted and afflicted, but he did not open his mouth; like a sheep being led to the slaughter or an ewe that is silent before her shearers, he did not open his mouth. 8. Now that he has been released from captivity and judgment, who could have imagined

such a generation? For he had been removed from the land of the living, an affliction upon them that was my people's sin. 9. He submitted himself to his grave like wicked men; and the wealthy submitted to his executions, for committing no crime, and with no deceit in his mouth. 10. God desired to oppress him and He afflicted him; if his soul would acknowledge guilt, he would see offspring and live long days and the desire of God would succeed in his hand.

God's Words:

11. He would see the purpose and be satisfied with his soul's distress, with his knowledge My servant will vindicate the Righteous One to the multitudes, and their sins does he shoulder. 12. Therefore I will assign him a portion from the multitudes and he will divide the mighty as spoils, in return for having poured out his soul for death and being counted among the wicked, and he carried the sins of the many, and prayed for the sinners.

Christianity divisively rewrote history. Jesus did not fulfill Isaiah 53's prophecy, it's just the opposite: Christianity fabricated the Jesus story, exactly in line with Isaiah 53. What Christianity presents as Jesus fulfilling Isaiah's words is really the opposite – Christianity plagiarized Isaiah. Christianity found a perfect story in the Torah, Isaiah 53. Here, The description is so pitiful, and evokes such sympathy; Christianity copied it and molded it into their fabrication of Jesus. Christianity, as you will read, capitalizes on the emotions of pity and suffering to attract adherents, making other transparent plagiarisms.

As my friend Ari indicated, and based on Radak 53:4, Isaiah 53 contains the nations' future (but false) interpretation of the Jews' suffering. The nations assumed the Jews suffered for the nations' sins, or, simply that the Jews received what the nations should have received, as the nations were admittedly living a false life, while the Jews always possessed the truth. The nations admit their error in the messianic era, by saying the Jews received what the nations should have received, that being the sufferings in exile.

Isaiah says further:

And as for Me, this is My covenant with them, said God, My spirit which is upon you and My words that I have placed in your mouth will not be withdrawn from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your offspring, nor from the mouth of your offspring's offspring, said God, from this moment and forever (59:21).

Note the words, "*placed in your mouth*". Christianity suggests Isaiah prophesied for the "future" about Jesus. However, Isaiah is referring to the past. God clearly refers to the "word" that will never be lost forever, as that which is already "placed in your mouth" – past tense. This is the covenant God makes. It concerns the ancient Torah, already in the Jews' mouths – not the future. Christianity's fabricators didn't read the verses.

Isaiah describes the Jews as "one man." "Man" here is not referring to an individual, but to the collective whole of Israel. The Torah uses "man" in place of the entire nation in dozens of other locations.¹⁶

16) See Deut. 27:14, Joshua 9:6, Judges 8:22 and 9:55...to name a few.

I fail to understand how Christianity can use these very verses to make the claim that one who is innocent can shoulder the burden of others. The verse openly says the opposite, *“if his soul would acknowledge guilt, he would see offspring and live long days.”* The suffering party possesses his own sin! “Acknowledging guilt” means they sinned. Christianity simply favors one set of facts, and ignores the others – an overt blunder.

We must also explain the words, *“He was pained because of our rebellious sins and oppressed through our iniquities, the chastisement upon him was for our benefit, and through his wounds we were healed.”* How can we understand the statement on its own?

ISAIAH 53 EXPLAINED

Radak (Rabbi David Kimchi) explains this entire chapter except the final two verses, as the words of the other nations. These words are not Isaiah’s words. Radak says the view that the depicted “man” (the Jewish nation) suffers for the sins of others, is in fact a wrong idea. Rather, it is the following verbalized beliefs of the other nations.

The nations sought to seek some justice for the innocent Jews suffering in exile. They saw that the Jews suffered, *“for [the Jews] committing no crime, and with no deceit in his mouth.”* The gentile nations vindicated the Jews. But they also could not tolerate having no explanation for the Jews’ suffering, while possessing no sin. These nations therefore verbalized their incorrect philosophy:

He was pained because of our rebellious sins and oppressed through our iniquities, the chastisement upon him was for our benefit, and through his wounds we were healed.

Evidently, this is recorded in our Torah, as Isaiah felt it essential that we understand the view of the gentile nations at that time. The question is, what is so important about our understanding of the gentiles' incorrect views? Why must we know that the gentile nations viewed our exile as a punishment for *their* sins? If this view is wrong, and it is, why take up space Isaiah? Aren't there more important ideas to address than the false notion that the innocent bear the burden of the sinners?

We are forced to conclude that God desires the Jews to understand this attitude of the nations. God desires we know that the nations do in fact seek to "understand." This is why they were compelled to offer some explanation, that we were exiled for their sins. Although such a notion is false, what we derive from hearing their position, is that the gentile nations seek "understanding." This I feel is the lesson.

11. He would see the purpose and be satisfied with his soul's distress, with his knowledge My servant will vindicate the Righteous One to the multitudes, and their sins does he shoulder. 12. Therefore I will assign him a portion from the multitudes and he will divide the mighty as spoils, in return for having poured out his soul for death and being counted among the wicked, and he carried the sins of the many, and prayed for the sinners.

Now, since the gentiles seek understanding, they stand as a concern before God, and He desires that they – just like the Jews – obtain true knowledge. God therefore says in the final two verses above, “*with his knowledge My servant will vindicate the Righteous One to the multitudes,*” and, “*and prayed for the sinners.*” God desires that the Jews benefit the other nations by teaching them and praying for them. However, as these last two verses are God’s words, why do we find God echoing the false sentiment of the nations?

The reason I believe God does so, is to “indicate” why He desires the Jews to teach and pray for the gentile nations: since the nations seek to explain, and find reasonable justice for the innocent Jews’ persecution, thereby they display their level as nations ready to hear reason. Now, since they are open to reason, God desires that the Jews teach them, and pray for them. So when God echoes their false views, it is to teach that such a false view is verbalized, only because those verbalizing it (gentiles) are seeking knowledge. A desire to explain means they are using their minds. Therefore, God desires the Jews to teach them. “*My servant will vindicate the Righteous One to the multitudes, and their sins does he shoulder*” may be read as follows: “*My servant (the Jews) will teach about the Righteous One (God) to the multitudes, because they (the gentiles) seek knowledge, as displayed in their view “and their sins does he shoulder.”*”

We have successfully shown that “man” does not mean a single person. We have proved that Isaiah 53 discusses the past, and cannot refer to the future – it does not predict Jesus. Also, Israel was suffering due to their own sins, not due to the sins of others. Therefore, there is no basis for the concept of one man suffering for others.

We learn that Isaiah 53 is primarily the verbalized, false notions of the gentile nations. But such a notion stems only from those who still retain some desire to understand. God, therefore, desires the Jews teach and pray for the gentile nations.

I include a refutation of Christianity's interpretation of Isaiah 53 only as a means to expose additional errors within Christian doctrine. We have rejected the impossibility of God becoming a man, the Biblical contradiction of men dying for the sins of others, and this attempt to support Jesus via distorted Biblical allusions.

But primarily, Christianity is rejected just as all other religions are: there are no mass witnesses. Christianity possesses no proof of Divine origin. If one wishes, he may equally blindly accept Christian doctrine, Greek gods, Egyptian idols, etc. There is no difference among any of these, since all are beliefs, without corroborating evidence. But if one desires truth, one's accepted religion must provide evidence of Divine origin. Judaism (the Bible) is the only religion to offer 100% proof, as is employed in verifying any history.

ISLAM

Islam claims:

No other book in the world can match the Koran, even with respect to its recording and preservation. The astonishing fact about this book of Allah is that it has remained unchanged, even to a dot, over the last fourteen hundred years. The Qur'an was recorded as soon as it was revealed under the personal supervision of the Prophet Muhammad.

The Bible has been unchanged for twice as long. Islam does not provide evidence for its claim of divine origin.

Say: we believe in God and in what has been revealed to us, and what was revealed to Abraham, Isma'il: Isaac, Jacob and The Tribes, and in (the Books) given to Moses, Jesus and the Prophets, from their Lord: We make no distinction between one and another, among them, and to God do we bow our will in Islam (Qur'an, Al-'Imran 3:84).

The Koran adds to the Bible, thereby contradicting its belief in the Bible, where God says not to add to it.

Islam is not a new religion. It is in essence, the same message and guidance provided by God revealed to all His Prophets.

Therefore, it must adhere to the Bible, but it does not, and must be rejected.

Islam rejects the idea of a Chosen people, making faith in the one God and good actions the sole key to Paradise.

This contradicts God's Biblical selection of the children of Israel. Moses tells the Jewish nation, "For you are a holy nation to God your God. In you has your God chosen you to be a treasured nation to God from all other nations on the face of the Earth (Deut. 78:6)." See herein the chapter, "Abraham & God's Chosen Nation" for further rejection of Islam's claim.

Similar to claims surrounding Jesus, Islam says Mohammed fills this promise, *“The Lord thy God will raise unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me: unto him ye shall hearken (Deuteronomy 18:15).”* Yet, Mohammed is not a brother to a Jew, nor has Mohammed fulfilled what the great Sages list as the Messiah’s qualifications, including Davidic lineage. (See above, pg 47) The Koran contains no genealogy at all.

To be clear, Islam is rejected as God’s word just as Christianity is rejected: neither religion provides evidence for its claim of Divine origin.

SPINOZA’S GOD

Can God place part of Himself into the universe, as Spinoza says, God “is” nature?

Reason cannot reconcile God simultaneously being non-physical and physical. It’s like suggesting black is simultaneously white, or a circle is simultaneously a square, or that I was born tomorrow. As nothing can create itself, everything was created, until we reach back in time to a first cause that “always” existed. Suggesting there are infinite causes, the present cannot be reached, as stated above. As God created the universe, He and the universe are two distinct entities. Therefore, there is no “part” of God in what He created. He is separate from His creation. For He always existed, and creation did not always exist. Thus, His existence is different than the existence of all else that was not eternal. He and the universe are two separate entities.

BLOOD MOON AND THE BIBLE

In his Laws of Idolatry, 1:1, Maimonides teaches that early man already began projecting greatness onto the heavenly bodies. Man thought, since the planets, stars and spheres “minister before God”, they too are worthy of man’s honor. Eventually, man’s corrupt thinking and sin increased as he replaced simple honor of stars with his worship of them as deities, until God was no longer recognized. Star worship reveals man’s false estimation that the heavens deserve to be worshipped. Man feared not only the spheres, but also the heavens. Jeremiah 10:2-3 says:

So says God, ‘To the ways of the nations do not learn, and from the signs of the heavens do not fear, because from them the nations fear. Because the statutes of the peoples are false, because a tree from the forest they cut, fashioned by an artisan with an adze.

Jeremiah teaches that man did in fact fear the heavens. But their fear stemmed from a false projection; not based in reality. Jeremiah’s lesson is insightful: he equates the fear of heavens with the idolatrous practice of prostrating to wooden idols. He wished to teach that the heavens do not hold any greater powers than wooden sculptures. Man’s idolatrous emotions project the same imagined authority onto both, the heaven and the trees. But the underlying message is that man does in fact ascribe greater veneration to the skies, as Maimonides taught above. It appears that based on man’s first error that God occupies space and lives in the skies, man erred again, ascribing greatness to the spheres and stars that are assumed to be “in close proximity” to God.

ABRAHAM & GOD'S CHOSEN NATION

In his article, “*Enlisting the Biblical Abraham as Peace Broker*” (Opinion, WSJ, Nov. 8, 2012) Jon D. Levenson concludes:

...and in each religion he [Abraham] is in relationship with a living God who has called a particular community to his service. Instead of attempting to devise some vague pan-Abrahamic religion that elides the actual differences among the three in the name of a bland universalism at odds with their scriptures, we should be wiser to confront the differences honestly and respectfully. The alternative isn't only too easy. It is also false.

Mr. Levenson stands for truth, and correctly suggests peaceful confrontation of the differences between Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Lying about one's views will not achieve the intended peace. Mr. Levenson correctly accepts the unequivocal truth of the Hebrew Bible – the Torah – for he identifies questionable ideas as those not found therein. I will proceed to present as religious truth, only those ideas and principles derived from the Hebrew Bible, which equally demand an honest rejection of all conflicting views.

The most primary truth of Judaism, is that Judaism is about truth, i.e., it is not a system of “belief” as are the world's religions. Judaism is a science, demanding the same level of reason, analysis and proof required in unraveling the mysteries of the universe and in understanding the natural world. Both of God's creations – the Hebrew Bible and the universe – equally reflect His wisdom.

As it takes scientists and mathematicians decades of intelligent analysis and reason to understand nature, the study of the Hebrew Bible is no less deep and abstract, and requires that same level of intelligence.

Using intelligence, but more precisely, the Hebrew Bible's unique method of exegesis, I wish to correct Mr. Levenson's suggestion below:

But the familiar image of Abraham as the discoverer of the true God and the uncompromising opponent of idolatry isn't found in Genesis or anywhere else in the Hebrew Bible. It is an idea that originated in Judaism after most of the Hebrew Bible had been composed, and from there it spread into the literature of the Talmudic rabbis...

This is not true; both on a literal reading and using the methods of exegesis. Abraham literally says to Sodom's king, "...I raise my hand to God, the supreme power, owner of heaven and Earth (Gen. 14:22)." Not only did Abraham swear by God in this case, and repeatedly teach of monotheism "calling out in God's name", (12:8, 26:25), but he was known as a monotheist, "And it was at that time that Avimelech and Pichol his military officer said to Abraham, 'God is with you in all that you do' (Gen. 21:22)." Abraham's reference to God is the "supreme power", the Creator. This is monotheism: the conviction in a singular cause for the universe, Who must therefore be a supreme power. The Hebrew Bible teaches that Abraham enunciated his monotheism, and that he was a famed monotheist.

Using the Hebrew Bible's unique methods of decryption, mastered only after decades of devoted tutelage under Rabbis trained

by others back to Moses, we can unlock a message that Mr. Levenson has pointed us towards with his question. That message is that Abraham's beliefs are best portrayed, not in mere statements, but in acts of devotion. God's records of Abraham are primarily about his trials, specifically his sacrifice of Isaac. Mr. Levenson's question makes us realize that God's way of teaching us of Abraham's monotheism, is through his trials. Yes, Abraham swore to Sodom's king, but God records his numerous trials and how he succeeded in them all. For it is through Abraham's sincere devotion that we learn his true convictions. It is the literal read of the Hebrew Bible that leaves much to be desired, and therefore cannot be read literally. However, the Talmudic student is trained and can detect the deeper, intended messages.

What about Abraham's platform of rejecting idolatry...was this not equally as vital as Abraham's publication of monotheism? Where then is this found in the text? Again, a literal read with no deductive thought does the Hebrew Bible injustice. God's message via omission is that Abraham's purest and most fundamental rejection of idolatry, is his conviction in God's absolute and exclusive role as Creator. There is nothing else. Thus, statements like "Abraham rejected idolatry" would be redundant, primarily due to Abraham's monotheistic devotion. Great thinkers like Maimonides record more of Abraham's history of idolatrous rejection, speaking to myriads of people who blindly accepted idolatry. Through reason alone, Abraham amasses thousands of monotheistic followers. (*Maimonides Mishneh Torah, Laws of Star Worship, chap. 1*) Additionally, Abraham's rejection is also derived from God's selection of Abraham and Isaac throughout the He-

brew Bible. God chose Abraham and Isaac...as they chose Him. In other words, God validates Abraham's monotheism, to the exclusion of all other deities.

Mr. Levenson also wrote, "...we should be wiser to confront the differences honestly and respectfully." I agree fully. Revelation at Sinai is the event that sets the tone of Judaism: based on the millions of eyewitnesses, it remains the only event offering proof that God ever revealed Himself. It is clear: God desires mankind to possess proof, not belief, for He granted mankind the intelligence to discern proof from belief, and He also offered proof of His existence and His will for mankind through that Sinaic event. All other claims of divine revelation lack the masses necessary to eliminate fabrication, or include contradictions, thereby reducing those claims to questions or mere belief – not proof.

Possessing only one proven Revelation, the event of God's gift of the Ten Commandments and the Hebrew Bible at Sinai, let us remain true to His words found therein, which include the prohibition to add or subtract from the Hebrew Bible (Deut. 4:2, 13:1).

Mr. Levenson quotes the apostle Paul who declares in the New Testament, "*It is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise.*" Meaning, Christianity views those following their Gospel as Abraham's "seed." Unlike Christianity, God said numerous times it is Abraham's physical seed from Isaac who are his true heirs (*Gen. 14:4-5, 15:18, 17:7-9, Deut. 10:15 and other verses.*) God also rejects Ishmael as Abraham's heir:

Ishmael will have 12 princes and be a mighty nation. But My covenant will be established in Isaac to whom Sarah gave birth (Gen. 17:20,21)

“God said to Abraham, ‘Do not be aggrieved regarding the lad [Ishmael] and your maid [Hagar]; all as Sarah said to you [send them away] you shall perform, for in Isaac will your seed be called’ (Gen. 21:12).”

Furthermore, Abraham follows God’s covenant:

And Abraham gave all he possessed to Isaac. And to the children of Abraham’s concubines, Abraham gave gifts and he sent them away from before Isaac his son while he was yet alive eastward towards the land of Kedem (25:5,6).

God says Isaac alone carries on God’s covenant of the chosen people. But God’s chosen are not a closed group. A Jew, although the proper seed, can forfeit his place in God’s covenant through violating God’s word. A Christian, Muslim and gentile can equally share God’s covenant, provided His word is upheld without distortion. This is sensible, as God created every human for a reason. And that is for the sole purpose of following Him. He desires all mankind to benefit from His directives. If this truth were shared, God’s will would become known to all. Sadly, instead, many Jewish leaders and even Rabbis compromise God’s messages, falsely suggesting all religions lead to God. The Jew who hides God’s true word preferring social acceptance, violates God. He makes man his false god. And there are many such Jews.

THE JEW IS NOT SUPERIOR

We must understand that God's selection of the Jew, is not for the Jew, as many arrogant and misguided Jews think. God says otherwise:

And you shall watch them and keep them as they [the commands] are your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations, who will bear all these statutes and declare, 'What a wise and understanding people is this great nation.' Because what great nation has God close to them like God, whenever (they) call to Him? And what great nation has statutes and laws as righteous as this entire Torah'(Deut. 4:6-8).

Clearly, God desires "all" nations to recognize His wisdom, and this is achieved only when the Jew properly performs the commands, upholding Judaism honestly and completely. Don't we see how concerned Moses was that his gentile father in law recognized God? God Himself selected the Jewish kings from Ruth, the gentile, for human perfection is not a birthright, but something accomplished by any human being. Even the Jewish Messiah will eventually be a descendant from that gentile, Ruth. World religions are correct in their claim that only one religion is sensible. There is only one human race; it is reasonable that there is only one will God has for all people, for under our skin, we are identical creatures. God's Hebrew Bible is truth; He does not play favorites. The Jew should take no credit for an act that was not his doing, I mean being born to Jewish parents. Let the Jew – and any human being – take credit for accomplishments alone. And let all peoples strive to accomplish an honest search for, and fulfillment of God's word.

Part III

THE BIBLE'S BRILLIANCE

My intent in the following chapters is to unveil the Bible's divine design and astonishing insights, which you will admit could not be written by man. You will be impressed by the hidden system of the Bible, transmitted from Moses to the Sages and to us today. It will be an eye-opening experience. Biblical wisdom is unlike anything you ever imagined. You will then be disappointed with the simple and unreasonable doctrines of other religions which do not contain intelligence, brilliance or Divine design.

NOAH AND THE TALKING RAVEN

I recently received the following question:

The Talmud cites Reish Lakish's comments on the passage, "*And he sent the raven... (Gen. 8:7)*":

The raven gave Noah an irrefutable argument: "God hates me, and you hate me. God hates me as He commanded to take seven of each pure species, but only two of the impure (my) species. And you hate me, as you did not take from the pure species for your mission, rather, me. If the heat or cold will kill me, the world will lack a species. Perhaps you desire my mate!" Noah replied, "Wicked one! In the ark, I was forbidden to my wife, who is normally permitted to me. All the more so I am forbidden to your mate, who is always forbidden to me (Sanhedrin 108b)!"

Obviously, the raven doesn't have the abstract capacity to think, make an argument, or talk to Noah. What is the idea of the raven's suspicion of Noah being out to destroy that species? Why would the raven think that Noah would desire his mate? How are we supposed to understand this? What can the metaphor be?

My reply follows:

We must first use the Torah's clues to grasp Noah's mindset, if we are to answer your questions. Upon the cessation of the rain, the Torah states:

Noah opened up the window (chalon) of the Ark which he made. And he sent the raven, and it went out to and fro, until the waters dried from upon the Earth. And he sent the dove from himself to see if the waters had ended from the face of the Earth (Genesis, 8:6-8).

A few questions present themselves: When did God instruct Noah to make a “*chalon*”, a window? Earlier (Gen. 6:16), God instructed Noah to make a “*tzohar*.” Even if one follows the opinion that *tzohar* means window, why here did the Torah change the word from “*tzohar*” to “*chalon*?” We also notice that the passage states “...*the window which Noah made.*” Who else could have made it?! This seems superfluous. When we see something apparently repetitive, we know there must be a lesson. And what was the purpose of sending the raven? Why is it not disclosed, as is done regarding the purpose of the dove in passage 8:8?

I believe a few proper questions will lead one to the answer:

What is a window for?

For when was the window to be used? Prior to the flood, or subsequent?

What are the differences between a raven and a dove?

A window can be used for light, let in air, shield from poor weather, or to look outdoors. We can determine that Noah knew what was on the outside as the Flood began, as he was told by God that all life would be destroyed (Gen. 6:17). Perhaps then, the window would be used subsequent to the flood. But for what? Sending out birds alone? From the quotes above, it appears Noah

harbored some undisclosed emotional conflict.

The Torah goes out of the way to tell us that it was Noah who made the window. Again, he made the entire ark, which includes this window. Therefore, the words “*that Noah made*” are not a repetition of who made the ark. Torah does not repeat itself. The lesson is that Noah made the window on his own, with no command from God. The Torah is pointing out that Noah desired a window for some reason. If he knows what is occurring prior to the flood, I suggest that he was concerned with the period subsequent to the flood. Meaning, Noah worried about what he would find after the flood was over.

Prior to exiting the ark, Noah sent the raven. The Torah is concealing something, for it did not tell us why he sent the raven, as it does disclose regarding the dove. In my opinion, Noah did not want to face the corpses of his society, once the ark landed and the water subsided. The raven is flesh eating. Noah was not yet interested in seeing if the land dried up, as he didn’t send the dove, for whose purpose this served. But he first sent a flesh eating bird, with a concealed purpose to discern whether there were bodies near the ark, something Noah did not want to face. If the raven did not return, Noah would know the raven found food, corpses, and he would be emotionally braced to face the tragic site outside of the ark. This explains why he made a separate structure of a window, in addition to the tzohar.

A wise Rabbi explained why Noah planted wine grapes upon his exit from the ark. He was experiencing depression from soli-

tude, as the only members left on Earth, and used drunkenness to escape the depression. This very same worry is what prompted him to create a window, on his own accord. Now we can answer the questions.

Noah's state of mind was not favorable. He knew the mission of the animals was to sustain the species. Sending the raven, Noah was grappling with this new reality. He risked a species, possibly as an unconscious expression of his troubled state of mind. Precisely using a species that had only one male and one female, Noah unconsciously expressed an aggression towards his morbid experience and the ark's purpose: sustaining the species. This is the meaning of the raven's words.

The Rabbis scripted this metaphor to teach this lesson. Additionally, the raven was suspect of Noah committing bestiality with its mate. This too is a reflection of Noah's state of mind; there was no real discussion between a bird and man. Somehow the elongated stay on the ark among the animals evoked identification with them. Noah's defense was halachic in content, saying the raven's mate was a prohibited species. Using a halachic response means Noah would not commit the act of bestiality, but it can also mean that he did harbor the psychological tendency. This is similar to a burglar breaking into a home, and when caught without any stolen items, saying in his defense, "I didn't take anything!" Although the burglar did not violate robbery, he did have the intention. Noah too possessed some corruption of mind, according to the Rabbis' scripted metaphor of a talking raven.

HAVE WE FOUND THE GARDEN OF EDEN?

Genesis contains many themes. The topics of my inquiry are limited to the Garden of Eden, the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life, the snake, man's sin, God's punishments, and God's plan which will emerge from understanding the elements just cited.

To commence, what was God's purpose in giving Adam and Eve a command? God specifically states that man can eat of "all" the trees of the Garden of Eden. But of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil, man must not eat...the punishment being mortality. This teaches that Adam had complete permissiveness, barring one fruit tree. God permitted all vegetation to man, except one fruit. What was this precise plan? Also, why was the punishment that man would become mortal? God apparently offered Adam to choose between obeying God and retaining his immortality. Or, if he disobeyed through unrestrained physical gratification by eating of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil, he would sacrifice his immortality.

Interesting...there are two accounts of Creation: the first account is the Six Days and the second is man in the Garden of Eden. We notice that the prohibition on eating the fruit is found in the second account of Creation. How is this account different than the Six Days of Creation recorded earlier? What new category of Creation is God describing? There are other details, such as the river that exited Eden and became four "heads." Mirroring the beginning of Genesis, King Solomon too, in the beginning of Koheles also discusses "water flowing." Is King Solomon duplicating God's lessons outlined in Genesis?

God places man in the Garden of Eden twice (Gen. 2:8, 2:15). Why this duplication? In the first instance (2:7,8) man is described as “*dust from the Earth*” and that God “*blew into his nostrils a living soul, and man became a living being. And God planted a garden in the east of Eden and He placed there the man whom He formed*”... a physical description. Whereas in the second placement of man in Eden, God omits any details of man’s form. Why is God placing Adam in Eden two times? Maimonides briefly discusses this:

“Another noteworthy saying is this: “And the Lord God took the man, i.e., raised him, and placed him in the Garden of Eden,” i.e., He gave him rest. The words “He took him, He gave him” have no reference to position in space, but they indicate his position in rank among transient beings, and the prominent character of his existence.”¹⁷

The Trees of Life and Knowledge

The Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge are not mentioned in Genesis 1:29, when God first describes the permitted trees of fruit; it is only here in this second account of Creation, and Adam’s second placement (omitting a description Adam’s physical form) that God prohibits the Tree of Knowledge. This is significant. “Eden” sounds similar to “Adam.” Any hint here? And why are these two trees “in the center of Eden” (Gen. 2:9)? What are these two trees, and why must they both exist? God does not prohibit Adam from eating of the Tree of Life...until he ate of the Tree of Knowledge. Why? And if God is concerned man will eat from the Tree of Life, why cannot God simply destroy it? Why does God,

17) The Guide for the Perplexed, book II chap. XXX, p 217 Friedlander paperback

instead, create the “cherubim and the flaming spinning sword to guard the path to Tree of Life”? What are these two entities?

The Snake

What was God’s purpose in creating a snake, an animal “more cunning than all other beasts of the field”? This creature caused the sin. Why was it necessary?

Eve’s Sin

What precisely was Eve’s sin? God tells us what Eve responds in her thoughts: “*the tree was good to eat, it was visually desirable, the tree was enticing for understanding...*(Gen. 1:6)” Where else in Genesis are we told of something being “good?” What is God sharing with us here?

The Snake’s “Rider”

Further, Maimonides teaches that it was not the snake, but its “rider” that enticed Eve.¹⁸ What is this rider? Maimonides states this rider was Samael. In Hebrew, Samael means blind from seeing God (*sama-el*). Maimonides further states that just as Samael has a meaning, the Hebrew term for snake, “nachash” has a meaning. What is Maimonides’ message?

Why does God record Adam’s blame of Eve, and her blame of the snake? What is this lesson God sees so essential for us to learn?

What is meant by God’s punishing the snake? And what is the

18) *ibid*

justice in God's punishments to Adam and Eve? Let's begin to answer these chapters...

Detecting the Clues

Let's focus on a few of our observations, and elucidate them.

1) Maimonides said the snake has a "rider"...but the Torah text does not mention any rider.

2) Maimonides calls this rider "Samael" and then says Samael and the instincts are the same being:

The serpent had a rider, the rider was as big as a camel, and it was the rider that enticed Eve: this rider was Samael." Samael is the name generally applied by our Sages to Satan. Thus they say in several places that Satan desired to entice Abraham to sin, and to abstain from binding Isaac, and he desired also to persuade Isaac not to obey his father. At the same time they also say, in reference to the same subject, viz., the Akedah (the binding of Isaac), that Samael came to Abraham and said to him, "What! Hast thou, being an old man, lost thy senses?" This shows that Samael and Satan are identical.¹⁹

3) God places man in the Garden twice. How can that be? And only the first placing refers to man in his physical form. What does this say about the second placing?

4) There are two accounts of creation, the second is introduced as, "*These are the products of the heavens and earth...(Gen. 2:4).*" This

19) Guide for the Perplexed, book II, chap xxx

section goes on to explain the behaviors or laws of vegetation, and then discusses man...as if saying, man too is discussed in his own productions, or behaviors.

5) A river is described that flows out of Eden and divides into four “heads.” Since when is a river called a head? One river called Pishon encompassed all of the land of Chavila, where there was “good” gold. Of what concern is this, and why state this here? After concluding the rivers, God places man a second time in Eden. As if to say, only now can we address man...but the man with no reference to his physical form. Which man is this?

6) There must be deeper meaning behind a literal spinning, flaming sword, and cherubim...and also why God didn’t simply destroy the two trees...

Two Accounts of Creation

Creation had two parts: 1) creation of physical entities from nothingness, and 2) creation of their governing laws. When commencing Koheles, King Solomon says, *“All the rivers go to the sea, but the sea is not full, to the place where the rivers go, there they return to go (1:7).”* A wise Rabbi explained that the king was first educating us on how man’s psyche works. Man has energies that “flow,” but man is rarely satisfied, or “full.” Man seeks accomplishments, novelty, happiness, success, and many other emotions. God and King Solomon commenced both books, Genesis and Koheles with lessons on human nature. For if we are to appreciate God’s Torah guide to human life, and king Solomon’s studies in happiness,

we must first know the subject of these books, that being man's internal makeup. Only once we recognize our natures, can we appreciate the rest of His Torah and how each law benefits us. Torah is not to perfect our mortal bodies, but our immortal souls.

Just as God commenced the second account of Creation with a description of how plants behave, and that same account refers to man, this suggests that God is describing man's behaviors as well. This theory finds support that man's sin is recorded, and also God's second placing of man, which does not make sense literally since man is already there in Eden.

Furthermore, in the second account of man being "placed in Eden", God omits man's physical description. This leaves only Adam's non-physical components to somehow be termed as "placed." As Maimonides stated, *"This has no reference to position in space, but indicate his position in rank among transient beings, and the prominent character of his existence."* Therefore, this account is not discussing a location of man, but man's internal design. God does place the real, physical Adam in Eden, *"And [God] blew into his nostrils a living soul, and man became a living being. And God planted a garden in the east of Eden and He placed there the man whom He formed (2:7,8)."* But then in 2:15 God placed man in Eden again. Here, it is not the physical man placed at a location, but God is "placing" man in a certain state of being, for no reference is made to man's physical form.

As a wise Rabbi said, "Man lives in his mind" or in his head. As is true in Koheles, the river in Genesis too indicates man's ener-

gies that flow toward various lifestyles, or “four heads.”

A primary human drive is success. Man’s energies first flow to Pishon, which encompassed a land called Chavila (when changed from vav to vais) means bundles. This land contained gold that was “good.” But gold cannot be good, that is a moral value. Gold is either pure or impure. However, God is teaching that man’s primary drive, what he values as “good”, is wealth. Eve too said the tree was “good to eat.” Man “encompasses” this bundling of wealth; he is quite attached to it. We are thereby taught that for man to pursue anything, he must value it as a “good.” Eve too had to justify her violation, calling the fruit “good.” We are also taught that bundling, or heaping up wealth, is a fundamental attraction of wealth. Thus, King Solomon teaches, *“One who loves wealth will not be satisfied with wealth... (Koheles 5:9).”* This is because the drive is not to attain a fixed amount; rather, it is the process of “amassing” or “bundling” for which one yearns. We witness many wealthy people who cannot cease from piling up more and more, despite their inability to spend even a fraction of what they have attained.

Other people are driven by desires, to satiate their senses and fill their bellies. Gichone was the second river, and it means belly. It encompasses the land of Cush, and chush means the senses. The third river flows toward Ashur, and ashray means happiness. Other people long to simply be carefree and happy without conflicts; wealth and lusts are not their objective. They prefer instead a simple pain-free life. The energies of Adam flow towards many drives.

Eden: A Blueprint of Man

It appears God wishes mankind to know why we were not initially created with a conscience, morality. It was due to our inability to follow God's commands without it. Had God created Adam and Eve at the outset, including a conscience (the cause of man's shame of his nakedness) we would question its necessity. As God's wish for man is to engage our intellect – the one gift man possesses over all other creatures – we could engage our intellects and ponder the marvels of creation to a far greater degree, if not burdened with concerns for moral choices. We would declare it unjust to be burdened with this extra faculty. However, now that God recorded the account of man's sin, we appreciate that the conscience was actually a much needed gift.

Adam was without a conscience; he viewed his nakedness as nothing different than a tree. It was simply a fact, with no moral value attached to it. He was initially enabled to have his mind 100% free to explore creation and uncover God's beautiful laws. He had no concerns about moral issues to cloud scientific inquiry. But God gave him one command. The command was so slight. He could enjoy literally all trees of the garden, except one. But Eve became fixated on satisfying her drives, instead of retaining immortal life in the Garden. Adam too succumbed to this desire. Both man and woman demonstrated their inability to abide by even the most minute limitation.

This is the lesson for mankind: man seeks unbridled gratification, even at the cost of his mortality. This is how powerful our instincts are. By gifting man and woman with a new faculty – the

conscience – we now have one additional chance to abstain from sin. We now feel guilt, a new emotion. Adam and Eve hid once they ate, feeling ashamed of their nakedness. This shame can be applied to any wrongdoing, assisting us in refraining from self-destructive actions. So we appreciate that God initially created man without morality, which diverts our energies from worldly scientific study, towards internal conflicts. But this diversion was necessary, if we are to abstain from sin, and earn continued life.

God also converted man from immortal, to mortal. Man's attachment to the physical gratifications is now severely curbed due to our recognition of our limited time on this planet. Mortality is the perfect response to a being seeking unlimited earthy gratification, like Adam. Mortality diverts us somewhat back towards Adam's state prior to the sin: a being focusing less on gratification and more on God's wisdom.

God's plan was that man invest all his energies into pursuing wisdom as this will offer him the greatest satisfaction. To redirect man back to this lofty goal, God created the conscience so as to slow us down before violating His will, and He also made us mortal, so we are less attached to this physical world. Coming to terms with our limited stay here, we are better equipped to focus on what is truly eternal, and that is God and His wisdom.

The greatest good was not taken from Adam and Eve. They could have lived eternally in Eden, had they remained on the path of naming the animals and other pursuits of wisdom. But now as mortals, this eternal attachment to wisdom will occur only in the afterlife.

Regarding man's other punishments, man sought unbridled gratification, and therefore God cursed man with thorns and thistles, and farming his daily bread. Meaning, he would no longer find complete satisfaction when seeking physical gratification: food takes toil to attain, things rot, metal rusts, and we find aggravation in our daily tasks. Man is preoccupied with farming or work, and less energies are available to sin. All this is a blessing, to redirect our energies away from physical gratification, and towards the world of wisdom.

Eve dominated Adam in her act of causing his sin, and was therefore made subservient to man to a degree to correct this. She was made to be absorbed emotionally with birth pangs, difficult pregnancy and child rearing. This too disengages her from dominating man.

Adam & Eve Cast Blame

When confronted by God after they sinned, both man and woman shifted blame from themselves. Although a "great intellect"²⁰ Adam did not readily accept responsibility for his sin. Maimonides states there is meaning in the word "nachash", snake. Nichush is the same word and refers to superstition; a false imagined reality which man wrongly accepts as equal to what his senses detect. Eve created her own reality, despite the snake's deception. It was Eve, not the snake, that caused her sin: *"the tree was good to eat, it was visually desirous, the tree was enticing for understanding...(Gen. 3:6)"* Her powerful emotions and imagination, termed by Maimonides as the "rider on the snake" are to blame. "Rider" means

20) Ibn Ezra describes man as a "chocham gadol" – a great intellect (Gen. 2:16)

that there was something other than the snake that caused her sin. This something, was imagination. The snake deceives Eve, and Eve is blinded by her own fantasies, what Maimonides stated earlier is identical with Samael, that which “blinds one from God.” Eve’s imagination blinded her.

Now, as the snake was closely tied to Eve’s sin, although a real creature, Sforno suggests it also embodies the working of the instincts. God curses the real snake, but simultaneously teaches us the modifications He now makes in man’s instincts: the instincts will now “*go on their belly and eat dust (Gen. 3:14).*” Meaning, God slowed the movement of our instinctual drives and also made our attainment of our lusts as distasteful as eating dust. These two measures minimize gratification in the attainment of physical desires, helping us again to redirect our energies towards wisdom. But God curses the snake further, “*Man will crush your head, and you will bruise his heel (Gen. 3:15).*” This occurs literally, but there is an additional lesson as Maimonides states:

*More remarkable still is the way in which the serpent is joined to Eve, or rather his seed to her seed; the head of the one touches the heel of the other. Eve defeats the serpent by crushing its head, whilst the serpent defeats her by wounding her heel.*²¹

Man defeats his instincts by crushing it at the “head” of the battle. Only if we thwart our emotional urges upon their very onset, do we succeed over them. But if we allow our emotions to swell, they eventually become too powerful to defeat, and the instincts defeats us in the “heel” of the battle.

21) Guide for the Perplexed, book II, chap xxx.

Man still shifted the blame after the sin, and did not confess he caved to his instincts. God records both Adam and Eve shifting the blame, to teach us that they were less in touch with their internal words, despite God's efforts in creating a snake that they could use as a model of their instincts, to apply to themselves.

Eden's Two Trees

Eden has two primary trees, I say primary, as God placed them in the "center" of the garden. Center denotes prominence. At the center of man's psyche is his feeling of immortality. It is this feeling of permanence that enables us the fortitude to progress in life. If death were a reality, we would live a morbid existence. King Solomon says "*And also the world [God] planted in man's heart (Kohel 3:11).*" God saw it necessary that man feel a sense of immortality, as if eternity were planted in his heart. The Tree of Life is appropriately named. As man was immortal before his sin, he had no urge to eat of this tree. It would do nothing for him. The tree alluded to what is in the core of man's psyche. Only once he was sentenced with mortality did this tree have any appeal, as God says:

*So it is, man has become as one of us to know good and evil,
and now perhaps he will send his hand and take the Tree of
Life and eat and live forever (Gen. 3:22).*

Man sinned, and due to his sentence of mortality, man will deny this mortality. It was very disturbing, and so he yearned to recapture his immortality. God could not destroy the Tree of Life, as this would mean God is removing from man his vital sense of being,

of enjoying life for a while. Go did not want man to live a morbid existence. He desired man to retain some sense of permanence on Earth. The solution is that man retain some sense of immortality, but also guard him from investing too much of his energies into a temporal Earthly existence. This balance was struck by giving man some realization of his mortality, while also allowing him to feel a sense of youth, expressed as an unapproachable, spinning flaming sword and the childlike cherubim that guarded the path to the Tree of Life.

At his center, man possesses two faculties or counsels (etz). Man is essentially a moral being, and a mortal being. The Etz Hachaim and Etz Hadaas, the Trees of Life and Knowledge, are in the center of the Garden of Eden.

Summary

Man is complex. Our psyche contains energies that flow towards many lifestyles. We live without realizing our instinctual urges, to which we succumb after some time of conflict with them. Underlying all our imaginations and plans, are feelings of morality, immortality and a need to accomplish. Many of us ignore or even deny this internal world. Yet, we must know about it, confront it, and manage it, if we are to succeed and live based on reason, not our instincts. The Torah is our guide to navigate this course in life, informing us of values and actions our Creator deems most beneficial, and from what we must steer clear. Ultimately, we must choose between our drives and our intellects. We can.

The Garden of Eden is on Earth. Yet, it paralleled many lessons for understanding what type of creatures we are, providing us insight unavailable on the surface.

THE SOUND OF GOD IN THE GARDEN

...and she took of its fruit and ate, and also fed her husband with her and he ate. And the two of them, their eyes opened and they understood they were naked and they seamed fig leaves and made for themselves garments. And they heard the voice of God traveling in the garden at the wind of the day, and they hid, man and his wife, because of God was in the midst of the trees of the garden. And God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" And man said, "I heard Your voice in the garden and I was afraid, for I am naked and so I hid." And [God] said, "Who told you you are naked; have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat?" And the man said, "The woman you have given with me, she gave me from the tree and I ate." And God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The snake caused me to err and I ate (Gen. 3:6-13)."

God then punished the snake, then the woman, and then man. However, my focus is on the verses above, what occurred prior to the punishments. After eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve "*heard God's voice moving in the Garden*" ...and they heard this "*at the wind of the day (Gen. 3:8).*"

There are many questions:

1) Did they truly hear a voice? If so, what was God saying? The verse does not teach of any words or communication.

2) What is the significance of hearing God at "the wind of the day"?

3) Why repeat God was in the garden, but add "in the midst of the trees"?

4) Why is God's voice only mentioned "after" the sin?

5) God questions Eve after Adam blames her, and God then punishes the snake when Eve blames it. Why does God seem to accept Adam's blame on Eve, then accept Eve's blame on the snake?

6) Why do they both shift the blame?

7) God does tell Cain about his inner world, that he can rule over it. Why does God not warn Adam and Eve prior to their sin?

We first learn that subsequent to the sin, the man and the woman received new knowledge, taught by the words "*their eyes were opened.*" From the very commencement of this Torah section, metaphor is employed, as "opened eyes" truly refers to knowledge, not to the moving of one's eyelids. Thus, other metaphors may be included.

The "*wind of the day*" is literal, referring to the dimming of daylight, at dusk, when the winds pick up.²² But here is the lesson... During the transition of daylight to darkness, a contrast presents itself to man. This caused man to distinguish, and reflect on both parts of the day. He then reviewed his actions; man reflected on his disobedience. Ibn Ezra says this means they repented. God was going to keep His word of punishment. Man recognized God would be "coming for him" in the garden. Man felt remorse, and this remorse shortly followed man's sense of nakedness. Remorse is part of the newly-born faculty of morality granted to man once he sinned. This morality is intended to offer man a secondary system of abstention from sin. If reason alone would not stop man from sinning, hopefully a sense of right and wrong will. Subse-

22) Ibn Ezra, Gen. 3:8

quent to the sin, the man and the woman received a new awareness, a conscience, which they did not possess previously. This explains why they were ashamed of their nakedness.

As the day subsided, man reflected, and with his new conscience, he then sensed his error conveyed as “hearing a voice.” Voice does not refer only to words, but also to “understanding.” Similarly at Sinai, Maimonides teaches the Jews heard no words, only a voice or a sound, based on the verse “*a voice of matters you heard (Deut. 4:12).*”

In the Garden, God was not speaking, as we see no message recorded. Nor can God be located anywhere; neither in heaven, on Earth, nor “in” the garden. Hearing a voice in the garden means that man understood he violated God, Who knows all man’s actions, as if He is “in the garden,” and Who will now exact punishment.

Sin and Denial of God

And they hid, man and his wife, because of God was in the midst of the trees of the garden.

Notice in the second half of that verse, God is viewed as amidst the “trees” of the garden, not simply “in the garden” as in the first half of the verse. “Amidst the trees of the garden” conveys that God is aware of his trees, including the forbidden tree which now is missing some of its fruits.

This teaches a fundamental lesson: until they sinned, man and woman were not contemplating that they stood before God at all

times. God was not “in the garden” while they sinned. Sin requires a denial of God and that He is watching. One cannot sin if he feels he is before God. This explains why man only contemplated God “after” the sin. King Solomon teaches “*at all times let your garments be white (Kobeles 9:8).*” The king means that one should abstain from sin (stained garments) at all times. And this, Pirkei Avos teaches is achieved if we recognize that God records all. But man and woman were able to deny God’s presence, just as anyone must do today when he or she sins.

More startling is the Torah’s method of conveying man’s mindset subsequent to sin. It is described as “*God going in the garden*” – a phenomenon external to man. Similarly, both man and woman blame another party when God inquired of their sin. And even God initially follows suit, seeming to initially accept their blame by seeking a response from the accused party: man blamed woman, and God turns to her and inquires from her. The woman blames the snake, and God turns and addresses the snake. Man and woman are punished after this, but at first, God entertains their blame. These acts of blame are significant enough that God records them in His Torah. And again, God also records man subsequent to sin, as hearing “*God going in the garden,*” a literal phenomenon, instead of describing man’s remorse. This is compounded by God being “*amidst the trees of the garden.*” What is this lesson?

But even with his remorse, man does not yet repent until God calls out to him, “*Where are you?*” God allows man to believe he has successfully hid himself, just as God asked Cain where Abel is, and asked Bilam “*Who are these men?*” The Rabbis teach God does this so as not to suddenly accuse man, which would be too stressful. And even when Adam replies, he does not confess his

sin, but says he was hiding due to his nakedness. It is only after God inquires if he did eat the forbidden fruit, that man confessed to the act, and even so, he still blames the woman.

In contrast to man and woman where God does not warn them prior to sinning, we find God does in fact warn Cain before he murders his brother.²³ Furthermore, God informs Cain that he can rule over his desire to sin. Here, there is an identification of the part of man that sins, as separate from man himself. Was Cain – and not his parents – warned due to his young age, or due to his greater self-awareness of his internal world (instincts), or was he perhaps different in human design than his parents? I can only speculate, but my speculation is in line with an idea I heard years back...

The answer to all these questions might be found in the difference in design between the first man and woman, and all subsequent people. Until they sinned, the instinctual drive was not an internal part of their makeup. Before the sin, it was only when man saw his wife, that he was sexually aroused. Otherwise, he was too engaged in wisdom, that his imagination would not naturally flow towards his instincts without external stimuli, as our instincts work today. Today, our imagination is strong, and is attached to our instincts from youth, as God says, “*For the inclination of man’s heart is evil from youth (Gen. 8:21).*” This means there was a change from Adam and Eve, to all their descendants. Adam and Eve did not possess an internalized instinctual drive. This is difficult for us to imagine, since all we know is our own makeup; our feelings have always been part of us. It is hard to grasp what

23) Ibn Ezra, Gen. 3:8

we would be like if we didn't have internal urges and a strong imagination. Yet, this was the state of man prior to sin.

This would explain why after the sin man viewed the "external world" as different, as "God moving in the garden", and not viewing himself as different (internal workings to blame). Adam did not yet recognize this new, internal part of his nature. This explains why he blamed the woman, why she blamed the snake, and why God accepted their blame. For they had not yet grasped the change in their psychological makeup. Therefore, they only recognized the external world, and felt justified to blame something else for their sin. This is significant, so God records their blame. God also momentarily accepted their blame as they were as of yet, not ready to appreciate their new makeup. However, Cain was born with the instincts, and could understand God's warning to control his internal urges. This is why God warns Cain, but not his parents.

Whichever explanation one accepts, we must appreciate God's inclusion of the details of this story, the many questions, and the significance of God recording the fact that man felt "God was in the Garden." The fact the Torah does not share any words of "God's voice", adds support that there was in fact no voice, but that this conveys a different idea, as we stated.

DIVINE DREAMS & THEIR LESSONS

When studying Joseph's dreams and interpretations, the analogy of a genius painter comes to mind. This painter would arrange millions of paint specks on a single paintbrush. Then, using only one stroke, he would move his brush across a blank canvas. Suddenly, a beautiful scene would emerge; trees with colorful leaves, birds in flight, sun and clouds, mountains, and streams. A passerby witnessing the picture-perfect scene emerge with one stroke would be in awe of how with one action, this painter anticipated how all the paint specks would fall into place and create a perfectly harmonious and picturesque scene. God's two dreams granted to the young Joseph paint such a picture.

When he was 17, Joseph dreamt of eleven sheaves bowing to him. And then in another dream, he saw eleven stars and the sun and moon bowing to him. Even after seeing his brothers' dismay at his retelling the first dream, Joseph nonetheless felt compelled for some reason to repeat his second dream to his brothers and his father, in a second recounting. It was due to these dreams that the brothers conspired to kill Joseph; eventually selling him instead. It was his father who rejected the dream's apparent interpretation that they would all bow to Joseph; the eleven stars being his eleven brothers, and the sun and moon representing Joseph's parental figures. At this stage, it does not appear that Joseph offered his own interpretation. Yet, thirteen years later, astonishingly, Joseph interprets not only the dreams of Pharaoh's stewards, but also Pharaoh's dreams. All four dreams came true exactly! But how did Joseph know their interpretations? This question is strength-

ened by Joseph's apparent lack of interpretative skills with regards to his own two dreams. And many of the Torah commentaries including Ramban and Klay Yakkar do not suggest Joseph was Divinely inspired with the interpretations: he succeeded in interpreting each dream solely through wisdom.

Later on, when his brothers descended to Egypt to purchase food during the famine, the brothers do not recognize the now 39-year-old, bearded Joseph standing before them. It is suggested that a denial of this Egyptian viceroy truly being Joseph was generated from the brothers' rejection of any success Joseph would attain; having been humiliated by his brothers, they were sure Joseph was permanently psychologically crippled from long ago.

When Joseph sees his brothers, he "recalls the dreams." According to a wise Rabbi, this means that Joseph understood he was to follow the Divine license provided by these dreams to subjugate his brothers into repentance: when the brothers "bow" to Joseph for wheat, he was thereby permitted to make them bow to him in higher matters, i.e., perfection (illustrated by the dream of the stars, higher matters). Creating a situation where the youngest Benjamin would be imprisoned on false charges, Joseph orchestrated a replica of his very own sale to force his brothers into a parallel dilemma: would they abandon the accused Benjamin now, who ostensibly stole Joseph's goblet, as they had done 20 years earlier when they sold Joseph? Or, would they display complete repentance, and sacrifice themselves for their brother? Normally, one is not permitted to place anyone under such a trial, but Joseph recognized his dreams as Divine in origin; a license to perfect his brothers. As this wise Rabbi taught, the first dream of the brothers' sheaves bowing to him – physical dominance – was

the precursor for Joseph's dominance over them in the spiritual realm – symbolized by the eleven stars, sun and moon bowing to him. The first dream was meant by God to teach Joseph that when the brothers would bow to him for food, Joseph thereby received permission to rule over them in regards to their perfection, symbolized by higher bodies: the luminaries.

Subsequent to his dreams, Joseph understood their meaning; and not necessarily 39 years later when he first saw his brothers, but perhaps much earlier. The Torah only tells us that he recalled the dreams upon seeing his brothers, to teach that this was when he would act upon those dreams. But their interpretation may have preceded this by many years.

We must now ask this: when did Joseph become such a great interpreter? He was in prison most of the time in Egypt, and he didn't seem to offer interpretation to his own dreams at 17 years of age. From where did Joseph obtain such knowledge of dreams, that he would eventually interpret his dreams, the dreams of Pharaoh's stewards, and Pharaoh's dreams, with exact precision?

We are aware of the Torah's description of Joseph as "*ben zekunim*" or as Onkelos translates, "a wise son." Jacob taught Joseph all the knowledge he attained at the Yeshiva of Shem and Aver. Perhaps this included lessons Jacob learned from his own dream of the ladder, and maybe others. So at the very outset, Joseph was a wise individual.

We also wonder why God gave these two dreams to Joseph, as they apparently contributed, if not caused, Joseph's sale. But we cannot approach God's true intent without His saying so. However, we can study, and perhaps suggest possibilities...

Dreams: Affecting History & Perfection

God is perfectly just. He would not jeopardize Joseph's life or well being, had Joseph's nature not warranted this sale. We learn that Joseph beautified himself. He also reported his brother's wrongdoings to his father. He had an egoistic tendency, which was rightfully corrected as God humbled him in prison for many years. He publicized his dreams attracting unnecessary jealousy upon himself, which culminated in his sale and ultimately, his imprisonment. Thus, with Joseph's dreams, God clearly intended to perfect him. But that was not the only reason for the dreams. As we mentioned, the genius painter performed one stroke of his brush, and created a perfect picture with tremendous detail. God's dreams given to Joseph also had many ramifications.

The wise Rabbi I mentioned taught that the dreams also provided an opportunity for the brothers' repentance, as Joseph was licensed through the dreams to place them into this trial regarding Benjamin. Simultaneously, this forced Jacob to part with Benjamin, perfecting Jacob as well, by helping him restrain his excessive love for Benjamin, displaced from his beloved, departed wife Rachel. And we see that Joseph's plan is successful. As Rashi states, when Joseph embraced his father after all those years, we would think Jacob equally embraced his son Joseph. But he did not: he was preoccupied "reciting the Shima." Of course the Shima (Torah phrases) did not yet exist, but this metaphor means Joseph's plan to perfect his father worked: Jacob no longer directed his excessive love towards man, but now, towards God. He re-channeled his passions towards the Creator, as should be done.

The dreams perfected Joseph by contributing to his sale and

refinement of his ego; they enabled Joseph to perfect his brothers by forcing them to defend Benjamin, and they perfected his father as well, forcing him to break his bond to Rachel, now displaced onto her son Benjamin. We might think these matters alone are amazing, that two dreams might offer so much good for so many. However, there is a great deal more to Joseph's dreams. Something even more astonishing...

Dream Instruction

We asked earlier how Joseph transformed into such a brilliant dream interpreter. How did he know that the dreams of the stewards and Pharaoh were Divine? What did Joseph know about dreams? All he had were his two dreams years earlier. Soon thereafter he was cast into prison for over a decade. However, those dreams offered Joseph more than we think.

What was Joseph doing in prison this entire time? Of course he must have had chores, and he was promoted to oversee the other inmates. But he had his solitude as well...time to think.

Having received tremendous knowledge from his father, the teachings of Shem and Aver, Joseph gained deep insight into how God rules the world, and interacts with mankind. He knew the concept of repentance, for he was soon to be the conductor of his family's repentance. He must have reflected on his own state, pondering his own repentance, "Why am I in prison? What is my sin?" He soon realized his dreams precipitated his descent into slavery, and that God gave him these dreams. He analyzed his dreams, and must have spent many hours, days, and weeks studying God's precise communications of the night. What did he discover?

Pharaoh and His Stewards

Ten years elapsed in prison. One day, Joseph saw the wine steward and baker troubled by their dreams, and he invited them to recount them to him. Joseph interpreted both dreams exactly in line with what happened: the wine steward was returned to his post, and the baker was hung. Two more years go by, and Joseph finds himself before Pharaoh. Pharaoh heard of Joseph's interpretive skills, and he too told Joseph his dreams. Again, Joseph interprets the dreams with exact precision; they come true. But if God did not tell Joseph the future, how did he know it? We now arrive at the core of the issue...

Two Divine Signs: Dreamer & Duplication

God's dreams granted to Joseph contained content, but they were also "instructive." I believe God gave Joseph two dreams for objectives in addition to perfecting his family and himself. Besides the "content" of the dreams, Prophetic dreams also have a "style:" the chosen dream recipient, and dream duplication.

Pharaoh received these dreams, and none other. He also received "two" dreams. Ramban states that two separate but similar dreams are unnatural: Pharaoh could have naturally seen both of his dreams in one single dream state.²⁴ However, Pharaoh woke up and dreamt similar content again as it was Divinely inspired. The same rule applies to the two stewards who dreamt similar dreams. And Joseph knew this. Joseph also had two separate dreams with similar content.²⁵ In Numbers 12:6 Ibn Ezra teaches that duplication in dreams indicates their Divine origin: "*[Divine] dreams are doubled, as is the manner of prophecies.*"

24) Ramban, Gen. 41:32

25) Gen. 37:9

Joseph had many years to ponder his situation in prison, and much of what he may have pondered was the last event leading him into prison: his dreams while still at home. He knew they were from God, as he tells his brothers years later: “*God sent me before you to place for you a remnant in the land and to sustain you (Gen. 45:7).*”

What did Joseph determine were indicative of Divine dreams? He recognized dream duplication was unnatural. He also recognized that his dreams affected his perfection, so the “recipient” also indicates Divine intent. These two elements were contained in the stewards’ dreams, and in Pharaohs dreams. The stewards’ dream duplications were a variation, but no less telling of their Divine nature, since they both occurred the very same night, to two individuals. Pharaoh also had two dreams, and of additional significance, it was “Pharaoh” – the man with the wherewithal to address the forecasted famine – who received the dreams.

Joseph understood from his own experience that dream duplication, and as I learned from a wise Rabbi, a strategic dream “recipient” are two indications of Divine dreams. So convinced was Joseph of their Divine origin that the recipient is of a telling nature, Joseph says to Pharaoh, “*What God plans He has told to Pharaoh (Gen. 41:25).*” Joseph meant to say, “Your reception of this dream as opposed to another indicates its Divine nature.” And Joseph repeats this in verse 28.

Had God not granted Joseph these two Divine dreams, Joseph would not have pondered dreams. He would not necessarily have studied their style, to the point that he was able to facilitate the good outcome God desired, by emancipating himself through the stewards’ interpretations, and rising to viceroy through applying his wisdom to Pharaoh’s dreams.

God's Brilliant Dream Strategy

God used dreams not only to perfect Jacob's household, but also to train Joseph in dream design and interpretation...the very matter essential for carving out Jewish history. The design of Joseph's dreams contained the blueprint for determining the Divine nature of the other dreams he would confront. In other words: his dreams were actually dream instructions, not just messages. This is akin to a coded message, where the message content is one lesson, but the textual arrangement also contains hints to decipher this new language. Joseph's dreams' "content" contained a message for directing his perfecting of his family. But the dream "design" (selected recipient and duplication) taught him how to unravel dreams in general.

With a single brush stroke of Joseph's dreams, 1) God placed Joseph in prison to humble him; 2) He caused the brothers to repent, this time not abandoning their youngest brother; 3) He caused Jacob to perfect his excessive love; and 4) He trained Joseph in the art of dream interpretation...the science essential for the aforementioned perfections of Jacob, his sons, and Joseph!

The very dreams that caused Joseph's imprisonment, also provided his escape, and helped sustain that generation. We appreciate God's brilliance: with one action He effectuates the greatest good for so many. We also realize that without Joseph's appreciation that God teaches man with sublime wisdom, Joseph would not have engaged his own wisdom to discern God's will, nor would Joseph acquire the dream interpretation skills he discovered while in prison. But since Joseph had such deep knowledge of how God works, he turned all his efforts while in prison to

analyzing his dreams, using wisdom to 1) uncover God's message, and 2) study dream style so as to determine which dreams are Divine, and how to interpret them.

A Fifth Message

Additionally, dreams are, by definition, a manifestation of "hidden" material. Understanding this, Joseph knew that if God communicates with His Prophets in dreams (*Numbers 12:6*), it is for this reason. God wishes to indicate that just as dreams conceal deeper ideas, so too do God's dreams, and even more so. God's selected mode of communicating with His Prophets via dreams underscores the principle that God's words too must undergo man's interpretation, if the intended message is to be discovered. With that appreciation, Joseph delved into the study of dreams, both prophetic and mundane. He also determined that dreams of Divine origin contain a code, and once detected, can be understood. Joseph knew that wisdom is how God designed the world. Therefore, it is only with wisdom that man succeeds.

A Life of Wisdom

Joseph's approach to life was based on his knowledge that God created all. Thus, the world "naturally" functions according to God's wisdom. Despite the fact that God did not reveal Pharaoh's or his stewards' interpretations, Joseph secured perfection and sustenance for his family, and all of Egypt and surrounding peoples using wisdom alone. Since wisdom guided his actions, he was not in conflict with God's world that functions according to

that same wisdom. Rather, he was perfectly in line with it, as his successes teach.

We too can perceive God's wisdom if we earnestly seek it out from His Torah. Wisdom is the key to success and happiness in all areas. We do not need God telling us anything more, or sending signs, just like Joseph did not need God to interpret the dreams. In fact, God has already intervened by giving His Torah to us all.

Responding to our misfortunes with "religious" beliefs that "it's all for the good," man deceives himself, and will repeat his errors. It is only through analyzing our ways and seeing if they match Torah ideals that we will terminate our need to falsely pacify ourselves with "it's all for the good." Using reason in all areas, and admitting our errors with a responsible analysis teamed with internal change, we can engage wisdom to steer us to the truly good path, one that God wills for all mankind, and is readily available without further intervention.

The Torah contains all we need. No quick fixes, amulets, or blessings will address our concerns. God says we require wisdom and personal perfection.

For only with this may one glorify himself: understand and know Me; for I am Hashem who does kindness, justice and righteousness in land, for in these I desire, so says Hashem (Jeremiah 9:23).



THE TABLETS: AN EXTRAORDINARY IDEA

The Three Weeks commences with the 17th of Tammuz and focuses us on the tragedies contributing to this day's sorrowful nature. Talmud Taanis 28b records Moses' smashing of the Tablets as one of these tragedies. As he descended from Sinai with those two sapphire Tablets bearing God's laws, he encountered the Jews sinning with the Gold Calf. He responded by breaking the Tablets. A wise Rabbi explained that he did so, lest the Jews increase their idolatrous behavior and deify these Divinely inspired objects even more than the Gold Calf. Moses broke the Tablets to eliminate this possibility. God agreed. We might think the service of the Gold Calf as more worthy of making the list of tragedies. But as a friend suggested, sin is not a "loss," but a waste. A true "loss" is the removal of something of value or a failure to realize a gain. That loss was the Tablets. The removal of the positive is loss, not the engagement in the negative, the latter being "harm." Similarly, we mourn the loss of the Temple and not the idolatry or enmity between Jews that precipitated those two losses, although the latter are evils for which we must repent.

To comprehend the loss of the Tablets we must understand 1) what they were and 2) why God gave them to us. The indispensable need for the Tablets is derived from God's granting to Moses a second set of Tablets after he smashed the first set.

What I will suggest herein astonished me, but I feel Maimonides' words point to this discovery:

*The Guide for the Perplexed (Book I, Chap. LXVI)
And the tables were the work of God" (Exod. xxxii. 16), that
is to say, they were the product of nature, not of art: for all*

natural things are called "the work of the Lord," e.g., "These see the works of the Lord" (Ps. cvii. 24): and the description of the several things in nature, as plants, animals, winds, rain, etc., is followed by the exclamation, "O Lord, how manifold are thy works!" (Psalms, civ. 24). Still more striking is the relation between God and His creatures, as expressed in the phrase, "The cedars of Lebanon, which he hath planted" (ib. 16): the cedars being the product of nature, and not of art, are described as having been planted by the Lord. Similarly we explain.

"And the writing was the writing of God" (Exod. xxxii. 16): the relation in which the writing stood to God has already been defined in the words "written with the finger of God" (ibid xxxi. 18), and the meaning of this phrase is the same as that of "the work of thy fingers" (Psalms viii. 4) this being said of the heavens: of the latter it has been stated distinctly that they were made by a word, "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made" (ibid xxxiii. 6). Hence you learn that in the Bible, the creation of a thing is figuratively expressed by terms denoting "word" and "speech." The same thing, which according to one passage has been made by the "word," is represented in another passage as made by the "finger of God." The phrase "written by the finger of God" is therefore identical with "written by the word of God," and if the latter phrase had been used, it would have been equal to "written by the will and desire of God.

Onkelos adopted in this place a strange explanation, and rendered the words literally, "written by the finger of the Lord." He thought that "the finger" was a certain thing ascribed to God; so that "the finger of the Lord" is to be interpreted in the same way as "the mountain of God" (Exod. iii. 1), "the rod of God" (ib. iv. 20), that is, as being an instrument created by Him, which by His will engraved the writing on the tables. I

cannot see why Onkelos preferred this explanation. It would have been more reasonable to say, “written by the word of the Lord,” in imitation of the verse “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made.” Or was the creation of the writing on the tables more difficult than the creation of the stars in the spheres? As the latter were made by the direct will of God, not by means of an instrument, the writing may also have been produced by His direct will, not by means of an instrument. You know what the Mishnah says, “Ten things were created on Friday in the twilight of the evening,” and “the writing” is one of the ten things. This shows how generally it was assumed by our forefathers that the writing of the tables was produced in the same manner as the rest of the creation, as we have shown in our Commentary on the Mishnah (Ethics 5:6).

Understanding Maimonides

We must pay attention to Maimonides’ words. He opens with *“And the tables were the work of God.”* His intent is to first discuss the Tablets – not their writing. He first explains how the Tablets were made via “nature,” meaning by God. They are not “works” or “art.” By definition, if natural objects are used in a new human construction or formation, like woodworking or paintings, we call this “carpentry” and “art” respectively. But if something is formed undisturbed by human influence, as leaves are formed with veins and trees with bark, this we call “nature” and not art. Therefore, when addressing the Tablets, Maimonides writes, “they were the product of nature, not of art: for all natural things are called *“the work of the Lord.”*” This means that the two Tablets formed naturally, but independently from the rest of the sapphire at Sinai that formed as a unified block. That is quite amazing. We will return

to what this means. But they were not works of carpentry or art. Remain mindful of this distinction.

Maimonides then addresses the Tablets' "writing:" *"And the writing was the writing of God."* He states that although the Torah says the writing was *"written by the finger of the Lord,"* this writing was no less natural than the Tablets themselves, or God's natural creation of the heavens. He disputes Onkelos' suggestion that a tool was used to form these letters, and insists that those letters were created without a tool, just as God created the heavens, by His will alone and without any tool.

But focus your attention on Maimonides' insistence that the writing was "natural" and not an act of carpentry or art. What does he mean by this? You must know that Maimonides bases himself on the verse that references both the Tablets and the writing: *"And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God (Exod. xxxii. 16)."* Maimonides teaches that this verse is not redundant. Not only were the Tablets a natural phenomenon, but so too was the writing. This is essential to our discussion. We must understand the distinction between writing that is natural and writing that is art.

God communicated Ten Commandments. Shortly afterwards they would be committed to the Sefer Torah Moses would write. Therefore, for what purpose did God create the Tablets with the same record of this communication? Is this not a redundancy?

Let's briefly recount history. God orchestrated Revelation at Sinai. The nation heard great sounds. Moses ascends Mt. Sinai; he remains in commune with God forty days and nights and then he receives the Tablets from God. While still on Sinai, God informs Moses that the Jews sinned with the Gold Calf and that He will

destroy the nation. Moses prays and God refrains from destroying the Jews. Before Moses descends the mountain we read these words:

And Moses turned and descended from the mountain, and the two Tablets of Testimony were in his hands; Tablets written from both sides²⁶, from this side and that were they written. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, were they, explained on the Tablets (Exod. 32:15,16).

Why is Moses' descent interrupted with this detailed description of the Tablets? Why was this description of the Tablets not included earlier (31:18) where we read "*And God gave to Moses – when He concluded to speak with him on Mount Sinai – two Tablets of testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God?*" This division of the Tablets' details into two Torah portions requires explanation, as does the term Tablets of Testimony: "testimony" to what exactly? And we wonder why "two" tablets are needed. Could not a larger tablet contain all the words; could not smaller letters accomplish the same message on a single tablet?

Maimonides also cited the Mishna in Avos: "*Ten things were created on [the first] Friday in the twilight of the evening,*" and *'the writing' is one of the ten things.*" Maimonides wishes to draw our attention to the necessity for God to have created the Tablets and

26) Ibn Ezra rejects the notion that the letters Mem Sofit and Samech (O-shaped letters) had miraculous center pieces floating. The Tablets' letters were not hollowed from one side completely through to the other, according to Ibn Ezra. They were simply written on two faces of the stones, as the stones were thick. Alternatively, I suggest the letters were internal facets in the translucent sapphire, seen on "both sides," like a crack can be seen from any side of a diamond. Furthermore, God does not perform impossibilities, so to have legible writing passing through a stone, with the exact wording seen on the opposite side, is not possible. God can do miracles, but not impossibilities. Similarly, God cannot create a circle that is a square.

their writing, at the end of the six days of Creation. What is his message?

In Exodus 34:1 God instructs Moses to hew a second set of Tablets and He says He will write on them the matters that “were” on the first tablets. Why doesn’t God say He will write on them the matters that “He wrote” on the first Tablets? He uses a less descriptive term. I also wonder if there was more to Moses’ breaking of the Tablets than already explained.

Revelation

Revelation at Sinai was intended to remove all doubt, and for all time, that a Supreme Intelligence exists, created all, sustains all and communicates with man, and that there is only one Revealed Religion. God desired that this message would not end at Sinai’s closure. A friend suggested that the Tablets were intended to be an everlasting “testament” (Tablets of Testimony). This explains why upon God’s completion of His communication with Moses atop Sinai, we read, “And God gave to Moses – when He *concluded* to speak with him on Mount Sinai – two Tablets of testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.” That is, once God *concluded* His Revelation, He desired an *everlasting* testimony of this Revelation. God did not desire the “conclusion” of the event to conclude the lesson. Thus, “testimony” appears in this verse and not later in the second description of the Tablets. In order that this testimony is everlasting, the words are embedded in a permanent object – stone. So “stone” is also in this verse.

But cannot anyone write words in stone? Of what proof, then, are these Tablets? The testimony God intended is to attest that

He alone is the source of the universe. We read that these Tablets were “written with the finger of God.” Maimonides said this was a “natural” phenomenon. Here now is the amazing idea and how these Tablets “testified”...

Astonishing Tablets

These miraculous Tablets contained something not found elsewhere in nature: naturally formed letters, sentences and commandments! Imagine a tree with branches that grew in the form of words, or leaves where the veins spelled-out sentences. That is how astonishing these Tablets were. As God formed these unique Tablets over time at the end of Creation, He also formed the “writing” simultaneously, and naturally. These commands were not subsequently “carved” into the Tablets, but they literally grew with the stones as the stones formed through nature: *“And the writing was the writing of God.”* Maimonides said above this means a natural phenomenon. This explains why God tells Moses that He will write on the second Tablets the matters that “were” on the first set, and not matters that He “wrote” the first set. For God did not “write” on the first Tablets. Yes, the words appeared “written” as the verse states²⁷, but not through an act of one thing carving into another, resulting in words. Again, the verse does not say, “I wrote” on the first Tablets, but rather, “were” on the first Tablets. The letters in the first Tablets formed simultaneously with the Tablets themselves. This is an amazing phenomenon found nowhere else. Perhaps the natural grain of sapphire formed into letters and verses of Ten Commandments. Anyone viewing

27) Exod. 32:15

these Tablets would realize the writing was a natural phenomenon, a miracle, and not possibly a subsequent etching, as the Tablets were solid. Perhaps the writing was “inside” these translucent stones with no access to its inner portion and thereby testified to its miraculous nature. (Writing internally is impossible.) Perhaps for this reason, Maimonides includes in this chapter his critique of Onkelos’ suggestion that the stone Tablets were carved through an instrument. Another truth is uncovered...

God of Nature and the Torah

What consideration demanded that God create such a phenomenon? Although the words appearing on the Tablets were duplicated in the Torah scroll, it was not the words per se that demanded the Tablets’ existence, but the *manner* of existence of these words. This natural formation of letters in stone is God’s message that He created both; 1) the natural world, and 2) the Torah. This is needed, for many people view nature as devoid of God’s creation and rule. Man becomes accustomed to phenomena by his very nature. The sun rises and sets; seasons change, and species beget their own kind. We take all for granted, thinking all occurs due to “nature” – not God. But with the existence of naturally formed Torah commandments in natural objects, we can no longer maintain a view of an unguided world. Nature is finally understood to be the expression of the Torah’s Author. Torah and science are complimentary and have the same source. How can one ignore a natural object that has Torah commands naturally imprinted, and not the work of art? This was the lesson of the Tablets.

Therefore, the Torah scroll's commands sufficed for the "content" of His words, but not for an everlasting "testament" which was revealed through natural stones containing intelligent words. We can no longer separate nature from God. His very words are embedded in these stones in a natural manner!

Why didn't God give the Tablets to Adam the First? Perhaps Adam had no need for them. God's original plan was that man use intelligence to discover God. The beauty and precision of natural law is sufficient for a person following a life of wisdom. However, at this era in mankind's development, these Tablets were intended to offer mankind a new leap in our wisdom of God. The ability for nature to produce such a phenomenon would offer us tremendous appreciation for the Creator of this nature. They were to be viewed and not placed in an Ark.

But as these Tablets were being delivered, the Jews sinned with the Gold Calf. The extraordinary lesson of the Tablets would not be realized with those Jews. These first Tablets required destruction. However, a lesson was required: the nation must now have a reminder of what they lost. God instructed Moses to hew a new set; their tablet form would not come about naturally, but by human craft. God also "wrote" the matters on this second set; again, no longer a natural phenomenon of words that were part of their natural design. A gap now existed between the Jews and God. The intended, intimate relationship that could have been, was now lost. To emphasize this break from God, these Tablets must be stored out of sight; in an ark. Perhaps this explains why King Solomon hid the Ark and no other vessel. He reiterated this message of "distance" between God and the nation through digging caverns to eventually hide the Tablets and the Ark.

Ten things were created on [the first] Friday in the twilight of the evening (Ethics 5:6).

As natural law needed to tolerate these unique Tablets, they had to be planned with the creation of the substance of sapphire. This could not be created later, for the very blueprint of how sapphire forms must contain natural laws that would generate stones with embedded communication. As this would be a “property” of sapphire’s substance, it must be set at the time that God endowed sapphire with its formative properties – during Creation.

And Moses turned and descended from the mountain, and the two Tablets of Testimony were in his hands; Tablets written from both sides, from this side and that were they written. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, were they, explained on the Tablets.

Why is Moses’ descent interrupted with this detailed description of the Tablets? Why was this description of the Tablets not included earlier (31:18) where we read, “*And God gave to Moses...two Tablets of testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God?*” We said above that the first account expresses the purpose of the Tablets – testimony. Thus, we learn that the testament is in durable stone, and that the testament is a unique phenomenon. But when Moses is about to descend to the sinful Jews, we are told of the Tablet’s nature that conflicts with their idolatry: the Tablets were “God’s work,” intended precisely to fend-off idolatry. This aspect is relevant in connection with the idolatrous Jews and therefore not mentioned until its relevance surfaces – at Moses’ descent towards the Jews now performing idolatry.

We now appreciate the loss of the Tablets: our prospect of attain-

ing greater knowledge of God was lost. This is the ultimate tragedy. What an amazing sight they must have been! Perhaps in the future this will be the means by which God will make His name fill the Earth. For we do not know if the Tablets were the only natural elements in which God embedded natural communication: perhaps others will be revealed. And as this was God's will at Sinai, perhaps in the messianic era He will unveil this again to a more fitting generation.

KOSHER

Do you know why God commanded us in kosher laws? More than most laws, kosher has become iconic of Jewish observance. And this is not without cause. Many times in His Torah²⁸, God commands us to abstain from eating and touching certain creatures. Like all other commands, the benefit in following any law lies in understanding how it perfects us. And as always, God provides clues. The following are God's words as He concludes the section on permitted and prohibited species:

Do not defile your souls with any loathsome thing that creeps, and do not become contaminated with them and remain contaminated through them. For I am God your God and you shall be sanctified and remain sanctified, for I am sanctified and do not contaminate your souls with any creeping thing that crawls on the Earth. For I am God who took you out of the land of Egypt in order to be your God, and be sanctified for I am sanctified (Lev. 11:23-25).

28) Exod. 22:30, Lev. chap 11, Deut. 14:3

In our first source above, God's objective for us in our abstention from these creatures is to become like Him, "sanctified." The avoidance of disgusting behavior is a path towards sanctity. But how does this sanctification work? What is "sanctity?" How does eating prohibited animals harm us? More precisely, how does eating physical objects harm our metaphysical souls? (How is one related to the other?) Rashi says²⁹ abstaining from loathsome creatures alone sufficed for God to take us out of Egypt. What is Rashi's point? Why are we also told many times (Lev. chap 11) to additionally "abhor" (shekktetz) those creatures prohibited from our diet? Why isn't abstention from eating sufficient?

The Torah goes very far in distancing us from many species. We can eat all fruits and vegetables; there is no restriction as is the case regarding animals. Why? And what is it specifically about "creeping" things that it is a predominant theme among creatures we are prohibited to eat? Finally, what is it about the act of eating per se that is harmful? Other peoples do not follow kosher laws, yet, they have existed as long as we have. Eating non-kosher apparently does not wipe out civilizations.

Deciphering God's Clues

In Leviticus chapter 11, God offers us signs that indicate permitted and prohibited animals: fully-split hooves, chewing cud, fins, scales, knees (locusts), multiple legs, belly-crawlers, paws, and things that creep upon the ground. Even the Rabbis say³⁰ that although in the Torah, birds are not signaled by a sign but by species, there is yet a sign relating to their legs. Interesting...most

29) Lev. 11:45

30) Tal. Chullin 59a. See the mishna.

signs indicating a species' kosher or non-kosher status are based on its means of locomotion...an idea worth pondering. Now, let's start making steps to answer our questions...

Locomotion & Kosher

What is significant about locomotion? Unlike inanimate vegetation, animate life – beings with locomotion – engenders human identification. We don't identify with inanimate objects, like plants, rocks, mountains, or oceans. But animals move. This element of animate life awakens in man our identification with that creature. We are drawn to animals and visit zoos. We obtain pets and mourn at their deaths. We develop systems of animal rights, in which, man draws distinctions: killing insects or even reptiles and birds is not met with the same crime as killing dogs or cats. This is because man places greater value on those species with which he identifies greater.

Identification exists with moving creatures, unlike inanimate objects. Signs of prohibited species inhere in their means of locomotion, the feature wherein man identifies.

Kosher is a Barrier

God wishes man to not identify with the prohibited species. By eating snakes, rats, spiders, etc. man breaks the natural barrier of disgust, and numbs his sense of what is to be loathsome. However, God wishes man to preserve this disgust. This is why He created man with this emotion. By preserving our emotion of disgust, our behavior in all areas benefits by these retaining walls. In contrast,

people who eat whatever they wish and engage in unbridled lusts, and worse, eat disgusting species, forfeit their purpose as an intelligent being. They are no longer “sanctified.” Sanctified refers to man operating on the highest level humanly possible. This level is when he is most engaged in intellectual pursuits, studying the universe and Torah, as God designed humans to do. Caving to desires without limit, and breaking the barriers of naturally-reviled things, man loses a critical boundary. (As vegetation offers man no dangers of identification, no restrictions apply. All fruits and vegetation are permitted as they were since Adam the First.)

We now understand that God wishes man to retain certain barriers. The emotion of disgust is invoked by certain types of creatures. A wise Rabbi once suggested that things that creep on the ground remind us of death. Perhaps it is that close proximity to the underground that we find abhorrent in these species. This can also explain why God created man upright, unlike most other creatures...distancing us further from the Earth. *“Also the world [God] planted in their hearts so man should not discover the matter that God has done from beginning to end (Kobeles 3:11).”* This verse refers to God’s design of man’s immortality fantasy. (Ibn Ezra, *ibid*) God does not wish us to be preoccupied with death. Anything that reminds us of the grave is disturbing. These species disgust us due to their association with death. This disgust is reinforced through the prohibition of contact with them.

Eating is one of our two primary drives. Sex is the other. The Rabbis and leading psychologists are in agreement on this. God restricts the Jew’s involvement in satisfying these core instincts so we may become accustomed to controlling our instincts. The goal

is to enable our intellects to rule our instincts. A person who has no limits on his appetitive and sexual activity will find great difficulty in advancing, or even engaging his intellect. His pursuit to know God will never be realized. For he will incite cravings that only grow as he feeds them: *“Rabbi Yochanan said, ‘There is a small limb in man: starve it and it becomes satiated, feed it and it becomes hungry’ (Tal. Succah 52b).”* Rabbi Yochanan teaches that the more we satisfy an instinct, the greater the urge, and thus, less energy is available for fulfilling God’s Torah.

Abstaining from lusts and from eating any creature, suffices to control our emotions on one level. By not eating “disgusting” creatures, we break identification with that species, and we additionally maintain the emotion of disgust, which can then be applied to other forbidden areas. God desires we maintain a minimal level of abhorrence in the area of the appetitive drive. Retaining this disgust for certain species, we don’t only control one emotion, but all of our emotions benefit. We will find avoiding detestable behaviors easier since we strengthened our overall emotion of disgust.

By our very nature, we cannot be overindulgent in one area, without our entire emotional makeup sensing this relaxation. This explains why the Jews worshipping the Gold Calf also arose to engage other instincts.³¹ The satisfaction of one emotion – idolatry – causes all other emotions to seek satisfaction. In contrast, abstaining from contact with certain species helps to control all other emotions.

Leviticus 11 categorizes mammals, then fish, then birds. It is interesting that pawed animals are not initially identified in the first group, that of mammals³². Also interesting is that mammals alone

31) Exod. 32:6

32) Lev. 11:1-8

are the one group in which we do not find the word “disgusting” (shekketz). Instead, they are called “tammay” or impure. Perhaps this is because God wishes to teach another consideration within kosher laws. One aspect is what we answered, to sustain a barricade of disgust. Another benefit – in abstaining from pawed creatures – is that it engenders mercy. Pawed animals offer man more identification than other creatures. They are more like man, who differs from animals in our speech and creative abilities. Paws closely resemble human hands, our tools of creativity. We even ascribe intelligence to species that express greater tactile dexterity, like monkeys. The more an animal resembles man, the greater the identification. It’s a natural human response. The prohibition to abstain from pawed animals may serve the opposite benefit: to retain a level of mercy towards God’s creatures. Therefore, God also prohibits animals that more closely resemble man. It is then not surprising that our pets are pawed. Our relationship to animals is then twofold: 1) abstention from disgusting creatures to maintain the necessary emotion of abhorrence, 2) to engender mercy toward beings that are not disgusting. Good and bad emotions are thereby kept in check.

God created man to naturally sense a feeling of abhorrence. We could have been designed to find all creatures equally appealing, but God deemed this harmful. He instilled in human nature many emotions, including disgust for many creatures. This disgust may be towards their outer appearance like rats and many insects. We also are designed to revile things that crawl, like snakes and spiders. God tells us this in the quote above. He created us with disgust, and additionally commanded the Jew to reinforce this disgust through abstaining from eating or touching many creatures.

Disgust is the natural wall between man and his instincts. By abstaining from instinctual gratification according to Torah parameters, God intends that man raise himself to the life where his intellect is not compromised, but rather, free to engage in studying the Creator. This is how man is sanctified, and resembles his Creator. This is Rashi's point, that the path to living an intelligent life is paved by controlling our instincts. Abstaining from certain species accomplishes this goal, and alone, this warranted God's Egyptian Exodus.

Summary

At first, we wonder at the various species, why are they all needed? What is kosher all about? Is it a health law?

We then appreciate that God permitted us to enjoy flesh in all corners of the Earth, since man is mobile. We travel. God provided food in all regions: land and sea, valleys and mountains. By analyzing the signs that indicate kosher and non-kosher species, we realize they address our inner emotional makeup, rarely examined, and many times rejected. But God teaches us through kosher laws that we must have one eye on our psychological health and strive toward the perfection of our instincts.

We also must recognize the species as God's will and show them mercy, as in sending the mother before taking the young, thereby sparing her pain, and perhaps also via abstaining from pawed species. This reinforces the mercy we are to show people. With our emotions in check, abstaining from eating certain species and even going so far to abhor them, we control our instincts and become in some small way like our perfectly intelligent Cre-

ator who is bereft of any human quality and emotion. We too can partake of wisdom, the pursuit that God designed that offers us the greatest satisfaction.

As Jews, our mission differs from all other peoples. As teachers of God's Torah, we must condition our instincts through restraint, allowing our intellects to be untarnished from urges that cloud our thought. In this pristine manner, we can study clearly and accurately teach God's single system for mankind in a manner that impresses all who observe us. God's words will then be fulfilled as the nations remark:

*What a wise and understanding people is this great nation.
For what great nation possesses righteous statutes and laws as
this entire Torah(Deut. 4:6,8).*

ABRAHAM AND THE ANGELS

One must repeatedly revisit Torah portions to uncover God's numerous lessons. What catches our attention during our first few reads of a given area, often obscures other questions and insights. However, if we follow the halacha of reading each weekly portion twice yearly, and we are fortunate, new questions arise leading to new discoveries. I will address the account of Abraham and the angels, following God's words that all prophets excluding Moses received prophecy only while unconscious.³³

33) "...If there will be prophets of God; in a vision to him I will make Myself known; in a dream I will speak to him. Not so is it with My servant Moses; in all My house he is

Three angels visit Abraham. We read five times how fast Abraham “ran” and “hurried” to prepare a meal for these guests, described as men. What is God’s intent in, 1) giving a vision to Abraham that highlights Abraham’s kindness to people, and 2) repeating how fast and attentively Abraham served them? Since God ultimately discusses directly with Abraham the justice of Sodom, of what purpose is this vision of the three men?

Only one angel appears required for this vision, since only its news of Isaac’s forthcoming birth was announced. The other two angels were silent the entire visit and could have initially “arrived”³⁴ at Sodom. The Rabbis teach that the other two angels had the respective missions of destroying Sodom and saving Lote. This being the case, there was no need for them to accompany the angel assigned with the mission of the birth announcement. What then was the purpose of the two other angels visiting Abraham?

One angel asked Abraham, “*Where is Sarah your wife?*” We would assume this was intended to call her to share the news. But this did not occur. As Abraham responded, “*She is in the tent*”, the angel then announced only to Abraham the news of Isaac. Why then did the angel inquire of Sarah’s whereabouts? It appears inconsequential. The Torah then tells us that Sarah “in fact” heard, as she was behind the angels. She denied her ability to become pregnant at ninety years old. God then ridicules Sarah addressing Abraham, “*Is anything impossible for God?*” As Abraham was

trusted. Face to face I speak with him and in vision and not with riddles; and the form of God he beholds... (Num. 12:6-8).”

34) I say “arrived”, but in no manner do I suggest that angels are an earthly phenomenon. Rather, as I elaborated within this essay, that the two other angels could have “addressed” God’s will for Sodom without connection with the announcing angel. (Similarly, the angels of God addressed God’s will that the pillar of cloud relocate behind the Jews. But angels are not on Earth; only the cloud is. See Maimonides’ Guide for the Perplexed, book II, end of chapter 6.)

alone in communion with God, what purpose was served by God including Sarah's words in this created vision? (Although this was Abraham's vision, God accurately depicts Sarah's true feelings, which no doubt, Abraham discussed with Sarah in his waking state subsequent to this prophecy. For she too would be instrumental in transmitting God's justice. Alternatively, Sarah might have very well participated in this prophecy; similar to when God gave a joint prophecy to Miriam, Aaron and Moses [Num. 12:4].)

This is followed by the angels "gazing at Sodom", but not yet leaving. Their departure is suddenly delayed, and interrupted by God's following consideration:

Shall I keep hidden from Abraham what I plan to do? And Abraham will surely become a great, mighty nation, and all nations of the land will be blessed due to him. For he is beloved on account that he will command his children and his household after him, and they will guard the path of God, performing charity and justice, so that God will bring upon Abraham what He has spoken. And God said [to Abraham], 'The cry of Sodom and Amora is great and their sin is greatly heavy. I will descend and see if in accordance with their cry that comes to Me I will annihilate them; and if not, I know' (Gen. 18:17-21).

Following God's words, we read in the very next verse (ibid 18:22) that the angels then left to Sodom. Again, the angels gazing towards Sodom should be immediately followed by their leaving. What is the meaning behind God's words above interrupting the angels' departure? And what is God's message here?

Abraham's Concern for Man

Why the emphasis of Abraham “running” and “hurrying” the meal preparations? Abraham was having a vision, and to him, he was relating to men, not angels, as the verses state. Abraham had a keen sense of kindness, and wished to give honor to his fellow man. One can serve others, but if he runs to serve them, this expresses the height of honoring others, as we see regarding Rivka “running” to draw water for Eliezer’s camels³⁵. One feels more appreciated when another person runs to assist them, and does not merely walk. Abraham wanted to make the three men feel as appreciated as possible. Abraham prized human dignity. Typically, a leader seeks honor. But the perfected leader views all others as equals, and even forgoes personal rights and feelings to accommodate others. But why was this part of the vision God created? How is this related to Abraham learning God’s justice?

Men such as Abraham, who are genuinely concerned for his fellow, and who teach others God’s ways of “charity and justice”³⁶ will be the recipient of greater knowledge in this area. God therefore teaches Abraham not only His ways, but also, that man (Abraham) earns this knowledge due to his acts of kindness to his fellow. Thus, Abraham sees himself showing kindness to the three men, and this is followed by God’s dialogue on Sodom’s justice. God says in other words, “Abraham, due to your kindness, justice and concern for mankind, I am revealing greater knowledge with you on how My true kindness and justice operate.”

35) Gen. 24:20

36) Gen. 18:19

Angels

Angels are not omniscient; they are God's metaphysical agents to perform events on Earth. As King David said, "*He makes His angels winds; His ministers [He makes as] blazing flames (Psalms 104:4).*" Each angel controls a particular sphere within natural law, and nothing outside that law. As Rashi taught, "...*one angel does not perform two missions (Gen. 18:2).*" We also read, "*And the angel of God that went before the Jewish camp traveled, and it went behind them; and the pillar of cloud that went before them traveled and stood behind them (Exod. 14:19).*" There is no redundancy. This verse teaches a fundamental: there are two entities: 1) the metaphysical angel, and 2) the physical entity (here, a cloud) over which God places the angel as a supervisor. God controls nature through an angel, charging the angel over a specific sphere of nature; here, the specific task of repositioning the cloud to protect the Jews from the approaching Egyptian army. Thus, angels themselves are not physical, but they control physical phenomena. This explains why this verse describes the angel traveling, and then again, the cloud traveling. We are taught that the angel controls the cloud. And angels only control the sphere of laws determined by God. Thus, the angel did not know where Sarah was and needed to ask, since this knowledge was outside its specific sphere of control. Yet, the angel somehow knew Sarah's name. This I believe further proves that this story was a vision. For if it were a literal event and these three were men and not angels, they could not know Sarah's name.

The angel did not intend to share the birth announcement with Sarah. It is my opinion that it was ascertaining that Sarah was not in earshot of this announcement. The angel's inquiry "*Where is Sarah your wife?*" is understood as ensuring she did not hear the

birth announcement. Why? I believe this teaches another lesson about God's justice. For it was Abraham who taught monotheism and God's justice to his children and mankind (Gen. 18:18). Therefore, the news of Isaac's birth — the son who would continue Abraham's legacy — related primarily to Abraham, and not Sarah.

The Vision

This entire vision dealt with God's justice. Justice is not merely the destruction of evildoers. A primary aspect of God's justice is educating man about His ways. Therefore, the two other angels, although silent the entire time, came along with the announcing angel to convey a relationship between all three angels. Isaac's birth was vital to continue Abraham's teachings, and the destruction of Sodom and Lote's salvation comprise important lessons on God's justice, the very substance of Abraham's teachings. Thus, all three angels' missions related to Abraham, and therefore were all part of this vision.

The Interruption: God's Dialogue with Abraham

God's will is to teach man. The angels were about to leave to Sodom, but not quite yet. First, God shares with Abraham a clue to greater knowledge of God's justice. This knowledge would have been "hidden" from mankind — "*Hamichaseh ani may'Avraham (Gen. 18:17)*" — had God not suggested to Abraham that although exceedingly great in sin, Sodom might be salvaged if certain conditions were met. God knew there were not 10 righteous people, and therefore the angels proceeded to destroy Sodom, prior to

Abraham's dialogue with God. But the message of the angels not departing to Sodom until God commenced a dialogue with Abraham indicates that the angel's mission of destruction played a great role in Abraham's knowledge of God's justice.

The sequence of events, then, is as follows:

- 1) God is about to destroy Sodom; the angels gaze at Sodom).
- 2) But God first shares knowledge of His justice before doing so. Once this dialogue ensues,
- 3) the angles depart to Sodom; the destruction can take place, and Abraham will attain greater knowledge.

Again, God's dialogue is inserted between the angels' gaze towards Sodom and their departure for Sodom, conveying a relationship between Sodom's destruction and Abraham learning God's justice.

Sarah

What purpose did Sarah serve in this vision? The Torah makes it clear that Sarah viewed natural law as absolute, "*After I have aged, will I truly give birth (Gen. 18:14)?*" Thus, God's response, "*Is anything too wondrous for God (Gen. 18:14)?*" The lesson to Abraham by God's inclusion of this scenario within the vision is this: knowledge of God's justice must include the idea that God's justice is absolute. Nothing – not even nature – overrides God's justice. This is expressed throughout Torah in the many miracles God performed to benefit righteous people. As God was teaching Abraham new insights into His justice, this lesson was of critical value.

Summary

God gives Abraham a vision intended to further educate him on His ways, and for him to teach his son Isaac and the world. But God only does so, since Abraham was perfected in his concern for man. Abraham is taught through the vision that this concern is what earned him new insights from God. The other two angels visiting Abraham, and the interruption of the angels' departure by God's dialogue, teaches that man's knowledge of God's justice is a primary purpose in His meting out of justice. Thus, the angels did not leave to destroy Sodom until Abraham was engaged in learning a new insight into God's justice in this destruction. Abraham also learns that God's justice is absolute, expressed in God's rebuke of Sarah.

Addendum

Although it is suggested that Abraham was pleading with God for the salvation of Sodom, the verses do not suggest this. I say this due to the absence of Abraham mentioning "selicha" or "mechila," meaning to forgive. It is my opinion that Abraham accepted God's decree, and was inquiring for his edification, what exactly are God's measures of justice. In contrast, Moses poses arguments to God that once He selected the Jewish nation, favored by His salvation, annihilation of the Jews would cast shame on God. This was not the case regarding Sodom.



MENORAH: A MAP OF THE UNIVERSE?

Unlike other religions toting arbitrarily-designed ceremonial objects and garb, and tapestries that express raw human fantasy, each of God's Torah laws and designs are precise, containing fundamental intellectual and moral truths.

Of all the Temple's vessels, the Menorah is most perplexing. As Einstein would not dismiss any order detected in the universe, we too cannot dismiss the Menorah's intricate details. With them, God intends to share something profound with mankind. While some details may be technical, patient study of the Menorah is rewarded with new insights and increased appreciation for God's design and purpose of this mitzvah, and of man. Without understanding the Menorah's designs and laws, we miss His intended lessons. Let us first identify the unique features of the Menorah, and then progress in an orderly manner to define those features. While there is much room for *drash* and allegory, it is vital for the sake of arriving at the true lessons of Menorah, that we do not overstep, or suggest ideas that are not loyal to Menorah's designs and laws.

Menorah's Design

Unlike most other vessels, the Menorah was made of pure gold, like the Ark's cover. Both could not be made in parts, and then subsequently assembled. They were both hammered into their final form from a single block of gold. Why? Iconic to Menorah is its six branches emanating from a center seventh branch: three branches protruded from both sides, left and right, totaling six protruding branches, plus a seventh center stem. Why do the six

branches emanate from the seventh; not standing on the ground independently, on six separate bases, just like the seventh stem? On top of all seven branches was a basin for the oil. The wicks of all six branches faced towards the center stem: those on the right faced left, and those wicks on the left faced right. And the direction of the center stem's wick faced towards the Holy of Holies. Why? On each of the six branches were unusual designs: three cups, one flower and one sphere. On the center stem there was an additional cup, three additional spheres (out of which the six branches protruded), one additional set of a flower, cup and sphere, and finally one more flower at the base. The base had three legs.

We readily understand Moses' perplexity of the Menorah's design, that is, until God showed him a vision of it. We too wonder what these cups, flowers and spheres mean. And why were there more cups, than flowers and spheres? But the near duplication of design on all seven branches must teach something. And the seventh's additional designs too teach another lesson. Furthermore, a miracle occurred that the center stem's wick burned unnaturally longer than the other six branches.³⁷ What was the need for this miracle? What is that lesson? In general, what is Menorah: a lamp? The Talmud states that God does not need light, for He lit our journey through the desert! King Solomon sought to highlight this unnecessary need for light precisely by designing the Temple's windows narrow on the inside, and wider on the outside³⁸. Menorah was not for the purpose of light. Now, let's proceed to answer this enigma, step-by-step...

37) Menachot 86b

38) Kings I, 6:4, Menachot 86b

What is Light?

“Nare mitzvah, v’Torah Or – A (single) flame is a command, and Torah is light (Proverbs, 6:22).” Here, King Solomon alluded to a primary metaphor: wisdom is likened to light. Furthermore, the wisdom of one mitzvah illuminates to “some” degree: a command is equated to one flame. While observing Torah entirely, removes all darkness. It is “light.” It is only with a broad understanding attained through observing “all” of Torah, that we see the truth in all areas, as if one walks in broad daylight. The Menorah, then, is not for God, as He needs nothing. The Menorah is to embody the concept of wisdom, light. And in Proverbs (chap. 8) King Solomon personifies wisdom as metaphorically “calling out to man.” Verse 19, wisdom says, *“My fruit surpasses fine gold.”* We thereby find Torah equating fine gold to wisdom. Therefore, Menorah’s light and requirement to be made of pure gold both attest to its equation to wisdom. Additionally, hammering the Menorah out of one gold block instead of making it through assembly requires greater wisdom, and embellishes this idea. What wisdom does Menorah impart?

Six Branches = Six Days

The first step in answering this question, is to recognize Menorah’s unique aspects. Seven branches, where six emanate from the center seventh stem, clearly parallel the Six Days of Creation, and the Sabbath. Just as our first blessing each morning – “Baruch She’amar” – defines God as the God of creation, Temple equally requires this concept. The most primary notion of Temple service is that the nation firmly attests to God as the sole cause of the universe. Menorah delivers this message. Rashi on Exodus 28:6 cites

Talmud Yuma regarding the priest's clothing, that with every six strands of blue, purple, red and linen, there was wound a seventh strand of gold thread. Again, the concept of six days of Creation is highlighted. But if, as Sforno teaches, subsequent to the sin of the Gold Calf, Temple came to correct man's notions, what does Menorah address?

Six Dependent Branches: The Physical is not Absolute

The sin of those who created the Gold Calf was that they viewed the physical world as what is truly "real." They viewed tangible things as absolute truths, more true than the abstract metaphysical God to whom they could not relate. In truth, the physical world, this universe, does not have to exist. It does, only due to God's kindness. The six branches "depend on the seventh," as they emanate from the latter. This teaches that the continued existence of the universe – the six days' creations – depend on God's will, as the universe cannot sustain itself. God willed all matter into creation, and He can equally will it out of existence. This design of six branches "depending" (suspended) on the seventh, corrects the fallacy harbored by the Gold Calf followers. They felt a physical object was "more real" than something abstract.

Arise and make for us a god that will go before us, for this Moses, the man, who took us up from Egypt, we know not what has become of him (Exod. 32:1).

Here, immediately prior to fashioning the Gold Calf, the Jews expressed their attachment to the "man" Moses. Our very point. But in fact, the physical world's existence is flimsy, always depending on God's will for its continued existence. "*He renews ev-*

ery day regularly, the works of Creation (Daily Prayers)." The Menorah corrects the false notion of an absolute physical world. Six branches – six days of creation – are dependent on the seventh. Decoded, this hints to the physical world (six branches) as dependent on God's will and His natural laws, or the metaphysical world, referred to as the seventh branch. The seventh branch – the Sabbath – has as its goal man's removal from physical creativity, and the engagement in wisdom.

What has Greater Reality?

We must realize that the universe is guided by metaphysical laws that are "outside" of the universe. And these laws are more real than the physical world, as they guide the physical world. If one thing guides another, the former is more real than the latter. Natural law is falsely viewed as "inside" all physical objects. But science likes simplicity. We do not say each body has its own law of gravity inside itself, in an attempt to explain why all elements fall after being lifted. Our minds say there is a "single" law of gravity that governs everything, and is external to all matter. Laws are metaphysical realities. We find this approach more pleasing and sensible. Similarly, God does not will each leaf to fall from every tree. Rather, we find far greater expression of God's greatness by viewing such phenomena as a result of His "laws," not His independent attention to each leaf. A law removes the need for individual attendance to all leaves. It is much more pleasing to our minds, and we view God greater with such an explanation.

The six branches depending on the seventh for their suspension, refers to the six days of Creation depending on metaphysical laws

for their existence. The Gold Calf disease can be corrected by recognizing that physical objects are subjugated to the laws that govern them. To embellish this point, the seventh center stem had a miracle of its flame burning longer than its oil quantity could sustain. This demonstrated that the physical laws that typically would cause that flame to extinguish, were overridden by God's will. Natural law can be altered by the metaphysical world, or God's will. To further express the subjugation of the physical world to the metaphysical, all six branches had their wicks pointing towards the center branch: a manner of deference. But interesting too is that the center branch itself had its wick pointing towards the Holy of Holies! This teaches that even those very metaphysical laws are not absolute, but they too are God's creations, and subject to His will. (The Holy of Holies is from where God caused His communications to emanate.)

*Spheres, Flowers & Cups:
Harmony Reveals God's Greatest Wisdom*

Now we must address the Menorah's unique decorations. Each branch represents one of the six days of creation. Yet, despite the difference in each day's creations, all six branches are identical. What, then, must we say these cups, flowers and spheres refer to? It would appear, what is identical on all days are the main categories of creation. I refer to substance, form, and properties, or function. Regardless of the specific created entities, all matter possesses these properties. And it is precisely by studying these properties that man attains God's intended lessons. These are the areas of wisdom, which each day imparts.

As we study the universe, we identify numerous “elements.” Originally, man assumed there were four elements: earth, air, fire and water. But man later learned there exists over one hundred elements as identified in the Periodic Table. Varying properties of each element, from carbon to uranium, teach us about God’s universe. We then witness various “forms” of creation, such as living species and minerals. For example, we learn from the different mouth structures of beasts, which are carnivores and which are vegetarians. Carnivores have much wider jaw openings and fanged teeth to help in their hunt and eating. Vegetarians, like cows, have smaller jaw openings. Fish have vertical tail fins, while mammals like dolphins and whales have horizontal tail fins in order to propel them upwards to rise above the surface for air.

But what imparts to man the greatest appreciation of God’s wisdom seen in creation, is the “functioning” of matter, or rather, the “systems” we witness. The solar system, digestive system, weather, etc. impress us most. And when many systems coexist and complement each other as is found in the human being’s respiratory and circulatory systems, we are even more amazed. The reason a system is most impressive, is because it points to a greater plan, and thus, greater knowledge and planning, than in a single entity’s substance or form.

Menorah’s cups refer to creation’s properties and functions (systems), Menorah’s flowers refer to form, and its spheres refer to raw amorphous substance. While Earth’s substances (Menorah’s amorphous sphere), and the form of all creations (Menorah’s flower) carry important lessons, Menorah’s cups (properties & systems) are more numerous on each branch. I believe this may indicate it is through studying the laws and systems of the

universe whereby man attains the greatest appreciation of God's wisdom. An apple is a beautiful creation, but when we study the revolution of the Moon and Earth, which cause seasons, combined with the precise distance of Earth from the Sun, and its axis, we are amazed at the plan, and with God. Therefore I believe there are more cups on each branch to emphasize this point. Through our study of these three areas, we view God's wisdom. Thus, each branch, each day of creation, intends to offer man expressions of God's wisdom, as seen in elements like iron and hydrogen, in various forms like plants and animals, but mostly, "how" these creations operate, seen in the numerous systems that guide our universe, from the subatomic world, up to the birth of stars. The reason we find cups, flowers and spheres on the seventh branch, despite the fact that no creation took place on day seven, is to teach that the physical creations of the six days are based on their metaphysical designs – the seventh branch.

Summary

Menorah is a lesson in the dependent and limited nature of the physical world. This world was created. Nothing demands it exists other than God's will. God also determined what properties all creations possess. Placing more trust in physical objects than in God, and certainly imagining physical things help us in any way other than through their natural properties, is foolish. We must not value a Gold Calf more than God, who controls all physical entities, and prohibits their worship. However abstract He is and however emotionally displeasing we initially find it, we must follow our minds and strive to become convinced that physical

entities cannot answer our prayers, be they Western Walls, red bendels, dead Rebbes, or Gold Calves. Instead, we are to follow God and His lessons. God provided manna. He performed numerous miracles. And although we are commanded to follow His natural laws and toil to earn our living and not rely on miracles, prayer teaches us that ultimately, God is the source of our success. There exists a physical world with laws that govern who eats and who starves. Sitting idly while a farmer toils each season, the idle person dies of hunger while the farmer thrives. But the farmer who is a Torah Jew knows this: despite droughts, a righteous person ultimately relies on God, who can deliver his daily bread. The intelligent Jew and gentile plans according to nature but relies on God to bring matters to success. He gives charity, *tzedaka* without fear of diminishing wealth, and in fact views charity as a means of enriching his lot. And although he abstains from work each Sabbath, he does not fear this will diminish his wealth. God is his rock. Menorah itself is an example that the details of God's creations must be studied to witness God's wisdom: as we study every inch of the universe, we also study the Menorah and all other commands. Menorah's primary lesson is that the universe is subjugated to the metaphysical world, to God's will. Menorah corrects the flaw of the Gold Calf followers and hopefully will correct the false views of those Jews and gentiles who still place their hopes in anything except God alone.

TZITZIS

My best friend Dani and I share Torah questions every Friday evening at shul (temple). Dani is very smart, and has quick and excellent answers to questions we discuss. Last week, as he celebrated his 9th birthday, I asked him, "So what's your Torah question this week?" He looked down at his Tzitzis and said, "What are Tzitzis...why these strings and knots?" This is quite important and I am glad Dani asked it. My friend Rivka, who suggested the creation of the Jewishtimes magazine some 15 years ago, gave me a book "Horeb" by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch. Rabbi Hirsch enlightens us to marvelous Torah concepts and philosophy, and he wrote a brilliant essay on Tzitzis.

Dani, since you asked me the question, I am writing this for you.

Rabbi Hirsch noticed a number of interesting things. I will list them for you Dani:

Why does the Torah portion that teaches us about Tzitzis, come right after the story of the man who violated the Sabbath by carrying wood? (We can't carry wood on the Sabbath.) The way God wrote the Torah, is that each section that follows another section, is somehow related to it; there is a connection between Torah sections that follow each other.

Why did God say Tzitzis should be strings, and why place these strings on our clothing? Why not place the strings on a door, like mezuzah? (I know Dani, now you will want to know why we have a mezuzah! Keep reading and you will find an answer here!)

Why 5 knots and 8 strings? What does the word Tzitzis mean? Why does Tzitzis have a blue string?

Rabbi Hirsch starts answering, by telling us something very important. So listen well Dani...

In all our daily activities, everything we see or experience, is something we can see or touch. But God is not something we can see. This makes people think God does not exist, and so many people decide to make idols, and say that the idol created the world! Other people get very attached to pleasures, like eating anything, and some people like money so much, they steal because they are too lazy to work. These sins all happen because people think that what is real, and what life is all about, is only what they see, or how they feel. Now, since they can't see God, and they don't remember that God gave the Torah, and since this isn't on their minds, they follow their feelings. Our feelings are what the Rabbis call the "yetzer hara," the evil instinct. Our minds, the part of us that thinks and understands truths, is what the Rabbis call the "yetzer hatove." And in the world around us, we don't see anything telling us to stop making idols or stop doing what our yetzer hara feels like doing. So what is going to remind a person that he must follow Torah and God? Yes, Tzitzis is the reminder.

Dani, the letters of Tzitzis in Hebrew add up to 600. Add 8 strings and 5 knots, and that is 613. This we discussed in shul last week. But Rabbi Hirsch also said that the translation of Tzitzis is "to appear visibly." What Rabbi Hirsch means is that the very purpose of Tzitzis, is that we all have a reminder of Torah and mitzvos, that we can see, that appears visible. This is needed, since we said before that we don't see God, or see mitzvos. But

God knows this, and that's why He created a special mitzvah that helps us remind ourselves to not just do whatever we feel. Tzitzis remind us of the 613 mitzvos, and also of God who gave these mitzvos to us.

Now Dani, you can understand why in the Torah section on Tzitzis, God warns us not to “follow our eyes and our imagination.” God writes this to teach this very lesson, that Tzitzis are made exactly to remind us not to follow what we see or feel! People feel they know everything, or they feel they are right all the time. But its funny, people don't decide what pills to take, they ask the doctor. Because people know they might kill themselves with the wrong pills. So they ask someone who knows better about the body, a doctor. Well, the same thing here...we can't just think we know what is best, like people who make idols. We must first read what God teaches us. So even though we see things in the world that we want to do, to eat, to make...we have to look at our Tzitzis, and remember that God wants us to follow His 613 mitzvos, since they are best things to do. God knows what's best for us, because He created us. And when we study what God says, we will find it always makes sense. Just like when we study His science and math laws, they too always make sense. Torah is the same.

When we look at the Tzitzis, we wonder why they are on our clothes, since they don't really cover us or keep us warm like clothes are supposed to do! The shirt does, but the strings don't. So what's the idea of wearing something that doesn't do what clothes are supposed to do? Great question! Right? Rabbi Hirsch asked: “When was the first piece of clothing made?” It was Adam and Chava's garments that God made right after they sinned by

eating from the fruit that God said not to eat. We see from here that clothes are connected to sin. So God wants us not to sin, and made the Tzitzis in the clothes we wear. The Tzitzis in our clothes reminds us of Adam and Chava's sin, and that we should not sin. And it says there that they felt the fruit was "good to their eyes", exactly what the parsha of Tzitzis tells us NOT to do, not to "follow our eyes."

Clothes also separate man from animals: animals live only by feelings, they have no yetzer hatove. So clothing also remind us not to be like animals that don't wear clothes, we are different than they are, and we should follow our yetzer hatove. So wearing Tzitzis on clothes, also reminds of those creatures that don't wear clothes, and they are animals that only have instincts and no yetzer hatove.

Now Dani, why do you think God placed this section of Tzitzis in His Torah, right after the story of the man who went outside and carried wood on Shabbos? Rabbi Hirsch said it was because outside, and on shabbos, this man did not have any mezuzah to remind him of God, and we don't wear tefillin on shabbos, so he had no reminders of God. So he broke the shabbos, since maybe he was cold, and wanted wood to make a fire that day or at night. He didn't stop to think about God's command not to break shabbos. Therefore, at this time in history, God created a new mitzvah of Tzitzis. The story of Tzitzis comes right after the story of the man carrying wood, to teach that Tzitzis comes to correct this man's mistake. Since outdoors and on shabbos he and no reminders of God that he could see, God said we must now wear Tzitzis so we always have a reminder of God and His mitzvos, and we won't sin so fast.

Why a blue string? Well, if you hold up a blue string to the sky, you can't see it, since it blends in to the same color as the blue sky. So the blue string reminds us again of what we cannot see, meaning God and His commands!

Dani, thanks so much for your question, and I hope you have a good shabbos. With your question and Rabbi Hirsch's answer, you both helped teach this important mitzvah of Tzitzis to 1000s of people!

I think you also see how much knowledge God placed in the Torah. Just from one question, we learned so many new ideas. But remember, you must review what you learn, if you want to remember it. So read this again.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Deuteronomy is Moses' farewell address, exhorting the nation in the Torah's fundamentals. It contains the second account of the Ten Commandments. Prior to repeating them to the nation, Moses emphatically asks the nation if God ever spoke to a people from amidst fire, or performed miracles, selecting one nation from another as He performed in Egypt. Moses means to say that God benefited Israel in two manners: 1) He demonstrated that He has a will for mankind – His Torah communicated through fire; and 2) He demonstrated that He protects those who follow Him, as evidenced in the miracles of the Exodus. In other words, the Torah lifestyle is a reality, as it is God's will. It is the purpose of our having been created. But it is also beneficial; to such an extreme that

God shields those who follow Him, providing great wonders for our good. Moses emphasized what great good God had bestowed upon this nation.

Moses then says this, *“You have been shown to know that Hashem is God, there is no other aside from Him (Deut. 4:35).”* Shown to “know”...not believe.

The Ten Commandments’ first law, and Maimonides’ first Principle states that we must “know” that God exists. This demands that man intellectually grasps what we mean by God. It is also not a matter subject to belief, as Moses teaches, “You have been shown to know”. God demonstrated His existence, and did so in a manner that allows us to “know” and not merely believe. But is belief beneficial, if we have not yet arrived at knowledge?

Belief is Meaningless

Let us assume a friend tells us that inside a closed box, there rests an item called “X”. Now, as I do not know what X is, does my agreement with him that X is inside, have any meaning? Is it of any worth at all, if I “agree?”

Well, what do I mean that I “agree?” It cannot mean that I have ascertained proof, since the box is closed, and I have not witnessed what this X is. I can “trust” my friend isn’t lying, but that trust offers me no knowledge whatsoever. I am still blind to what X is, regardless of my verbal statements.

Similarly, if my Rabbi were to tell me any idea, an idea that I have no way of proving, I am again no more informed if I say “I agree with you, since you are my Rabbi.” In halacha, yes: we must follow our Rabbis, as this is concerning how we “act,” not how we

think. But in philosophy, an area not subject to a *psak* or ruling, if even our Rabbi tells us an idea that we do not comprehend, my saying “I agree with you” is a meaningless statement. I cannot “agree” with that which my mind does not grasp. So if someone says any idea about God, an idea I do not see clearly as true with my mind, any agreement or belief is meaningless. Furthermore, I have not performed any mitzvah with my agreement; my agreement is also a lie, as I have not increased my knowledge, nor have I become any more devout to God. The converse is true: I have rejected reason and allowed myself to be fooled that I know something, which I do not. Torah is about truth. To say I agree with that, which I do not understand, is a lie.

The truth is, you, the reader, know the difference between knowledge and belief. You “know” who your parents are. But you only “believe” your cousin in Florida is wearing a blue shirt right now. You would not be any more informed by saying you agree that he’s wearing a blue shirt. You don’t know this is true and real. So your agreement is meaningless. Belief is meaningless. You must also feel it is equally meaningless to agree with any person, if you don’t see the idea as true with your mind.

You even possess knowledge – and not belief – of historical events, as you know that George Washington was the first president. Had this been a lie, it would not be the singular account found in history, unopposed by the “real” story. There would – at least – be two stories circulating. But there isn’t. This explains how God can say that His Revelation at Sinai would be a proof for “all time:” *“Behold I come to you in thick cloud, so that the nation hear when I speak with you, and also in you will they be convinced forever (Exod. 19:9)”*.

Moses was following God: just as God wished that man have a proof, Moses too reminded the people of what they saw, *“You have been shown to know.”*

Proof

Moses goes so far as to demand that we not only listen to an idea, but we consider it until it becomes a conviction in our hearts: *“And you shall know today, and place upon your hearts...”*³⁹ The Rabbis teach that this verse teaches two steps: 1) we know something by way of transmission from our Torah and Rabbis; and 2) that we place it on our hearts, meaning that we use reason to prove the matter to our minds. Rabbi Bachhya ben Joseph ibn Paquda (Duties of the Heart) teaches that if we fail to use reason to prove something to our minds, and simply rely on the authority of the Rabbis, we commit a sin to our Creator:

*Without knowledge of the fundamentals and foundations, and without practicing them, one simply cannot fulfill the commandments.*⁴⁰

*It is forbidden for one affirming Torah as true, to remain without knowledge, for the Torah warns on this, as it is written, “And you shall know today and place upon your hearts”*⁴¹

*Whomever has the intellectual capacity to verify what he receives from tradition, and yet is prevented from doing so by his own laziness or because he takes lightly God’s commands and Torah, he will be punished for this and held accountable for negligence.*⁴²

39) Deut. 4:39

40) Duties of the Heart, Feldheim english edition pg. 21

41) ibid pg. 23

42) ibid pg. 25

*If however, you possess intelligence and insight, and through these faculties you are capable of verifying the fundamentals of the religion and the foundations of the commandments which you have received from the sages in the name of the prophets, then it is your duty to use these faculties until you understand the subject so that you are certain of it – both by tradition and force of reasoning. If you disregard and neglect this duty, you fall short in the fulfillment of what you owe your Creator.*⁴³

Torah has no room for doubt, as God gifted us all with the ability to ascertain proof. Maimonides teaches⁴⁴ concerning someone who errs in any of the 13 Principles, that he/she is not entitled to Olam Haba:

And when one stumbles in a principle of these Principles, he is excluded from Klal Yisrael, he denies the essence [kofer b'ikkur], he is considered a heretic and an apikores, and it is a mitzvah to hate and destroy him.

This harsh statement must waken us all to the severity of these principles and the urgency of our immediate study and intelligent grasp of all 13 Principles.

God of Heaven and Earth

Now, who is our God? Moses makes it clear, “*For God is Governor [Elohim] in heaven above, and on the land below, there is no other (Deut. 4:39)*”. Moses means to teach that in all of creation, nothing

43) *ibid* pg. 27

44) Maimonides' Peirush Hamishnayos, Sanhedrin: chap. 10 (13th Principle)

exists that controls the universe. This must be so, since in all of creation, all is “created” and by definition, not the Creator! God alone created and runs the world. . .both realms, heaven and Earth.

This is so clear, that it boggles the mind when we find Jewish leaders and Rabbis, suggesting the heretical: they say “God fills up all space”, “God is everywhere”, and “a piece of God is in every man”. This violates the exact warning Maimonides gave, calling these people heretics with no world to come. Sadly, “Rabbis” teach this heresy, as does the Tanya. Yet, people are led to accept what is in print or repeated by those with Rabbinic titles and famous reputations. They fail at Moses’ teaching, to see truth. However, the truth is what God says through His prophets:

And (God is) not like one man that may be divided into many individual parts’ and also, ‘the Chachamim (wise men) denied God as being composite or subject to division’, and, ‘the prophet said (Isaiah, 40:25), ‘To what shall you equate Me that I should be similar, says God?’ (Principle III)

As God is dissimilar to anything in creation, God cannot occupy space; God cannot be divided where “parts” of Him are inside humans or anything else. Absurd. Moses does not mean God is “in” heaven or “on” Earth. He means that God’s “control” is exclusive over both realms.

“There is No Other”

This must be clear. We do not accept any intelligent being aside from God. This means we must reject notions of idolatry, superstition, omens, forces, amulets, mysticism, and all suggestions

that there are “controlling” or “ruling” forces, other than God. We must equally reject the practice of seeking protection and success by asking blessings from Rabbis. Why? Because Maimonides includes Reward and Punishment as one of these principles, which is throughout Torah. No Jew ever asked Moses for a blessing. They understood they can pray directly to God, and that Moses too, was a mortal, unable to do anything other than God’s commands. (Moses did not effectuate the Plagues; he acted as God commanded – to raise his staff – and God performed the miracle.)

God rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked, regardless of Rabbis’ blessings, which have no affect. This is a righteous and just system, not one where a wicked person gains success through a Rabbi. Jacob told this to his wife, *“Am I in God’s place (Gen. 50:19)?”* Jacob was angry with Rachel for asking him for help, instead of God.

The Silence

Yet, despite the severity of Moses’ teachings and Maimonides terrifying threats...few Jews take seriously these fundamentals. How many Jewish organizations, teachers and Rabbis insist these fundamentals be taught in every medium, until others possess this knowledge, and not belief, and no longer stumble? I also wonder why very few Rabbis fail to oppose heretical teachings that still go unchallenged within orthodox groups? If leaders fear man more than God, and desire positions instead of truth, we are in a sorrowful time. This appears to be the case, clearly marked by the absence of the Temple, *“Any generation in which the Temple is not rebuilt, is considered as if it was destroyed in its time”*⁴⁵. That means we need

45) Talmud Yerushalmi, Mesechet Yoma 1:1

much repair. And education of Torah fundamentals must be where we start.

We all must take a lesson from Moses. He did not fear admonishing the Jews. He possessed genuine concern for the notions each Jew possessed. I am gratified that one of my friends has continued to speak out against an erring, noted Rabbi and author on Torah fundamentals, as we all must. Others should take his courageous lead, insisting on truth, paying attention to God's words alone with no concern for reputations. We must care that others are no longer misled. We must act to ensure the most vital teachings are spread.

In the end, we learn from Moses and our great Rabbis that we must search for proof, and not simply rely on what we are taught. This is a sin. This violates God's words. We must know that no human has a monopoly on truth, and that Rabbis and books can – and do – transmit heresy. To confirm we do not harbor heretical notions, our only recourse is study and reason, as Rabbi Bachya teaches. We must be clear that God is unlike anything on Earth: He is not “in space”, nor is “part” of Him “in” us. We must know that nothing but God alone has any power. We must dismiss all fables of amulets, spirits, omens, horoscopes, blessings, consulting the dead, and the like.

We must seek and support truth.

HUMAN EQUALITY

Too often we hear the term “Jewish soul” expressing baseless, Jewish arrogance. Others accept the heretical belief that God literally blew a “piece” of Himself into man: “*And He breathed into his nostrils a living soul*” (*Gen. 2:7*) and, “*And God created man in His image; in the form of God He create him [man]...(ibid, 1:27).*” Certainly, if Maimonides, Ramban, Rashi, Unkelos and literally all other Rabbis rendered such anthropomorphisms as false and heretical, we must fully understand why these genius minds reinterpreted these verses, and then adopt their truths.

Maimonides teaches that since God is not physical, He possesses no physical qualities or accidents, such as “division” (13 Principles; Principle III; Yesodei HaTorah 1:7), All Rabbis agree; God has no “parts.” Thus, metaphors like the “Tzelem Elokim” (form of God) placed in man, must be understood differently: simply indicating the “higher status” which humans possess over all other creations. As a Rabbi taught, God called our soul “Tzelem Elokim” – including His name – to underscore the great potential of our souls. For only with our souls, can we learn about God. But in no way can God have parts, and therefore, man’s attempt to abandon responsibility by feeling God is “inside” him, is a fallacy. (This pantheistic view led Jews to believe that God existed even inside sin, and other absurdities.)

Ironically, these arrogant Jews contradict themselves, basing their view of a Jewish “superior” soul, on those verses above... which address the “gentile” Adam the First. Continuing with the Torah’s lessons, God’s selection of the convert Ruth as the forerunner of our future Messiah, and Kings David and Solomon,

clearly teaches that God finds no favorite in the Jew. In fact, God created man only once, and all humans are direct descendants of that first gentile couple. God never re-created man or the soul, giving the Jew a “new and improved model.” We all share the exact same design and potential. It was only due to mankind’s idolatrous sins and Abraham’s monotheistic lifestyle that God selected Abraham and his children to receive and guard the Torah...for “all” mankind. God’s plan was, and remains, that “*All sons of flesh call His name* (Alenu Prayer).” Furthermore, since God planned to give His Torah to descendants of gentiles, this means that gentiles are fully capable of practicing Judaism and obtaining Torah perfection. The born Jew has no advantage.

It is not the “receipt” of Torah that perfects humans, but our adherence to the commands...this applies to Jew and gentile alike. Human perfection is not a Jewish birthright, but an accomplishment, available to all God’s creatures. And if a gentile is wise, he will love the Torah as does a knowledgeable Jew, and he will take on more than his mere seven Noachide laws. He will see that God’s commands perfect a human, and he will wish to share in that lot. Converts throughout history showed themselves as the wisest members of society, many becoming great, Jewish leaders.

Those seven commands are not a “limit” for the gentile, or as some say, “their” system. A Rabbi once taught: the Noachide laws are the bare essentials that entitle a human to retain his right to life. It is not a system of perfection. Rather, Noachide laws are a starting point – not an exalted destination. Since the gentile is no different than the Jew, he too benefits equally by adhering to the Torah’s commands, as the Torah teaches:

“One Torah and one statute you shall have for yourselves, and the convert who dwells among you (Num. 15:16).” This proves all humans share the identical design and potential.

The foolish view that converts always had some Jewish “spark” is equally arrogant, and baseless. For all the Talmud means by *“future Jews and converts stood at Sinai (Shavuot 39a)”* is that any person who sees the truth of Torah, is “as if” he or she witnessed Revelation, which proves Torah beyond all doubt. Just as witnessing Sinai removed all doubt of God’s existence and the Divine nature of Judaism, those today who realize this truth are viewed “as if” they stood at Sinai. Equally true: a Jew today who abandons Torah is “as if” he wasn’t at Sinai.

Abraham was no more Jewish than Sodom’s sinful inhabitants annihilated by God. Abraham’s difference was in his use of his Tzelem Elokim, through reason alone, extricating himself from an idolatrous youth, and discovering and teaching monotheism to his fellow man. He viewed all humans as equal expressions of God’s will. All men are created equal.

Abraham was a prophet, and more perfected than anyone alive today: Jews and Rabbis included. He was not Jewish, yet God loved him. Talmud Sanhedrin 59a states: *“A gentile who studies Torah is akin to a High Priest.”* And the prophet Isaiah 2:2 teaches that in messianic times, gentiles will literally stream to Jerusalem to learn Torah. But gentiles cannot simply wake up one day and desire Torah, and thus, the Messiah cannot arrive...if Jews hide the Torah from gentiles by voicing acceptance of other religions. No, that deludes them into believing that we view their religions on par with Torah. However, the Torah teaches, *“From a false matter distance yourself (Exod. 23:7).”* Hence, we must be honest and clear:

Judaism views all others religions as imposters, since no other religion is God-given. This explains why others preach faith, and not proof, as does Judaism. Our core tenet is that Judaism alone is Divine, proven by the mass witnesses at Sinai...the same manner in which all history is proven. Such a mass revelation is absent in literally all other religions, and why we do not accept their baseless claims. Furthermore, if we recognize any other religion, we violate God's words: "*Do not add to it [Torah] and do not subtract from it (Deut. 13:1).*" All other religions defy God's fundamental directive in their addition to, or subtraction of Torah law. Again, God said, "*One statute shall be for you; for the convert and the born Jew of the land (Num. 9:14).*" This means no other laws are acceptable, for any people.

One other popular misquotation is from Job 31:1,2: "*A treaty have I made with my eyes; for what shall I gaze at a virgin? And what portion of God above shall I have, and an inheritance of God on high?*" Job rightfully defends himself, claiming that he never gazed at a woman for any other reason than examining her qualities, to determine if she was a fit bride for his sons. For by gazing longer, it would be out of lust, and he would forfeit his share of God's reward. But many Jews and a popular, chassidic work misquote this verse, illiterately isolating the words "portion of God above" ("*chelek Elokim mimaal*") to mean that God placed a part of Himself into man – truly an inexcusable corruption of Torah. This is also an outright denial of our greatest Rabbis who state such beliefs forfeit our Olam Haba, our afterlife. And this is all in the name of feeling that as Jews, we are better? Since when does illiteracy and denial of God's Torah and Rabbis elevate one's soul over the gentile?

In truth, the arrogance of these Jews, is the exact opposite trait which Ruth the convert expressed, and earned her great status, and the role as ancestor to Messiah and our great kings. God did not create gentile and Jew; rather, He simply created “man and woman.”

GENTILE & JEW EQUALITY

I add here another facet to human equality. God created one human pair: Adam and Eve. Noah and all others down to you and I descend from this couple. No one since Noah was created anew: no one possesses a different design than any one else. Therefore, it is incorrect to suggest there exists different types of humans. Thus, Jew and gentile are identical in design. Where we differ is not in our design or potential, but in our Torah obligations.

The Haftorah read on public fasts is Isaiah 55:6-56:8. My good friend Doug repeated a question that he heard concerning this portion: “Isaiah appears to suggest that a gentile must observe the Sabbath. While we know Sabbath observance is prohibited for gentiles, how do we understand this?” I would add that this portion indicates that without Sabbath observance and following all of Torah, the gentile will not share in the future good to be granted to the Jew. Is this so? And if it is, why isn't the gentile obligated in all of Torah? Is God playing favorites with the Jew, purposely excluding gentile from living the greatest possible life?

Let's review the text, and then offer an explanation:

Chap. 55

6. *Seek God when He can be found; call Him when He is near.*
 7. *Let the wicked person forsake his path and the man of sin [forsake] his thoughts and return to God and He will have mercy on him, [return] unto our God for He is abundant in forgiveness.* 8. *'For My thoughts are not like your thoughts and your ways are not like My ways', says God.* 9. *As the heaven as are higher than the land, so are My ways higher than yours and My thoughts from your thoughts.* 10. *For as the rain and snow descend from the heavens and to there [heaven] they do not return; rather they moisten the land giving birth and sprouting, giving seed to the planter and food to eat.* 11. *So will be the word that leaves My mouth, it will not return to Me empty: for it will do that which I desire, and it will be successful where I sent it.* 12. *For in joy you will go out and in peace you will arrive; the mountains and valleys will break forth before you in song and the trees of the field will clap hands.* 13. *In the place of the thorn bush a cypress will rise; and in the place of the nettle a myrtle will rise and this will be a monument to God, an eternal sign never to cease.*

Chap. 56

1. *Thus says God; observe justice and perform righteousness for My salvation is soon to come and My righteousness to be revealed.* 2. *Happy is the human who does this, and the son of Adam who seizes it; observing the Sabbath rather than profaning it and guarding his hand from doing all evil.* 3. *And let not the son of the stranger who attached himself to God say, 'God will surely separate me from His people and let not the barren one say 'Behold, I am a dry tree'.* 4. *For so says God to the barren who guard My Sabbaths and select which I desire and seize My covenant.* 5. *And I will give them a*

place and fame within My house and within My walls, better than sons and daughters and an eternal name I will give them that will never cease. 6. And the son of the stranger that attaches to God to serve Him and to love the name of God and to be to Him servants; all who observe the Sabbath instead of profaning it and seize My covenant. 7. And I will bring them to My holy mountain and I will gladden them in My house of prayer, their elevation offerings and peace offerings will find favor on My altar for My house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples. 8. The word of God, Who gathers the dispersed of Israel; 'I shall gather to him even more than those gathered to him'."

Radak and others who understand the "son of the stranger" (56:3) to be Israelites, do not address here the distinction between Jew and Noahide. Rashi and Metsudas David understand "son of the stranger" to be the gentile. Following these two Rabbis let us proceed to understand these verses.

Isaiah's Message

We are first told to seek God when He is near and can be found. This is a call to Jews sinning in action and in thought, to return to God...to reestablish a relationship with Him. Repentance is thereby defined as not simply ceasing from sin, but reconnecting with God. The Rabbis teach that God is "found" only when we are earnest in our desire to draw close and do not practice Torah in a rote fashion. Alternatively, He is "found" during our judgment (Rosh Hashanna or before death). For in these times reality hits us most, and we are genuine. God is also found (He responds) and

we can repent, only during life, for we are taught that after life we cannot repent.

But man has a hurdle: he feels that perhaps his sins are not worthy of forgiveness. Therefore God tells us that His ways are different than man's ways. For man will at times guard his hatred for others and never forgive. We project this onto God, but wrongly. God assures us that He is far above our ways and He fully forgives, recalling nothing of our sins, if we are sincere.⁴⁶ His promise is secure, "*as the rains and snow never return upwards,*" but successfully descend and water the Earth. So too, God's word is fulfilled, assuring us success in our repentance. Not only success, but also God says we become "*an eternal sign never to cease*".

Isaiah then addresses gentiles. For they too have a chance at the same life as the Jew. A new address is made, "*Thus says God... (56:1)*" indicating the audience is now shifted from the previously-mentioned Jews. God invites all to enjoy His "salvation," referring to the redemption. God clearly identifies this new audience of "humans" and "sons of Adam" to include all mankind. God teaches that true happiness is only achieved through the adherence to His entire system of 613 commands, termed as Sabbath and covenant.

So we answer the question above that while it is true that a Noahide is not permitted to observe the Sabbath, at the same time, his happiness and ultimate perfection relies on fulfilling all 613 commands. All will agree: with increased Torah observance comes increase perfection.

46) Ezekiel chap. 18 echoes this truth

Jew and gentile are equal. Just as the wicked Jew must return, forsaking sinful acts and thoughts, and adhere to the 613 to enjoy “an eternal sign never to cease”, so too a gentile is taught here to observe Sabbath and the covenant (i.e., all of Torah) if he too wishes the identical “an eternal name I will give them that will never cease”. (56:5)

All Men are Created Equal

Of significance is the parallel: Isaiah exposes the same concern shared by gentile and Jew: “*God will surely separate me from His people*”. Meaning, as Rashi states, the gentile feels he will not enjoy the reward of the Jew, “So why should I convert?” the gentile feels. Therefore, God corrects the gentiles’ false assumption, promising the identical reward: “*And I will give them a place and fame within My house and within My walls, better than sons and daughters and an eternal name I will give them that will never cease.*”

God concludes: “*...their [the gentile’s] elevation offerings and peace offerings will find favor on My altar for My house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples. The word of God, Who gathers the dispersed of Israel; ‘I shall gather to him even more than those gathered to him.’*” God refers to His house as a house of “all people”, and further, He says he will gather to Him peoples, in addition to the Jews.

God created all members of mankind with the same potential. The only difference is that the Jew was not given the choice to observe the 613 commands, while the gentile has this option. As the gentiles’ Noahide system is not a system of perfection, but an

entitlement to his right to life, he must abide by a bare minimum of laws. But the 613 is a system that enables any man and woman to achieve complete perfection.

The gentile has the opportunity that equals that of the Jew. Both Jew and gentile require actions to ensure their identical reward; the Jew must forsake sin and follow his obligation of 613 commands, and the gentile too can select this life. These are the two addresses in this portion.

As a final thought, why is the Sabbath singled out, if the entire 613 commands must be followed? This is because Sabbath recalls Creation, and it is Creation that bestowed equality on all men and women, whom God created as descendants of a single couple. Isaiah's words underscore a theme of human equality throughout all of these verses.

As this portion is read on public fasts, its intent is to assist in repentance, so we learn of God's appreciation of the hurdles blocking man's repentance, and how He assists our return to Him by assuaging our concerns: the same concerns shared by Jew and gentile, and assuring our success.

God's "equation" here of the Jew and the gentile is evidenced not only in the identical rewards enjoyed by both, but also in the identical concerns for the hurdles to repentance we both share, seeking to reestablish our relationship with God.

REINCARNATION

Saadia Gaon: "The Book of Beliefs and Opinions"⁴⁷

Yet, I must say that I have found certain people, who call themselves Jews, professing the doctrine of metempsychosis (reincarnation) which is designated by them as the theory of "transmigration" of souls. What they mean thereby is that the spirit of Ruben is transferred to Simon and afterwards to Levi and after that to Judah. Many of them would go so far as to assert that the spirit of a human being might enter into the body of a beast or that of a beast into the body of a human being, and other such nonsense and stupidities.

This in itself, however, indicates how very foolish they are. For they take it for granted that the body of a man is capable of transforming the essence of the soul so as to make of it a human soul, after having been the soul of a beast. They assume, furthermore, that the soul itself is capable of transforming the essence of a human body to the point of endowing it with the traits of the beasts, even though its form be that of men. It was not sufficient for them, then, that they attributed to the soul a variable nature by not assigning to it an intrinsic essence, but they contradicted themselves when they declared the soul capable of transforming and changing the body, and the body capable of transforming and changing the soul. But such reasoning is a deviation from logic.

The third [argument they present] is in the form of a logical argument. They say, namely: "Inasmuch as the Creator is just, it is

47) Yale Judaica Series, Vol. I "The Soul" chap. VIII pp 259

inconceivable that he should occasion suffering to little children, unless it be for sins committed by their souls during the time that they were lodged in their former bodies.” This view is, however, subject to numerous refutations.

The first is that they have forgotten what we have mentioned on the subject of compensation in the hereafter for misfortunes experienced in this world. Furthermore we should like to ask them what they conceive the original status of the soul to be – we mean its status when it is first created. Is it charged by its Master with any obligation to obey Him or not? If they allege that it is not so charged, then there can be no punishments for it either, since it was not charged with any obligations to begin with. If, on the other hand, they acknowledge the imposition of such a charge, in which case obedience and disobedience did not apply before, they thereby admit that God charges His servants with obligations on account of the future and not at all on account of the past. But then they return to our theory and are forced to give up their insistence on the view that man’s suffering in this world is due solely to his conduct in a previous existence.

KINDNESS, JUSTICE & RIGHTEOUSNESS

There are a few concepts germane to Tisha B’Av and repentance, *teshuvva*, highlighting some of that solemn day’s Torah readings. In addition, Tisha B’Av’s morning Haftorah addresses why God destroyed the Jews:

A slaughtering arrow is their tongue, deceit they speak with their mouths: they speak peaceably to their friend, and inside [their hearts] they plant their ambush. On these [people] shall I not visit them [with punishments] so says God; if with a nation as this, shall My soul not take revenge (Jer. 9:7,8)?

God describes the evil for which He punished the Jews: they were two-faced and wished the destruction of their peers. We learn that baseless hatred, *sinmas chinam* was the cause for the Temple's and the Jews' destruction. This sin stems from self-aggrandizement. We then understand the conclusion of Jeremiah's words:

So says God, 'let not the wise man praise himself in his wisdom, nor the mighty in his might, nor the wealthy in his wealth. But only in this let the one who praises praise...understand and know Me for I am God, performing kindness, justice and righteousness in the Earth, for in these do I desire, so says God (Jer. 9:22,23).

Since we learned that the Jews' sin was ego-motivated, the correction is to oppose the self with a true recognition of human equality through God's principles of kindness, righteousness and justice. Living as if one is the center of the universe allows one to trample underfoot another person. But recognizing another person with equal rights to one's self, we are enabled to treat them as ourselves...Hillel's very summation of the entire Torah, and Maimonides' concluding words in his "Guide". So important are these three traits, they are included in God's 13 Attributes, and they are God's consideration for giving Abraham descendants as numerous as the stars in heaven:

For I have loved him, for he commands his sons and his household after him, and he will guard God's path, performing righteousness and justice, in order that I bring upon Abraham what I spoke (Gen. 18:19).

We also mention these values in our daily prayers (Shmoneh Esray) three times a day, and in Ashray, again three times a day. What I would like to focus upon is why these three values are so central to Torah.

Chessed, Mishpat & Tzedek

What is kindness, *chessed*? Maimonides says this refers to acts of goodness towards one, upon whom nothing is due: i.e., a stranger, or even a parent, but giving him or her more than what is necessary. *Mishpat*, justice, is the act of rewarding the good in others, and punishing their evil. And *tzedek*, righteousness, is acting in accord with what is morally due, i.e., giving a poor person indebted to you his only coat at nightfall, so he might not be cold...even though that coat is your rightful collateral for his debt. But we find *tzedek* not only in connection with performing acts for “others”, but even towards one’s self, and surprisingly...even towards God! How do we understand these two additional cases of righteousness? Deuteronomy 6:25 reads, “*And righteousness will be to us, that we guard and observe to do all the commands...*” The righteousness here refers to doing what is morally correct for “ourselves”. It makes no difference that we are both, the acting and receiving party. For righteousness refers to any act, in which we uphold some moral truth. And as spiritual beings, we perform righteousness when we give our souls life through Torah observance.

But how does this explanation fit into God's praise of Abraham, "*And He took him outside and He said, 'Gaze now at the heavens and count the stars if you can count them' and He said, 'So shall be [numerous] your seed.' And he [Abraham] trusted in God, and He considered his trust as righteousness (Gen. 15:5,6).*" God says that He considered Abraham's trust in Him, as righteousness. This offers a deep insight into Abraham's keen perceptions, and that God recorded these words indicates that God desires us to know this perfection of Abraham.

What is this perfection? It is this: Abraham's sense of righteousness was not limited to the sphere of interpersonal relationships. Rather, Abraham's sense of righteousness was of such perfection, that he expressed it in relationship to God. Abraham's knowledge of God included the primary idea that God and truth are synonymous. Abraham understood God to be the source of all knowledge, and this reality to Abraham surpassed all others. It was this recognition that compelled Abraham to ask, "*How shall I know they [the Jews] will inherit the land (Gen. 15:8)?*" He never doubted God, but always yearned to know more about this Creator of the universe. His gravity towards this amazing truth – that the universe as magnificent as it is has a Creator – was so intense that Abraham did not flinch when asked to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac. His relationship with this Creator overcame his subjective wishes.

Now, as Abraham viewed God essentially as the One with ultimate knowledge, he knew that God's word must be synonymous with truth, for God's will is that knowledge permeates the universe, and that He created man alone with intellect, for the sole purpose of apprehending knowledge. This explains why Abra-

ham's trust in God is referred to as "righteousness." For Abraham paid to God what was due Him: i.e., trust. We then refine our definition of righteousness as "Giving what is due to any being:" giving food to the hungry, money to the poor, Torah observance to ourselves, and trust in God. All these acts would rightfully be termed acts of "righteousness."

So important is our correct understanding and performance of righteousness, that God records this praise for Abraham acting righteously...even towards God. On a deeper note, this means that Abraham was not moved by interpersonal considerations, where his self-image was central and needy of human accolades. Abraham's sense of what was most important in life was in the realm of God. His relationship with God surpassed all other concerns. It was however due to this relationship, that Abraham was so concerned for mankind, and why he risked life and health to teach others. He understood this to be God's will, and God's will was Abraham's life. Abraham's perfection is seen in his relating to God, as we relate to our friends. Just as we express kindness towards those in our lives, Abraham surpassed us, expressing trust in God, as his method of displaying his conviction in God's faithfulness. Trust for Abraham, meant conviction in God's attributes.

To Abraham, God deserved his acts of righteousness, as it is befitting God that man "trusts" the One, who is the cause of all "truths". Righteousness refers to acts befitting the recipient.

Why didn't Abraham act towards God with "kindness?" This is because kindness is applicable only in cases when the recipient is benefited, and nothing can benefit God. He is self-sufficient.

God's Ultimate Kindness

But now, let us understand why kindness, righteousness and justice are Torah fundamentals. One Rabbi explained Divine “kindness” as God’s creation of the universe and man, granting man existence so as to realize and enjoy the truth that God exists. Thus, God’s creation of mankind was the ultimate act of kindness, since we did not yet exist, and therefore, had no claim on God to do anything. His creation of us was with no obligation, no justice yet existed so as to demand He create man, and therefore, His creation of mankind is complete kindness.

When we are obligated by Torah to “be kind, since God is kind, to be merciful since God is merciful” we are in essence reflecting on God’s act of creation, His paradigm act of kindness. The Torah command to be kind, then, is really a means of recognizing God as “Creator.” For when we are kind, we do not follow our subjective notions and expression of kindness, but we must follow what God deems as kind. We do not heal murderers, or give money to idolaters. We must study God’s definitions, since He alone determines what is kindness. And when we study His methods, we arrive at the original act of kindness: His creation of us. We conclude that the command to “be kind” is truly targeting the greater goal of our recognizing God as “Creator.” And this concept is essential to our observance of the most satisfying life, since subservience to God’s will, means we are following the One who knows what is best for us.

Common Bond

These three values have a unifying theme: they all address the area of “relationships.” Kindness refers to relationships where the good is not necessary, but yet helpful; righteousness is when the good we do is warranted by the recipient’s condition; and justice refers to a necessary “response” to others (be it reward or punishment) with the objective of perfecting or deterring the recipient. In all three cases, we relate to another based on our assessment of what is beneficial, befitting, or warranted. In all three cases, we are sustaining what we determine is “good.”

A Rabbi once taught that although Torah study is the greatest mitzvah, it is essential that we enact those ideas we study. He explained that since man’s life centers around the realm of interpersonal relationships, it is in these innumerable interactions that we can express conviction in those learned Torah values. For with knowledge alone, and no expression of those values, man’s convictions are lacking. Humans are designed to express that, of which they are convinced. So the man who praises himself must praise that He knows God, who “performs kindness, justice and righteousness in the earth.” This means that just as God’s perfection is not theoretical, but put into practice, man too must emulate this great Divine perfection with his own actions.

Application to Israel

Another common bond is that all three perfections are truly proper, only because the recipient “deserves” our good actions. Situations deserve our good response if they meet with conditions approved of by God. God created life, so He alone deter-

mines when life is to be spared, or destroyed. As we mentioned earlier, we do not heal a murderer, but he is put to death. And in war, we must adhere to God's considerations, not the opinions of world leaders, political pressures, or our emotions evoked by pictures of dead children. God destroyed all life with His Flood, and on occasions, commanded us to do so, including children.⁴⁸ He teaches that there are times and conditions when life is not to be preserved. And if we ignore God's considerations that are based on the ultimate good for us, we will cause the ultimate harm to ourselves.

For this reason, it is vital that the IDF and Israeli leaders confer with independent thinking and well-versed Rabbis so they may learn what is considered "just" in God's eyes when in battle, so they may properly favor the lives of IDF soldiers, over alien civilians.

STARTLING LESSONS OF THE UNIVERSE

Nothing can create itself. For if a thing already exists, it cannot create itself again. And if it did not yet exist, there is nothing that can perform the creation. So, how did the universe get here?

Something other than the universe must have caused the Big Bang, the birth of the universe. Wise scientist do not postulate anything prior to creation. For they rightfully accept ignorance concerning anything that our senses cannot detect, and prior to

48) Deut 20:16

the “beginning” is beyond our senses. The Talmud (Chagiga 11b) agrees with these scientists. Other scientists propose a “multiverse” theory. This theory suggests an infinite number of universes, where the chance of one that perfectly functions for human life (our universe) was bound to happen. Using statistics as a crutch, such a theory attempts to remove God from the picture. These scientists suggest either an eternal chain of universes, or that something created the first in the endless series. The eternal chain theory is false, for we could never reach the present. The second theory demands God. And once we recognize the need for God to cause the numerous universes, why would this omnipotent Being “play dice with the universe,” when He can simply create a perfect universe the very first time? Also, a theory of infinite universes developed to escape the need for a God, begs the question: what causes infinitely varying designs of universes? Why can’t there be infinite universes of identical design? The multiverse theory actually requires a “Designer” in order to ensure that all succeeding universes purposefully differ from preceding ones.

Others suggest the universe always existed. These include Aristotle and Plato. Aristotle says the universe as we see it, always existed in this state. But he holds the universe was not God’s will: it is merely a natural result of God’s existence. Plato suggests matter was eternally present, but that God molded that matter into a designed universe. These thinkers are closer to the truth than scientists who do not attribute the universe’s existence to God. But both Aristotle and Plato claim matter existed eternally.

This is quite apropos to the 9 Days. We read Jeremiah’s (chap. 2) prophetic accusation of the Jews, as compared to other nations.

Jewish leaders became corrupt; our prophets lied to the nation that the god Baal communicated with them, the Jews left off serving God and exchanged Him for deaf and dumb idols. Jeremiah described how other nations never exchanged their gods, while the Jews were doubly evil by doing so: the Jews experienced real goodness from God's providence, but rejected Him. In contrast, other nations would, when pasture was exhausted by their flock, loyally carry their lifeless stone gods on their backs from place to place for better grazing. A wise Rabbi taught, other nations were proud of their heritage; the Jew was not. The critique: the Jews denied reality of the Exodus, the 10 Plagues, the Manna, the Well, the pillars of cloud and fire, and numerous historical truths where God benefitted us. Despite this, the Jews abandoned God. The other nations had a better reason to do so, since their gods never answered. Yet, we were the nation who denied reality, who denied God. When good is experienced, and yet, the recipients reject that goodness, the sin is all the more egregious.

For our sin of idolatry, God allowed our enemies to kill us and destroy the first Temple. How can we reverse the tide back towards acceptance of God and a rejection of atheism, non-religious life and the belief in idolatrous mystical beliefs? It is only through knowledge. So let us learn...

Maimonides teaches that the natural laws of creation seen in their current state today, did not operate during that thing's formation. The example he gives is of a human that requires daily air, food, and excretion. Yet, although for 9 months, the orifices enabling these bodily functions were not operational, the embryo

lived. And even prior to the formed embryo, the interdependency of organs did not yet function, yet, they lived. How the body functions now is not how it functioned during its formation.

Scientists accept a Big Bang where debris becomes a sun of a precise size and temperature. An Earth and a moon “end up” somehow at sizes and distances relative to each other, and to the sun, that are perfect for animal and plant life. Multi-decimal deviations in these measurements would end life. Somehow, plant and animal life contain nutrients that perfectly satisfy as food for animal life. Somehow, from chaotic explosions of brute matter, one species develops a spiritual element. But no one proposes exactly how a spiritual element emanates from a physical one. (Einstein marveled that the human mind can perceive the intelligence in creation.) Species somehow developed genetic structures that produce a circulatory system, a digestive system, the ability to heal, eyes to see, and a host of marvels that help perpetuate the species including sperm and eggs. All by accident? And what about natural “laws?” What caused their design and sustained patterns? Aside from the need for precipitation, an atmosphere, and that a weather pattern “developed by accident” and addresses this need, what guides all laws to “continue?” What determines that each object that reproduces, reproduces its own kind? Look at this page: would you accept that this could be created by random ink drops thrown at this paper? Yet, this is nothing in comparison to the design evidenced in the universe. And yet, scientists suggest a random cause of the universe. And if the universe developed randomly, as Maimonides asks, why do we not see randomness exhibited in the natural laws governing species, gravity, etc?

Clearly, there exists a Designer. During Creation, natural laws were not yet set; they were actually undergoing creation. So, as Maimonides teaches, the current laws of the universe do not dictate how matter was formed. And this makes sense, since the very formation of all creation, was not through itself. Therefore, the laws that belong to all creations now, were not yet existing at its creation: other forces were at work. Therefore we are unable to view current laws and suggest they operated during Creation. But what we do know, is that Creation was not unguided, as explosions occur today, without an objective and design. There is simply too much perfection and design to suggest the universe is an accident.

Therefore, scientists err when attempting to explain the origin of the universe based on laws witnessed today, the only laws we detect. It is as if a child suggested he was eating, excreting and breathing in his mother's body. So too the universe, but I will explain through a few astonishing points...

Matter requires creation; this law is part of its very design. Now think...as a law too is a created thing, the "need to be created" is only applicable to matter and its laws...not to the Creator. The Creator is not subject to the laws that He created. Thus, the need for creation as a means to exist, does not apply to God, Who created that very law. Think over this point.

The next point is this: as matter requires creation, it was made either from some previous matter, or from nothing. For we cannot suppose Z was made from Y, and Y from X, and X from W, ad infinitum back in time. If so, we never reach the "original cause," as there is no original cause in an eternal chain, and thus, nothing could exist. Think this through as well. These are not small points.

The first lesson is that God does not require creation to exist; this need applies only to created things. Lesson number two: if there was not an Original Cause, nothing could exist. Suggesting an infinite chain of causes is an impossibility. We conclude that there must have been some first matter, before which, no matter existed. This, Maimonides teaches, is the view of the Torah, that God created the universe from nothingness, *creatio ex nihilo*.

The other theory (Aristotle, Plato) of matter having existed eternally would mean that God did not design it based on His will. Maimonides teaches a desire to create, must precede its creation, and thus, matter did not always exist. Other arguments against eternal matter include the impossibility to alter that matter through miracles (which we know are historically proven). Now, since according to this view, it was not God's will that the matter existed, it therefore exists external to God's desire, as a "natural result" of God's existence, like a shadow, and thus, its design was not due to God's will. Therefore, God could not have altered natural law to create all the miracles He truly performed, had matter been eternal as God is eternal. Thus, we conclude matter was created by God's will from nothingness.

The quandary of the scientist is that he cannot move past nature; he does not see anything in the universe that came from nothing. So he accepts a baseless theory of an eternal universe, because of his mind's limitations. That's not a good reason to accept a theory. But even with our limitations, man can arrive at this most fundamental truth, as we learn from Abraham. Even though he was raised in an idolatrous culture, Abraham's mind was able

to recognize and become more attached to truth and reality, than to idolatrous fantasies and peer pressure.

There are 2 paths before us: imagination and reality. Tisha B'Av recalls the Jews who succumbed to their idolatrous fantasies. This was more attractive to their weak minds than following the truths of God's goodness they knew He performed. Recognizing God through the universe is a primary tool for mankind to return to its senses. A few words of Maimonides are appropriate here (Guide, book ii, chap xxiii):

You will, however, be able to decide the question, as far as necessary, if you free yourself from passions, ignore customs, and follow only your reason. But many are the conditions which must be fulfilled. First you must know your mental capacities and your natural talents: you will find this out when you study all mathematical sciences, and are well acquainted with Logic. Secondly, you must have a thorough knowledge of Natural Science, that you may be able to understand the nature of the objections. Thirdly, you must be morally good. For if a person is voluptuous or passionate, and, loosening the reins, allows his anger to pass the just limits, it makes no difference whether he is so from nature or from habit, he will blunder and stumble in his way, he will seek the theory which is in accordance with his inclinations. I mention this lest you be deceived; for a person might some day, by some objection which he raises, shake your belief in the theory of the Creation, and then easily mislead you: you would then adopt the theory [of the Eternity of the Universe] which is contrary to the fundamental principles of our religion, and leads to "speaking words that turn away from God." You must rather have suspicion

against your own reason, and accept the theory taught by two prophets [Abraham and Moses] who have laid the foundation for the existing order in the religious and social relations of mankind. Only demonstrative proof should be able to make you abandon the theory of the Creation: but such a proof does not exist in Nature.

Maimonides teaches that nothing in the observable universe directs us to abandon the theory of Creation. He also teaches that we must examine and manage our own emotions and loyalties, for these can corrupt clear thought, allowing us to accept fallacy and opinions that cater to our instincts. Maimonides does state that if the eternity of the universe was proven, we would have to reinterpret Genesis⁴⁹. Thus, he does not view an eternal universe as impossible, but rather, as unproven.

PUNISHMENT: MEASURE FOR MEASURE

God responds to man, “measure-for-measure” or in Hebrew, “Midda K’negged Midda.” This means that if man sins with evil speech, God will respond (if the man is worthy) with a commensurate punitive measure. For example, when Miriam spoke poorly about her brother Moses, God afflicted her with leprosy. In general, leprosy is visited upon one who slanders another. The justice or “measure-for-measure” here, as that since one slanders in order to destroy another so as to lift their own reputation and self-im-

49) Guide for the Perplexed, book ii chap xxv, last sentences

age, the proper response is that which isolates the person from the accolades of others and lowers them to reality: leprosy and isolation are therefore appropriate. Ego is the culprit, so degradation to one's image is the proper response, and leprosy accomplishes this.

God's justice is one in which He attempts to correct a person's or a nation's flaws, by addressing those very flaws: God will first inform the person where in their actions or thoughts lies their corruption, so the person might correct what was previously overlooked, or ignored. God also first visits the sinner with lighter measures, before resorting to more drastic ones. This is witnessed in God's deliverance of leprosy to the home first, then to one's clothing, and then finally if the person ignores the first two warnings, his body is afflicted.

Another example cited in Megilla 12b, is Achashverosh's queen Vashti. She was killed for refusing to appear in the nude before the king. This was in response for her sin of stripping the Jewish women and forcing them to work on the Sabbath. Vashti, and others who hear of Vashti's fate, are afforded the opportunity to again witness God's justice.

We also learn from the Rabbis, that if one let's slide the ridicule he received from others without response, God too will be light with such a person, and God will not take him to task, as He will do with others. What is the justice here? I believe this idea is that as this person does not value the abuse of another as something worthy of his response, this means that in his framework, such an act of abuse is not deemed by him as severe. This being the case, God will not deal severely with this man, when he does the same to another victim, since this man does not view the crime as a severe matter. The justice is that God will at times work within

man's framework, so man feels God is just. In other words, if a person simply did not deem some infraction as severe, for good reason, God will not hold him accountable for violating that very infraction. Similarly, a Rabbi recently stated that one who sins with a sudden impulsive passion, God does not punish him in the same measure as if committed in a premeditated manner.

In the Torah section Yisro, again we find this theme:

And Yisro was gladdened for all the good which God did for Israel, that He saved them from the hand of Egypt. And Yisro said, "Blessed is God that He saved you from the hand of Egypt and from the hand of Pharaoh; that He saved the people from under the hand of Egypt." Now I know that God is supreme from all other gods, for in the matter that they [Egypt] were judged (Exod. 18:9-11).

This last verse is a bit enigmatic, but Onkelos the proselyte explains: "Now I know that God is supreme and there is no other god than He; for in the thing which Egypt contemplated to judge Israel, they were judged." This means that as the Egyptians killed the Jewish infants via drowning, Egypt was drowned in return. The question is this: where in this "measure-for-measure" did Yisro find validation for God's superiority over other gods?

I do not know if there was one matter, which won over Yisro's praises for God to the exclusion of all imposters. For in God's measure-for-measure system, we learn many of God's praiseworthy traits: this implies God's knowledge of man's (Egypt's) actions viz., drowning infants; it teaches God's laws of justice, that He punishes man; it teaches that God controls the universe, as He suspends natural laws; it teaches that God wants the good for

man, and steers him towards it through punishments; and measure-for-measure teaches that God seeks to correct man. Perhaps in this last trait, Yisro found wherein God deviates from all other gods: He is the only God that interacts, while all others are inanimate stone idols and woodcarvings.

Looking even closer at Onkelos' words, he says, "*for in the thing which Egypt contemplated to judge Israel, they were judged.*" It appears that "judging" is an issue. Perhaps Yisro also saw this unique phenomenon: typically in his era, man projected the fallacy that lifeless idols governed and judged man. However, this was never corroborated by reality. Now, upon seeing that God returned upon Egypt their very judgment on the Jews of drowning them, Yisro was faced with the fact that not only can't idols judge, nor does man, but it is God alone. Lifeless idols do nothing, and even animated man may make plans...but God destroys idols, He overrides man's plans (Egypt's judgment to drown infants) and He drowns them. This incident of the Red Sea exposed all other would-be judges (idols and Egypt) as imposters. God alone judges man.

In the capacity of "judge" God demonstrates that nothing compares to Him. For although Egypt was so supreme as Yisro saw, yet, their attempt to drown Israel backfired: they were punished by a Power that exposed Egypt as truly powerless. Yisro saw that the fabricated authority assumed by various peoples and cultures are so tenuous. This contrast of Egypt's relative power, to God's ultimate power and justice, evoked a reverence to God in Yisro.

DESIGN IN NATURE

There exists a specific, purposeful design embedded in the natural world. The Rabbis used analogy to derive truths from them. For example, in Ethics of the Fathers, *Pirkei Avos*, 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.⁵⁰ The wise are viewed as an overflowing well.⁵¹ King David's first Psalm equates one who is praiseworthy to a tree, of which its leaves⁵² don't wither, and gives forth fruit⁵³ 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 lowliness, to be humble. Moses 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 exponentially-increasing events. In the food chain, smaller animals serve as

50) A metaphor for a firm foundation in Torah.

51) As a well nourishes, so does the creative Torah ideas "poured out abundantly" by the wise Rabbis.

52) Leaves parallel mundane speech, as leaves are of lesser importance than fruit.

53) Fruit refers to Torah speech; the more important "produce" of the righteous.

food for the larger, and those, serve as food for those even larger. 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. On the micro level, the leaf too works in this fashion: its stem derives nourishment from the branch and then delivers this nourishment to the leaf's veins and to the capillaries. This design is identical to vein structures: blood is pumped through larger arteries, to veins and to vessels. Also identical, are the forms of rivers emerging from mountains. Single, large rivers are formed, which offshoot into smaller streams, nourishing all life. Other streams merge with rivers and finally collect in the sea. On the largest scale, the universe is expanding, with galaxies of billions of stars each, propelled away from some previously located center by some "big bang."

In all cases, a single source 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, so much parallels this "branch design." This concept of a "source of nourishment" parallels God, 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 primary category or definition. If something is to be apprehended for 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 proper morality or corruption? All such 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. Thus, "a wooden object" does not define "chair;" but "a three or more legged object with a raised platform" is.

There are many categories in the universe, the largest being "created things." Within creation, we find two categories; metaphysical⁵⁴ and physical things. Within the physical, we find three subcategories; objects, events and behaviors. Within objects, we find three subcategories: animals, plants and elements. As we identify each category, we delve into each member, differentiated by variations. 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 branch of knowledge. Nature's cohesive design reminds us that there is a "Source" from

54) Things that are not physical such as ideas, natural laws and man's soul.

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.”

Why God designed the world 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, decay and disintegrate. Thereby, we learn that physical existence must not be God’s objective. Rather, the physical universe is a vehicle designed to generate inquiry: Why was this animal created with this unique feature? Why are there patterns of behavior in all elements? Why are there parallels between the universe’s design and the world of thought? Decay teaches that our attention must not end with what is temporal⁵⁵, but we must seek further; 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.

55) The physical world

This is our purpose, our obligation, our true happiness, and our design.

For 2448 years since Adam, Torah was not necessary: the world alone offered man all he needed to reach his goal. However, God's knowledge dictated that at a certain point in history, the Bible (Torah) was indispensable to man's goal. In His kindness to mankind, God gave us a Torah system to help man conquer his shortcomings, and advance his 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).

TO KNOW THE EXISTENCE OF THE CREATOR

Maimonides 1st principle:

To believe in the existence of the Creator, and this Creator is perfect in all manner of existence. He is the cause of all existence. He causes them to exist and they exist only because of Him. And if you could contemplate a case, such that He was not to exist...then all things would cease to exist and there would remain nothing. And if you were to contemplate a case, such that all things would cease to exist aside from the Creator, His existence would not cease. And He would lose nothing; and oneness and kingship is His alone. Hashem of strength is His name because He is sufficient with His own existence, and sufficient [is] just Him alone, and needs no other. And the existences of the angels, and the celestial bodies,

and all that is in them and that which is below them...all need Him for their existence. And this is the first pillar and is attested to by the verse, "I am Hashem your God (Maimonides 13 Principles; principle 1).

The single definitions of either, "God exists" or "God is the Creator" do not accurately represent Maimonides' precise formulation. For there is much more Maimonides includes in his words.

1) We must first "believe in the existence of the Creator."

That is, we must first realize:

- a. the universe owes its existence to an ultimate "Cause."
- b. This further means this cause is a single cause.
- c. Additionally, we must not subscribe to the alternate view of an eternal universe.

2) "The Creator is perfect in all manner of existence"

This means we must recognize that as the Creator, God has a certain "type" of existence. When the term "existence" is applied to both the universe and God, typically, one understands the existence of both to equate. Maimonides second point is to distinguish between God's existence, and the existence of all other things. All other things exist only accidentally. Meaning, of their own 'nature' (which too is not due to their own doing) all else has "dependent" existence. All else but God was "given" existence, and at one point in history, did not exist. This means that the universe's existence is not mandatory or absolute: it cannot exist on its own...it requires God's will to exist. In contrast, God's existence is not dependent. His very nature is to exist, whereas all created things by definition do not have existence as part of their nature.

3) Due to this distinguishing quality, Maimonides states “and oneness and kingship is His”

Can there be a king without subjects? This means that man – the only intelligent creature – must view God as king. The knowledge of God’s unique nature to eternally exist, and that He is the Creator (2 complementary truths) must generate in man a respect for God, as the “king.”

4) “Hashem of strength is His name”

Here, Maimonides says God has a name. A “name” by definition, is that which distinguishes one being from another. When applied to God, Maimonides means to teach that God’s uniqueness is “known,” it is famous. As in, “he made a name for himself.” Maimonides teaches an idea similar to that of Rav Hai Gaon, who said the first of the Ten Commandments – “I am God” – is in fact not a command. Rav Hai Gaon said that God’s existence is so apparent, it would belittle the honor due to God, had there been a command to know Him. God intentionally designed the universe precisely to reflect His existence and wisdom, so that mankind would stand in awe of God and all His marvels, and enjoy a life pursuing sciences, truths, and morality, to better understand the Creator. Thus, the overwhelming “apparent” wisdom reflected in the universe makes God’s existence undeniable. A command to know God would belittle the obvious nature of His existence.

5) “Because He is sufficient with His own existence”

We must not assume creation was made due to anything lacking in God, as if He has a motive, or a need, or loneliness. For motive, need and loneliness are all human traits. And, as God created

humans, He is not governed by human traits, i.e., His creations.

6) “And the existences of the angels, and the celestial bodies, and all that is in them and that which is below them...all need Him for their existence”

Finally, Maimonides teaches that although the earthly creations may not be on par with God's existence, man might falsely equate higher beings' existences to God's existence. Therefore, Maimonides dispels this fallacy as his final lesson of his First Principle. So, what is Maimonides' First Principle? It is this:

To realize the Creator.

To know He is one.

To reject the eternity of the universe.

To distinguish His existence from all else, knowing that He exist by His very nature, and all else has dependent existence.

That honor is due to God.

That His existence is obvious.

Not to project human motive onto God for creating the universe.

That He is elevated over all else, including the heavens and angels.

MAIMONIDES ON GOD'S PROVIDENCE

The Guide for the Perplexed

My opinion on this principle of Divine Providence I will now explain to you. In the principle which I now proceed to expound I do not rely on demonstrative proof, but on my conception of the spirit of the Divine Law, and the writings of the Prophets.

The principle which I accept is far less open to objections, and is more reasonable than the opinions mentioned before. It is this: In the lower or sublunary portion of the universe, Divine Providence does not extend to the individual members of species except in the case of mankind. It is only in this species that the incidents in the existence of the individual beings, their good and evil fortunes, are the result of justice, in accordance with the words, "*For all His ways are judgment.*" But I agree with Aristotle as regards all other living beings, and certainly as regards plants and all the rest of earthly creatures. For I do not believe that it is through the interference of Divine Providence that a certain leaf drops [from a tree], nor do I hold that when a certain spider catches a certain fly, that this is the direct result of a special decree and will of God in that moment; it is not by a particular Divine decree that the spittle of a certain person moved, fell on a certain gnat in a certain place and killed it. Nor is it by the direct will of God that a certain fish catches and swallows a certain worm on the surface of the water. In all these cases the action is, according to my opinion, entirely due to chance, as taught by Aristotle. Divine Providence is connected with Divine intellectual influence, and the same beings [man alone] which are benefited by Divine intellectual influence so as to become intellectual, and to comprehend things comprehensible to rational beings, are also under the control of Divine Providence, which examines all their deeds in order to reward or punish them.

It may be by mere chance that a ship goes down with all her contents, or the roof of a house falls upon those within; but it is not due to chance, according to our view, that in the one instance

the men⁵⁶ went into the ship, or remained in the house in the other instance: it is due to the will of God, and is in accordance with the justice of His judgments, the method of which our mind is incapable of understanding.

I have been induced to accept this theory by the circumstance that I have not met in any of the prophetic books with a description of God's Providence otherwise than in relation to human beings. The prophets even express their surprise that God should take notice of man, who is too little and too unimportant to be worthy of the attention of the Creator: how, then, should other living creatures be considered as proper objects for Divine Providence! Compare, "*What is man, that thou takest knowledge of him (Ps. cxlv. 3)?*" "*What is man, that thou art mindful of him (ibid. viii. 8)?*" It is dearly expressed in many Scriptural passages that God provides for all men, and controls all their deeds, e.g., "*He fashions their hearts alike, He considers all their works (ibid. xxxiii. 15)*"; "*For Your eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men, to give every one according to his ways (Jer. xxxii. 19).*" "*For His eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings (Job xxxii. 21).*"

In the Law there occur instances of the fact that men are governed by God, and that their actions are examined by him. Compare, "*In the day when I visit I will visit their sin upon them (Exod. xxxii. 34).*" "*I will even appoint over you terror (Lev. xxvi. 16).*" "*Whosoever hath sinned against Me, him will I blot out of My book (Exod. xxxii. 33).*" "*The same soul will I destroy (Lev. xxiii. 30).*" "I

56) Divine Providence relates to individual men, not only to the human species. Regarding the ship and all other minerals, animals and plant life, God does not relate to each individual member, as in the examples Maimonides cites. In these areas, natural forces or "chance" are at work. God is not willing these events. For why should God wish this lion to attack that deer? As animals and all other creations do not possess intelligence or morality and therefore are outside the system of justice, God's will that a specific animal be attacked is not reasonable. Merits and culpability cannot apply.

will even set My face against that soul (ibid. xx. 6).” There are many instances of this kind. All that is mentioned of the history of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is a perfect proof that Divine Providence extends to every man individually. But the condition of the individual beings of other living creatures is undoubtedly the same as has been stated by Aristotle. On that account it is allowed, even commanded, to kill animals; we are permitted to use them according to our pleasure. The view that other living beings are only governed by Divine Providence in the way described by Aristotle, is supported by the words of the Prophet Habakkuk. When he perceived the victories of Nebuchadnezzar, and saw the multitude of those slain by him, he said, “*O God, it is as if men were abandoned, neglected, and unprotected like fish and like worms of the earth.*” He thus shows that these classes are abandoned. This is expressed in the following passage: “*And makest men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them. They take up all of them with the angle...(Hab. i. 14, 15).*” The prophet then declares that such is not the case; for the events referred to are not the result of abandonment, forsaking, and absence of Providence, but are intended as a punishment for the people, who well deserved all that befell them. He therefore says:, “*O Lord, Thou hast ordained them for judgment, and O mighty God, Thou hast established them for correction (ibid. ver. 12).*” Our opinion is not contradicted by Scriptural passages like the following, “*He giveth to the beast his food (Ps. cxlvii. 9)*”; “*The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God (ibid. CiV. 2 1)*”; “*Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing (ibid. cxlv. 16)*”; or by the saying of our Sages, “*He sitteth and feedeth all, from the horns of the unicorns even unto the eggs of insects.*” There are many similar sayings extant in

the writings of our Sages, but they imply nothing that is contrary to my view. All these passages refer to Providence in relation to species, and not to Providence in relation to individual animals. The acts of God are as it were enumerated; how He provides for every species the necessary food and the means of subsistence. This is clear and plain. Aristotle likewise holds that this kind of Providence is necessary, and is in actual existence. Alexander also notices this fact in the name of Aristotle, viz., that every species has its nourishment prepared for its individual members, otherwise the species would undoubtedly have perished. It does not require much consideration to understand this. There is a rule laid down by our Sages that it is directly prohibited in the Law to cause pain to an animal, and is based on the words, "*Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass... (Num. xxii. 32)?*" But the object of this rule is to make us perfect; that we should not assume cruel habits, and that we should not uselessly cause pain to others: that, on the contrary, we should be prepared to show pity and mercy to all living creatures, except when necessity demands the contrary, "*When thy soul longeth to eat flesh, etc. (Deut. xii. 20).*" We should not kill animals for the purpose of practicing cruelty, or for the purpose of play. It cannot be objected to this theory, "Why should God select mankind as the object of His special Providence, and not other living beings?" For he who asks this question must also inquire, "Why has man alone, of all species of animals, been endowed with intellect?" The answer to this second question must be, according to the three afore-mentioned theories: It was the Will of God, it is the decree of His Wisdom, or it is in accordance with the laws of Nature. The same answers apply to the first question. Understand thoroughly my theory, that I do not ascribe to

God ignorance⁵⁷ of anything or any kind of weakness; I hold that Divine Providence is related and closely connected with the intellect, because Providence can only proceed from an Intelligent being, from a being that is itself the most perfect Intellect. Those creatures, therefore, which receive part of that intellectual influence, will become subject to the action of Providence in the same proportion as they are acted upon by the Intellect. This theory is in accordance with reason and with the teaching of Scripture, whilst the other theories previously mentioned either exaggerate Divine Providence or detract from it. In the former case they lead to confusion and entire nonsense, and cause us to deny reason and to contradict that which is perceived with the senses. The latter case, viz., the theory that Divine Providence does not extend to man, and that there is no difference between man and other animals, implies very bad notions about God; it disturbs all social order, removes and destroys all the moral and intellectual virtues of man.

Chapter XVIII

Having shown in the preceding chapter that of all living beings mankind alone is directly under the control of Divine Providence, I will now add the following remarks.

It is an established fact that species have no existence except in our own minds.⁵⁸ Species and other classes are merely ideas formed in our minds, whilst everything in real existence is an in-

57) God not engaging in individual providence over minerals, animals or plants, is not due to His ignorance of them.

58) Like any other "idea", a "species" is not a physical entity; we don't perceive a species. We perceive animals. We then use our minds and categorize animals sharing common features, and label them a "species." Similarly, we do not see 3 or 4 deer, but we see animals, which we label as "deer" and then attribute a number in our minds.

dividual object, or an aggregate of individual objects. This being granted, it must further be admitted that the result of the existing Divine influence that reaches mankind through the human intellect, is identical with individual intellects really in existence, with which, e.g., Jonathan, Aron and Benjamin, are endowed. Hence it follows, in accordance with what I have mentioned in the preceding chapter, that the greater the share is which a person has obtained of this Divine influence, on account of both his physical predisposition and his training, the greater must also be the effect of Divine Providence upon him, for the action of Divine Providence is proportional to the endowment of intellect, as has been mentioned above. The relation of Divine Providence is therefore not the same to all men; the greater the human perfection a person has attained, the greater the benefit he derives from Divine Providence. This benefit is very great in the case of prophets, and varies according to the degree of their prophetic faculty: as it varies in the case of pious and good men according to their piety and uprightness. For it is the intensity of the Divine intellectual influence that has inspired the prophets, guided the good in their actions, and perfected the wisdom of the pious. In the same proportion as ignorant and disobedient persons are deficient in that Divine influence, their condition is inferior, and their rank equal to that of irrational beings: and they are "*like unto the beasts (Ps. xlix. 21).*" For this reason it was not only considered a light thing to slay them, but it was even directly commanded for the benefit of mankind. This belief that God provides for every individual human being in accordance with his merits is one of the fundamental principles on which the Law is founded.

Consider how the action of Divine Providence is described in reference to every incident in the lives of the Patriarchs, to their occupations, and even to their passions, and how God promised to direct His attention to them. Thus God said to Abraham, “*I am thy shield (Gen. xv. 1),*” to Isaac, “*I will be with thee, and I will bless thee (ibid. xxvi. 3),*” to Jacob, “*I am with thee, and will keep thee (ibid. xxviii. 15),*” to [Moses] the chief of the Prophets, “*Certainly I will be with thee, and this shall be a token unto thee (Exod. iii. 12),*” to Joshua, “*As I was with Moses, so I shall be with thee (Josh. i. 5).*” It is clear that in all these cases the action of Providence has been proportional to man’s perfection. The following verse describes how Providence protects good and pious men, and abandons fools: “*He Will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness: for by strength shall no man prevail (I Sam. ii. 9).*” When we see that some men escape plagues and mishaps, whilst others perish by them, we must not attribute this to a difference in the properties of their bodies, or in their physical constitution, “*for by strength shall no man prevail,*” but it must be attributed to their different degrees of perfection; some approaching God, whilst others moving away from Him. Those who approach Him are best protected, and “*He will keep the feet of his saints,*” but those who keep far away from Him are left exposed to what may befall them; there is nothing that could protect them from what might happen, they are like those who walk in darkness, and are certain to stumble. The protection of the pious by Providence is also expressed in the following passages: “*He keepeth all his bones (Ps. xxxiv. 2 1),*” “*The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous (ibid. ver. 16),*” “*He shall call upon Me and I shall answer him (ibid. xd. 15).*” There are in Scripture many more passages expressing the principle that men enjoy Di-

vine protection in proportion to their perfection and piety. The philosophers have likewise discussed this subject. Abu-nasr, in the Introduction to his Commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, says as follows, "Those who possess the faculty of raising their souls from virtue to virtue obtain, according to Plato, Divine protection to a higher degree."

Now consider how by this method of reasoning we have arrived at the truth taught by the Prophets, that every person has his individual share of Divine Providence in proportion to his perfection. For philosophical research leads to this conclusion, if we assume, as has been mentioned above, that Divine Providence is in each case proportional to the person's intellectual development. It is wrong to say that Divine Providence extends only to the species, and not to individual beings, as some of the philosophers teach. For only individual beings have real existence, and individual beings are endowed with Divine Intellect; Divine Providence acts, therefore, upon these individual beings.

Study this chapter as it ought to be studied; you will find in it all the fundamental principles of the Law; you will see that these are in conformity with philosophical speculation, and all difficulties will be removed; you will have a clear idea of Divine Providence.

After having described the various philosophical opinions on Providence, and on the manner how God governs the Universe.

[This ends Maimonides' words on God's Providence]

GOD'S JUSTICE: INTRODUCTION

Why do evil people live and prosper?

Why do good people suffer?

Who deserves God's providence?

When does God mete out reward and punishment?

Are our calamities God's doings, or results of our errors?

How do we determine if any event is a benefit, or an evil?

What is good and what is evil?

Is God just?

Few matters are more central than the topic of God's justice. We may view an experience as unjust, until we become wiser and learn how we benefitted, or learn how we deserved a punishment. Until the end of our lives, any given event may yet have ramifications that can turn an apparent good into an evil, and vice versa. Wisdom is the only means to answer our questions, and we must be humble enough to admit we do not possess God's absolute knowledge. Although this topic is too broad to assess all cases, we must proceed to study what we can.

GOD'S JUSTICE I: GOD KNOWS ALL AND HE IS JUST

God cannot create something, without knowledge of His creation. God is aware of all He created. God is aware of each person, our daily activities, our successes, failures, and even our thoughts.

In the Ashray psalm, King David taught:

God is good to all, and His mercies are upon all His works. God supports all the fallen, and He sets upright all who are bent. You open Your hand and satisfy the needs of all life. Righteous is God in all His ways, and pious in all His acts. God is close to all who call Him, to all who call Him in truth. The will of His fearers He performs, and their cries He hears and saves them. God guards all who love Him and all wicked people He destroys (Psalm 145).

It is notable that King David repeats the word “all” throughout this psalm and again earlier in Psalm 34, “*Many evil befall the righteous person, and God saves him from all of them (34:20).*” This means God is consistently good. If two men are perfectly upright, God will not afflict one and save the other: He will save both. “All” perfectly righteous and deserving people receive God’s goodness. Additionally, God is good “all” the time. This is King David’s message. Nothing prevents God from meting out perfect justice. A building can collapse but God ensures that a righteous tenant leaves to escape any harm.

Questions concerning righteous people and their sufferings arise due to our ignorance of people’s true character, or the true character of the “evil” such people endure. As we said above, it is possible what seems evil, ends up as a great benefit. People get stitches due to a car crash. Detained in the emergency room, they are detained from their flight that crashes. The car crash was a good. Others win lotteries only to suffer the tragic deaths of their family members who squander the wealth on drugs. The wealth

in this case became an evil, and people harm themselves through their free will.

But what about real evils? Why do people who are apparently righteous endure such pain? Maimonides addresses this very point in his Guide for the Perplexed (Book III, chap. XXIV):

People have generally the notion that trials consist in afflictions and mishaps sent by God to man, not as punishments for past sins, but [wrongly] as giving opportunity for great reward. This [reward] principle is not mentioned in Scripture in plain language, and it is only in one of the six places referred to that the literal meaning conveys this notion. I will explain the meaning of that passage later on. The principle taught in Scripture is exactly the reverse; for it is said; "He is a God of faithfulness, and there is no iniquity in him (Deut. 32:4)." The teaching of our Sages, although some of them approve this general belief [concerning trials], is on the whole against it. For they say, "There is no death without sin, and no affliction without transgression (Tal. Sabbath 55a)." Every intelligent religious person should have this faith, and should not ascribe any wrong to God, Who is far from it; he must not assume that a person is innocent and perfect and does not deserve what has befallen him.

Read that again: "He must not assume that a person is innocent and perfect and does not deserve what has befallen him." God knows every last detail of all His creatures. It is God's omniscience and steadfast trait of justice that convinced King David that "God is good to all, and His mercies are upon all His works." No one today would suggest he is wiser than King David or Maimonides. The

scope, depth and brilliance of their works demands at the least, that we consider what caused King David and Maimonides to accept God as perfectly just.

It is crucial that you do not evaluate a single quote isolated from the rest of what is written concerning God's justice. Reading the above alone, one might argue that he has done nothing to deserve a calamity. So we must study further. It could be nature, human aggression, or that a person made a foolish choice five years ago that finally meets up with him and destroys his life. In his *Guide for the Perplexed*, Maimonides addresses these three classes of evil in book III, chap. XII reprinted in the following chapter.

GOD'S JUSTICE II: THREE KINDS OF EVIL

(1) The first kind of evil is that which is caused to man because he possesses a body. Some persons have great deformities or paralysis of some of the organs. This evil may be part of the natural constitution of these persons, or may have developed subsequently in consequence of changes in the elements, e.g., through bad air, or thunderstorms or landslips. We have already shown that, in accordance with the divine wisdom, genesis can only take place through destruction⁵⁹, and without the destruction of the individual members of the species the species themselves would not exist permanently. Thus the true kindness, and beneficence and goodness of God is clear.

59) Man's aging is his movement towards death. Only through aging does an infant develop the capacity to procreate.

He who thinks that he can have flesh and bones without being subject to any external influence, or any of the accidents of matter, unconsciously wishes to reconcile two opposites, viz., to be at the same time subject and not subject to change. If man were never subject to change there could be no generation: there would be one single being, but no individuals forming a species. Galen, in the third section of his book, The Use of the Limbs, says correctly that it would be in vain to expect to see living beings formed of the blood of menstruous women and the semen virile, who will not die, will never feel pain, or will move perpetually, or will shine like the sun. This dictum of Galen is part of the following more general proposition: Whatever is formed of any matter receives the most perfect form possible in that species of matter: in each individual case the defects are in accordance with the defects of that individual matter. The best and most perfect being that can be formed of the blood and the semen is the species of man, for as far as man's nature is known, he is living, reasonable, and mortal. It is therefore impossible that man should be free from this species of evil. You will, nevertheless, find that the evils of the above kind which befall man are very few and rare: for you find countries that have not been flooded or burned for thousands of years: there are thousands of men in perfect health, deformed individuals are a strange and exceptional occurrence, or say few in number if you object to the term exceptional, they are not one-hundredth, not even one-thousandth part of those that are perfectly normal.

(2) *The second class of evils comprises such evils as people cause to each other, when, e.g., some of them use their strength against others. These evils are more numerous than those of the first kind: their causes are numerous and known; they likewise originate in ourselves, though the sufferer himself cannot*

avert them. This kind of evil is nevertheless not widespread in any country of the whole world. It is of rare occurrence that a man plans to kill his neighbor or to rob him of his property by night. Many persons are, however, afflicted with this kind of evil in great wars: but these are not frequent, if the whole inhabited part of the earth is taken into consideration.

(3) The third class of evils comprises those which every one causes to himself by his own action. This is the largest class, and is far more numerous than the second class. It is especially of these evils that all men complain, only few men are found that do not sin against themselves by this kind of evil. Those that are afflicted with it are therefore justly blamed in the words of the prophet, "This hath been by your means (Malachi I. 9)", the same is expressed in the following passage, "He that does it destroys his own soul (Prov. vi. 32)." In reference to this kind of evil, Solomon says, "The foolishness of man perverts his way (ibid. xix. 3)." In the following passage he explains also that this kind of evil is man's own work, "Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright, but they have thought out many inventions (Eccles.vii. 29)", and these inventions bring the evils upon him. The same subject is referred to in Job, "For affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground (Job 5:6)." These words are immediately followed by the explanation that man himself is the author of this class of evils, "But man is born unto trouble." This class of evils originates in man's vices, such as excessive desire for eating, drinking, and love; indulgence in these things in undue measure, or in improper manner, or partaking of bad food.

This first lesson is that all evils are of 3 kinds: 1) Natural evils, which are few in our lives, like sickness and floods; 2) human aggression; and 3) our own foolishness. Thus, all of these evils are not due to God. And if you were to ask why God must create sickness and aging, then you are asking why He made humans and the natural world in the way He did. But this question has two fatal defects: 1) we would not be human, had God changed a single thing; 2) this question can only be asked if you can produce a better alternative, which no one can. Only the Creator knows why the natural world must be designed as it is and why mankind demands the design we bear. Regarding floods, tsunamis, etc., these must occur due to the design of the Earth. Rain and mountains create valleys through which water reaches communities distant from reservoirs. But this combination of rain and topography also creates floods and landslides. Wise people don't build their homes on mountainsides or areas known to be flooded. We can use intelligence to steer clear of most anticipated harm.

Our knowledge as an "observer" of the universe is defective. As a wise Rabbi recently stated, "We are within the universe, and limited in our understanding as we too are creations, and not the Creator who is 'external' to the universe." This may be explained by an example. A person is created deformed. He did not live yet so as to sin, to deserve this deformity. Man might view this as an injustice, for we are limited to observe the universe alone, and this forces our error. However, God knows all ramifications had this person not been deformed: life may have played-out a more severe hand to this person. Had he not been deformed and lived another path in life, he may have met with a brutal fate. We don't know, so we cannot say his deformity is an evil, and that God is

unjust in creating him that way. Rashi actually teaches that Chanoch was “taken by God” before his time to prevent him from caving to a destructive lifestyle. God killed him earlier to preserve his righteous state, before he might corrupt his soul. (Gen. 5:24) Similarly, during the first Temple, according to one view, the righteous were killed first so they were saved from witnessing the nations’ death, and the pain it could have caused them. This view suggests that the typical interpretation of death as an “evil”, is in fact false. Death can be a benefit, since the soul continues. More likely, in God’s best design for human beings, which demands chromosomes, genes and racial mixtures, there will be rare deformities when some genes combine. But the rare effects do not warrant God refraining from creating the rest of mankind. (Many times, the deformed person fully accepts his or her deformity; it is we who are bothered.) Similar to what Maimonides stated above quoting Galen, God’s design of a being with soft muscles and hard bones subjects that being to suffering if he comes in contact with harder substances. Nonetheless, the human design is amazing and offers us tremendous goodness. We are then careful to preserve our lives by steering clear from any dangerous situation. To be clear, we cannot suggest with accuracy an explanation for a specific natural deviation. This is only known by God.

So we note 3 types of evils, and not one casts any injustice on God, as King David said.

The reason God’s punishments are not included in Maimonides’ list of evils, is because they are not evil, but corrective measures: “*For those whom God loves, does He rebuke (Proverbs 3:12).*” Fortunate is the man or woman who attracts God’s discipline. This means God knows such a person will repent and improve due to

His lessons. That is why God “loves” such a person. God redirects a righteous person onto the right path, and at times this might be a disturbing circumstance. But since it is for the person’s benefit, it is not an evil. But who is on the level where he or she deserves God’s providence? That, Maimonides addresses a few paragraphs further.

GOD’S JUSTICE III: HOLOCAUST/GOD HIDING HIS FACE

God teaches us in His Torah that He will administer a “hiding of His face” (providence) if we become so vile to deserve this. Our Rabbis have applied this to the Holocaust. During the first Temple too, we suffered greatly due to our sin of idolatry. And there, God says He commenced the deaths of Jews with the elders. How do we understand that? And during such a dark period, are the righteous swept away with the evil Jews? Talmud Sabbath 54b-55a conveys some surprising details:

Whoever can forbid his household [to commit a sin] but does not, is punished for [the sins of] his household; [if he can forbid] his fellow citizens, he is punished for [the sins of] his fellow citizens; if the whole world, he is punished for [the sins of] the whole world. R. Papa observed, “And the members of the Resh Galutha’s [household] are punished for the whole world. Even as R. Hanina said, why is it written, “The Lord will enter into judgement with the elders of his people, and the princes thereof.” If the Princes sinned, how did the elders sin?

But say, [He will bring punishment] upon the elders because they do not forbid the princes.

R. Aba b. R. Hanina said, "Never did a favorable word go forth from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, of which He retracted for evil, except the following case where it is written: 'And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set the letter Tav upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof, etc.' The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Gabriel [Ezek. 9], 'Go and set a Tav of ink upon the foreheads of the righteous, that the destroying angels may have no power over them; and a Tav of blood upon the foreheads of the wicked, that the destroying angels may have power over them.' Said the Attribute of Justice before the Holy One, blessed be He, 'Sovereign of the Universe! Wherein are these different from those?' God replied, 'Those are completely righteous men, while these are completely wicked.' The Attribute of Justice replied, 'Sovereign of the Universe, they had the power to protest but did not.' God replied, 'It is fully known before Me that had they protested the wicked ones would not have listened to them.' The Attribute of Justice replied, 'Sovereign of the Universe, if it was revealed to Thee, was it revealed to them?'

Hence it is written, '[Slay utterly] the old man, the young and the maiden, and little children and women; but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my Sanctuary [mikdash]. Then they began at the elders which were before the house.'" Rabbi Joseph recited: "Read not mikdash but mekuddashay [my sanctified ones]: this refers to the people who fulfilled the Torah from alef to Tav.

This last quote states that God instructed His destroyers not to afflict the elders, *“but come not near any man upon whom is the mark.”* This is followed by a statement of elders being killed first, *“Then they began with the elders which were before the house.”* Thus, God appears to have recanted His former decree to spare the elders. But we must understand: God does not change His mind since all is known by Him. Nor does there exist a separate being (the Attribute of Justice) with whom God converses. This metaphoric portion requires interpretation.

Idolatry is the worst sin. In a vision, God took Ezekiel to Jerusalem and showed him just how rampant idolatry had become. They worshipped the sun and idols, even within the Temple. The Jews deserved death.

God does not recant. However, there were elders who “sighed and cried” concerning the sins of the Jewish idolaters. Thus, they did not sin. How do we understand what appears to be a “change” in God’s mind regarding those elders? Why were they killed too?

The Talmud’s dialogue must be understood in human terms. The Rabbis – the authors of the Talmud – constructed this Talmudic portion as a metaphor. Their lesson is that although God has no parts (individual attributes), at times people are saved, punished, or killed. Thereby, man perceives God at one time as merciful and at other times, strictly just.

In this historical instance many Jews deserved death. But some elders did not sin at all and actually fulfilled the entire Torah. God’s preference is not that man dies, but that he repents: *“Do I truly desire the death of the sinner, says God Elohim. Is it not his repentance from his ways [that I seek] and that he lives (Ezek. 18:23)?”* This is what is meant by God marking the elders for life with a Tav, the

letter commencing the word “tichyeh,” to live. It refers to God’s “preference,” as if God did this first. But in this sin, God could not exempt the elders from the fate of death received by their brothers and sisters, since the elders failed to rebuke the Jews. Thus, Ezekiel says, “*Then they began with the elders which were before the house.*” Meaning, God commenced the killing with these elders. This is the one case where God’s preference of His mercy bowed out to His justice. However, the additional lesson is this: had the elders rebuked the nation, they would have been spared. God does not punish a wholly righteous person. This is not only learned from this story, but also from Abraham and Sodom. Abraham said, “*It is improper for You to act so, to kill the righteous [together] with the wicked, and the fate of the righteous will equal that of the wicked. It is improper for You. The Judge of the entire Earth won’t perform justice (Gen. 18:25)?!*” This was not a question. Abraham was certain that He who is the Judge, will be completely just. It is wrong to suggest God kills the righteous together with wicked, that they meet the same fate. Maimonides addresses this topic of God “hiding His face” from us (Guide for the Perplexed, book III, chap. LI):

Hence it appears to me that it is only in times of such neglect that some of the ordinary evils befall a prophet or a perfect and pious man: and the intensity of the evil is proportional to the duration of those moments, or to the character of the things that thus occupy their mind. Such being the case, the great difficulty is removed that led philosophers to assert that Providence does not extend to every individual, and that man is like any other living being in this respect, viz., the argument based on the fact that good and pious men are afflicted

with great evils. We have thus explained this difficult question even in accordance with the philosophers' own principles. Divine Providence is constantly watching over those who have obtained that blessing which is prepared for those who endeavor to obtain it. If man frees his thoughts from worldly matters, obtains a knowledge of God in the right way, and rejoices in that knowledge, it is impossible that any kind of evil should befall him while he is with God, and God with him. When he does not meditate on God, when he is separated from God, then God is also separated from him; then he is exposed to any evil that might befall him; for it is only that intellectual link with God that secures the presence of Providence and protection from evil accidents. Hence it may occur that the perfect man is at times not happy, whilst no evil befalls those who are imperfect; in these cases what happens to them is due to chance. This principle I find also expressed in the Law. Compare, "And I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them: so that they will say in that day, 'Do not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us (Deut. xxxi. 17)?" It is clear that we ourselves are the cause of this hiding of the face, and that the screen that separates us from God is of our own creation. This is the meaning of the words, "And I will surely hide my face in that day, for all the evils which they shall have wrought (ibid. ver. 18)." There is undoubtedly no difference in this regard between one single person and a whole community. It is now clearly established that the cause of our being exposed to chance, and abandoned to destruction like cattle, is to be found in our separation from God. Those who have their God dwelling in their hearts, are not touched by any evil whatever. For God says, "Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God (Isa. xli. 10)." "When thou pass through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee (ibid. xliii 2)." For if we

prepare ourselves, and attain the influence of the Divine Intellect, Providence is joined to us, and we are guarded against all evils. Compare, "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear; what can man do unto me (Ps. cxviii. 6)?" "Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace (Job xxii 21)"; i.e., turn unto Him, and you will be safe from all evil.

Consider the Psalm on mishaps, and see how the author describes that great Providence, the protection and defense from all mishaps that concern the body, both from those that are common to all people, and those that concern only one certain individual; from those that are due to the laws of Nature, and those that are caused by our fellow men. The Psalmist says, "Surely He will deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust: His truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flies by day (Ps. xci. 3-5)." The author then relates how God protects us from the troubles caused by men, saying, "If you happen to meet on your way with an army fighting with drawn swords, killing thousands at your left hand and myriads at your right hand, you will not suffer any harm; you will behold and see how God judges and punishes the wicked that are being slain, whilst you remain unhurt. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked (ibid. verse 7, 8)." The author then continues his description of the divine defense and shelter, and shows the cause of this great protection, saying that such a man is well guarded, "Because he hath set his love upon Me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name (ibid. verse 14)." We have shown in previous chapters that by the "knowledge of God's name," the knowledge of God is meant. The above passage may therefore be paraphrased as follows: "This

man is well guarded, because he has known Me, and then (bi cbashak) loved Me.” You know the difference between the two Hebrew terms that signify “to love”, abah and bashak. When a man’s love is so intense that his thought is exclusively engaged with the object of his love, it is expressed in Hebrew by the term bashak.

GOD’S JUSTICE IV: THE LESSON OF JOB

Maimonides stated:

This perplexity [of God’s providence] is caused by the account that a simple and perfect person [Job], who is upright in his actions, and very anxious to abstain from sin, is afflicted by successive misfortunes, namely, by loss of property, by the death of his children, and by bodily disease, though he has not committed any sin.

Maimonides notes that Job is not called intelligent. Had he been intelligent, he would have justified God despite his troubles, knowing that losses he suffered were no questions of God’s complete system of justice, with all its considerations, which man cannot know. In the end, Job admitted his error when he gained wisdom (Guide for the Perplexed, book III, chap. xxiii):

Job abandoned his first very erroneous opinion, and himself proved that it was an error. It is the opinion which suggests itself as plausible at first thought, especially in the minds of

those who meet with mishaps, well knowing that they have not merited them through sins. This is admitted by all, and therefore this opinion was assigned to Job. But he is represented to hold this view only so long as he was without wisdom, and knew God only by tradition, in the same manner as religious people generally know Him. As soon as he had acquired a true knowledge of God, he confessed that there is undoubtedly true felicity in the knowledge of God; it is attained by all who acquire that knowledge, and no earthly trouble can disturb it. So long as Job's knowledge of God was based on tradition and communication, and not on research, he believed that such imaginary good as is possessed in health, riches, and children, was the utmost that men can attain: this was the reason why he was in perplexity, and why he uttered the above-mentioned opinions, and this is also the meaning of his words, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye sees thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent because of dust and ashes (xlii. 5, 6)" that is to say he abhorred all that he had desired before, and that he was sorry that he had been in dust and ashes; comp. "And he sat down among the ashes (ii. 8)." On account of this last utterance, which implies true perception, it is said afterwards in reference to him, "for you have not spoken of Me the thing that is right, as My servant Job hath."

The new idea, which is peculiar to Elihu and has not been mentioned by the others, is contained in his metaphor of the angel's intercession. It is a frequent occurrence, he says, that a man becomes ill, approaches the gates of death, and is already given up by his neighbors. If then an angel, of any kind whatever, intercedes on his behalf and prays for him, the intercession and prayers are accepted; the patient rises from his illness, is saved, and returns to good health. This result is not

always obtained: intercession and deliverance do not always follow each other: it happens only twice, or three times. Elihu therefore says, "If there be an angel with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to show unto man his uprightness, etc. (Job 33:29)." He then describes man's condition when convalescent and the rejoicing at his recovery, and continues thus, "Lo, all these things works God twice, three times with man (ibid. 29)." This idea occurs only in the words of Elihu.

Maimonides points us to the unique idea spoken by Elihu. That idea is that man cannot understand how God works, and the angel's intercession is only known through a divine communication, not observable phenomena. Elihu continues with another example of man's ignorance of God's ways:

His description of the method of prophecy in preceding verses is likewise new. He says, "Surely God speaks in one way, yea in two ways, yet man perceives it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls upon man, in slumberings upon the bed (ibid. 14, 15)."

Here, Maimonides isolates a second example of our ignorance of God and His ways, where "man perceives it not."

He afterwards supports and illustrates his theory by a description of many natural phenomena, such as thunder, lightning, rain, and winds; with these are mixed up accounts of various incidents of life, e.g., an account of pestilence contained in the following passage, "In a moment they die, and at midnight; the people become tumultuous and pass away (34:20)." Great wars are described in the following verse, "He breaks in pieces

mighty men without number, and sets others in their stead (ibid. 24)." There are many more passages of this kind.

Here, *Elibu weaves into human existence the same notion, that God's ways are unfathomable, for we view our lives' incidents as 'natural,' and know not when it is truly God's hand at work. Elibu shows from many examples how man cannot have a claim on God, since man does not know how God operates. This is the purpose of Elibu's words. The "mixing up" of natural phenomena and human existence is to convey to Job that just as we are ignorant of the depth of God's governing of the universe, we are equally ignorant of His hand in human affairs.*

In a similar manner the Revelation that reached Job (chap. xxxviii., chap. xli.), and explained to him the error of his whole belief, constantly describes natural objects, and nothing else; it describes the elements, meteorological phenomena, and peculiarities of various kinds of living beings. The sky, the heavens, Orion and Pleiades are only mentioned in reference to their influence upon our atmosphere, so that Job's attention is in this prophecy only called to things below the lunar sphere. Elibu likewise derives instruction from the nature of various kinds of animals. Thus he says, "He teacheth us through the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wise through the fowls of heaven (xxxv. 11)." He dwells longest on the nature of the Leviathan, which possesses a combination of bodily peculiarities found separate in different animals, in those that walk, those that swim, and those that fly. The description of all these things serves to impress on our minds that we are unable to comprehend how these transient creatures come into existence, or to imagine how their natural properties commenced to exist, and that these are not like the things which we are able to produce. Much less can we compare the manner in which

God rules and manages His creatures with the manner in which we rule and manage certain beings. We must content ourselves with this, and believe that nothing is hidden from God, as Elihu says, "For his eyes are upon the ways of man, and He sees all his goings."

This lesson is the principal object of the whole Book of Job; it lays down this principle of faith, and recommends us to derive a proof from nature, that we should not fall into the error of imagining His knowledge to be similar to ours, or His intention, providence, and rule similar to ours. When we know this we shall find everything that may befall us easy to bear; mishap will create no doubts in our hearts concerning God, [asking ourselves] whether He knows our affairs or not, whether He provides for us or abandons us. On the contrary, our fate will increase our love of God; as is said in the end of this prophecy, "Therefore I abhor myself and repent concerning the dust and ashes (xlii 6)," and as our Sages say, "The pious do everything out of love, and rejoice in their own afflictions (B. T. Shabb. 88b)."

If you pay to my words the attention which this treatise demands, and examine all that is said in the Book of Job, all will be clear to you, and you will find that I have grasped and taken hold of the whole subject; nothing has been left unnoticed, except such portions as are only introduced because of the context and the whole plan of the allegory. I have explained this method several times in the course of this treatise.

GOD'S JUSTICE SUMMARY: HISTORY OF A JUST GOD

Can man start to explain the natural world, how all the creatures were created, what came first, and why all species are required? No, he cannot. As man cannot fathom these “lower” matters, the depth of wisdom in designing and sustaining the species and all of physical creation, he certainly cannot suggest he knows better than God how He should judge man. Complaints against our fate are therefore completely groundless. Job complained when he lost property, children and health. He thought these to be primary goals, and losing them was a just cause to complain of divine injustice. But Job finally was shown by Elihu and God that he was unaware of God's creation and rule of the natural world, thereby admitting he could not understand God's other sphere of control: His government of man. Job accepted he was wrong to complain since he does not know God's justice. Job became awe struck by the realization of such wisdom, and found in it a greater purpose in life than wealth, health and children. It is vital that we read that again:

He confessed that there is undoubtedly true felicity in the knowledge of God; it is attained by all who acquire that knowledge, and no earthly trouble can disturb it. So long as Job's knowledge of God was based on tradition and communication, and not on research, he believed that such imaginary good as is possessed in health, riches, and children, was the utmost that men can attain.

Once he admitted this error, this raised him to a higher level, a level on which he earned God's providence. Only then, did

God communicate with Job. Job's losses were replaced with even greater good; his end far exceeded his beginning.

God created mankind with an intellect, a faculty capable of understanding the world, how to gain, avoid pain, and how to follow God's commands. From Cain through Pharaoh, God warned man on numerous occasions in order that he not hurt himself through flawed choices. And those who sought to harm innocent and righteous people deserving God's protection, God ruined their evil schemes; Lavan, Esav, Pharaoh I, Pharaoh Raamses, Amalek, the Greeks, and Haman all failed.

We may cause our own downfalls. We may mistake opportunities, as evils. We cannot accurately assess anyone as perfectly righteous. We must know that as He alone is Judge, God alone knows best how to administer justice to mankind. He knows when to answer us, when to say no, or "not now." God wants the best for us. If we abandon Him, He abandons us. Torah sources are God's direct instruction to mankind on what are absolute truths. If we draw close to Him through meticulous adherence to Torah, we can trust Torah's numerous stories of the Patriarchs and matriarchs, as well as King David's words, "*The will of His fearers He performs, and their cries He hears and saves them.*"

If man frees his thoughts from worldly matters, obtains a knowledge of God, and rejoices in that knowledge, it is impossible that any kind of evil should befall him while he is with God, and God with him.

This belief that God provides for every individual human being in accordance with his merits is one of the fundamental principles on which the Law is founded. —Maimonides

EARNING GOD'S PROVIDENCE

Since many of us are not engaged in Torah study as we should be and lack much knowledge, we are easily misled by our peers, certainly by those religious in their practice. We assume “They’ve got it all right.” So when we see the orthodox masses spending the overwhelming portion of their day engaged in business, we think this is proper. However, this is not so. I wish to share a few sources that spell out Torah’s actual view on man’s required dedication to God and Torah, as opposed to following man and worldly pursuits.

Trusting God Over Nature

A wise Rabbi once said that man tends to be attached to the “messenger”, and not the Master. Meaning, Jews tend to be attached to the pursuit of their livelihoods more than they are attached to God, the actual One who determines our income each Rosh Hashanna.

This weakness is an expression of our reliance on natural law, more than on God. We feel that with less work, we will not earn sufficiently. Torah says otherwise.

There is a primary principle you must know as a basis for all else written herein. Just as God wills plants to grow when supplied with sufficient moisture and sun, He also wills His laws of providence to grow man’s wealth when he abides by Torah principles and philosophies, and trusts in God. Neither one – nature, or God’s laws of providence over man – is more real than the other. They are equally “created systems” that at one time in history, did not exist. Therefore, neither system should be trusted any less. But man is overtaken by his emotions; he sees natural

law around him from his youth, and all day. But he doesn't "see" God's providence.

Due to the sensual nature of natural phenomena and our inclination to live sensually, we tend to trust nature to be more "real." But if you engage your mind, you will realize that both natural law, and God's system of providence over man (Reward and Punishment) are equally true. We must exert our thinking over our emotions, if we are to see this clearly.

Once we review all the Torah's lessons of God's interactions with the Prophets and all the benefits they received from Him, we affirm that the "invisible" system of providence is a reality. We can then loosen the grip that our trust in nature has placed on us. We then acknowledge that God is the true provider and that natural law is under His rule. We will agree that following His words will ensure greater success than ignoring His words and chasing after wealth with our mortal means and mathematical calculations.

It is for this reason, I believe, God says only once in His Torah "test Me," in connection with charity. Here, God is asking us to part with our source of security, our money. So He tells us we may test Him, to see if He doesn't "*open the storehouses of heaven, emptying out a blessing that's more than enough (Malachi 3:10).*" God understands our weakness; our belief that parting with wealth leaves less, not more. So He informs us in this verse that this is not so. He tells us that by following His word, we will end up with more.

We must realize that God runs nature. If we see this clearly, if we trust His promises, we will be able to part with our wealth,

be charitable and actually become richer. It is the one who does not trust God, that does not part with his wealth, and works far more during his day than he learns. Another verse tell us this: "God does not forsake those who search Him out (Psalms 9:11)." Here, God promises His providence for those who seek Him through studying His ways, and studying His Torah. These are the closing words of Shacharis, just before reciting Alaynu. Those who seek out God (study Torah) fulfill the greatest mitzvah (Moade Katan 9b). Thereby, they increase their worth before God, and are more deserving of His assistance. Such a person detaches himself from the physical and is more convinced in God's abilities than in physical means. God controls the physical, so the person is attached to the Controller, not the controlled (i.e., nature). Psalm 147:11 teaches that God desires those who await His kindness. This means that God will act on their behalf.

In his Laws of Sabbatical Year and Jubilee (13:13) Maimonides writes:

Any person whose spirit moves him, using his/her understanding, to separate himself to stand before God, to minister and serve Him...to know God...and this person walks upright as God made him, and he removes from his neck the yoke of many calculations [monetary concerns] that the masses seek: this person is sanctified as holy of holies and God will be his portion and inheritance for ever and ever and he will merit in this world sufficient means, just as is merited by the priests and Levites. Behold, King David, peace upon him, said, "God is my allotted portion and my share; You make my lot perfect". And Psalms (9:11) says, "And those who know Your name will trust in You; for You have not forsaken those who seek You, Hashem.

And a few more quotes:

...and one should work each day based on his needs to survive if he has not what to eat, and the remainder of his day and night [he should] engage in Torah study (Maimonides Laws of Torah Study 3:8).

Minimize your involvement in work, and maximize your engagement in Torah study (Pirkei Avos 4:12).

One living in accord with Torah philosophy is not caught up in amassing that which “cannot be taken with you.” Torah is concerned that man pursues what improves his soul and his relationship with His creator. For this alone endures.

Be Part of the Community

Attend minyan. In this manner, one’s status as part of the community’s prayer is much greater in God’s eyes than his individual worth. Maimonides teaches that the minyan’s prayers are “regularly heard” (Laws of Prayer 8:1).

Observing the Most Primary Commands and Affirming Truths Regarding God

One must be concerned not to violate all commands, but the commands are not all equal. Maimonides was quite passionate about the loss of our souls that results from not accepting the 13 Principles. By studying these principles and becoming convinced of their truths, we raise ourselves to a higher level, earning God’s kindness that much more.

Summary

God teaches man to pursue Torah study more than wealth. He should also part with his wealth. Doing both, man will not suffer the assumed loss of income. This message is throughout the Torah, as we have seen above. This does not mean God will make man a millionaire. King Solomon and all the Prophets did not value wealth as an ends, for they all knew man takes nothing with him as he departs this world. The Prophets valued only that which is eternal; man's soul. Yes, it is difficult to veer from the lifestyle of all your close friends. To change your lifestyle of chasing less after the fancier things and sitting in the Beis Medrash will also raise eyebrows. But it will gain God's attention, as you pursue the life He says is most valuable. This path of Torah study and study of the natural world will provide greater fulfillment than all else: *"Better is wisdom than pearls, and all desirous things do not equate to it (Proverbs 8:11)."*

Trust that God is correct, and that the world is wrong. Abide by all the Torah sources mentioned. After you trust Him, and you live this proper Torah lifestyle, you will no longer need to trust how good it is. For you will have firsthand knowledge that the life of wisdom surpasses all else. Regarding livelihood, work wisely, work minimally and be charitable. God has many messengers to assist you. You may not be wealthy, but as the Birchat Hamzone ends, "You will not lack anything." As you live the correct philosophy, you will not want much, as King Solomon said, *"do not make me wealthy, or poor [but] provide me my daily bread (Proverbs 30:8)."* As you engage wisdom as your primary pursuit, you will naturally desire wealth much less. The simpler things will suffice, as your focus will become more centered on Torah's marvels.

GOD'S PLAN FOR MAN

“Why am I here? What will fulfill me most and make me truly happy?” These questions gnaw away inside us. Can we arrive at a satisfying answer?

We know that Judaism is God's only religion: this is proven like any historical fact, and is based on mass revelation at Sinai. While other religions demand blind faith since they lack proof for their claims, Judaism demands intellect and reason, and is the only religion that provides proof of divine origin. So our question is not concerning “which” religion is true; this has been established and even affirmed by the other religions. Rather, our question concerns God's intent...God's plan for man.

Why was Torah not given until year 2448? What does this say about God's plan for those initial individuals and societies? What does this say about their capacities as thinking beings? Did God not desire the best life for them as well? And what does this say about us, who are created identically to those previous generations? There are a few sources that enlighten us to a fundamental truth about God's will. I will cite those sources, through which I feel you will detect the answer that I will suggest at the end...

Maimonides on God's Plan

Maimonides wrote many brilliant works, including his Mishneh Torah and his Sefer Hamitzvos. These works elucidate the Torah's commands. However, when comparing his words in both works addressing the mitzvah of “Loving God,” we find a major discrepancy. In the Sefer Hamitzvos, Maimonides teaches the

path to loving God is through Torah study. But in his Mishneh Torah, he says the path to loving God is through studying the universe. How do we explain this conflict? We also wonder why he wrote both works, if they cover the same topic.

Why does Maimonides derive Love and Fear of God from King David's words?:

When I see Your heavens, the work of Your fingers...what is man that You should be mindful of him (Psalms 8:4)?

What lesson may be learned from Maimonides' selection of this specific verse as the source that identifies the love and fear of God?⁶⁰

His Sefer Hamitzvos is a listing and elucidation of the 613 mitzvos. In contrast, the Mishneh Torah goes beyond this, as we find "Laws of the Fundamentals of Torah" and "Laws on Personality Traits", two categories outside the sphere of God's formalized 613 commands. In his Laws of the Fundamentals of Torah, Maimonides discusses a unique categorization of topics; not Torah "laws" as we might think. So we wonder: what is Maimonides' intent in his Mishne Torah?

Maimonides commences this section with God's unique existence as independent (eternal) in contrast to all else that is dependent existence. That is, all created things required God's will to come into existence. But creation also requires God's will that it might continue to exist. That is, "creation" alone does not endow any entity with permanence; it's duration too requires God's will. (That alone deserves a few moments to fully appreciate.)

60) Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah 2:2

Maimonides teaches that God alone must exist, and if He did not (were that possible) all else would suddenly cease existing. Conversely, all else need not exist, nor does it affect God at all if all else were to cease to exist.

In law 1:6 concerning the knowledge of God's role as the sole cause and only "true" existence, Maimonides says this is a positive command. We wonder: why didn't Maimonides discuss the "command" element at the very outset?

Maimonides continues, teaching that God is not physical, and therefore all physical conditions and affects cannot apply to God. This includes God having no parts, location, He does not change, become tired, He does not eat or possess emotion. Maimonides describes the categories of all existences, from man to the stars, spheres and the angels, and elaborates on them.

Finally, what connects all these topics placed in Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah, i.e. God's existence, creation, metaphysics, angels, sanctifying God's name, not profaning God's name, prophecy, false prophets, revelation at Mount Sinai, the unchanging status of Torah and the prohibition to change it at all? What consideration demands this compilation of topics?

Talmud on God's Plan

Another source directs us towards the answer. Talmud Sanhedrin states:

Rabbi Judah said, "Adam the First was commanded only against idolatry." Rabbi Judah ben-Besayra said, "Adam was also commanded against cursing God." Others say Adam was

also commanded on setting up courts. With which opinion is this in accord? Rabbi Judah said in Rav's name, God said to Adam, "I am God," thereby teaching not to curse Me; God said to Adam, "I am God," thereby teaching do not exchange Me with another god; God said to Adam, "I am God," thereby teaching My fear shall be upon you (Talmud Sanhedrin 56b).

Our interest is piqued as Adam was not commanded on the 613 commands. Furthermore, the Talmud teaches a fundamental that can easily be overlooked. This fundamental is that through one phrase "I am God", God intimated to Adam a few other commands. But why intimate, instead of clearly stating each command outright?

Talmud Niddah 30b teaches, *"The embryo is taught all of Torah, and at birth, and angel smites its lip and he forgets it."* What does this metaphor explain?

The Two Tablets

As we once discussed, the original two Tablets, the Luchos, were formed naturally, including their letters. Maimonides derives this from the Torah's verse:

And the tables were the work of God" (Exod. xxxii. 16), that is to say, they were the product of nature, not of art: for all natural things are called "the work of the Lord.

And the writing was the writing of God (ibid).⁶¹

Of what dire import was it that the first Tablets be "naturally" formed; not Moses' carpentry as in the second Tablets?

61) Guide for the Perplexed, book I, chap. LXVI

Torah on God's Plan

Torah starts with Genesis and the stories of the Patriarchs and matriarchs. Why not simply start with the first command?

Rabbi Acha said, "More pleasant is the speech of the servants of the Patriarchs before God, than the Torah (commands) of their children, as we find Eliezer's account (describing his encounter with Rebecca) doubled in the Torah, while many of the central commands of the Torah are only given by way of hints."⁶²

What lesson does this comparison teach?

God's Original Plan

Why did God give Adam only one command, and Noah only seven? Why not give them the entire Torah of 613?

The answer: it was unnecessary. God's work is perfect; He created Adam with all that he required so as to live as God intended. Meaning, with intelligence alone, man is capable of deriving truths through independent thought. This is God's will, and His preferred state for man.

The Core Message

Functioning by design and not coercion (i.e., commands) is the most pleasing and perfected existence for us, and God wants man to live in the most pleasing state. When our minds grasp a truth through studying the natural world (as opposed to Torah study)

62) Rashi's commentary on Gen, 24:42

this truth registers as something rooted in our experience...in reality. It impacts and impresses us most deeply. This realization in turn propels one to non-conflicted action. We are most happy when we act in accord with what we see as real and true. Conversely, coerced Torah adherence carries some conflict. The Rabbis say “*God held Sinai over our heads*”⁶³ to threaten our Torah acceptance.

Nonetheless, man did require at least one command, for there is one idea that cannot be grasped through observing nature: obedience to God. This relationship of God as Master and man as servant requires communication. Therefore, the Talmud teaches that God gave Adam one law: idolatry. From there, the Talmud teaches that man can derive other lessons:

God said to Adam, “I am God,” thereby teaching not to curse Me; God said to Adam, “I am God,” thereby teaching do not exchange Me with another god; God said to Adam, “I am God,” thereby teaching My fear shall be upon you.

The Talmud is explaining how Adam, from one simple command and his very design, was equipped to derive all other truths.

Maimonides' Message

This explains why in his Mishne Torah, Maimonides says that love of God is attained through studying the natural world, and not through the Torah. For with his Mishne Torah, specifically in this opening section of the Fundamentals of Torah, Maimonides is presenting the most primary truths. These truths are prior to

63) Talmud Avoda Zara 2b, Talmud Sabbath 88a

Torah, from which Torah was formulated. That is why they are called “fundamentals of Torah”...the building blocks from which God created the Torah system.

Maimonides’ Mishne Torah differs greatly from his Sefer Hamitzvos. The latter addresses the Torah system and mitzvos alone. But with his Mishne Torah, Maimonides describes “reality” – topics more inclusive than Torah commands. He addresses God’s existence, angels, prophecy, the heavens, and our relationship to God based on these truths. Our understanding of these topics are prerequisites for following Torah commands. We must know God’s role as Creator and Sustainer of all else. We must know that although quite lofty, the heavens and angels too are creations, not existences worthy of deification as previous sinful generations blindly believed. We must know that God relates to man, this is “prophecy.” We must know that our role is obedience, so we must sanctify God and respect His name and fame. Once we know all this, then we are ready to move to the next step, and that is understanding our personalities and gaining control over our tendencies and passions. Thus, the laws of Personality Traits follow.

We see, Maimonides’ Mishne Torah encompasses much more than a list of commands: he is preparing us for life. In doing so, he cleverly teaches us that man possesses a design through which we can attain the best life, love of God’s knowledge and awe of His creations. That’s why he teaches that love of God can be learned from King David’s admiration of the natural world, as opposed to citing a command. By citing King David’s words — *“When I see Your heavens, the work of Your fingers”* — Maimonides presents an example of man loving God through the study of the natural world.

Maimonides avoids stating the “command” of knowing God until he first states this reality based on reason alone. Again, the command element is second to the arrival of this truth through reason, a natural process. Interesting too, is that his treatment of Mitzvos is discussed only at the end of his Guide.

A wise Rabbi explained the metaphor of the angel in the womb. The human mind is naturally endowed with a set of innate faculties. For example, we do not need to learn to “compare,” as the mind does this naturally. When a child sees a stranger, it cries as his mind compares this face to his recalled image of his mother’s face. There are a number of others, like “equality:” we know when two objects are dissimilar; without ever being taught the concept of “equal.” Neither do we need to be taught about cause and effect. We can also deduce, without being taught how to deduce. All this shows that a human being innately possesses these intelligent faculties, just as he innately possesses emotions. The Rabbis taught this by saying, *“an angel teaches the embryo Torah, and we forget it all at birth.”* “Forgetting” is in contrast to never having learned. For the person who learned, but then forgot, still retains pathways back to that knowledge. This is the Rabbi’s message: we innately possess pathways, or rather faculties, that can uncover truths concerning God, the universe, and our roles here. Torah was not absolutely required.

Rabbi Acha said: “More pleasant is the speech of the servants of the Patriarchs before God, than the Torah (commands) of their children.”

Again this highlights the Patriarchs' perfections. Without Torah, we are taught the high degree of perfection that even their servants' mundane words expressed. Thus, man can naturally achieve perfection, without Torah. Even the first naturally-formed Tablets expressed the idea that nature offers man a revelation of the Creator's hand at work. What an amazing sight that would have been to see...sapphire Tablets with God's words naturally formed inside its grain.

When we study creation, we are examining existence. In contrast, when we study Torah, although still witnessing God's brilliance...we are not relating to "existence." Moses very request of God, "*show me Your honor*" was his attempt to understand God's very existence. Evidently, "existence" in Moses' eyes was something most central. Additionally, when we are studying creation by using our minds alone, we engage the process of thought greater than when relying on Torah's "shortcuts" (commands). Great thinkers from Abraham to Aristotle and Einstein reveal this raw human potential.

Torah starts with the genesis of the universe for this very reason. Naturally, man was well-equipped to study the universe, as we read of Adam accurately naming (defining) the animals. Torah is not a history book, and as Rabbi Isaac said, it could have started with the first command. But we require fundamentals before we can accept and follow Torah. Maimonides codified these fundamentals. We now understand the distinction between his Sefer Hamitzvos and his Mishne Torah.

Over the years, man corrupted himself. Many Torah laws were invented to combat these corruptions, like not following superstitions

or the ways of the Canaanites and Egyptians. Laws and holidays like Passover and Succos were invented to recall God's kindness. Tefillin recalls the first born deaths during God's salvation. So the Torah as we have it today, the 613, could not have been given to Adam. Later generations backslid, and God in His kindness formulated a Torah system to help mankind correct itself. Adam was quite capable of using his mind to arrive at those laws independent of man's deviation. Without a command, Adam, his sons, Noah and Abraham sacrificed to God, as they fully understood man's relationship to his Maker. Prayer was introduced by our Patriarchs, without any command. They used their minds to grasp God, His ways and His will for man. Prophecy was God's means of communicating with man, and prayer was man's means of communicating with God. Torah and Mitzvos do not target a new plan, but remain true to the original plan, like first fruit offerings that compel us to recognize the Creator of our bounty, as do tithes. Again, we see Abraham gave tithes without a Torah, displaying how the human mind can arrive at truths and morality independent of the Torah. This was God's initial plan. The greatest mitzvah is education, and we learned that Abraham taught tens of thousands. Kindness and justice was also exemplified by Abraham's wars against the kings, and God said of Abraham that He will reveal greater justice by teaching Abraham of Sodom's justice so Abraham could teach God's ways as he always did. This means Abraham understood God's ways, without a Torah. As we study the Patriarchs, as is God's will, we will arrive at even more examples supporting the Rabbis who metaphorically taught that "Abraham observed the entire Torah."⁶⁴ This means that Abraham was able to arrive at the same truths God later taught in a formal

64) Talmud Kiddushin 82a, mishna

communication to mankind. The Rabbis teach that ultimately, in the days of the Messiah, man will return to the state of Adam where we naturally are attached to God and wisdom. But this is only the general rule. Anyone today can engage his or her mind and become an Abraham. We each have this capacity, as we are now. It only takes the conviction that God will provide, and the trust He will do so, and then we can release our attachment to the “calculations sought by the masses”⁶⁵ (prioritizing wealth) and minimize our work so as to maximize our Torah study.⁶⁶ Doing so, we will arrive at the greatest fulfillment through realizing God’s wisdom.

THERE ARE MORE THAN 613

I was asked to explain why Torah luminaries such as Maimonides and Rabbi Karo didn’t prohibit singing Torah verses in their codes of Halacha. He said that although Rabbi Feinstein may have prohibited singing all verses, this does not conclusively indicate that this is, in fact, the “Law.” My response follows.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein zt”l “clearly” prohibited the singing of verses (Yoreh Daya 2:142). It’s not a gray issue. This great mind completely understood this clear Talmudic portion:⁶⁷ it is prohibited to sing a verse. Rav Moshe expressed that although the practice of singing scriptural verses is widespread, and even respected men engage in this practice, he states that it is certainly prohibited and he does not see a just reason for those who violate. Rav Moshe

65) Hilchos Shmitta v’Yovale 13:13

66) Ethics 4:12

67) Talmud Sanhedrin 101a

added that some might read Rashi as singling out Shir HaShirim “alone” as the only prohibited text. But Rav Moshe makes it clear that Rashi means to say that if Shir HaShirim is prohibited, which is a song...certainly all other scriptural passages are prohibited.

It may well be that if Maimonides and Rabbi Karo didn't prohibit singing Torah verses in their codes of Halacha, perhaps the reason is that those codes are restricted to matters pertaining to the 613 commands and associated Rabbinic safeguards. But there is more that is incumbent on us than just the 613. There are matters of Jewish “law,” and then there are Torah “principles” and Torah “ideals.”

Some are surprised to learn that there are real Torah “obligations,” although not codified as one of the 613 “mitzvahs.” A wise Rabbi once taught that besides technical “mitzvah”, Torah contains many fundamental, ideals and requirements.

In the opening of his Sefer Hamitzvos, Maimonides' Fourth Rule for categorizing something as “mitzvah” is to exclude general commands. *“Guard all which I tell you...(Exod. 23:13)”* and *“And you shall watch all My statutes...(Lev. 19:37)”* Maimonides states, do not qualify as part of the 613 since these commands do not have a specific act.

His Tenth rule is not to count as one of the 613, any introductory or preparatory information, like “taking” the flour to make the Showbread. Placing the Showbread on the Table is the command, but it obviously requires “taking” the flour and baking it first.

Other types of mandates that are not included in the 613 include ideals. God told Abraham to *“Walk before me and be complete (Gen. 17:1).”* God teaches us too, to aim towards this level, as He

included His mandate to Abraham in the Torah that He gave to all generations. Thus, the lesson is equally applicable to all of us, that we should seek to reach a level of complete devotion to God. This, of course, is of much greater importance than waving a lulav. Despite its not being counted as one of the 613, it is a level for which to strive. In our regular strides for Torah's perfection, it is as "obligatory" (if not more) to be complete with God, as it is obligatory to keep kosher.

Wherein lies the difference in obligation between law and principle? Well, both target a benefit. Not fulfilling either, we equally forfeit the perfection of our souls. Laws or mitzvahs are distinct in that their performance contributes to the general structure of Jewish practice, to Torah's identity, something essential to Judaism's continuation. In contrast, principles and ideals, like striving to be perfect, trusting God and others, are more subjective and even internal. They are not communally practiced. Yet, they are more important to one's soul than failing to eat meat on holidays, a mitzvah. Therefore, to view the prohibition of singing verses as "less", as it may not form part of "law," but rather "principle," is akin to saying 10 is less than 5.

King David spoke of his tremendous trust in God, and God included David's words in His Torah. This means that this ideal of trusting God is of great value, even though it is not a mitzvah, for there is no specific mitzvah or "way" to trust in God. This takes on many expressions.

Rav Hai Gaon said "Anochi Hashem Eloheca", "I am God", written at the opening of the Ten Commandments, is not a "command." His reason: a command to recognize God belittles the obvious nature of God's existence.

Being truthful is another most primary ideal or principle. The Talmud cites a case where a merchant was in the midst of his prayers, when a customer offered him \$X.00 for a gem he had on sale. As he was praying, the merchant could not speak, making the customer assume the silence meant the price was too low. To this, the customer raised his price. When the merchant completed his prayers, he told the customer he would accept the initial, lower price; for in his heart, he accepted it when first offered. This level of perfection is not a mitzvah, yet the story is recorded for the purpose of aiming man towards this to level of truth.

Singing Torah verses belittles the purpose of Torah. This is why the Talmud says⁶⁸, *“Torah garbed itself in sackcloth and stood before God and said, ‘Your children have made me like a harp that is sung to by scorners.’”* There is no dispute in the Talmud about the tragedy of treating Torah as a tool for emotional gratification through song. This explains why Nemukey Yosef, Maharsha, Rash and Raav Moshe Feinstein zt”l all cite this prohibition. Rabbi Akiva goes one further, saying one forfeits his afterlife for violating this prohibition.⁶⁹ We conclude that a principle need not be in the Shulchan Aruch, for our great Rabbis to call it “prohibition.” Additionally, it is no less harmful to violate a principle, than a law. Therefore, if the soul is equally or more severely harmed, we are wise to treat such violations of principle as “violations.” That something is not found in the Shulchan Aruch, we must not view it as a “lighter” matter. In fact, Rabbi Akiva said one loses everything for singing Torah verses...his afterlife is taken from him.

Prohibition does not refer to law alone, as Torah and Talmud are

68) ibid

69) Tosefta Sanhedrin, 12:5

replete with lessons based on Medrash and morality too; not just mitzvah. It doesn't matter that these Torah ideals are not found in the Shulchan Aruch. What matters is God's inclusion of such lessons, and the Rabbis' warnings.

Pirkei Avos is not Halacha, yet it contains such vital truths as recalling our responsibility for our sins and uncountable values. There is no "mitzvah" to recall our sins. Yet, it is at the forefront of perfection; our objective. To suggest something is not prohibited, simply because it is not located in the Shulchan Aruch, is a false statement.

We must adjust our perspective. Talmud is more authoritative than those who comment on Talmud. If the Talmud cites a case – even in metaphor – where the Torah is garbed in sackcloth and mourning due to the Jews' disgrace of her by singing the verses and not studying them, a real prohibition is being taught.

I will end with a lesson I recently heard from a old friend. A wise Rabbi lectured on *Emunas Chachamim*, trust in our wise Rabbis. We should not treat someone like Rav Moshe Feinstein as an "independent view" and suggest we need not follow him due to his "sole position" on this issue. First of all, I cited many Rishonim who agree with him. Second, Rav Moshe was an unparalleled mind. It is wise to investigate his reasoning and sources. Perhaps it is the very wise Rabbis who are light years ahead of anyone today, who voice independent positions due to their brilliance, not due to – God forbid – their ignorance.

TWO WAYS WE SIN

Lessons of the Yom Kippur Sacrifices

Many people subscribe to the notion of “modernity”, i.e., previous generations are archaic and not as advanced as today and previous cultures’ values are no longer applicable. Some cite “animal cruelty” in connection with Temple sacrifice. Additional rejection of the sacrifices of Yom Kippur may arise due to their association with a long day of fasting, standing, and many uncomfortable restrictions. Are the Temple’s “ancient” sacrifices just that; archaic, inapplicable, and even brutal acts, deserving our abandonment? Must our religiosity comply with our subjective feelings, or must “we” comply with God’s practices and ideas?

As Torah Jews who respect that all in our Torah is God’s word, applicable for all time⁷⁰, we take a different road: we seek to discover the eternal truths contained in each of our precious Mitzvahs and ideals, instead of projecting our wishes onto them. As Torah Jews, we know all that God commanded does not expire, as man’s nature does not expire. There is great wisdom in each command...if we patiently “seek it out like silver and buried treasures” as King Solomon instructs⁷¹.

As was Adam’s design and as the Jews at Sinai, so are we today: possessing their identical faculties and desires. As such, we are no less in need of the Torah’s sacrifices and their lessons. The sacrifices would still aptly address our human nature today. It is only due to our sins that the Temple is non-existent, degrading us by its absence. Until the Messiah’s arrival, may it be soon, and the Temple is rebuilt and sacrifice reinstated, we may still perfect

70) See Maimonides’ 13 Principles

71) Proverbs 2:4

ourselves to a great degree by understanding the underlying ideas of the Yom Kippur sacrifices. We must study the characteristics and requirements of the sacrifices. We must review the Torah, Talmud, and our sages, such as Maimonides, Ramban, Rashi and Ibn Ezra.

Two Goats

I will address just two of the Yom Kippur sacrifices: the two goats upon which a lottery was cast. Two goats – preferably with similar visual features, height, and cost – were presented in the Temple. The priest would blindly draw a lot, which contained both God’s name and that of Azazel. Each goat was designated by the lot selected for it. The scapegoat – the one sent to its death off Mount Azazel – is described as “carrying all the sins of the Jews.”⁷² The other goat dedicated as a sin offering in the Temple atoned only for the sins of the Jews in their defiled entry into the Temple sanctuary.

What is the reason for the goat’s similarity? Why were their designations for either a sin offering in the Temple, or Mount Azazel, decided by a lottery? Why do we require two goats: cannot a single goat atone for all sins? What was significant about Mount Azazel? And why was there a service of clouding the Holy of Holies with incense where the Ark resided, included in the process of sacrificing these two goats?

Furthermore, we are struck by the Torah’s placement of the Yom Kippur sacrifices in Achrei Mos⁷³ immediately subsequent to the death of Aaron’s two sons who offered a “strange fire:” an

72) Lev. 16:22

73) Lev. 16:1-34

offering not commanded by God. What was the gravity of their sin, that God killed them, and what is the connection between Aaron's sons' sin and the Yom Kippur sacrifices, that the Torah joins the two in one section? We also wonder what God means by His critique of Aaron's two sons, "*And you shall not come at all times to the Holy of Holies behind the Parochess [curtain] before the Kaporess⁷⁴ which is on the Ark, so none shall die...for in cloud do I [God] appear on the Kaporess*".⁷⁵ What is the stress of "for in cloud do I appear on the Kaporess"? What is the significance again of "cloud"? And finally, why, after concluding the section on Yom Kippur sacrifices, does the Torah continue with the restriction of sacrificing outside the Temple, with the punishment of one's soul being cut off? In that section⁷⁶ God warns the Jews about sacrificing to demons (imaginary beings) and also warns about eating blood, which also meets with the loss of one's soul. Maimonides teaches that the practice of eating blood was imagined by those sinners to provide them camaraderie with assumed spirits, and that those sinners would benefit by such a union. Although the questions are many, I believe one idea will answer them all.

The Scapegoat

What is the significance of Yom Kippur? It is the day when we are forgiven. What does "forgiveness" imply? It implies that we sin. And in what does man sin? This is where I believe we can answer all our questions.

We readily answer that we sin by deviating from God's com-

74) The Kaporess was the Ark's lid formed of solid gold, with the figurines of two cherubim – childlike creatures with wings.

75) Lev. 16:2

76) Lev. 17:1-16

mands. The worst sin, of course, is idolatry, where we assume the greatest error: other powers exist, besides God. If one assumes this fatal error, his concept of God is false, and his soul cannot enjoy the afterlife, which is a greater connection with the one, true God. This explains why those sinners who sacrifice to imaginary beings – demons – and those who eat blood, lose their eternal life. And even if these exact practices are not performed, but one harbors the thought that there exists powers other than God, be they powers assumed to exist in physical objects, or even in Hebrew texts or objects of mitzvah...such individuals also cross that line of idolatry.

The Scapegoat – the one goat sent to its death off Mount Azazel – was to atone for all our sins. Sin emanates from a disregard of God and His word, but its most grave form is idolatry. The Rabbis say that the Scapegoat is not sacrificed, but hurled from a peak downwards, to prevent us from assuming it is a sacrifice to those demons, normally associated with the wilderness surrounding Mount Azazel. By destroying the Scapegoat and not sacrificing it, we actively deny any claim of those desert-based demons, and deny truths about camaraderie with spirits by eating blood from sacrifices to demons. We wish to deny any and all claims of assumed powers other than God. Our atonement is effectuated through the Scapegoat, by admitting the fallacy of idolatry, and the rejection of any intelligent existence besides God, His angels, or man. Nothing else exists that is self-aware. Nothing but God, His angels, and man, possess intelligence, or capabilities other than natural laws. The Scapegoat thereby undermines and utterly rejects man's path of Torah deviation. But there is another area of sin.

The Other Sin

“And they brought before God a strange fire, which He had not commanded them.”⁷⁷

Aaron's sons Nadav and Avihu expressed the other area of sin: man-made, religious practice. Although we assume sin to be solely identified as deviation from the Torah as seen in idolatry, sin also exists when we attempt to approach God, but with our own devices, as the verse states, *“And they brought before God a strange fire...”*. “Before God” is the operative phrase. Nadav and Avihu intended to approach God, not in accord with His ways, but with their own design. The Rabbis stated, *“The Jews desired to contain the Evil Instinct. It exited as a fiery lion from the Holy of Holies. They attempted to restrain the lion by seizing its mane, but it let out a loud roar.”* Regarding this Talmudic metaphor, a wise Rabbi once asked what is most significant. He answered, “The instincts were exiting the Temple's Holy of Holies”. What does this mean? It means that man's instincts are most powerful – like a fiery lion – in connection with the most religious of activities and locations: the Holy of Holies. We need not look far to realize this truth, expressed today by ISIS. Religion is a great target for man's instincts, as in this area he is greatly passionate. In unguided religious expression, man's emotions will take over, as seen in Aaron's two sons who wished religious expression of their own creation. The existence of so many divergent man-made religions proves this point that man wishes subjective religious expression.

It is this sin, I believe, that the second Yom Kippur goat ad-

77) Lev. 10:1

dresses. This second goat sin offering was brought in the Temple, and not sent to the wilderness as the other. For it is this goat that addresses man's sin in the Temple. Man sins in two ways: deviating from God, and in approaching God. God too addresses these two deviances with His commands not to add to, or subtract from the Torah. Subtracting from the Torah parallels the Scapegoat, where man abandons Torah and God in place of demons. Adding to the Torah parallels the sin of Nadav and Avihu who expressed an addition to the Torah's prescribed commands, corrected by this second goat brought in the Temple to atone for the Jews' sins in Temple.

God's Arrangement of Torah Sections

We now understand why God placed the Yom Kippur sacrifices in His Torah, between the sin of Nadav and Avihu and the prohibition to sacrifice to demons. It is because Yom Kippur sacrifice intends to address man's two areas of sin: the over religious sin seen in Nadav and Avihu, and the lack of religiosity seen in demon sacrifice, where one does not approach God, but runs from Him towards imposters. Yom Kippur atones for us by directing our attention to the two areas of human sin: non-religious, and over religious. We are alerted to apply this lesson to our own deviances. One who abandons Torah for other beliefs assumes more knowledge than God, as he feels he understands better how the world operates. He therefore creates his own "demons" and worships them. He is lacking an understanding of the One Creator, as he assumes different or multiple forces. The over religious person feels otherwise: he feels safe, as he "approaches God" as did Aar-

on's sons. He feels with his intent to serve God, anything goes. He feels he can create new modes of religious practice, and that he will find favor in God's eyes. But the Torah's response to both is death of some kind. Thus, "any" deviation – even when our intent is to serve God – is construed by God as sin.

The need for two goats is derived from our two areas of deviance. As one goat addresses the abandoning of God in idolatry, that same goat is unfit to address our faulted approach to God: idolatry is a far greater crime: idolatry errs about God Himself, while over religiosity errs about His will. But both goats are preferably identical, to teach that either goat satisfies one or the other requirement, since there is nothing in the goat per se that atones, but it is our understanding of these lessons that truly atones for us. The lottery also contributes to removing any significance to either goat, as each was picked by chance.

Cloud

Why was clouding the Holy of Holies where the Ark resided, included in the service of Yom Kippur? And why was God's response to Nadav and Avihu, "*for in cloud do I [God] appear on the Kaporets?*" Cloud was also present at God's Revelation at Sinai. What is the connection?

Nadav and Avihu violated the principle that God is unknowable, by assuming they knew how to approach God. Thus, God responds that He appears in cloud. What is cloud? It represents man's blindness. Man is blind about God's nature, and without Torah, man is also blind about how to approach Him. Nadav and Avihu's sin was their denial of their ignorance concerning God.

God therefore reiterated to Moses and Aaron the concept of man's blind ignorance, by describing how He appears in cloud. And again in our yearly Yom Kippur service we must demonstrate our ignorance by clouding the holiest of all places, the Holy of Holies. Our religious practice must contain a service that demonstrates our limitations. Our atonement relies on a rejection of our instinctual, religious fabrication.

Application for Today

It is vital in our approach to God, that we are careful not to add to Torah commands, regardless of the popularity of new practices, even among religious Jews. Our barometer for what is God's intent, is God's word alone. We must not fall prey to our need for human approval, that we blindly accept what the masses of religious Jews perpetrate as Torah. If we are truly careful, and seek out authentic, authoritative Torah sources, we will discover what is true Torah, and what violates God's words.

In a conversation with a dear friend recently, I was asked what I felt about certain Kabbalistic views. They included these: that cut fingernails are dangerous; that people might hurt us with evil eyes; that reciting the letters of God's name offers man power; and other opinions. My first response was that there is doubt as to the authenticity of the Zohar, and further, Zohar is not the Torah given by God at Sinai. But regardless, I told this friend that if an idea makes no sense, it matters none if a Rabbi wrote it, for even Moses erred; the most perfected man. Therefore, no man alive today is infallible. So quoting the Zohar is meaningless, if the idea violates Torah and reason.

God gave each of us a *Tzelem Elohim* – intelligence – that we must engage, and not ignore. Regardless of the prevalence of practices in religious Jewish communities, we have intelligence with which we may discern what makes sense, and what is nonsense. It matters none if the practice is a sacrifice to demons, or a practice that includes a Torah object like a mezuzah, a challah, even if one cites an accepted book authored by a Rabbi. We have the Torah's authentic principles to guide us towards reasonable practices. Just as demons and their assumed powers are imagined, so are the powers assumed to exist in challas, red bendels, mezuzas, or reciting Torah verses with the intent to heal the sick.

Religious deviance seeks substantiation by including Torah articles in man made practice. And as we learn from Nadav and Avihu, any deviation from God's commands – even to approach Him – is a sin. If you are in doubt about the validity of a practice, study the Torah, read the Shulchan Aruch, or ask a Rabbi to show you a source. But if you find no source for a given practice, do not follow it. And many times with your mind alone, you can uncover the falsehood in popular claims.

Yom Kippur is a time to break free from what is popular, comfortable, or falsely promises success and health. "*Teshuva, Tefila and Tzedaka*", repentance, prayer and charity, are what God says is our correct response. Do Teshuva from false notions and actions, regardless of their popularity, for you exist to follow God, not to impress your neighbor by copying their errors. Pray to God to direct you to new truths, to forgive and purify you, and to help you abandon fallacy. And if your Hebrew reading is not excellent, pray in English or in your own language, for prayer is meaningless if you do not understand what you recite. And give charity to

recognize your insignificance, to break loose of your attachment to wealth, and recognize that God alone grants wealth. Assist others, recognizing Jew and gentile equally as God's creations, and show them pity, as you wish God to show you. Follow God's laws alone to secure your good life, and do not continue in the sins of abandoning God, or attempting to serve Him in ways He did not command. The Scapegoat teaches that our imagination is destructive, and the goat sin offering curbs our over religious tendencies. We must learn where these lessons may apply to each one of us, for we all have false notions in connection with purely instinctual needs, and religious needs. Be guided by reason, and by God's precisely worded Torah. And may we all forgive, be forgiven, make peace with others, and enjoy a life of health, wealth and happiness that can only come from careful Torah adherence.

SIGNS OF WISE MEN

Pirkei Avos (Ethics of the Fathers) outlines signs of the wise men and signs of the unrefined personality:

Seven [indications] of the golem (unrefined person) and seven of the wise. The wise [man] does not speak prior to someone greater in wisdom or in years; he does not interrupt his friend's speech; he is not hasty to respond; he inquires in accord with the topic and answers according to halacha; he addresses the first matter first and the second matter second; and on that which he did not hear he says, "I have not heard anything [on this topic]" and he admits to a truth. And the converse is true of the golem. (Ethics 5:7)

Unlike the boor who is completely bereft of intelligence and morality, Maimonides teaches that the golem is a person with partial, yet undeveloped intellect and morality. His mind is therefore inconclusive in both areas. The wise person is the opposite; he or she possesses refined intelligence and morality. He/she is clear about both realms of knowledge. Let us now define each of the seven.

*The Wise [Man] Does Not Speak Prior
to Someone Greater in Wisdom or in Years*

The wise man respects knowledge over all else. He also recognizes that knowledge is found in people possessing keen intellects, and also with aged people. Years offers man knowledge gained through trial and error, and through witnessing many events and their outcomes.

A keen intellect can think better (thought process), and the aged person more accurately forecasts outcomes (results). Thus, wisdom is attributed to how we think, and also our real knowledge of the workings of the world, what we call experience.

He Does Not Interrupt His Friend's Speech

As Rabbi Moshe Barbanel stated, waiting to hear a complete thought of others is mandatory for our acceptance and responses. For interrupting another person's speech does not allow the listener to grasp the intended words of the speaker, and therefore, any response is premature. Waiting for one to complete his thought, we might then accurately agree or disagree. But no one can assess

an idea unless it was fully expressed.

Why does one interrupt? This is due to one's brazen conviction in his own ideas; his subjectivity. But the wise man is objective, not subjectively tied to his personal views. Therefore, the wise man has no urge to push forward his views. He does not interrupt others. He patiently awaits his friend's concluded idea to ensure he has fully grasped his friend's notions. For the wise man does not feel he possesses a monopoly on truth. His friend might offer a new insight, and his love of wisdom compels his patience. He wishes to learn from any person.

He is Not Hasty to Respond

Haste does not allow a person to fully digest, examine and conclude his thoughts.

*He Inquires in Accord with the Topic
and Answers According to Halacha*

The wise man follows a trend of thinking, not veering at all. This is required to fully exhaust any given topic. And only when a topic is exhausted and all possibilities are reviewed, can one possess a truth. If, for example, one wishes to offer a description of man, he must address his muscles, bones, sinews, and the various systems such as the digestive and respiratory systems. However, if one does not discuss these fully, or omits man's intelligence or other components, his description of man will be inaccurate.

Rashi comments that responding in accord with halacha refers to answering a person in accord with the core issue. Wise peo-

ple do not speak of peripheral matters, but they get to the main point, upon which the topic rests. In this manner, he best assists the questioner. For example, if one asks, “What is wrong with this specific idolatry?”, the wise man’s does not respond that it is ancient, or that he never saw it work. But he explains that all was created by one being, who also continuously governs all He made. Thus, nothing else is capable of overriding His rule. And it follows from this essential idea, that all idolatrous expression is futile. By offering a core definition, the questioner is thereby enabled to apply this concept to more cases, than if he was merely told that “this” idol never worked.

*He Addresses the First Matter First
and the Second Matter Second*

Rabbeinu Yonah teaches that this doesn’t mean that he simply goes in order. Here, “first” means “prior in logics.” For example, if one asks, “How do you open a door, and what is a key?”, the wise man first addresses the more prior issue, which here, is the second question. For once he explains how a key works, the questioner also understands how a door opens. Had the wise man answered in the order of the questions put to him, he could not answer successfully, for he would still need to explain what a key is. Saying, “You open a door by putting in a key and turning it” cannot answer this questioner, as he is ignorant of what a key is. The wise person anticipates this problem, and answers the questioner in a logical order.

We also learn that the wise man is concerned about others. His attachment to wisdom is not for himself alone, but he treasures

wisdom so much, that he wishes to share it. And he does so in a manner that best helps others. The wise man has a relationship with wisdom, as stated by King David, “it is a plaything” i.e., a most treasured pursuit. He appreciates that wisdom is intended for everyone, and he therefore acts on this. Abraham was a prime example, as he taught others wherever he traveled. This was his primary concern in life.

*On that Which He Did Not Hear,
He Says, “I Did Not Hear”*

The wise man’s ego is not involved in his pursuit of wisdom. Wisdom is about exploring that which is external to the self: the psyche is absent in this pursuit. He cares nothing about being wrong, or saying “I don’t know.” He has no personal agenda or biases that could cloud his search.

He Admits to a Truth

He actually expresses a truth, even if it contradicts his stated position (Rashi). This is a further development of the previous trait, for here, he must say, “I am wrong,” not simply, “I did not hear anything on the topic.”

Finally, why is the barometer of wisdom limited to the realm of “dialogue?” Why are we not taught that a wise man is one who turns one cent into one million dollars, or one who invented a telescope, or some other great accomplishment? Perhaps the answer is because the tool of wisdom is speech. Meaning, in one’s very process of acquiring wisdom, i.e., dialogue, herein lies the phe-

nomena most crucial to attaining wisdom. What man does with this knowledge afterwards – accomplishments – is merely an expression of that acquired wisdom. But to become wise in the first place, this requires a specific set of behaviors in the “attainment” stages, not how he expresses that attained wisdom.

BOOK SUMMARY

God created each man and woman with the unique faculties of intelligence and reason; our marks of distinction among all creations. God granted us these faculties so we may employ them in all areas; most of all, in following His will in religious life, what gives us eternal life. He has communicated His will in His Bible.

If we are honest, restrain our emotional tendencies, discard peer pressure and what is popular, study God's Bible always, and live intelligently, we will discern what is true and proven, from lies and fallacy. We will reject false religions and accept the one true religion: God's Torah, the Bible. We will be in awe of the wisdom His Bible contains, not found elsewhere. We will realize that as there is one God and one man, there must be one religion.

We live once. May we each live as God desires. May we teach others.

