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SUBJECTIVISM:

THE CONTRADICTION

Reader: How can one disprove Subjectivism? If Subjectivism doesn't hold by logic, how can you argue against it?

Mesora: Subjectivism has an inherent contradiction: Their proponents claim that all is subjective. By definition, they hold a "principle", (all is subjective). However, a "principle" is something which is always true, meaning, it is "objectively" true. Thus, their contradiction. While they wish to be subjective, they endorse a principle, in doing so, they follow an objective phenomena, and cannot also hold that Subjectivism is valid.

Another inherent flaw with their theory is that since all members of mankind share the identical psychological makeup, (i.e., ego, guilt, desire for happiness, etc.) their claim that man should follow whichever path he feels is a clear denial of this equality in all mankind. By definition this means that all mankind should function similarly, not however they wish, as supported by Subjectivism.

Subjectivism also carries with it a denial of God, and the giving of the Torah at Sinai. As God commands ALL man in one path of life, God testifies to the objectivity of Torah.

More essentially, Subjectivism denies the way man actually thinks and lives. I wonder how far adherents of Subjectivism are willing to go: Would they deny all history, because they will claim that each member of mankind is entitled to believe what he feels? And what of the terms "right" and "wrong"? Do they allow each man live by his own Subjective definition? This would certainly cause crime and many deaths, as each man can define "justice" as suits his needs.



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What ideas were meant to be taught through each of the plagues?

Readers' Questions, & Answers

E-mail your questions to: questions@mesora.org

Question: Where do the Sages make a statement like "Two people who share a problem or affliction, that is half the consolation?" Wouldn't it be more of a consolation to know that someone else is not suffering? Thank you.

Mesora: I'm not familiar, but "misery loves company" is in conformity. This statement teaches that part of the pain of personal troubles, is the additional feeling of persecution.

True, one who is objective will not be glad to hear of his friend's misfortune. However, most of mankind is consoled when some aspect of the pain is lifted, even through another's pain. Although physical or psychological pain remains, one experiences relative ease when there are lifted from him his feelings of persecution. It is no longer "me alone" who is suffering. It is not "me" who is the victim if others experience a similar fate. It is clear then that "persecution" carries with its pain, the additional pain of "isolation". If this were not the case, additional people suffering would not be an ease.

When the feeling of persecution is belittled by seeing others sharing in our plight, our pain becomes more bearable, as this "victimized" feeling abates.

Reader: "What are the real problems with intermarriage? Can I talk to my intermarried brother? Thank you."

Mesora: If Avraham Avinu spoke with idolaters to help them back on the right track, why can't you speak with your brother for doing a lesser crime?

Intermarriage is something which we all must dissuade others from committing. The consequences include the cancellation of potential Jews, as all children born of Gentile mothers are not Jewish.

The Torah in no way condones intermarriage which is at the very core of the current destruction of the Jewish people. We even have many protective laws guarding against intermarriage. However, once one has intermarried, we must be objective about the new situation - however grave. Leaving all emotions aside, we should communicate with those intermarried, keeping our relationship strong, perhaps in time they will be exposed to ideas, eventually seeing Judaism's tenets as true. Tell them about our site, but not so soon. First, reestablish a connection with both of them for now.

All other religions distort ideas regarding true monotheism. Intermarriage therefore is an acceptance of other religions - a denial of God's word, and His Oneness. It is an act which denies all the principles of the Torah. If one marries a Christian, he goes further and he displays an acceptance of idolatry. God gave one system, Judaism. Marrying someone from another religion is an acceptance of that religion to some degree, and Judaism is intolerant of any degree of acceptance of alien notions.

God's word and His Torah are perfect, not to be altered at all, as we are commanded not to add or subtract from the Torah, or veer from the words of the Rabbis.

The Plague of Hail

A SUBTLE MESSAGE

In Parshas Vau-Ayra, at the end of the ninth chapter, we find Moshe (Moses) not only responding to Pharaoh's plea to halt the plague of hail, but also giving Pharaoh rebuke: Exod. 9:30, "And you and your servants, I know that you have yet to fear God."

Why during the plague of hail, unlike other plagues, does Moshe suddenly rebuke Pharaoh? Is there something we may derive from this story that may explain Moshe's behavior?

It doesn't appear that God instructed Moshe to rebuke Pharaoh, so Moshe's words here are his own. What then did Moshe see in this plague, and what was his purpose in this dialogue?

(continued on page 2)

The Plague of Hail

(CONTINUED)

We must understand that the plagues were not simply haphazard acts, but each was carefully designed by God. Each one contained some unique idea. Moshe understood better than any man the depth which can be discovered by studying any of God's creations, including these plagues. I am certain Moshe pondered each plague, but saw something unique in hail.

After Moshe says "And you and your servants, I know that you have yet to fear God", these two verses follow, "The flax and the barley were struck, for the barley was ripe and the flax was in its stalk. And the wheat and the spelt were not struck for they ripen later." There is a question as to who said these two verses. Ramban says these words are spoken by Moshe. I agree, but I would like to pose my own interpretation.

As God intended to awaken the Egyptians and Pharaoh to His unique distinction as the Creator of heaven and earth, God desired not only to show His might, but to counter obstacles in this society's corrupt nature so they may arrive at the truth. What obstacle did Pharaoh harbor? Moshe said, "You and your servants have yet to fear God". Pharaoh's obstacle was obstinacy.

Moshe was first telling Pharaoh what his exact flaw was in recognizing God. Moshe then viewed the hail, and pondered the different affects it had on various crops. Moshe saw that stiff plants broke, while flexible ones survived. He then thought to himself why God created a plague which didn't destroy all crops.

Perhaps Moshe saw God's approach to reprimanding the Egyptians: God created each plague - not necessarily pre-designed from the outset - but God meted out what was needed at each juncture, depending on Pharaoh's current response. Pharaoh was now being obstinate, as Moshe pointed out to him "you have yet to fear God".

Obstinacy had to be pointed out to Pharaoh if he was to understand Moshe's next statement which were in direct response to his character. Stripping Pharaoh of his defenses would be the best method for him to finally recognize God. Moshe therefore intimidated to Pharaoh his character flaw via a parallel: "The flax and the barley were struck, for the barley was ripe and the flax was in its stalk." Meaning, "you Pharaoh are going to be broken" as you are stiff like the flax and barley. "And the wheat and the spelt were not struck for they ripen later." Again a parallel, "you Pharaoh would be spared if you

were flexible", as are the wheat and spelt.

Moshe was intimating to Pharaoh, "this current plague was designed as a parallel to you". The goal being that you repent and follow God, as God wishes this for all mankind, "For I do not desire the death of the dead (the wicked) says God, but (in his) repentance and in his living."

This also taught Pharaoh an essential lesson about God, that He recognizes man's thoughts and actions. How else could God design a plague to address a single man's (Pharaoh) specific nature? This is a great lesson. I believe the Egyptians would be surprised if an idol talked to them although they desired the idols to recognize and respond to their actions. Now however, Pharaoh was being taught by Moshe that there is in fact a God Who does know all man's thoughts.

Why did Moshe tell Pharaoh this through metaphor and not directly? Perhaps in general, when someone is faced with a principle which completely counters his current philosophy, he will push it away with both hands in defense. No one likes feeling the carpet is pulled out from under them. So to leave Pharaoh with some room to digest the ideas, Moshe used a metaphor which can, after time, appeal to the person more casually, thereby avoiding the defensive onslaught of the ego, and offering the best possibility for acceptance.□

Pharaoh, intimidated?

Reader: So I have looked through Rashi, and the Midrash, but there is no comment I can find on an interesting question: When Moses first appeared before Pharaoh why did not Pharaoh simply have him, and Aaron killed? or after the first plague, or even the fifth. After that I understand that Pharaoh had removed the element of freewill from himself. Moses was, after all, according to Egyptian law guilty of murder of an Egyptian, and Pharaoh knew this. Opinion please

Mesora: I heard a rabbi answer that the term "Elohim", (applied to Moshe, being made an Elohim by God over Pharaoh), meant that God made Moshe greatly revered in Pharaoh's eyes. As such, Pharaoh was greatly intimidated by Moshe, to the point that he would not threaten him. Outwardly, Pharaoh had to maintain respect of his people, so he spoke harshly to Moshe and Aaron. Inwardly, he feared Moshe.□

Letters..

letters@mesora.org

Question: In the case of Sinai you have a group of people who claim that their ancestors witnessed something amazing. None of the original witnesses is still alive, so you can't ask them about it. - Anonymous

Mesora: You would admit that George Washington, Caesar, Alexander the Great, and Columbus existed, although you cannot ask anyone about them. One need not ask someone else in order to have proof of something. I'm sure you visit doctors when ill, and would even allow surgery, even though you never saw this doctor attend medical school. How do you know he is a doctor? Answer: You use second hand knowledge, even when you need surgery. You attest that even though there are no witnesses, and the doctor could be lying, you accept second hand knowledge. Well, that is what we use to prove that Sinai existed. The same method you employ to accept someone as a doctor, or that the world had leaders thousands of years ago, even though there is "no one to ask."

Question: In the case of the Jews, none of these alleged witnesses (except the author of Exodus) recorded his testimony, so you can't examine that, either. - Anonymous

Mesora: Your error here is that if there were no other witnesses, then why did the story survive? Imagine your argument as true for a moment: Moses would go to a people called Jews, telling them that they were all at an event. If they weren't there they would not agree that their history as a nation was "X" when it wasn't. It would be akin to someone telling the us today that Kennedy was not president. Moses could not get a nation to accept that their history was something other than what it was. In such a scenario, Moses would be a laughing stock, and not one person would accept his "book". He would not be remembered either. But by the very fact that this event at Sinai is accepted on not only a national level, but on a world scale, that is the very proof that the story must have happened, otherwise it would not have been circulated. At worst, we would at least have an alternate history of the world at that time period of what you suggest "really" took place. But we don't. Why then according to you is there no alternate history? The answer is precisely that; there is no alternate history. Sinai actually took place.

False Notions

Some Jews have the idea that the Torah prohibited magic because it is true. They believe 100% that magic and fortune telling works. The Ibn Ezra (Leviticus, 19:31) says the following, "Those with empty brains say 'were it not that fortune tellers and magicians were true, the Torah would not prohibit them.' But I (Ibn Ezra) say just the opposite of their words, because the Torah doesn't prohibit that which is true, but it prohibits that which is false. And the proof is the prohibition on idols and statues....."

The Ibn Ezra states clearly, and without softening the blow - that it is not the way of God to prohibit us from that which is true. Just the opposite, our lives are meant to be in search of truth, attaching ourselves to it. The Torah prohibits magic, witchcraft, fortune telling and the like, all due to one reason: they are absolutely false. Saadia Gaon states this as well in Emunos v'Daos; that the Egyptian's who mimicked Moshe's feats, did so through slight of hand, not magic. They used dyes to turn the Nile red, and chemicals to repel frogs from the water.

God designed us with a mind which can discern between truth and falsehood. If one would suggest - as these fools had in Ibn Ezra's time - that God wants us to see the truth, but not follow it, it means to say that God contradicts Himself. Does He or doesn't He desire we follow the truth? Ibn Ezra says that God's plan - as expressed through Torah commands - is to abandon that which is false. The reason? Fallacy steers us away from the Source of all truth - God, while truth leads us to Him. Therefore, we must attach ourselves to all that is true as commanded by the Torah, and we must deny all fallacy.

We also note that the Ibn Ezra, and all other sages, did not play politics when they saw an idea as ludicrous. Terms like "empty brains" were used by them to make their teachings as penetrating and as passionate as possible. And this must be done if we are to make a point clear, how evil or how good an idea is.

Many times people arguing over Torah ideas will back off their opinion if the other party becomes heated. This is wrong, as all must be sacrificed for Torah. We must not protect a friendship in place of allegiance to the truth. The person does not enter the equation when we debate over God's ideas. Rather, we are taught by Ibn Ezra that we must disagree, and do so strongly.

Shluchey Mitzva Ayn Nizukin

MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

There are a few gemaras which deal with Rabbi Eliezer's principle: "An emissary of a commandment cannot be harmed." (Pesachim 8, Kiddushin 39, Yuma 11)

What type of statement is this? Is Rabbi Eliezer teaching that there are protective forces guarding one who is enacting a command, unconditionally shielding him from any evil which might normally befall him? This clearly cannot be the case, as Rabbi Eliezer continues further, "In a place which is known for danger (i.e., on a ladder or in a town with marauders) this principle will not apply."

The Talmud cites one case where someone was checking mezuzos - a mitzvah - and he was robbed of a large sum of money. Another case was cited that one sent his son to perform the command of sending away the mother bird, and on his descent on the ladder, he fell and died. In both cases, it is stated that in a situation of danger this principle does not apply, hence, tragedy struck.

These two cases show that one who is involved with a command is not guaranteed safety. We must now compare this with the statement that emissaries of commands are in fact "immune to danger".

So, are or aren't emissaries of commandments procured safety?

If we think into the statement, I believe the answer readily shows itself: Rabbi Eliezer said, "emissaries of commands aren't prey to harm". I believe this means that when one is involved in God's commands, (activities which are for man's perfection), there is no negative aspect to the performance of such commands. "Toras Hashem temima", "God's Torah is perfect". Also, "vchol darkeha, darcei noam", "all her ways are pleasant". Rabbi Eliezer is teaching that the act of mitzvah - commandments - are Divinely designed activities which only afford good to the performer. The inherent act is pure from harm, as it is in fact a vehicle for man to raise himself to higher levels of perfection.

While this is true, this is only a statement about the act of mitzvah per se. This in no way means that if one gives charity at the mouth of a volcano that he will not be scorched, or killed. Rabbi Eliezer's statement is addressing the act of the command itself, and nothing else.

(continued on page 4)

The Service of Love

RABBI REUVEN MANN

We read in Pirkey Avos: "If you have learned much Torah do not take credit for yourself because that is what you were created for". On the surface this idea is difficult to understand and goes contrary to common perception. It is generally regarded as fitting to "give credit where credit is due". One who overcomes the pull of emotions and directs his energies towards the good certainly deserves praise. Thus, we constantly extol the good deeds of righteous people, for their example can inspire others to emulate them. If those who work hard to attain much Torah knowledge are not deserving of credit then who is?

I believe we must look at the words carefully. They are addressed to the Torah scholar himself. "If you have learned much Torah do not take credit for yourself". Others may and should praise you and give proper recognition for the achievement. However, the scholar himself has no right to take credit. Why not? Because "this is what you were created for". This means that when a person studies Torah he is fulfilling the purpose of his existence. His psyche was designed for this particular activity and when he engages in it properly it affords him the greatest satisfaction and happiness. People pursue many diverse lifestyles in their frantic search for fulfillment. "There are many thoughts in the heart of man but only the plan of G-d will prevail". The one who studies Torah achieves the highest form of life. He should not feel that he has sacrificed anything, that he deserves credit for his efforts. Rather, he is permeated with an intense feeling of happiness and regards himself as privileged to have partaken of the delights of G-d's Torah. He feels totally fulfilled and imbued with the special satisfaction of one who has achieved the mission he was sent to perform. Such a person loves Torah profusely and wants to share it with others.

On Shavuot we celebrate the most significant event in human history: the Revelation of G-d's Torah to mankind. The Jewish people have been chosen to make the wisdom of Torah available to the nations. However before we seek to help others, we must perfect ourselves. The mitzvot are not magical pills which automatically transform us. Effort on our part is required. It is up to us to rise to the challenge of Sinai. A complacent attitude toward Judaism is perhaps our greatest problem. True, we perform mitzvot and even devote some time to

study. Yet we feel as though we are fulfilling an obligation for which we deserve credit. There is nothing wrong with that attitude. It would be nice if more Jews felt a greater sense of responsibility about their religious duties. However, Judaism offers something more beautiful and profound. When studied properly Torah enlightens the mind and inspires the heart. It transforms one's observance of mitzvot into a labor of love.

Let it be our prayer that the "words of Torah should be pleasant in our mouths and the mouths of our children". The experience will help us achieve the "service of love." It will enable us to become a kingdom of Priests and a Holy nation.

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Man and Woman

RIVKA OLENICK

The Raavad says: "Marriage is man's natural state. Without a mate, human beings are incomplete; through marriage man's completion is achieved. Marriage and family are essential to God's divine plan and reflect an important part of man's nature. They are not arbitrary institutions created by society." The above statement hits you right in the face; let's analyze what it says. "Marriage is man's natural state." And in Genesis 2:18, it says: "It is not good for man to be alone, I shall make him a help meet unto him." The Raavad's statement certainly supports what is said in Genesis. If man was not meant to be alone, then his natural state must be marriage. And it seems that the "good" (Genesis 2:18) refers to woman. Wouldn't every man want the good?

Without a mate, human beings are incomplete. Man was alone for a time, but became frustrated. There was no one for him to identify with. So, woman was created from him and brought to him. Man needed to identify with her physically and psychologically. He needed to see part of himself reflected in her existence and to realize that without her, he was lacking and not complete. Let's ask: What about her?

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch says that: "only through his wife does a man become a Man," Hirsch continues to say: "Only husband and wife together are 'Adam', a task which is too great for one person must be divided, and just for the accomplishment of the whole of Man's mission, God created Woman for Man." "I shall make a help meet unto him." (Genesis 2:18) Hirsch continues to say: "And this woman is to be azer kenegdo, help meet." This statement expresses the

whole dignity of Woman. It does not contain the slightest reference to sexual relationship, she is placed purely in the realm of Man's work, it was there that she was missing, she is to be azer kenegdo, help meet. And azer kenegdo expresses no idea of subordination, but rather complete equality, and on a footing of equal independence. Woman stands to Man, kenegdo, parallel, on one line, belonging together, at his side." Man's work, is the work of mankind. Together they fulfill the will of the Creator.

What woman does not realize from the above statement is how essential she is in God's plan for mankind's existence. Could any "feminist" challenge these ideas with any other proof that is more objective and true?

In Genesis 2:24, we read: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and cleave unto his wife and they shall be one flesh." This follows immediately after Eve's creation, a next step. Until man "cleaves" he is still alone, and that is not "good". So by cleaving to woman, he acquires the good and he becomes "whole". Although originally, they were created, man and woman, separate; in marriage they now become "one", in mind, heart and body. By conforming their efforts and strengths to God's will they can now live harmoniously and fulfill their potential in a more perfected state.

These ideas are beautiful and profound. They are the purpose of man's (man and woman) existence, of mankind.

If we could become more aware of our true purpose in life we could break out of the traps society has set up. The trap on our psyche and emotions; that has convinced so many that only romance and love at first sight is real love. We should spend a little more of our "bittle zman" - spare time - actually thinking about what is important for our perfection in marriage and in life, and what is required to be complete.

Shluchey Mitzva Ayn Nizukin

(CONTINUED)

This is why the gemara says that in a place where danger is readily found, meaning external circumstances, mitzvah has no bearing on such normal phenomena.

We now see two distinct issues: 1) The command itself, that which is truly perfect and has no negative aspect, 2) Phenomena which are external to the act of performing commandments, phenomena which follow natural laws, and affect people whether they are doing mitzvos or not.

To clarify the point, if both the performer of a mitzva and one standing idly by are together at the mouth of a volcano, they will most definitely be scorched equally. True, one doing the commands gains metaphysical perfection by doing so, but it does not shield him from normal, physical phenomena. This is what Rabbi Eliezer meant by, "that in a place which is known for danger this principle will not apply." Meaning, external circumstances have nothing to do with what Rabbi Eliezer addresses.

The gemara in both citations proves the point that in dangerous places, commands do not shield. It does so by quoting Samuel I, 16:2. After Saul was dethroned for not obeying God's command to slaughter Agag, God instructs Samuel to stop mourning Saul and anoint a new king. Samuel says to God, "Saul will hear this and kill me". God gives Samuel a method for avoiding Saul's onslaught. Interestingly however, although Samuel is now given a Divine directive from God Himself, Samuel nonetheless does not feel he will escape Saul's wrath. Amazing! God Himself tells Samuel to do a commandment, yet Samuel feels he is still under natural law (of Saul's jealousy flaring up and placing Samuel's life in peril). The gemara wishes to teach from this case that commandments are not protective devices - even those commandments uttered by God Himself. Samuel was right, he must not rely on miracles. God as well does not respond to Samuel saying that He will perform some miracle to save him. God's advice is to deal with the situation following natural order. Samuel does not endorse reliance on miracles, and certainly God does not endorse this.

We see from Rabbi Eliezer that the principle derived is much different than on face value. A cursory reading of Rabbi Eliezer's principle lures one into a false belief that mitzvah affords physical

protection. But one must continue reading the Rabbi's statement. And when he finishes reading, he must reason that dangerous places do not apply to this principle. We end up with a new understanding of exactly how a mitzvah affords us some good, and the answer is perfect:

In the mitzva itself the good benefits us in two ways: 1) The knowledge our soul gains enhances our perfection. 2) There is moral value inculcated by the performance of the mitzva.

I urge you to read the Radak on the passage in Samuel I, 16:2. I will quote a brief portion here:

"Even though God performs miracles and wonders with His fearers, the majority of time He operates within natural law. And so in accordance with natural law did Jacob fear Esav (he sought to kill Jacob), and David feared Saul if he was anointed king in Saul's lifetime. And he rightfully had to find recourse to tactics so as to save himself. This is also what Samuel asked of God..."

Mitzvah is not a panacea for physical gain, Samuel and David rightfully didn't believe so, and God doesn't teach so.

Divine Sparks

Reader: I have a question concerning your objection to Chassidim. My understanding is that a part of your objection is that Chassidim teaches that there is a divine element in the physical world. They teach that if it were not for the "divine spark" matter could not exist. Some consider this a form of pantheism. The Chassidim counter that this view necessarily results from the idea that G-d is infinite. If G-d is infinite, they say, how can the physical world be separate from Him? If it were separate, then there would exist something that was not G-d, and He would be finite.

Mesora: Just because there is something which is not God, it does not follow that this limits God. They say this is a limitation because their idea of God is connected to the physical, and that is heresy. By their very assumption that God would be limited if there were other things which are not "Him", indicates that they assume incorrectly that God and the physical share something in common, that is, "space". Since they cannot conceive of God outside of the physical, they feel that creation actually encroaches on His "turf". Additionally, they deny the actual Torah which says that God created the

world, a thing other than Himself. I repeat, other than Himself. This is a complete proof that He shares nothing in common with created matter. These verses in Genesis are not used by God as word games to mislead us. If God said He created the physical world, then He did. All the Rabbis teach the same. This is our Mesora.

In reality, God has no connection with the physical. Once someone can accept this, they will understand their other nonsensical ideas have no basis. (See my related article o "Tzimtzum")

Reader: Can you explain the idea of an infinite Creator with a creation that is separate from Him?

Mesora: We do not know what God is, so we cannot think in terms of "separate from Him". What we can know is that we know nothing of what God is, but that God is the source of all reality, the entire universe, their governing laws, and the Torah. We also know that the physical is not God, as God said He created the physical, which by definition, cannot be Him.

Reader: Further, do you think that the soul of man contains a divine spark, and are you troubled that this form of matter contains divinity?

Mesora: Man's soul is not part of God in any way - God has no parts. See Maimonides 13 Principles, Principle 2.

Does God Prevent Man from Sin?

Reader: If God "knew" from the very outset that man could not keep the command, and eventually would need the trappings of organized religion to keep from straying into paganism, why not institute that from the outset? Why wait for man to fail once and need to go through the Flood, Tower of Babel and expulsion from Eden?

Mesora: That is exactly the point: God does not intervene unless man has demonstrated the need. This is part of God's perfection, that He does only that which is necessary. He does not interfere with man's freewill. So although He knows man will fail many times, He does not address failure, until failure is a reality to man, and only then is the remedy applied if such a man is

worthy, and will heed to the remedy, or extermination, if required. Proverbs teaches, "Those who God loves does He rebuke".

God did not give man the conscience until Eve and Adam ate from the tree of life. God knew they would do so, but the conscience was not given until man demonstrated the need in his own reality. Had He given it earlier, it would have been unnecessary. God does however try to steer man away from evil and towards the good, as we see through the numerous prophets sent by God to warn people of imminent destruction if repentance does not take place.

Reader: This is especially true since the Talmud in places credits God with "creating the cure before the malady," teaching that its better to preempt bad turns of events than to wait to respond afterwards. Why not do that here?

Mesora: I don't think that is what we are to derive from the Talmud in those instances. I believe the concept there is that God does not create a world which is doomed to failure, i.e., a world with no remedies. And since man cannot possibly refrain from the instincts which cause his constant backsliding, the creation of the cure prior to the malady teaches that man is doomed to slip, and that God want's man to have the ability to rectify and be cured..

Did Our Forefathers Observe the Torah?

Reader: I have always been troubled by the assertion that our forefathers observed the 613 before Sinai. It sounded like revisionism to me. And it seems that the commentators (Rashi, I think) go to great lengths to explain away what seems obvious from the text, that Avraham served milk and meat to the visiting angels. They say he didn't.

How should I interpret the claim about the forefathers and the 613?

Mesora: Egypt didn't exist during Abraham's time, so how could he be celebrating Passover, before the very event commemorated happened? A rabbi once taught that when the Rabbis say that Abraham and the forefathers kept the entire Torah, it means they upheld actions and ideals which were in line with the very perfections derived from the Torah. It teaches us metaphorically that the forefathers were not missing any of the perfections which God placed in the Torah.